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Putting RFID to Work

May 3, 2006



What Questions Should I Ask Hardware Providers?

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General Advice

- Get answers in writing
- Technical feasibility analysis usually a good idea
- Talk with references AND industry insiders
- Keep in mind that everyone is on the bleeding edge
 - If they are saying its easy, think twice

Questions for Hardware Provider

- Company & Product Maturity?
 - How long has the company been producing the products you are buying
 - How many generations old is the hardware
 - How many total units have been deployed (NOT how many produced)
 - What is yield (e.g. tags) and failure rate of equipment

Questions for Hardware Provider

- Support / Maintenance?
 - Crucial when you want to support production deployments
 - Hardware is new and can be fragile, it WILL break
 - On-site vs Exchange programs
 - How strong is geographical coverage for on-site support
 - 24 hr support
 - How many field/sales engineers

Questions for Hardware Provider

- Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)?
 - You don't always need the best performer
 - Support and maintenance can be expensive
 - When using in production, reliability is worth a lot of money (i.e. downtime is expensive)
- Breadth of product line?
 - Facilitates production rollout when a common infrastructure is utilized
 - Fixed, handheld, portal, vehicle mount and future form factors

Questions for Hardware Provider

- Supported by major software players?
 - Get into the weeds! List which features on which hardware platforms are supported
 - Also lends itself to weeding out players who have little traction (software folks like to support the major vendors)
- Strong support through integrators?
 - RFID systems integrators understand big picture and can act as trusted advisor
 - Hardware companies will be hamstrung to only their product, integrators know readers, printers, tags, etc

Questions for Hardware Provider

- Gen2 and GenX upgrades?
 - Must support broad set of Gen2 capabilities
 - Should be backwards compatible
 - Understand ease of upgrade for Gen1 to Gen2
 - Most readers are now software defined radios
- Supply and Availability?
 - On time delivery
 - Distribution model (direct, integrator channel or distributors)

Questions for Hardware Provider

- Adherence to standards?
 - What pieces of Gen2 standard are supported
 - Beware of the marketing (semi-passive and active tags)
- Configurability & Flexibility?
 - Types and sizes of antennas
 - Power levels (by antenna)
 - Protocols (by antenna)
 - GPIO
 - Local custom apps

Questions for Hardware Provider

- Bonus Question
 - Is your product FCC certified?

