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## CASE STUDY

### Showtime for RFID

*Radio Frequency Identification technology helps event managers and exhibitors deliver better events*

#### **Problem:**

Beyond registration and check-in, attendees at conferences, trade shows and other events are largely “invisible” to the organizers and hosts. Most conference managers can’t say with certainty that attendees are present at the sessions they registered to attend. There is no accurate way to measure traffic volume and flow on a trade show floor. And the food and beverage counts hosts receive from caterers are often inaccurate.

According to a 2005 CMO Council survey, both chief marketing officers and event managers say they are challenged to evaluate an event’s return. While event marketing ranks as the third most important function for companies surveyed and commands 20 percent or more of their budgets, just 31 percent of chief marketing officers believe they capture sufficient information to evaluate event marketing value.

“Demonstrating a return on investment for events can be challenging for both event hosts and participants,” said Kenneth Ratton, VP of Sales & Marketing with Radiant RFID. “Most companies have little knowledge of what’s actually happening at events.”

Hand counting and bar codes are often used to track participation behaviors at events. But these incomplete and, often, inaccurate methods leave event stakeholders searching for a better method for capturing booth traffic and other activity data.

#### **Solution:**

In late 2002, Alliance Tech spotted RFID technology as a means to build on their 15 years of experience supporting event management. With a call to Radiant RFID, the two Austin, Texas-based companies began developing an RFID solution that would provide a non-intrusive way to measure and understand activity at meetings, conferences and events.

“Radiant RFID’s lab went to great lengths to find the RFID technology that best enables the capture, analysis and presentation of participation data,” said Ratton. “Selection of hardware – especially tags and readers – was critical in developing a solution that would work in large environments like trade show floors.”

Attendee name badges are at the center of the solution. These badges include an RFID inlay that is encapsulated within a label, programmed and verified by Mason City, Iowa-based Metalcraft, Inc., and then applied to the name badge.

“Metalcraft is an RFID tag converter that adds a lot of value,” said Ratton. “They have good technical insight when we need it, and the badges they produce are built to our specifications, protecting the RFID inlay. Moreover, they produce them only as we need them for events – not in large, advance quantities.”

The system uses 900 MHz EPC compliant passive technology and reader “gates” at key measurement points.

“Today, we’re primarily using gates at the session doors and at key locations in an exhibit space,” said Ratton. “The future will see more readers at the individual booth level – showing exhibitors exactly who is with them at any moment and across the duration of an event.”

Web-based software delivers the attendance reporting with unprecedented accuracy. Alliance Tech’s reporting system generates real-time views on session attendance, exhibit floor traffic patterns and other monitored attendee behaviors. The information allows management, sponsors and exhibitors to better measure and improve the ROI of conferences and tradeshow.

**Results:**

RFID technology provides unprecedented insight into event activity by capturing attendee behaviors accurately and unobtrusively, and the results expected by Alliance Tech, Radiant RFID and Metalcraft are taking shape.

The event solution has consistently delivered a higher level of visibility than previously available, with greater accuracy, security and privacy than traditional barcode systems.

In high traffic flow areas of 150 people per minute, the solution is 90 percent accurate. Attendance numbers are 98 percent accurate. The partners have performed video validations of their data to back up these numbers. But Ratton reinforces that the value of the visibility that RFID brings to events is greater in the trend analysis than tracking individual attendees. By seeing trends of all attendees, event coordinators can juggle schedules and content to improve the attendees’ experience.

“In early deployments, we’ve seen great reductions in the time and cost required to capture, analyze and present attendance and participation data at private events and conferences,” said Ratton. “As expected, RFID has proven to be cost effective, efficient, secure and accurate. With Metalcraft’s help, Alliance Tech and Radiant RFID are changing how events are understood and managed.”

Occasionally, an attendee has questioned the privacy implications of RFID technology in the name badges – that they are being tracked away from the conference. But that apprehension is quickly put to rest with a bit of education: RFID is not a ubiquitous tracking mechanism and the tag is only activated when in proximity to a “gate” and, then, provides only the tag number.

“Everyone wants better events,” said Ratton. “And RFID name badges are helping move toward that goal.”

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Call 800-437-5283 or visit [www.idplate.com](http://www.idplate.com) for more information on Metalcraft RFID tags and their customers’ solutions.