RFID Winner

● This integrator expects 25% sales growth by offering customized hardware and software supply chain solutions for the food industry.

by Mike Monocello

With the initial hoopla surrounding RFID (radio frequency identification) being replaced by cautious optimism, we at *Business Solutions* enjoy coming across creative RFID implementations that showcase not only the capabilities of RFID, but the tangible benefits as well. The winner of this year's Channel Innovator Award for RFID technologies, Merit-Trax Technologies, Inc., specializes in creating supply chain systems for the food industry. The software developer and integrator created a real-time information management system for Atlantic Beef Products, Inc., a Canadian beef slaughterhouse. The system provides 100% traceability of cattle throughout all points of processing.

The traceability begins when animals arrive at the plant with barcoded ear tags. An employee scans the ear tags of slaughtered animals using a Psion Teklogix 7530 handheld mobile computer, which automatically creates a database entry for each animal. The carcass is then placed onto two leg hooks, which have embedded passive RFID tags. From that point on, rail-mounted Syscan International RFID readers throughout the slaughterhouse record the progress of the carcass as it moves through various stages of processing and eventually is butchered into individual cuts of beef.

In some stages of processing, the Atlantic Beef staff revert to the 7530 handheld mobile computer to record information about the carcass. For example, at one stage the hot weight of the carcass (the weight of the animal without its head, hide, innards, and fat) and grade of the meat is recorded and passed to the accounts payable computer system to help compute the kill settlement (how much money is owed to each producer). "This part of the tracking system allows Atlantic Beef to process kill settlements in as little as 15 minutes, as opposed to other nontechnical plants where the process could take a full day," adds Paul Berry, VP of software development at Merit-Trax.

PAUL BERRY,
VP OF SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

Merit-Trax Technologies, Inc.

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FOUNDED: 1985

VENDORS: IBM, MICROSOFT, PSION TEKLOGIX, RED HAT LINUX, SYSCAN INTERNATIONAL, THOROUGHBRED SOFTWARE

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Are You Touting The Traceability Benefits Of RFID?

Perhaps the greatest benefit of tracing the beef to the cut level is that Atlantic Beef now can provide detailed reporting information to the Canadian Cattleman's Identification Agency (CCIA), an industry-initiated organization that tracks the birth, movement, and kill location of all cattle. "The CCIA was created to aid in the containment and eradication of animal disease," says Berry. "One hundred percent traceability of processed meat equals quicker recalls, which helps to protect consumers and reduce the amount of wasted meat."

Berry attributes the success (the company expects 25% sales growth this year) of Merit-Trax to a variety of sources. First, Berry credits the relationship Merit-Trax has developed with its wireless and RFID partners such as IBM, Microsoft, Psion Teklogix, Syscan International, and Thoroughbred Software. "We've selected partners that offer products with a history of reliability and features that enable us to create solutions that fit our clients' unique needs," adds Berry. For example, the Psion Teklogix 7530 handhelds were chosen for the Atlantic Beef install partly because the units could withstand the extreme cold temperatures of the blast freezers. Second, Merit-Trax prides itself on its customer service. "All of our employees carry pagers, which allows us to offer support 24/7," says Berry. "We've built our reputation on a lot of hand-holding, and we have a customer base that appreciates that." Finally, the company designs its software to meet GS1, a set of global standards which assist in the traceability of products down to the case level. "It gives our solutions credibility and establishes our software as globally compliant, and it is easier to cost-justify our solutions when they are based on case-level traceability standards," concludes Berry. "The only way to minimize risk and control the losses of a recall is to provide case-level traceability. At the case level, you can truly isolate the recalled product without having to recall and destroy entire lots of products." ●

Channel Innovator Awards