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ZEBRA ENSURES RELIABILITY FOR INNOVATIVE DOD RFID COMPLIANCE SERVICE

Challenge

Many suppliers to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)—especially those who use radio frequency identification (RFID) printer/encoders and supplies from Zebra Technologies—have learned that producing accurate RFID labels for shipments is the easy part of meeting the DoD's compliance requirements. The hard part is matching shipments to contract numbers and orders, generating the documentation for each shipment and electronically submitting it to the DoD's Wide Area Workflow (WAWF) and other computer systems.

"RFID labels are just one part of meeting the DoD's requirements," says Anne Ramppen, government products coordinator at New Dynamics, which provides monthly shipments of earplugs to the DoD. "The Wide Area Workflow system needs contract numbers, CAGE codes, and product numbers, and each RFID label number associated with each shipment is also required—that's a lot of numbers to be typing in."

"The term 'slap-and-ship' is a gross over-simplification of the reality of meeting the DoD RFID mandate," says Cotty England, chief technology officer of ODYSSEY. "The common misconception is that generating the RFID tag is the core challenge, but as the DoD's commercial suppliers get actual exposure to RFID, they quickly realize that the core challenges are the work flow process control, flexibility and seamless WAWF integration."

Solution

Data management is a common problem for suppliers. ODYSSEY has created a solution to handle data entry, encoding, label printing and reporting needs by pairing an easy-to-use Web-based application for data entry with reliable Zebra printer/encoders to output compliant shipping labels.

The ODYSSEY service simplifies DoD reporting requirements for suppliers by eliminating most data management activities. ODYSSEY is a hosted application that is configured for each client. Instead of entering numerous contract numbers, contractor ID and item codes, suppliers use drop-down menus to prepare and submit shipment information to the DoD. Suppliers have the option of using ODYSSEY's service bureau to print RFID-encoded shipping labels, or to produce them on site with their own Zebra R110Xi printer/encoder that is offered with the service. With hosted software and off-site printing/encoding, users do not need to install or maintain any hardware or software to meet their DoD RFID compliance requirements. Suppliers simply make selections from validated pull-down lists, and the software handles the rest.

The system directs a printer/encoder either at the supplier's site or at ODYSSEY's service center to produce the required smart labels. The



Zebra® R110Xi™

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Industry
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Zebra Solution
• Zebra R110Xi

Results

- Simplified reporting and compliance fulfillment for DoD suppliers
- Easy-to-use, Web-based application for data entry, and rugged, reliable Zebra printers/encoders to output compliant shipping labels





labels are validated for data integrity and readability to DoD specifications with an Alien Technology reader ODYSSEY provides as a part of the solution, and then the RFID labels are applied to the cases and pallets. ODYSSEY's service center validates that the shipment data is correctly packed and all tags are readable prior to automated submission to WAWF and other government systems.

"ODYSSEY's ASP (application service provider) service worked very well for us because we ship products to the DoD from several locations," says Brian Meyer of Hawkeye Glove Manufacturing, which uses the complete service for data management, reporting and label printing. Hawkeye selects DoD order information from the browser-based system and receives RFID-encoded shipping labels from ODYSSEY by express shipment. Hawkeye Glove maintains no RFID equipment at any of its locations. "We ship to the DoD from three facilities and may add a fourth," says Meyer. "I'm not sure we could justify the cost if we had to install equipment for RFID compliance at each."

About one-third of RFID users choose to have ODYSSEY print and ship their smart labels, with the rest printing on site. Wherever printing/encoding occurs, the RFID smart labels are produced by a Zebra R110Xi, which is the only printer/encoder ODYSSEY trusts for its system.

The R110Xi encodes the standard EPCglobal Gen 2 RFID tags the DoD requires, and includes a software-defined radio (SDR) so other RFID protocols can also be supported. The R110Xi is rugged, reliable in high duty cycle applications, and offers multiple connectivity and remote management options.

"Reliability is paramount to us because we are remotely managing more than 125 RFID devices at our customer sites, plus the equipment in our own service bureau," says James Lusk, director of sales and marketing at ODYSSEY. "We can't afford any downtime, and neither can our customers. We use best-of-breed components, and that includes Zebra printers and supplies."

Zebra quality and reliability is clear to customers, too. Silas Martin, IT manager at Winston Salem Industries for the Blind, which provides the DoD with uniforms and other apparel, has firsthand experience with the R110Xi and a competitive model that is part

of a legacy compliance tagging system used at a subcontractor facility.

"I've worked with different solutions and can compare the equipment," says Martin. "I could see Zebra's superior construction just by opening the box. The R110Xi is made from stainless steel, others are made of plastic. The other printer/encoder we use was installed first. Once the Zebra was running, it was like looking at a Cadillac next to a Pinto."

Results

Suppliers have used ODYSSEY to ship hundreds of thousands of RFID tagged cases, and scores of companies use it every month to meet their RFID requirements. One customer, Bernard Cap, used the service to become the first contractor to meet the DoD's VIM-ASAP reporting requirements for textile suppliers.

"We went to a meeting for textile suppliers and the DoD singled us out for complying perfectly," says Larry Weinstein of Bernard Cap. "We were the only one, and there were several hundred companies at the meeting. We were one of the smallest suppliers there by far."

Bernard Cap is one of many small suppliers who use the ODYSSEY service and appreciate the convenience it provides.

"I had a lot of concerns when I learned about the DoD RFID requirements and thought it would be very time-consuming," says Ramppen of New Dynamics. "The most surprising thing about becoming compliant with the DoD is how easy it was. It would have cost much more and taken us much longer if we had to develop and install our own system."

"We have multiple people access the system at different facilities and they've all been able to pick it right up and use it no problems," says Meyer of Hawkeye Glove. "If someone prepares an RFID order for shipping at one of our other facilities, I get automatic notification. It's surprising how little I actually have to do for the order."

Suppliers also appreciate not having to invest heavily in a system that will only be used for one customer, and perhaps only for one order. If the DoD doesn't renew a contract, the supplier can simply cancel

its subscription to ODYSSEY and isn't stuck with equipment or software.

"When you factor in support, that's another big issue," says Martin of Winston Salem Industries for the Blind. "I have to remotely support different sites. ODYSSEY takes care of all the maintenance and upgrades for their system. The other system we're running has already come out with upgrades, which I had to manage. Our other system also went down, so I had to diagnose why and take corrective action. I don't have to worry about these issues with the ODYSSEY service."

"There is zero margins for error with DoD compliance systems," says ODYSSEY's Lusk. "Customers can't afford their systems to be down. That's why they rely on us, and that's a big reason why we insist on Zebra."



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