



The DATA CAPTURE Report

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Special SCAN: The DATA CAPTURE Report Reprint

Blue Vector—The Only True Edgeware Company?

Blue Vector, based in Palo Alto, CA, bills itself as the only true edgeware company. The company's products are rapidly becoming favorites with industry partners such as **Motorola**, **Nortel**, and **Intellex**. And its customers include giants like **McKesson** and **Rite Aid**. In a special interview with VP of Marketing John Beans, he explained why he believes Blue Vector is unique.

Blue Vector was founded in 2002, and in 2005, the company hired Nancy Anderson, a former **Hewlett-Packard Company** manager, to serve as CEO. In 2006, the company began its first big marketing campaign to demonstrate its automation platform, which puts RFID, bar code, temperature, GPS, and motion sensors to work for businesses in the pharmaceutical, retail, distribution, and manufacturing industries. According to Beans, the platform can serve as a standalone solution or as an adjunct to current enterprise applications.

"Our president, Anurag Mendhekar, worked at the **Xerox** Research Facility in Palo Alto before founding Blue Vector," said Beans. "His team developed a new approach to software development called 'Aspect Oriented Programming' (AOP) that is really the only architecture available today that can program and manage thousands of independent distributed

processes—potentially a different process in every sensor—in a convenient, manageable way. Instead of one big, hard-to-modify, software application, the system looks at the user's Web-configured settings and generates automatically distributed programs that run locally at each sensor."

Details of the system

AOP is the core of Blue Vector's system, and although we sometimes found the conversation with Beans a little over our heads, the company's technology does sound different from anything we've heard about. One of the key aspects of the system is that it does not depend on a central server. Devices called Edge Managers—about the size of a paperback book—are located at points of scanning or RFID interrogation. As an item is scanned, the Edge Manager compares the information from the scan against a shipping manifest to determine if that item is really supposed to be going out the door at that time and for that delivery.



John Beans, VP of marketing, Blue Vector.

"We are able to process transactions from 40 dock doors in about two seconds," said Beans. "If there is a mistake, it's important to find it immediately, not later. "It's all part of a solution designed to insure 100% shipment accuracy. We want the right product, going out at the right time,

for the right order, and on the right truck.”

The Edge Managers are only one part of the system. They communicate with the Blue Vector Network Manager. In global companies with multiple locations, each facility would have one Network Manager. The Network Manager relays information to the Global Manager which processes information for the entire organization. The independently run, Internet-based, distributed network can then be linked to a company’s global IT system.

Vendor agnostic

Another great aspect of the Blue Vector system is that it is vendor agnostic. “It really doesn’t matter whose bar code scanner or RFID reader is collecting the data,” said Beans. “That’s irrelevant to us or our system. We have a great working relationship with Motorola, but that doesn’t affect our ability to work with whatever technology is running in a customer’s facility.”

Security—a high priority

Realizing the importance of security, Blue Vector designed its system so that all information traveling over LANs and WANs—whether wired or wireless—is encrypted.” Additionally, the Edge Managers are “call out” only. This eliminates the ability of anyone to call or tap into one of the devices and steal information.

“Our system can manage thousands of points of automation,” said Beans. “All work well without effecting the performance of each other. And all are secure.”

Company philosophy

There is a plethora of companies springing up in the RFID sector—many funded by venture capital. And we believe some will undoubtedly fall by the wayside. So, what about Blue Vector? Will it survive?

When asked for his thoughts, Beans told *SCAN/DCR*, “We have done things a little differently than some of the other companies that have surfaced in the RFID arena. We’ve taken a very conservative approach and deliberately stayed under the radar until we had some customers. Some companies try to make a big splash about their technology when they haven’t even tried it out in a real-world situation. Sometimes, their products aren’t even ready for the market.

“Blue Vector has some substantial customers and more coming on board in the near future. We waited four years before we launched a major marketing campaign. Some companies will begin to drop out from lack of funding...but I don’t see that happening with Blue Vector. Most of the companies that will fade away are ones that fail to accumulate any major sales. You must have customer traction if you want to keep funds coming in.”

Major RFID rollouts coming soon?

If Beans is correct, the RFID industry should begin to see

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some major rollouts coming soon. “Most RFID implementations today are closed loop, said Beans. “Customers are adopting the technology for themselves—not for someone else. And many of these users are in their second, third, or fourth stages of adoption. They found it worked in one area and decided to expand the use of the technology.

“People are going to be surprised at the pace of rollouts now that the hype is over. Reality has set in—RFID works, it’s practical, and in some cases, it’s plug-and-play. And, we are developing innovative technologies that are opening up new application opportunities. For instance, Intellex has some excellent technology in the area of battery-assisted passive (BAP) RFID. They are a great partner with a well-priced product. In some cases, we are using their products for RTLS apps.”

Last words

Before we closed the interview, Beans told us,

“We are very excited about the future of our company and the RFID industry in general. “We’re not into slap-and-ship projects because they don’t show a direct customer payoff. We now have offices in CA, southern CA, NY, and India and are welcoming new partners.”

This just in: Just as we were going to press, we received word that Blue Vector has launched a new RFID platform for the pharmaceutical industry. The Blue Vector Pharmaceutical Edition includes features that have been beneficial in pharma deployments. These include support for dock door, conveyor, shelf, and desktop RFID automation stations—either from Blue Vector or from third parties—as well as simultaneous support for multiple tag types including UHF, HF, and long range active RFID tags. Contact the company for more on this announcement.

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