

# Choosing a registration and lead-retrieval system

Tips on picking the best technology for your show

## Pros and cons of common technologies

### 1. Barcode badges

Barcodes are an easy to produce form of lead-retrieval technology. The type used by almost 48 percent of shows incorporates 2D barcodes, which allow several hundred characters of data to be stored in a single barcode, essentially enough to store key contact information. Exhibitors can scan the code with a reader and collect a database of contacts.

**Pros:** For show management, this technology is the least expensive. The badges can be printed for pennies.

**Cons:** If the barcode is damaged, it can't be read. At sessions, it requires attendees to cooperate to scan their badges, or a staff person at each door to ensure badges are scanned to gain an accurate record of attendance. Often harsh exhibit hall lighting reflecting off a badge holder can cause difficulty in reading the barcode. Updating information encoded in the barcode requires printing a new badge. These badges can't store as much data as a radio frequency identification (RFID) badge.

### 2. MagCard badges

This technology has a long and proven track record. While the badges are slightly more expensive than barcode badges, the costs can be recouped by selling sponsorships on the badges. Exhibitors can easily swipe the cards. SMART-reg International can provide equipment so badges can be printed on site.

**Pros:** It's a proven technology familiar to everyone with a credit card.

**Cons:** Sometimes the magnetic strip can get demagnetized. It also can't store as much data as an RFID badge.

### 3. RFID badges

RFID technology offers a lot of features the more traditional badges can't. Currently, there are two types of RFID technology being used in the trade show industry—long range and short range. SMART-reg chose to use the short-range technol-

ogy (which can be read at three inches) that utilizes the worldwide MIFARE standard because it provides the most security and allows badges to hold more information.

**Pros:** RFID badges are able to carry much more data than the other alternatives. Exhibitors can easily collect information beyond just a name and phone number—if show management permits. The technology offers a greater degree of security because the data is password-protected. This technology can also be used by show management to replace tickets or verify attendance at continuing-education classes. The SMART-reg All in the Badge™ RFID badges can even be encoded with up to \$999.99 of cash value that attendees can use for show services or at the show bookstore. The SLD-5 reader from SMART-reg can be used for

exhibitor lead capture in addition to attendee authentication for events.

**Cons:** Some attendees don't fully understand the technology and may have false perceptions about "big brother" watching their every move. Also, if you use long-range RFID, the badges won't be able to hold as much information and can't be used to replace tickets. The information that could be provided for lead retrieval is limited to no more than 24 characters. Long-range RFID also can't be used for cash value.

## Determining your needs

Ask yourself these questions before selecting a registration and lead-retrieval technology:

- How important is direct cost? Would you be able to sell a sponsorship to make up the expense?
- How will attendees use their badges? Will they simply be used at the door of the exhibit hall

and to give information to exhibitors, or would you like attendees to use their badges to access product locator kiosks or the cyber café? Would it be helpful to use badges to verify attendance at sessions or for continuing-education credits? Would you like to be able to eliminate tickets for special events or equip the cards with cash value that could be used at the bookstore?

- What do exhibitors prefer? Some exhibitors in certain industry sectors prefer a certain type of lead-retrieval system.
- What do attendees prefer? Are your attendees likely to be put off by someone pointing a laser at their chest to read the badge?
- Do you want to be able to track attendee movement?

## Cost considerations

RFID is more expensive than other traditional forms of registration and lead-retrieval technology. RFID badges cost an average of 60 cents each, compared with 14 cents apiece for a magcard badge or a few cents to print a barcode badge. However, show organizers should look at these prices in relation to total expenses and how the

*The SMART-reg All in the Badge™ RFID badges can be encoded with up to \$999.99 of cash value that attendees can use for show services or at the show bookstore.*

technology could be used, says Arnie Roberts of SMART-Reg. "RFID can be more expensive on the face of it, but you can get an instant ROI. Your actual costs might be 20 cents to \$1.20 less per badge. For a lot of our clients, it can actually reduce expenses in the long term."

For example, one SMART-reg client was dismayed at a food-and-beverage bill that was \$100,000 more than expected. Attendees had loaned each other their badges to allow friends to get access to a free meal, running up costs to much more than had been planned. Had RFID badges been utilized this would not have happened. The RFID badge could have been scanned as attendees walked through the door and when they re-entered the same event, so the person scanning the badge could see that it had already been used for that function.

To learn more, visit: [www.smart-reg.com](http://www.smart-reg.com).