

GTAG: Make up your mind, say chip manufacturers

GTAG says the proposed UHF standard must be in place by March 2002. They don't say how.

By **Salina Christmas**

There were loud protests, but major chip manufacturers have bowed to GTAG's proposed UHF standard of 862-928 MHz frequency.

Philips Semiconductors, an enthusiastic campaigner of 13.56 MHz, and Gemplus have partnered with

Intermec Technologies to expand into 800/900 MHz-based technology. One-nil to GTAG? Not quite. GTAG wants the frequency to be globally implemented by March 2002. That's a long shot.

What's the story, GTAG?

Philips Semiconductors says it is able to provide the silicon within the designated time. The alliance with Intermec has guaranteed this. But GTAG must issue the specifications soon.

Katja Kienzl, the marketing manager of RF Tag and Label ICs at Philips Semiconductors, notes, "We need sufficiently detailed specifications from GTAG, defining topics such as the protocol, command sets and system parameters."

The problem is, one observer notes, GTAG is ambiguous about the definition of protocol. It has yet to declare how it proposes the data to be handled.

Global acceptance will take several years, just like it did for 13.56 MHz, says Kienzl. "In the US, end users should have these UHF systems available quickly after the chips are available, depending on the design-in time needed by system integrators," says Kienzl. "In Europe and Japan (where the proposed frequency is illegal for supply chain applications), end users need to deal with existing regulations. Changes in these regulations are difficult to achieve and timing is currently not foreseeable."

More time needed

"My layman's understanding is that it takes typically six months from design to delivery of a particular chip," says Paul Chartier of Praxis Consultants.

"Some radio regulators may want to see tests of tags and readers before they establish power emission levels, etc."

No buts

GTAG's project leader John Greaves dismissed critics at the last GTAG session in Frankfurt, Germany, insisting that manufacturers must meet the standards within the designated time. The penalty for not doing so is "death", he pronounced.

"I have an aversion to the term 'pilot' and 'tests'. We would call it 'proof of concept'. RFID has been around for years, so why have 'tests'?" he said.

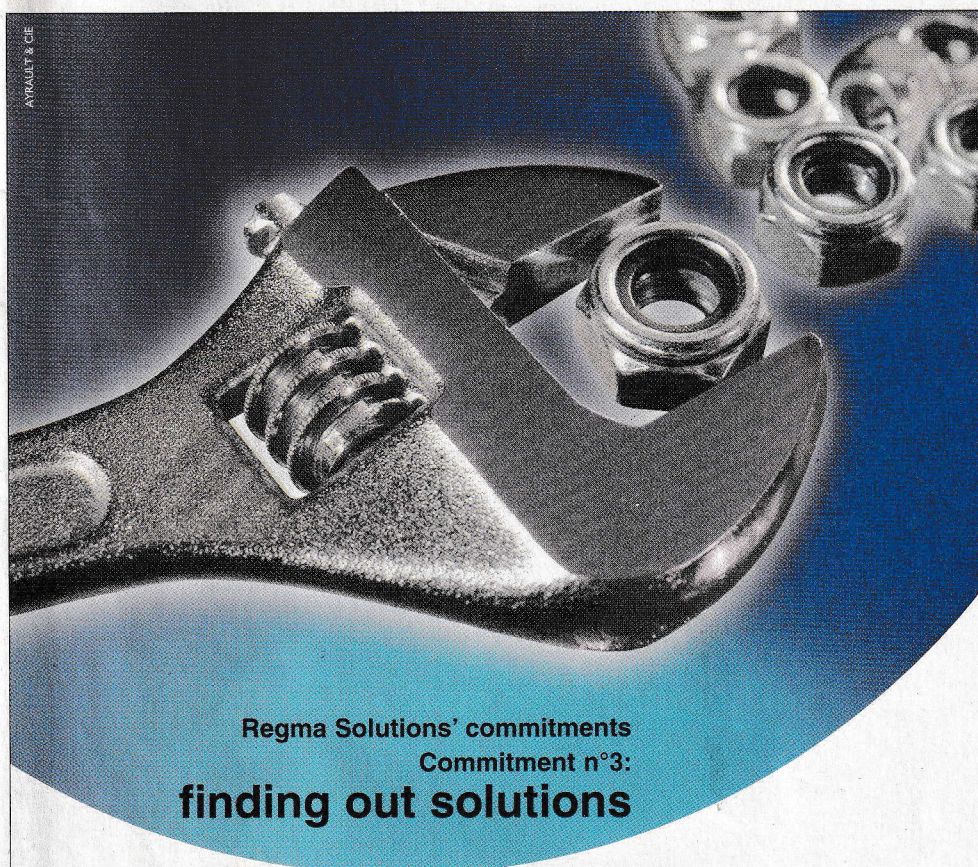
"Manufacturers are obsessed with protocols."

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