

Contactless identification and transaction technologies (NFC, for “Near Field Communication”) have experienced rapid development in a global market that enjoyed accelerated growth in 2010 which has continued into 2011. According to Eurosmart, global use of “smart secure devices” in 2011 amounted to almost 6.1 million units (contactless smart cards), used in telecommunications (microprocessor cards – 4.6 million), financial and payment services (one million) and passports, identity and healthcare cards (e-government and e-healthcare – 0.22 million), with the remainder split between a variety of applications, notably in transport (tickets, tolls, etc.) and pay TV.

French companies with recognized expertise in the sector include **Inside Contactless** in Aix-en-Provence (Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur region), a member of the TES (Secure Electronic Transactions) innovation cluster in Caen (Basse-Normandie region), which has acquired ATMEL's SMS (Secure Microcontroller Solutions) division; **Gemalto** in Sophia Antipolis (Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur); and **TAZ-TAG** in Rennes (Brittany), which has entered into a partnership agreement with Toronto-based Canadian company **Quand Medical**, which specializes in medical information.

Foreign investors have been quick to seize opportunities in the French market, making use where possible of tax incentives supporting research and development (e.g. France's research tax credit). For example, Japanese company **SATO** provides RFID solutions from its Lille site (Nord-Pas de Calais); U.S. coding and identification company **Markem-Imaje** has established a site in Bourg-lès-Valence, close to the SCS (Secure Communication Solutions) innovation cluster at Valbonne-Sophia Antipolis (Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur); German company **Deister Electronics** is a leading player in RFID solutions in the Île-de-France (Paris) region; while **Maroc Traitement de Transactions (M2T)** has also established an Île-de-France site, aided by the IFA and the Paris Region Economic Development Agency. Innovation clusters Novalog in St-Étienne-du-Rouvray (Haute-Normandie) and Systematic Paris Region, which both specialize in traceability, are home to many foreign companies.

The “**2011 Cards and Identification**” show, due to be held in Paris from November 15-17, 2011, will focus on the contactless card and payment industry, the “object internet” and M2M, as well as the development of identification technologies. In this latter field, **Bluelinea** is preparing for the 2011 launch of an electronic bracelet to monitor Alzheimer's patients in their homes. More generally, the ability to monitor any item, cargo, vehicle, animal or person requiring special surveillance will call for detection infrastructure to be installed at mandatory transit points. Furthermore, ethical considerations arising from monitoring and identifying people and goods will need to be considered. Other applications could quickly become widespread: till procedures (bar code scanners), toll points (RFID scanners) and ticketing (for metro systems, shows and performances, vehicle parking and day-to-day transactions).

In October 2011, the **NFC Forum**, a consortium of manufacturers responsible for defining NFC standards, updated the so-called SNEP (Simple NDEF Exchange Protocol) specifications for peer-to-peer sharing. This protocol enables two NFC-equipped phones to exchange data simply by touching the handsets together. This function can be put to a wide variety of uses: exchanging business cards, gathering special offers for use at a later time, contacting and following other people on social networks, and exchanging small amounts of money or travel tickets.

In May 2011, the French government issued a €20 million call for projects (“Rolling out NFC contactless mobile services”). Funding will be awarded to 20 to 30 contactless mobile telephony projects to be rolled out in several major French cities offering information and payment transactions.

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