'Information such as lot codes and expiration date can now be available immediately, rather than having to look it up on a database,' says Desmons.

Before the companies can trial the tags in large volumes, they need to set up an infrastructure and databases in order to verify the individual codes on the tags.

According to Desmons, Impinj will begin shipping the tags in high volumes in the next few months.

Desmons reveals several companies in Japan and Korea have also shown an interest in the tags.

'In Japan and Korea there is a greater interest in item-level tagging. These companies are not just looking at our tags for pharmaceutical and apparel products, they are looking at a broader set of applications,' he says.

Swiss watchmaker clocks potential of markless technology

Switzerland-based digital solutions company AlpVision will launch an anti-counterfeiting product that makes a fingerprint image of any product, without any additional marking, in the next couple of months.

The new technology, called Fingerprint, has already attracted the attention of a leading watchmaker in Switzerland.

Roland Meylan, corporate communications manager at AlpVision, says: 'Watchmakers are very reluctant to add anything that isn't already a part of the watch because even a small change could lead to a negative effect on its precision. Our technology is so unobtrusive that this isn't a problem.'

Fingerprint works on the accepted principle that every manufactured product contains minute unique characteristics that come directly from its manufacturing process. A standard scanner can make an image of this item or part of the item. No marking is required.

Many other applications are also being investigated. The first of these in line are food, small bottles of cosmetics, medical instruments, luxury products, automotive and aeroplane parts.

The system works by sending the image to a secured server for later comparison when needed. The server contains the digital prints of genuine objects as well as any previously identified counterfeits.

Sophisticated mathematical algorithms allow comparison of the image of an object with millions of stored reference images in a matter of seconds, telling the owner quickly whether it's a counterfeit or legitimate product.

RFID hits active sport markets

Big brand names in the extreme sports industry are planning on using an RFID tag the size of a grain of rice to stop snowboards and sunglasses being counterfeited.

Australian surfboard brand Hot Buttered is interested in the technology, called the Surfboard Tracker (SBT). A Brazilian company is also interested in using the technology in its range of sports bikes.

Roll-out for both projects is expected in the coming year, with the tags for the system competitively priced.

The technology, which was originally designed to stop surfboard counterfeiters, works by using hard-to-replicate RFID tags that can be embedded in the product. A special logo is placed over the area where the device is implanted. Once implanted, the tag can be scanned to find the details of the original owner.

Andrew Smith, director of Surfboard Tracker, says: 'I came up with the idea 18 months ago after my surfboard was stolen. We brought the tags into full production four or five months ago. The SBT can help prevent goods being stolen and also protect companies from having their designs ripped off, which is an increasing problem with counterfeits coming in from China and South America.'

Once implanted and registered the details are added to a global database, recognised by police units around the world.

Smith hopes that in four or five years the SBT will become a standard in the industry and is currently working to have the scanner sent out to surf and snowboarding resorts so more people can take advantage of it.

Laser etch cosmetic packaging by 2007

Cosmetic companies are in talks with UK-based brand protection solution firm Total Brand Security about using its Naginels system to finely etch data onto plastic or glass cosmetic packaging.

The Naginels system uses a laser to etch data onto a surface and has been earmarked