

Printronix Expands RFID Offerings

The company broadens its SmartLine family of RFID solutions with two smart label thermal printers, a smart label developer's kit, an RFID-upgradeable thermal printer, and two smart label printer-applicators.

By Jonathan Collins

July 8, 2004—[Printronix](#), a long-time developer of industrial and enterprise printers, has introduced a number of UHF smart label printers as well as a pair of integrated smart label print-and-apply systems. The new SmartLine printer line builds on Printronix's first smart label printer offering—an Electronic Product Code-compliant smart label developer's kit for EPC RFID pilots—which was launched last September. Since then the company says it has seen demand for its RFID offering. “We have already sold hundreds of these printers to several dozen active pilots,” says Brad Jarvis, director of product marketing at Printronix, which is based in Irvine, Calif.

The new members of the SmartLine family consist of two smart label thermal printers, an enhanced smart label developer's kit, a new RFID-upgradeable thermal printer and its related RFID-upgrade kits, and the smart label printer-applicators.

The new smart label thermal printers are the SL5000e MP and the SL5000e C1. The MP version incorporates a multiprotocol UHF RFID reader from [Applied Wireless Identification Group \(AWID\)](#) able to support applications using EPC Class 0, 0+ and 1 standards labels for company's that either have yet to determine which label standards they will have to support or know they will have to support a mix of tag standards. The SL5000e C1 version incorporates an [Alien Technology](#), UHF RFID reader that supports just EPC Class 1 labels. Both SL5000e models accept 4-by-2-inch, 4-by-4-inch, 4-by-6-inch, 4-by-8-inch and 3-by-3-inch labels. Pricing starts at \$4,695 for the SL5000e C1 and \$4,995 for the SL5000e MP.

Printronix new smart label developer's kit, the SL5000e DK, provides a set of tools bundled with the SL5000e MP smart label printer. This kit lets users test label read rates and label placement on various products in preparation for their pilot programs. It features network print management and Ethernet connectivity and includes technical support (provided via the phone for the life of the printer) and two 500-label rolls of smart labels (either 4x6-inch or 4x2-inch labels with Alien Class 1 squiggle antenna inlays) certified to be functioning. The kit also comes with Printronix's unique RFID software migration tools that allow users to migrate from the printing of Universal Product Code (UPC) and Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) bar code labels to the encoding of EPC-compliant smart labels. The SL5000e DK starts at \$7,995.

For companies uncertain about when they will need to deploy RFID technology, Printronix's has also launched a thermal label printer that can be upgraded to support RFID printing at a later date. Part of the T5000e series of thermal printers that the company launched about 2 years ago, the new T5000e Smart Ready is a specifically configured version that allows for easy field upgradeability to RFID. Customers have a choice of upgrade kits: the SL5000e MP Upgrade Kit, which has an AWID reader that supports multiple tag protocols, or the SL5000e C1 Upgrade Kit, which has an Alien Technology that supports just Class 1 tags. Both kits come with RFID software, all necessary cables and connectors, and software migration tools that

permit the encoding of smart labels Printronix says, however, that its existing T5000e printers cannot be upgraded using this kit. The T5000e Smart Ready starts at \$2,995; the upgrade kit for the T5000e Smart Ready, at \$2,295.

Printronix's new SLPA7000e family of smart label printer-applicators consists of two models: the SLPA7204e, which prints at 200 dpi, and the SLPA7304e, which prints at 300 dpi. Codeveloped by Printronix and [FOX IV Technologies](#), the LPA7000e series combines Printronix's thermal print and RFID reader technology uses in its SL5000e MP printer with FOX IV's Uniwall label applicator system. According to the Printronix, the combination is the first integrated Electronic Product Code UHF print-and-apply system.

Designed for product manufacturers and distributors, the SLPA7000e printer-applicators use an integrated controller board to combine the smart label printer and the label applicator into a single unit. According to Printronix, that design reduces the costs and complexities of the machine, which can process about 20 labels per minute, depending upon a number of factors, including the complexity of tag, the amount of data being written to the label and the yield (percentage of functioning tags) of the label supply.

Both the SLPA7204e and the SLPA7304e support a range of label sizes (4x2 inches, 4x4 inches, 4x6 inches, 4x8 inches or 3x3 inches), and various antenna designs (Alien "Squiggle," Alien "M-Tag" and Rafsec "Psychedelic"). With a firmware upgrade to EPC Class 0/0+, the printer-applicators will eventually be able to support Matrics' "Dual Dipole" Class 0 and 0+ tags and Alien Technology's Class 1 Squiggle and M-tag 96-bit tags. The models can apply labels to either the top or the side of any carton to within 1/16-inch. An optional feature enables automatic label placement based on adjustable X-Y coordinates. There is also optional Wi-Fi support to provide the printer with a wireless network connection.

Printronix says it is currently taking orders for the SLPA7204e (priced at \$21,500) and the SLPA7304e (priced at \$21,800) and that the units will start shipping within 90 days.

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