

KSW-Microtec has unveiled new washable RFID labels that can be attached directly to the fabric of garments.

Nov. 11, 2002 - KSW-Microtec, a Germany company that makes RFID tags and labels, has unveiled two new washable RFID labels. One can be ironed or sewn directly onto the fabric of a garment. The other is mounted on a polyester substrate and sewn onto a garment.

The new flexible 13.56 MHz labels can withstand temperatures of up to 40 degrees Celsius. They have a life-expectancy of 10 years and aren't affected by tumble-drying, ironing or other cleaning processes. KSW is also working on a label that can withstand temperatures of 60 degrees Celsius and be dry-cleaned.

The company is targeting the apparel and uniform rental markets in the United States, according to KSW's Eitan Avni. "The whole area of textile tagging is huge," he says. "We are working with end-user retailers and multibillion-dollar companies to assemble washable tags. There is huge potential for tagging uniforms in the U.S., which is the biggest market."

The labels are available in two sizes, 60 mm by 60 mm and 90 mm by 65 mm. The company will also customize tags with special textile packaging material. Both can be delivered as single blank tags with the customer's design or as an endless tape on a reel.

The tags use Philips' I-code SL1 chip, with 384 bits of memory, or an ISO-15693-compatible version of the I-code that has 1 kilobit of memory. KSW also offers the label with the My-d or MF1 chips from Infineon. The My-d is also compatible with ISO-15693 and can have either 2 kilobits and 10 kilobits of memory. The MF1 supports ISO-14443 and comes with either 2 kilobits or 4 kilobytes of memory.

KSW's Avni says a major retailer has been working to prove the concept of tagging textiles before making an announcement. "This is not like Prada, where they tag things in one store and get a lot of press," he says. "This company is looking for a major roll out of the technology."

X-ident GmbH, a Germany company that specializes in manufacturing smart labels, tickets and tags under the brand IQ-Paper, has also been working on washable tag aimed at the rental uniform market. The company said its product is still in development and declined to comment further.

The potential market for tracking uniforms is huge. More than 5 million people a day wear uniforms from Cintas Corp., the No. 1 uniform supplier in the U.S. The company has more than 500,000 clients and had revenue of \$2.3 billion in fiscal 2000. RFID tags help reduce loss and enable companies to better track when garments need to be washed or disposed of.

In Europe and Australia, RFID tagging of uniforms is fairly common. But it is a relatively new concept in the United States. KSW opened an office in Cincinnati (where Cintas is based) in May to go after the market.

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