

Metro Group Goes Live With Gen 2

Germany's largest retailer is using EPC Generation 2 UHF readers and tags at its Future Store, in what the participants claim is the first "real-life" adoption of Gen 2 technology.

By Jonathan Collins

June 17, 2005—Spearheading the adoption of EPC Generation 2 tags and readers, Germany's largest retailer, Metro Group, is using EPC Gen 2 UHF readers and tags from Intermec Technologies at its Future Store in Rheinberg, Germany. Participants claim this is the first "real-life" adoption of Gen 2 technology. The Intermec hardware is based on EPCglobal's Gen 2 standard and the ISO 18000-6 Part C specification currently being considered for adoption by the International Organization for Standardization (see Gen 2 Candidate Passes First ISO Ballot).

Metro deployed two Intermec IF5 readers, one at the Future Store, the other at a distribution center in Essen, where Intermec's Gen 2 RFID tags are affixed to pallets and cases and shipped to the store. The tagged pallets and cases are tracked using IBM's WebSphere Device Infrastructure and Premises Server software, which had to be upgraded to support the new Gen 2 readers and the data read from the Gen 2 tags. The reader uses the IBM RFID software to collect and filter data, execute business processes and integrate the RFID information with software for enterprise resource planning (ERP) and warehouse management applications.

IBM and Intermec say that the deployment, which involved reconfiguring two portals to suit the new readers and antennas, took place over a two-week period. According to IBM, although the deployed Gen 2 infrastructure was tested only over a short period of time, it is already proving faster and more reliable than Metro's existing Gen 1 implementations. "We are seeing tags being read up to 10 times faster using Gen 2," says Bernd Bükler, IBM Business Consulting Services' retail industry executive.

Metro has deployed Gen 2 readers only at the Future Store, which the firm opened in April 2003 as a showcase for technological innovations in retailing (see Metro Opens "Store of the Future"), and at the DC in Essen. The company eventually plans to deploy Gen 2 throughout its supply chain, replacing the Gen 1 infrastructure used in certain stores and DCs since November last year, as well as introducing Gen 2 RFID to stores and DCs where RFID has yet to be deployed. The company says its deployment of Gen 2 equipment will be tied to the availability of the hardware.

Due to the limited availability of Gen 2 tags and hardware, the retailer expects its Future Store will receive pallets and cases bearing a mix of Gen 2 and Gen 1 tags for some time.

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