RFID JOURNAL
THE WORLD'S RFID AUTHORITY

Asiana Deploying RFID at Six Airports

The South Korean airline plans to tag and track passengers' baggage, from preflight check-in to postflight pickup.

By Jonathan Collins

Sept 22, 2005—Having completed trials that use radio frequency identification technology at six South Korean airports over the past few months, South Korea's Asiana Airlines is about to extend the systems as a way to track and monitor its passengers' luggage.

"This is the first airline in the world to make a commitment to use RFID," says John Shoemaker, vice president of business development at Symbol Technologies, which is supplying the RFID tags and readers that the airline is using for its baggage-tracking system. Because a number of Asiana passengers book domestic flights that shuttle between the six airports, the network will track bags from a flight's origination to its destination. Symbol believes this to be the first such multi-airport implementation of RFID.

Symbol has already seen its technology installed by airports in the United States and Asia (see Las Vegas Airport Bets on RFID, Hong Kong's Airport to Tag Bags).

Asiana Airlines' trial deployment was carried out in conjunction with the Korea Airport Corp., which operates the six airports, and HiTrax, a local Symbol RFID distributor, and with government backing from South Korean's Ministry of Information and Communication and the National Computerization Agency. Asiana was able to deploy readers at each of the airports because the airline has permanently assigned gates and baggage-handling conveyors it doesn't share with other airlines. Those airports are Cheju International, Cheongju, Gimpo, Kwangju, Pusan International and Taegu. Asiana expects to handle about a total of 100,000 bags per month.

The trial consisted of one or two Symbol AR400 readers (interrogators) placed on the baggage conveyors at each of the six airports. These ensure that the Symbol Class 0+ EPC UHF tag attached to baggage could be reliably read and tracked. According to Symbol, the limited trial involved around 50,000 tags and showed that using an RFID system would improve the efficiency of its baggage tracking and monitoring systems by 20 percent, compared with the existing bar code-based system.

Asiana plans to extend the deployment of Symbol's RFID network to all of its baggage tracking and monitoring systems, from preflight check-in to postflight baggage pickup. Symbol believes the deployments will be up and running by the end of the year. Expanding the system will require additional equipment at each site. "They will need RFID encoders and printers at the check-in desks, as well as fixed and handheld readers," says Shoemaker.

Symbol claims Asiana is considering integrating its RFID network with cellular services to send mobile phone messages to customers, alerting them to any problems with their luggage.