

Pie Maker Cooks Up RFID Trial

Australia's Patties Foods is preparing to test the use of passive UHF RFID tags to track its frozen fare.

By Jonathan Collins

Sept. 28, 2005—Starting next month, Australian pie manufacturer [Patties Foods](#), located in Bairnsdale, Victoria, will begin a three-phase trial to test the use of passive UHF RFID tags to track its frozen products, both at its own facilities and at those of its supply chain partners.

The company believes Australian retailers are moving toward implementing their own RFID networks, and is determined to be prepared. "When we have finished the three stages, we can say to our trading partners that we are RFID-ready and waiting," says Joe Rettino, general manager of purchasing and supply at Patties Foods. "When retailers say they want RFID-tagged shipments, we'll be ready."

The company, which has an annual revenue of around AUS\$140 million (US\$106 million), produces 23,000 pies an hour, 20 hours a day, six days a week. The family-owned firm spent the past two years coordinating the use of bar codes with its customers and suppliers. It has also implemented an electronic shipping and receiving notification system with its suppliers, logistics providers and retailers. Now, it is looking to RFID to help improve aspects of its operations that bar-coding cannot.

"We can see benefits at the warehouse level, both for us and our third-party logistics supplier. With no line-of-sight requirements and the ability to read RFID tags on cases in the middle of a pallet, RFID promises real benefits over bar codes," says Rettino.

The first stage of the trial is expected to last four to six weeks. This stage will test the placement of tags and interrogators to ensure reliable and accurate reads of tagged pallets in the company's own facilities.

The trial is set to use EPC Gen 2 RFID labels and readers provided by [Matthews Intelligent Identification](#), an Australian reseller of data-capture, printing and labeling equipment, and RFID middleware from [VeriSign](#).

In the second stage, scheduled to last five weeks, tagged pallets of Patties Foods frozen pies will be read as they leave the company's manufacturing facilities, then again as they arrive at the distribution center of logistics provider [Montague Cold Storage](#), in Narre Warren North, Victoria. The pallets will be read a third and final time when they leave the Montague's DC en route to a retailer.

In the third stage, also five weeks long, the company hopes a retailer will deploy an RFID portal at its receiving dock. So far, Patties has no retailer to take part in the third phase of its trial, but as the pilot progresses, the bakery hopes one will come onboard before the end of the trial. That will enable the company to track the flow of its products better through its retailer's supply chain. Patties says it is also keen on working with a retailer to test RFID-tagging of individual items, which can be single pies or packets of four pies, although the company realizes the cost of tagging individual items remains too high to implement tagging at that level. According to Rettino, item-level testing would be the project's final objective, but a lot of

hurdles in a freezer environment must be overcome before the pilot gets to that point.

In addition to understanding how RFID can improve its own business, Patties Foods says it is eager to see how RFID will perform in the frozen-food market. "We couldn't find any research into RFID in frozen environments," says Rettino. The company is also looking into potentially using tags able to sense the temperature of a shipment to help ensure that its frozen goods have been kept at the right temperature en route to its customers.

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