

# Proview Deploys RFID System

The monitor and TV manufacturer has launched an RFID system at its manufacturing facility in Shenzhen, China, to tag shipments to retailers and issue advance shipping notices.

By Claire Swedberg

Jan. 18, 2006—Proview International Holdings Ltd., a Hong Kong-based manufacturer of computer monitors and televisions, has launched an RFID system at its manufacturing facility in Shenzhen, China. The new system will tag and track cases and pallets of products Proview ships to Best Buy and other customers. Best Buy requires its suppliers to apply Electronic Product Code RFID tags to shipments sent to the retailer. The system uses Manhattan Associates' software integrated with Proview's existing in-house data system.

Proview came to Manhattan Associates in search of a solution that would allow the Chinese company to continue using its legacy material requirements planning (MRP) data and tracking system. "The questions they asked were very much focused on integration," says Manhattan Associates' director of product management, Greg Gilbert.

What Manhattan Associates provided was its EPC Manager application, which acts as an interface between the tag's EPC number and the company's existing MRP system. EPC Manager accesses information from the MRP system, such as the type and quantity of items in a case and each item's serial number. The software then encodes and prints out RFID smart labels with EPC numbers corresponding to the company's serial numbers. Proview employees apply the labels to cases at the production line. Once the cases are tagged, have passed quality assurance and are loaded on pallets, the EPC Manager captures all the case tags at the manufacturing line and prints out a smart label for application to the pallet.

Manhattan Associates also provided RFID integration to manage reader communication with Proview's legacy MRP system and filter tag data. In that way, Gilbert says, the system allows Proview to maintain its existing tracking system with its own in-house serial numbers. Proview uses these serial numbers for such functions as issuing advance shipment notices, (ASNs). These serial numbers and EPC numbers are both stored in the Proview system, allowing users to cross-reference a serial number to the corresponding EPC number. The data is also integrated back to the company's existing system to generate reports for internal use, to track inventory and to issue ASNs to Best Buy. "They are used to performing with their own ID numbers," Gilbert says, adding that with the new software, Proview can "to maintain a cross-reference between the data on the tag and the data in their system."

To avoid the additional labor of attaching both an RFID label and a shipping label, the company now prints the shipping label information onto the RFID label. The tagging process is also mobile; it can be moved from one production line to another.

Manhattan Associates have about 60 customers worldwide, most in North America, but this is the first Asian customer for the software provider. Gilbert predicts this deployment could signal a trend in the Asian market for Manhattan Associates. Because Chinese manufacturers will have to adopt RFID in their supply chains to continue meeting their clients' demands and to increase their competitiveness, the demand for RFID systems

will increase.

Gilbert points to what he calls "the predominance of Asia in manufacturing" and the growing interest in RFID solutions, which, he says, "is a good sign not just for us but for the industry overall," since it is likely to lead to more RFID systems across Asia. From a software standpoint, he adds, there are unique challenges in integrating the system in Asia, in part because the operating system in the Microsoft server is different. "The script isn't alphabet-based, as ours is," Gilbert says.

Some challenges still lie before Proview as its customers shift from EPC Gen 1-based tags and readers to those based on the EPC Gen 2 standard. Proview's existing RFID hardware system is designed for application of Gen 1 RFID tags and labels because that is what its customers requested. As some customers move to Gen 2 tags and labels, while others stay with Gen 1, Proview is likely to use a system allowing both types of tag labeling.

"For us, from a software standpoint, that is not a big transition," says Gilbert, referring to what his firm would need to do to bring Gen 1-compliant companies up to the Gen 2 standard. For Proview and other retail suppliers, it will mean either upgrading the firmware on their readers and printers, or replacing them entirely. "Most of the work is going to be changes to hardware, and possibly acquiring more hardware," he says, if the manufacturer must use both Gen 1 and Gen 2.

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