

Italian RFID Lab to Open in May

The University of Parma is readying a research lab geared toward supporting Italian companies investigating the potential of RFID in their operations.

By Jonathan Collins

Mar. 17, 2006—Hoping to be the first organization in Italy authorized to use UHF radio frequency identification equipment, the [University of Parma](#) is preparing to open a research lab geared toward supporting Italian companies investigating the potential of implementing RFID in their operations.

The 865 MHz to 868 MHz radio frequency band has been chosen for RFID use across the majority of [European Union](#) states, but in Italy, that band remains under the control and sole use of the Italian military. "We have asked for a site license from the [Ministry of Defense](#) and are confident we will be awarded one soon," says Antonio Rizzi, full professor of industrial logistics at the school's department of industrial engineering, which will operate the lab.

The new research center, [RFID Lab](#), is set to open in the first week of May. Located on the university's campus in Parma and staffed by approximately 10 professors and Ph.D. students, the lab will aim to offer RFID vendors and end-user companies a resource for developing their RFID deployments and products.

The university says the impetus for the lab came from work already carried out by the university for [GS1 Italy](#), the body charged with promoting the adoption of Electronic Product Code RFID technology in Italy. Starting in 2004, the university began studying the potential for RFID to help improve processes at the Italian units of 10 international companies, including [L'Oréal](#), [Sony](#), [Heineken](#), [Nestlé](#) and [Carrefour](#).

"The lab will give us the ability to study the feasibility of the solutions we engineered, and to test models we developed," says Rizzi.

The lab will be capable of working on all potential types of RFID and EPC deployment—both UHF and HF—but given its background and the local Parma industries, the focus is expected to be on RFID application in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and food industries. With that in mind, the university is already exploring the potential of working alongside established RFID labs at universities in the United States—most notably, the [University of Arkansas' RFID Research Center](#) and the [University of Florida's Center for Food Distribution and Retailing](#) (see [University Opens RFID Research Center](#) and [University Takes a Fresh Approach to RFID](#)).

"We are in discussions about how we can extend our research in Italy to the U.S., and the other way around," says Rizzi.

The lab is being created with the support of end-user and RFID technology companies. End users are expected to make up the executive board of the RFID Lab and help determine the work undertaken, while RFID technology vendors will supply the hardware and software used by the lab. End users and RFID vendors alike will have to pay to use the lab, though pricing has yet to be determined.

So far, Intermec, Caen and Siemens are all set to provide interrogators for installation on conveyor belts, forklifts and wrapping machines, while Sun Microsystems will supply EPC middleware and two workstations. Id-Solutions, a company spun off by the university that provides RFID-based systems to manage the supply chain, will help coordinate the project.

The 150-square-meter lab will be extended to 600 square meters within the next three years. In addition to offering RFID end-user services, the university says the lab is considering the possibility of adopting the EPCglobal accreditation program as part of its goal of becoming a certified EPCglobal test center.

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