

RFID Tracks Transatlantic Shipments of Jaguar Parts

Logistics provider Unipart is using radio frequency identification to monitor the security status and location of containers sealed with Savi Network's active tags.

By Beth Bacheldor

Sept. 25, 2006—RFID is being used to speed up and streamline the supply chain for after-market Jaguar automobile parts being shipped from the United Kingdom to the United States. Unipart Group, a third-party logistics provider, is testing active RFID tags and sensors affixed to containers carrying the parts from two of Unipart's distribution centers in the United Kingdom to two of its warehouses in Mahwah, N.J., and Brisbane, Calif. There are currently no plans to track parts as they move from Jaguar's manufacturing facilities to Unipart's, but both companies say they will explore additional ways to leverage RFID.

Unipart, which manages Jaguar's entire after-market parts supply chain, is working with Savi Networks, a joint venture of RFID systems provider Savi Technology and seaport operator Hutchison Port Holdings (HPH), says Susan Evans, Savi Networks' director of business development for the European and African regions. Unipart is using Savi Networks' SaviTrak, an RFID-enabled global container shipment-tracking service. SaviTrak includes RFID tags and interrogators, as well as software that collects, processes and analyzes the RFID data.

"RFID is something Unipart is getting into, and the company sees RFID as a big, potential service offering they can provide to their customers," says Evans. The RFID-enabled supply chain, called the Jaguar Tradelane Project, will provide Unipart a good deal of logistical information. This will include when containers leave and arrive at various points along the supply chain, as well as any details about the condition of containers, such as temperatures or whether the container was opened. "If RFID can take one day out of their lead time from point of origin to point of destination, that is a significant savings," she says.

Unipart also plans to leverage the technology to increase the level of certification it currently has under the U.S. government's Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT), a voluntary program for shippers, freight forwarders and carriers involved with U.S. importation.

Unipart started planning the Jaguar Tradelane project about six months ago. The company is now using RFID interrogators at its U.K. distribution centers in Honeybourne and Baginton on containers outfitted with Savi Technology's Savi Tag ST-676 ISO Container Security Tag, an active 433 MHz RFID tag that clamps onto the cargo container's door. The Savi Tag ST-676 also includes a sensor bus affixed to the inside of the containers, which monitors temperature, shock, light and humidity.

While Jaguar doesn't have the same requirements that a pharmaceutical or perishables company has with regard to temperature or humidity, changes in any of those conditions could indicate a container has been opened. If a tag detects any such changes, it creates an alert that a handheld or fixed-position RFID interrogator can read when the container arrives at one of the ports or warehouses.

So far, Unipart has tagged seven containers, which were loaded onto ships at the U.K.'s Port of Felixstowe today. Last week, Savi Networks announced it had extended the SaviTrak RFID service to terminal locations at the Port of Felixstowe, including the addition of RFID interrogators on dockside cranes and at entry and exit gates. The seven RFID-tagged containers filled with Jaguar parts will travel to two destination ports in the United States: the Port of New York/New Jersey and the Port of Oakland in California.

RFID interrogators there (as part of Savi Networks' SaviTrak service), will record the containers' arrival, as well as collect any alerts that may have been created from the sensors, such as a change in temperature or light, which could indicate whether the container was opened in transit. The containers will then be moved to the U.S. warehouses, where interrogators will again record date, time and sensor data. The data will be used to create reports that Unipart can analyze to understand better how the parts flow through the supply chain.

Unipart plans to tag up to 120 containers as part of the Jaguar Tradelane project, which is expected to run for about three months, Evans says. When the trial is completed, Savi Networks will present business-value analysis to Unipart and Jaguar, along with proposals on extending the RFID deployment, he adds.

According to Evans, Unipart is testing the RFID and sensor technology on its Jaguar supply chain first, but hopes to extend the capability to other customers. "Unipart doesn't expect to get the biggest savings on this particular supply chain because they've really optimized it already, but they do expect to gain experience with RFID and identify new opportunity for Jaguar and other clients."

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