

A real-time location system, coupled with a cell-phone application, enables logistics provider Jöbstl to deliver clothing to Charles Vögele stores on time, resulting in reduced inventory and enhanced customer service.

By Claire Swedberg

Oct. 31, 2006—Austrian third-party logistics company [Jöbstl Warehousing & Fashion](#) is seeing results from an RFID system it implemented two years ago to track the movement of clothing items to stores run by [Charles Vögele](#).

Jöbstl is using [WhereNet's](#) real-time locating system (RTLS) technology to manage containers at its own distribution center, as well as at the neighboring DC of Jöbstl's largest customer, Charles Vögele, which operates nearly 800 clothing stores in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The system has helped automate workflow for the company's yard drivers and reduced the amount of time needed to process containers in yards and through dock doors, says Erwin Gabardi, managing director for Jöbstl.



Erwin Gabardi

The technology has been continually modified since it was first implemented. "This was not a fast rollout, but it was a very positive one," says Florian Erber, director of sales and business development for WhereNet in Europe.

The system uses RFID technology to locate shipping containers at both sites. Approximately 35 containers are transported from the Jöbstl DC each day, each equipped with a WhereTag active RFID tag, which transmits a signal at 2.4 GHz and has a read range of 1,000 meters (3,000 feet). The tag can be set to transmit at varying intervals, Erber says, and Jöbstl has chosen to have tags transmit signals every two minutes, at which rate the battery life is five to seven years.

Jöbstl has three WhereLAN Locating Access Points (LAPs) installed on a building at its site. These receive the WhereTag transmissions and feed the EPC numbers of each tag into the company's ERP system. [Comtrix's](#) 4ward RFID integration software transmits that data to Jöbstl through the readers' cable connection.

At Vögele, which has a much larger operation, Jöbstl provides six WhereLAN LAPs, mounted about every 100 meters, to create a grid throughout the yard, allowing operators to keep track of the locations of tagged containers. Vögele also has 25 exciters installed at dock doors. Each exciter, known as a WherePort, has its own unique identifying number, which it transmits to the WhereTag of any container within 8 meters of the dock door. The tag can then send that data to the company's ERP system, notifying personnel that a specific container is at a specific dock door.



Florian Erber

In addition, Jöbstl uses a mobile cellular system to track garment shipments during delivery to one of 150 retail sites throughout central Europe. A truck driver arriving at a stop uses a Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) Web application on a cell phone to input his identification and place of arrival.

By enabling the complete visibility of Vögele's closed-loop supply chain, the WhereNet system optimizes the flow of containers between the Vögele and Jöbstl DCs and the retailer's stores across central Europe. This results in increased throughput, reduced inventory, enhanced customer service and shorter order-to-cash cycle times.

Jöbstl initially considered a global positioning satellite (GPS) solution, Gabardi says, but found it was too expensive and required more power than Jöbstl could generate. The GPS unit requires a constant energy source, but containers are not always connected to the truck tractor, particularly while in storage.

"We are still expanding, and plan to open another warehouse in 2008," Gabardi says. "We will be very interested in implementing this system there."