

Pfizer to Tag Celebrex

The drugmaker will use Gen 2 RFID technology to track cases and pallets and test the concept of case-level serialization and authentication, which could help wholesalers catch counterfeit Viagra.

By Beth Bacheldor

Nov. 14, 2006—In the past year, Pfizer has successfully tagged more than 2 million bottles, 55,000 cases and 400 pallets of Viagra. Now, the drug manufacturer is ready to start tagging another of its top-selling drugs: Celebrex.

In 2007, Pfizer plans to affix UHF Gen 2 RFID tags to all cases and pallets of the drug—a pain reliever and anti-inflammatory—bound for the U.S. market. This is part of an effort to expand the scope of Pfizer's RFID initiative, the drugmaker announced at this week's RFID Health-Care Industry Adoption Summit conference in Washington, D.C. The Celebrex trial will require Pfizer to build out its RFID infrastructure and expertise beyond its plant in France, which produces and packages Viagra, to a much larger plant in Caguas, Puerto Rico.

The initiative will incorporate four assembly lines used to produce and package Celebrex, each of which operate at a speed four times that of a Viagra line. The expansion will enable Pfizer and its trading partners to vet findings established in the past year with the Viagra RFID project. For example, says Byron Bond, director of trade operations and customer service for Pfizer's U.S. pharmaceuticals division, the Celebrex pilot will provide the drugmaker a more accurate picture of tag read rates, which have thus far proven very high in the Viagra trial, involving only one product and one assembly line.

"This will be a little more challenging environment," Bond says. "The higher volumes will help us validate what we've learned and better understand RFID's costs. Celebrex has significant volumes, so for [distributors], as well as us here at Pfizer, who really want to look at operational efficiencies, we'll all be able to get a clearer picture."

Celebrex's annual volumes are significantly higher than Viagra's and, therefore, more costly to tag. As such, Pfizer has opted not to tag at the unit level. Moreover, tagging cases and pallets of Celebrex will allow the manufacturer to test the concept of case-level serialization and authentication, which could help wholesalers identify counterfeit drugs. "I'm not going to tell you we're convinced that case-level validation is the only solution, but it can enable systemic counterfeit detection," Bond says. "You don't always have to go to the expense of item-level tagging."

Drug counterfeiting continues to be a problem for Pfizer and other pharmaceutical companies. In the first half of 2006, in fact, Pfizer's global security organization documented more than 4.9 million pills of counterfeit Viagra and 304 kilograms of sildenafil citrate (1 kilogram is enough to make about 7,000 100 mg Viagra tablets). During that same time period, the company also uncovered 100 pills of counterfeit Celebrex.

So far, wholesalers and distributors have authenticated 300,000 tagged bottles of Viagra by verifying each tag's unique Electronic Product Code (EPC) (see [Pfizer Using RFID to Fight Fake Viagra](#)). Verifying each

tag's authenticity helps ensure that a product is genuine. However, no pharmacies or hospitals have yet authenticated any of the tagged bottles they've received, except for those involved in three specific pilots. Though Bond says about a dozen pharmacies have registered to begin verifying each tag's EPC code, their slow start in doing so has hindered Pfizer's 2007 RFID plans. "It's one of the reasons we aren't tagging at the item level for Celebrex," Bond says.

RELATED_ARTICLES Moreover, Pfizer reports that in 2007, it will begin tagging all cases and pallets of Viagra with UHF EPC Gen 2 tags, rather than the EPC Gen 1 MHz UHF tags the company currently uses. For both Viagra and Celebrex, tags will be affixed to the sides of cases to ensure the most consistent reads, Bond says. To tag individual bottles of Viagra, Pfizer has been using RFID labels with 13.56 MHz HF tags containing NXP Semiconductors (Philips) ICode chips. The drugmaker says it will start testing tags compliant with the HF specification currently being developed by EPCglobal's HF Air-Interface Working Group. According to Bob Celeste, EPCglobal's director of action groups, the organization expects to ratify that specification as a standard by the third quarter of 2007.

Next year, the pharmaceutical company expects to initiate an electronic-pedigree pilot with several trading partners (see [Pfizer's RFID Pilot Is the Start of Something Big](#)). E-pedigrees are secure files, created via RFID or a similar technology, that store data regarding each move a product makes through the supply chain. Such files are used to authenticate that a product is genuine.

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