

Canadians Take Collaborative Approach to RFID

The Canadian RFID Center is looking to help domestic produce companies deploy RFID together.

By Mark Roberti

Nov. 16, 2006—"Canada is taking a different approach to RFID adoption," says David Wilkes, senior vice president of trade and business development for the [Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors](#) (CCGD). "We have a culture of collaboration on supply-chain issues, so we'd like to do RFID in a collaborative way."

Wilkes is a key player in the adoption of radio frequency identification in Canada. In addition to his role at the CCGD, he also serves as the head of the [Canadian RFID Center](#) (CRC), a 5,000-square-foot facility located in an [IBM](#) building in Markem, Ont.

The center opened in 2005 thanks to C\$1.7 million (US\$1.4 million) in funding from CCGD, as well as Canada's [Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food](#); grocery industry groups [Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers](#), the [Canadian Produce Marketing Association](#) and the [Food and Consumer Products of Canada](#); and RFID vendors and services suppliers [IBM Canada](#), [Intermec](#) and [Symbol Technologies](#) (see [Canadian RFID Center Debuts](#)).

"We needed a way to learn about and understand RFID together," Wilkes says of Canadian grocery retailers. "A center was the right approach to do that. CCGD's members need to work with suppliers, as opposed to issuing RFID-tagging mandates."

To date, retailers and suppliers have worked collaboratively in Canada. [Loblaws](#), for instance, has just completed a pilot it describes as a Canadian grocery-industry effort, rather than just a Loblaws solo project (see [Canadian Retailer Wraps Up RFID Pilot](#)). Much of the early testing of tags and interrogators was done in the CRC—so much so that Wilkes describes the center as "a platform for the pilot."

RELATED_ARTICLES Some 250 people have visited the center in the 14 months since it first opened. Most companies bring their leadership team. "They get to see the technology working—and not working—and how it can be applied to freezer and refrigerator environments," Wilkes says. "They get a sense that it's real, and they start to think about the strategic decision about when to use, and how to use, RFID."

The center is a particularly valuable resource to smaller companies that can't afford to start their own labs. These firms can follow what industry leaders are doing and learn from their efforts. Wilkes believes this collaborative approach could lead to a faster pace of adoption for the industry as a whole. "If we all do it together, it's less expensive," he says. "And you get to crucial mass quickly. That's the key."

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