

Lab ID of Bologna, Italy, has developed an RFID system designed for tracking garments.

Feb. 19, 2003 - Marco Astorri wants to make RFID fashionable. The executive VP of [Lab ID](#), based in Bologna, Italy, has been working on a complete radio frequency identification system to be used to track garments and other items.

Lab ID has spent 10 million Euros and 15 months developing tags, readers and antennas that operate at high frequency (13.56 MHz), as well as the software necessary to manage the readers. The company's system is based on ISO 15693, a standard for how vicinity cards communicate with readers (the air interface). The standard is also used in smart labels.

One of the company's target markets is the textile and apparel industry. The company has its own lamination equipment and creates labels that can be put on clothes and transponders that can be embedded in shoes. The company has its own test facilities, including a simulation of a store environment.

"We have designed and produced 20 micron-thick polyamid and polyester labels for garments," says Astorri. "They can withstand any kind of domestic washing."



Lab ID's label maker

The apparel and footwear industries have been keenly interested in RFID tracking. One reason is they tend to have large numbers of stocking-keeping units (SKUs). A shirt may come in four sizes with ten colors for each size. Making sure all of all of these SKUs are in stock is no simple matter.

Another issue is making sure product is on the right shelf or rack when the customer wants to buy it. Often a customer will try on a pair of jeans or a sports jacket and then return it to the wrong place. The next customer sees no items of that size on the shelf and walks out without purchasing anything, even though the item was in stock.

The higher price of most clothing items means that it's easier for the manufacturer or retailer to justify using an RFID tag that costs 50 cents or more to track the goods. If tagging increases sales by ensuring the products are available, the system can provide a good return on investment. RFID also makes it easier to track returns from customers.

Astorri says that Lab ID is also working with companies that make and sell consumer goods, electrical appliances, and electronics equipment. "We think these will become significant markets pretty soon," he says.

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