

NCR Tags Its Own Shipments

Using its own RFID technology, point-of-sale equipment provider NCR has begun tagging cartons and pallets of its electronic products shipped to a global retailer.

By Claire Swedberg

July 18, 2007—Using its own RFID technology, NCR has begun tagging cartons and pallets of its electronic products as they are shipped out of its Atlanta warehouse destined for a global retailer.

NCR sells point-of-sale terminals, payment kiosks, self-serve point-of-sale equipment and ATMs to the retail market. At its Atlanta customer-fulfillment center, it receives component parts for various terminals. These devices are assembled, tested and then packed and shipped to customers, says Donna A. Wright, vice president and general manager at Automatic Identification and Data Collection (AIDC) Solutions Group, a division of NCR.

For this specific retail customer, which Wright declines to name, NCR ships some products to the retailer's distribution centers and others directly to its stores. In either case, the retailer wants the cartons and pallets to be tagged, allowing it to track when the items arrived at the dock doors and where the items went from there, prior to installation in the store. Although NCR does not have details as to how the tracking is being done, the retailer might read tags as the cartons arrive at the distribution center and then again at the store dock doors, as well as at the time workers open the boxes to install the NCR devices. "They may also be reading the tag when the carton packaging materials are disposed or trashed," Wright says. All of these practices would give the retailer more visibility into which shipment is where prior to installation and when installation took place.

In April last year NCR acquired IDVelocity, a company that provides AIDC software solutions for data collection from bar code, RFID, biometric and other sources. So in the case of this implementation NCR used IDVelocity's software and NCR's own integration services known as TransitionWorks Retail RFID Compliance. The system was fully deployed in April 2007.

Sections of the Atlanta warehouse are dedicated to shipments destined for a specific customer. For the retailer that is requesting tagged equipment, NCR workers pack items and use a Zebra printer to encode EPC Gen 2 RFID labels. The label also includes a bar code in the event the label's RFID tag cannot be read. NCR personnel use a handheld Motorola RFID interrogator to take a validation read of the label's tag, as well as Motorola portal readers in the dock doors with an IP connection to NCR's database.

RELATED_ARTICLES NCR is using Oracle ERP for its warehouse management software, while the shipment tag reads are stored in a separate SQL server database. That software stores the RFID number, items on the pallet, descriptions of the items and ship-to data for use by NCR for shipment reports and history, Wright says. "This is in case the retailer requires information concerning the EPC RFID encoded information, date or time read, or if retailer says [a] tag could not be read," Wright says, "we would prove that we did read the tag before shipping."

Eventually, Wright says, NCR may integrate the RFID system into its ERP system. This integration would

eliminate errors and labor hours, she explains, by automating the shipment orders and advance shipment notices, as well as catching missing or incorrect RFID tags as shipments are loaded through the dock doors. Most immediately, however, she says, NCR is likely to focus on providing similar labeling systems to its other fulfillment centers throughout the country and eventually tag cartons and pallets containing equipment destined to other RFID-enabled retailers.

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