# Daisy Brand Benefits From RFID Analytics

The dairy products maker is now using RFID data to manage promotions and the introduction of new products, and has installed upgraded hardware while planning expansion to its new warehouse.

By Claire Swedberg

Jan. 18, 2008—Dairy products manufacturer Daisy Brand has taken its RFID deployment to a new phase, says Kevin Brown, the company's director of information systems, and is now concentrating on using data analytics to better manage promotions and high-volume shopping times. Daisy is using those analytics to manage the release of a new cottage cheese product that first appeared in some Texas area stores in November 2006, as well as its sour cream, by tracking how quickly the items reach the shelf, and how often they are replenished.

Daisy Brand recently upgraded its RFID hardware, deploying Alien Technology ALR9900 readers for forklifts and portals. The ALR9900, the dairy products maker says, enables the portals to achieve a better read rate and requires only one antenna per forklift.

Daisy deployed its initial RFID system at its warehouse in Garland, Texas, in 2005. Now the company is deploying similar technology at its new manufacturing plant in Casa Grande, Ariz., expected to open in the second half of this year (see RFID Increases Sour Cream Maker's Visibility and Daisy Brand Deems RFID a Success).

While Daisy Brand's initial goals for RFID involved testing tag placement and hardware functionality at its Garland site, the company has now taken the next step—utilizing the data. "A lot of our activity has been around the use of information from Wal-Mart's Retail Link," Brown says, referring to the retailer's extranet service for sharing supply chain data with suppliers.

According to Brown, the importance of analytics comes into play especially with promotions, new product releases or heavy shopping events. Daisy Brand has leveraged the RFID data to identify when a store shelf does not contain the product that needs to be there, or when replenishment will soon be required. "In our case," he says, "we've got a perishable product, and we want to see the product go out on time—but not too early." With the RFID system, Daisy's managers have begun tracking how quickly the items are loaded on shelves in various Wal-Mart stores. "If it goes out a week ahead, it will be gone before the promotion starts," Brown explains.

All Daisy Brand pallets and cases shipped to RFID-enabled Wal-Mart stores are identified by Alien's Omni-Squiggle Gen 2 RFID tags. (For non-Wal-Mart locations, including Sam's Club, Daisy is sending all shipments only on RFID-tagged pallets.) Once the tagged cases arrive at an RFID-enabled Wal-Mart store, an interrogator captures their tag RFID numbers, transmitting them to Wal-Mart's back-end system. The data is then displayed on Retail Link, alerting the dairy products maker that the items are being placed on the store shelf. When the emptied cases are moved to the trash compactor, Brown says, an interrogator at that location captures the RFID number once more, and the system notifies Daisy Brand, through Retail Link, that the

product has been sold.

"We want to know if it got placed on the shelf, which stores were compliant and which were not," Brown says. "If we get zero sales on one day, we want to know why." That information can be particularly important regarding a promotion, he says, adding that "advertising and media costs money, and if you then face an out-of-stock, that's not good."

With the launch of Daisy Brand's cottage cheese product, Brown and his team have been able to determine when the product was put on the shelf, as well as monitor how quickly it sells. In the event of a problem, such as empty shelves during a promotion, the company can send its personnel to the store to correct it. "That's a better use of my marketing team and Wal-Mart's time," Brown says. Thus far, he adds, they have found no serious problems at Wal-Mart stores.

In its Garland warehouse, Daisy Brand originally employed Alien 9780 interrogators on its forklifts. Those readers, since replaced with the smaller Alien ALR9900 interrogator, were bistatic, requiring separate antennas to transmit and receive RF signals. The new model is monostatic, using one antenna to receive and transmit data. Because the ALR9900 needs only one antenna to operate, Brown says, "there aren't as many things in the way of the forklift driver."

RELATED_ARTICLES At the dock doors, the company switched from the bistatic Alien 9800 to the monostatic ALR9900. In this case, Brown says, the upgrade boosted the read rate because Daisy Brand uses the same number of antennas it did with the Alien 9800, but gets better response because all antennas can now receive and send data—previously, only half the antennas received, while the other half transmitted data. The Daisy Brand system employs GlobeRanger's iMotion Edgeware to collect data from the interrogators.

"From here," Brown states, "my hope is to get some of our suppliers on board." That includes companies providing Daisy Brand with raw materials such as milk and cream, as well as boxes, cups and lids. Daisy currently tracks the arrival and use of materials and supplies on paper, he says, but would rather use RFID instead because "it would be good from a forecasting standpoint. We'd like to be able to say we're consuming this amount of your product," making it easier for the companies to predict the next order. Thus far, Brown says, none of the manufacturer's suppliers use RFID technology, though several have asked him about it.