

Get RFID Readers in a Flash (Card)

Syscan's compact flash reader, which plugs into almost any handheld computer, will cost \$150 and read 13.56 MHz ISO-compliant tags.

April 22, 2003 - Syscan International has developed a new RFID reader in a compact flash card. The device will cost under \$150 and will plug into most handheld computers.

SanDisk Corp. developed the original compact flash card in 1994 as a very small removable mass storage device. Many handheld computers have CF ports, so users can add memory. With the Syscan reader, companies will be able to turn almost any handheld computer into an RFID reader. Data gathered can be transmitted to a host system by 802.11B or other wireless technology.

Syscan expects to ship a small number of readers to customers next month. General availability is expected later this year. The reader plugs into any standard CF slot or PCMCIA slot with an adapter. That means it can be used with almost any handheld computer, organizer, tablet PC, laptop or desktop PC without the need for additional hardware.

"There's no question that this is becoming a mobile world," says Axel Striefler, president of Syscan, which is based in Ottawa, Ontario. "This technology can allow people to use the RFID reader with their devices at an affordable price."

The device is based on a Contact Flash Interface Type II and has software interfaces for Windows 9x, Windows 2000, Windows ME and Windows CE. The read range is just five to 10 cm (two to four inches). But Striefler says the company is working to extend that. "We hope to increase the power of the chip to improve its read range," he says.

Buying a separate RFID reader can cost more than \$1,000 per handheld, but Striefler says Syscan's compact flash RFID reader will sell for less than US\$150. "That should open up the market to lots of applications," he says.

The reader can record changes in temperature, time and other data. The initial reader that Syscan is producing works with 13.56 MHz tags based on the ISO15693 and ISO14443 standards. The company is working to produce versions for the ISO 14443A and ISO 14443B standards. It will also create readers for the Sony FeliCa RFID chip, and 125 kHz and 134 kHz frequencies.

The company plans to sell the readers to both retailers and manufacturers. Among the market sectors it is targeting are logistics, transport, asset tracking, identification, and ticketing. Striefler envisions the technology being used within tire manufacturer plants to track tires through the supply chain.

Syscan already has customers for other readers its developed in the meat industry and warehouse and logistics arena. Striefler says Some of them are "showing an interest" in deploying the compact flash reader in small trials within their companies. -- By Jennifer Maselli

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