

# RFID Helps Keep Nick on the Go

CR Media uses active RFID tags to track entertainment players loaded with Nickelodeon programming and provided to Hertz customers at locations across the United States.

By Claire Swedberg

March 10, 2008—Miami-based startup company CR Media, in partnership with children's media company Nickelodeon and the Hertz rental-car company is renting RFID-tagged entertainment players for kids known as Nick on the Go.

The system, launched in December 2007, now provides portable preloaded media players with children's programming from Nickelodeon as well as video games to be rented along with Hertz rental vehicles. For a price of \$16.95 per day, travelers can rent the brightly colored, rugged devices that can be mounted on the back of the headrest of the front seat, as well as carried outside of the vehicle to be played at the pool, in restaurants or hotel rooms.

Tracking the \$700 devices requires an automated system, says Joshua Wallack, president of CR Media. They are being rented from 43 different Hertz locations at airports throughout the United States. In the future, CR Media intends to provide the system in more U.S. airports, as well as throughout the world. Because they are being handled and serviced by Hertz employees across the country, says Wallack, CR Media needed a system that would provide visibility at every rental location of just what devices were in stock, and when and where the others had been rented. They also needed a system that required no added labor by Hertz employees.

The solution, with software and integration services, provided by NCR, accomplishes both tasks, Wallack says—making the devices visible to CR Media without any effort by Hertz employees. Each media player, of which there are currently about 1,000 in use, comes with an RF Code 433 MHz active RF Code RFID tag that beacons every five seconds, says NCR director of marketing Terry Massey. The use a proprietary air-interface protocol and have a 1,000 foot read range. Each Hertz rental outlet has an RF Code RFID reader. When someone rents a player and removes it from the premises, the reader stops receiving transmissions from the tag.

Reader data is sent to CR Media's Internet-based server using NCR software to translate that data. CR Media employees can view an image of a map of the United States to see in real time how many players are in any specific location at a time, Wallack says. CR Media personnel can click on any location to find out how many are in inventory and how many were rented and when. They can also access a device's rental history to find out when and how often a particular player was rented and for how long, as well as the locations from which it was rented and then returned.

When a player is returned, it is taken to the back room to be cleaned and recharged and the reader captures that ID number again and sends the ID number to the server.

CR Media uses the data both to monitor the devices at the 43 participating Hertz locations and to compare against monthly rental reports from the individual locations as well as to send reports to Nickelodeon.

If a Hertz office reports a player missing, CR Media can track when the player left the location and Hertz can access their video records to see an image of the individual who took the player. "We are able to see on-hand inventory, run reports, and use those reports to compare to actual sales reports," Wallack says. Hertz has its own back-end system in which it stores data about who rents the players and when and where they return them. Hertz sends those sales reports to CR Media monthly.

One challenge NCR faces when installing the systems at airports is working around existing RF transmissions, which vary from one airport to another, Massey says. In each installation, an NCR engineer measured RF in the vicinity and mounted readers accordingly to shield them from those RF signals if they were present.

"It's worked really nicely," Massey says. "It's fun to play a mission critical role for such a new company. CR Media needed creative help, and it was great to provide that. They are very high-energy, bright people."

RELATED\_ARTICLES "So far we've had 110 percent customer satisfaction [regarding the players]," Wallack says. "It's a very 21st-century amenity. They love it to death." Wallack says CR Media sees itself as a technology pioneer, forming an unprecedented partnership with Nickelodeon and Hertz to provide technology to their customers, and he says the use of RFID for tracking furthers that pioneering effort.

Currently, each player plays programming only in English, but content in Spanish will be available in May. Hertz employees use content-loading stations, supplied by CR Media, to add new programming that CR Media provides periodically.

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