

RFID Is Now in Fashion

More apparel, footwear and accessory companies are getting serious about deploying RFID because early adopters have proven the business benefits, and because product improvements have made the technology easier to deploy.

By Mark Roberti

June 23, 2008—Two years ago, I reached out to the [American Apparel & Footwear Association](#) (AAFA) and proposed that we work together to produce an [event](#) designed to educate retailers and apparel, footwear and accessory companies regarding the benefits of using radio frequency identification technologies to improve the way they do business. At the time, there was a great deal of excitement in the sector about RFID technology, and Mary Howell, AAFA's VP of industry relations, agreed that a partnership made sense.

The events we ran in [2006](#) and [2007](#) were successful, but the excitement about RFID cooled a bit when privacy advocates unfairly attacked a few early adopters, who received bad press even though they'd done nothing wrong. I think the industry also cooled because the real benefits for apparel, footwear and accessory companies are at the item level, and the technology wasn't yet ready to be deployed at that level.

But things have since changed. While privacy advocates are still concerned—and rightly so—about the possibility of people being tracked without their knowledge via RFID tags in their clothes, companies have learned how to employ the technology in ways that benefit them and their customers without putting customers' privacy at risk. These include incorporating RFID into hangtags or packaging, rather than in apparel items, so customers can discard the tags before wearing the clothing.

The technology has improved significantly, to the point that it's now possible to RFID-enable a department within a store, or even an entire store, to manage inventory. High-frequency (HF) technology has improved with [Magellan Technology's](#) phase jitter modulation innovation, which allows groups of HF tags in close proximity to be read without a problem. And ultrahigh-frequency (UHF) RFID has also improved, with more reliable tags and more sensitive interrogators.

There are even companies, such as [Mojix](#), [RF Controls](#) and [Wirama](#), that enable identification of an item in 3D space, so that if a customer puts an item back on the wrong shelf or rack, software could determine its incorrect placement and alert staff members so they can fix it. Trials of RFID technology in apparel retail stores have shown that sales can increase 5 to 15 percent, because RFID improves inventory management and the ability to make sure each item is in the right place.

RELATED_ARTICLES And the technology continues to evolve in ways that will save retailers time and labor. A startup known as [VRF Holding](#) has developed a dynamic price tag combining RFID technology with electronic paper. Want to mark down items? Use RFID to transmit the new price and display the savings automatically. This not only saves the time normally required for employees to mark down the item, but also ensures pricing accuracy and reduces problems at checkout.

We'll be producing our third annual [RFID in Fashion](#) event with AAFA, from Aug. 13-14, at the [Fashion](#)

Institute of Technology in New York. It should be an exciting event, because we have leading early adopters from the United States and Europe speaking about the benefits they're getting from RFID today—and because more companies than ever seem ready to take these lessons, and the new technologies now available, and turn them into successful implementations.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below. To read more of Mark's opinions, visit the [RFID Journal Blog](#) or click [here](#).

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