

At two sites in New York, the company plans to test the ability of item-tagging to help improve stock availability, productivity and customer service.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

Aug. 15, 2008—[Jones Apparel Group](#), the designer and owner of the [Nine West](#) chain of women's footwear and accessory stores, is planning a pilot program to evaluate the benefits of employing passive EPC Gen 2 RFID technology for product tracking. The program, set to begin before the end of this year, will involve two Nine West retail stores—one in New York City and an outlet store in the greater metropolitan area.

The objectives of the pilot are to determine whether—and how much—using radio frequency identification to track individual products can help the retailer improve stock availability, productivity and customer service. Jones also wants to monitor how well the RFID tags and readers will function, even during peak business hours.

At one of the company's distribution centers, RFID tags will be placed on all products headed to the two stores, where interrogators will read the tags of the goods upon arrival. RFID-enabled shelves in each site's storeroom will also interrogate the tags. As an item is purchased, a reader embedded in the sales counter will read that product's tag and remove the item from the store's inventory databases.

In addition, according to Norm Veit, Jones Apparel Group's executive VP of management information systems (MIS), the company plans to launch a campaign to make its customers aware that RFID technology is being tested in the stores during the pilot.

To design and deploy the program, Jones Apparel Group is presently working with a group of RFID vendors. [Avery Dennison](#) is providing RFID tags integrated into product labels. [inCode Wireless](#), a [VeriSign](#) company, is serving as systems integrator, coordinating the hardware and software installation and managing the project, as well as working with consultancy [RFID Sherpas](#) to monitor the pilot and develop a business case analysis for Jones Apparel Group.

[Vue Technology](#)'s RFID software will be used to commission the tags and track their data, and the company's specialized RFID reading stations for retail environments will be utilized within the Nine West test locations. [Motorola](#) is providing fixed and mobile RFID readers for the program.

Jones Apparel Group intends to run the pilot for up to six months. After the program's conclusion, the company plans to analyze the results before determining whether, and when, it will continue investigating the technology.