

RFID for Your Shopping Cart

Multichannel Retail has developed an RFID-enabled version of its Personal Shopping Assistant to take advantage of item-level data.

July 1, 2003 - [Multichannel Retail](#), a UK-based software and services company, has developed a new version of its Personal Shopping Assistant software specifically to interact with item-level RFID tags in the store. Using RFID instead of bar codes opens up a world of opportunity -- once companies start tagging individual items.

Multichannel worked with hardware provider [Wincor Nixdorf International](#) on the personal shopping assistant being used in the Metro Future Store (see [Metro Opens Store of the Future](#)). The computer is mounted on the shopping cart and communicates with in-store systems via a wireless local area network.

The 60 shopping assistants currently being used in the Metro store scan bar codes on loyalty cards and on products. The new version of the device incorporates a 13.56 MHz, ISO 15693-compliant RFID reader from [FEIG Electronic](#). The device has a read range of about a foot, so it can't automatically scan everything in the cart. But shoppers will no longer have to worry about aligning the bar code to a laser.

The shopping assistant tracks the shopper's movement using wireless LAN software from Saratoga, Calif.-based [Ekahau](#) and displays location-specific personalized shopping lists, favorites and special offers. The system can offer discounts on items related to those put in the cart. It can also trigger in-store signs. So if the shopper puts Pringles in the cart, an ad for Coca-Cola might be displayed. Shoppers who scan all their items can have the information communicated to a cash register wirelessly and checkout quickly.

The system could provide additional benefits if retailers adopt a standard method for identifying products and sharing data because consumers would be able to access data related to the product through the shopping assistant. For instance, a customer might scan the tag on a package of meat, and the device would be able to show the customer where and when the animal was born, reared, slaughtered and packed.

The goal of the Metro store is to understand how different technologies can be combined in the retail setting and to see how customers react to them. The shopping assistant is a big part of that, and RFID would add a little more convenience by eliminating the need for line-of-site scanning. But the application is unlikely to take off until many items in stores have RFID tags.

"There is interest in the RFID-enabled personal shopping assistant among retailers," says James Pemberton, Multichannel's managing director. "But everyone recognizes that we need majority-adoption of item-level RFID tagging to be achieved first."

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