

Passive, Active RFID Tags Linked

Savi Technology is combining its long-range battery-powered RFID tags with passive tags from Matrics to create "nested visibility."

July 24, 2003 - Savi Technology is collaborating with EPC tag producer Matrics to develop a new range of equipment that will enable companies to combine long- and short-range RFID tags to create "nested visibility" within the supply chain.

Savi, a Sunnyvale, Calif., provider of RFID devices and software for the management and security of supply chain, offers active, or battery-powered, tags for tracking shipping containers, trailers and other conveyances. Up to now, most of Savi's customers would scan bar codes on boxes and then write the bar code data to Savi's EchoPoint active tags. The partnership with Matrics will allow customers to use RFID tags, instead of bar codes.

"The problem with tracking bar-coded items is that once they are inside the container you lose that visibility," says Stephen Lambright, VP of Marketing at Savi. "This collaboration extends visibility into the container through the active tag."

Columbus, Md.-based Matrics produces and sells passive RFID tags based on the Auto-ID Center's Class 0 specification. By providing visibility down to the items within a box, Savi is providing a higher level of visibility, which it says will offer companies new capabilities. For example, if the security of a container is breached, the integrated RFID solution could tell in real-time that the container had been tampered with and which, if any, specific items are missing.

In addition, using tags in place of bar codes should also bring savings in time and greater inventory accuracy, according to Lambright. "Replacing bar codes at the carton and palette level with passive tags lets us automate the entire process," he says.

That functionality can also be used to track backwards to find out how individual items have been shipped and what happened to them. Let's say packages of meat are spoiled when they arrive at the store. The supplier could trace which cartons they were shipped in and what trucks they were on. That could help the supplier determine what happened, whether other meat was similarly affected and needs to be recalled and how to correct the problem.

The first product to come from the collaboration will be a handheld device that reads Matrics' passive EPC tags and writes the data to Savi's 433 MHz active RFID tags and seals. The unit will be able to read passive tags from up to 33 feet (10 meters) away and active tags from up to 330 feet (100 meters).

The handheld device should be available within a few months and separate fixed readers for dock doors, forklift trucks and conveyor systems should come to market by the end of the year. The readers will be produced by Matrics but marketed by both companies. They will support the Universal Data Appliance Protocol, which Savi developed for the military. UDAP enables any data collection device to be connected to the network.

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