

Two More RFID Test Centers Open

Systems integrators SIS Technologies and RSI ID Technologies open facilities where manufacturers and shippers of consumer packaged goods can try out readers and tags.

By Jonathan Collins

Feb. 5, 2004—As momentum behind RFID deployment gathers speed, two more systems integrators—SIS Technologies, in Texas, and RSI ID Technologies, in California—have opened RFID test centers to enable their customers to trial the technology in advance of deployment.

Business process automation integrator SIS Technologies has built an RFID network at a distribution center in Hutchins, Texas. SIS says the RFID Deployment Center will enable it to provide an established RFID environment where manufacturing and third-party logistics companies can test RFID tags on pallets of products and even outsource their RFID requirements by letting SIS and its partners tag pallets and ship them to retailers' distribution centers.

“At the center, we can test tags and readers [for our CPG customers], but we can also take on customer shipping as well,” says Jessica Bray, chief strategy officer of SIS Technologies. The RFID network covers roughly 30,000 square feet of DC Logistics' 150,000-square-foot facility, with four of the 24 dock doors fitted with RFID readers. The facility is suitable as staging post for tagging pallets and cases to comply with Wal-Mart's 2005 mandate and then shipped on to Wal-Mart's distribution centers.

“There are 40,000 suppliers to Wal-Mart that don't fit into the Fortune 1000 model of deploying RFID,” says Bray, referring to the fact that smaller suppliers don't have the means to pay for and deploy expensive RFID networks. To address this need, SIS says it will offer RFID tagging and shipping service, with SIS receiving untagged goods at its DC, loading the goods onto tagged pallets, shipping the pallets to Wal-Mart facilities, and managing the process using a system that will allow its customers to track the movement of their goods over the Internet.

To deliver the offering, SIS teamed up with Distribution Center Logistics (DC Logistics), DC Logistics, which owns and operates the distribution center that contains the RFID Deployment Center, and Transport Industries, a nationwide trucking company based in Mesquite, Texas, that manages 2,700 trucks and 4,200 trailers in 30 distribution centers. By the end of March, SIS expects to have RFID readers installed in Transport Industries GPS-enabled trucks linked by Qualcomm satellite network so that its customers can track their shipment of their goods through a Web interface.

“Where third-party logistics companies like DC Logistics typically offer ‘pick, pack and ship,’ adding our RFID capabilities to their DC center extends that offering to ‘pick, pack, slap—i.e., slap an RFID tag on an item, case, or pallet—and ship,’” says Bray.

In California, RFID and bar code systems integrator RSI ID Technologies has expanded its RFID System Testing Facility to include testing of UHF tags and readers. The 1,500-square-foot facility is at the company's Chula Vista, Calif., headquarters.

“We have set up the facility to try different types of UHF readers, antennas and tags with customers’ products and packaging. We used to do this with HF RFID equipment, but with UHF there is an even greater need because with UHF there is a whole bunch of new variables that have to be tested before deployment,” says Wolf Bielas, CEO at RSI ID Technologies.

According to the RSI, equipment testing in the facility can take from a few hours to a few days depending on the scope and scale of the potential deployment under examination. RSI has been offering systems integration services for RFID implementations for five years and has implemented working RFID solutions for smart shelves, medicine cabinets, wine cellars and garment tracking.

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