

Target Issues RFID Mandate

The retailer plans to require suppliers to put EPC tags on pallets and cases beginning in late spring 2005.

Feb. 20, 2004—Target, the fourth largest retailer in the United States, has told its top suppliers that they will be required to apply RFID tags on pallets and cases sent to "select" regional distribution facilities beginning late spring 2005. The company wants all suppliers to tag pallets and cases by the spring of 2007.

The information was disseminated in the form of a letter from Target CIO Paul Singer to vendor partners on the company's extranet. It says: "Target expects top vendor partners to apply tags to all pallets and cases and start shipping to select regional distribution facilities beginning late spring 2005. Target's intent is to accept RFID tags from all vendors as a supplement to the current bar code markings at the carton and pallet level by spring 2007."

The company sees RFID as a complement to current bar code and electronic data interchange (EDI) technologies. Like Wal-Mart, Target is requiring RFID tags as well as the continued use of all current bar coding requirements. The company is currently testing proof-of-concept RFID technologies at the pallet and case level with selected vendor partners.

In the letter, Singer writes that Target "supports a retail industry migration approach" to the adoption of RFID. The letter says that Target is working with EPCglobal to develop common technology standards that will benefit both retailers and their suppliers.

Target will require suppliers to use UHF tags based on the EPC Class 0 and Class 1 protocols. But the company expects to move to EPC Class 1 Gen 2 when tags and readers based on this specification become widely available. Class 1 Gen 2 specifications are supposed to be completed by the middle of this year, and the first products should be on the market before the end of the year.

The letter from Singer doesn't make clear how Target defines "top suppliers" or whether the tagging requirements apply only to shipments sent to the 1,200 stores that operate under the Target name or include the 350 Mervyn's and Marshall Field's stores that the company also operates.

Singer did not respond to several requests for an interview for this article, but in his letter, he states: "We will learn more this spring in our pilot projects, and will share more information with our vendor partners later in 2004."

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