

House of Fraser Tags Its Garments

Supply chain manager Exel will run a yearlong trial that uses combined EAS/RFID tags to track Fraser's womenswear from factory to point of sale.

By Jonathan Collins

Feb. 27, 2004—Hot on the heels of its RFID trial at U.K. retailer Selfridges (see [Selfridges Trials Tagged Shipments](#)), supply chain manager [Exel](#) says it will launch an international RFID trial with House of Fraser, which operates 50 department stores in the U.K. and Ireland.

“This is an important trial and a much bigger step forward than the continuing Selfridges trial because of the size and scope of the project,” says Paul Richardson, the business director for the retail sector at Exel, which is based in Bracknell, England.

The trial, which will commence in June, will run for a year. House of Fraser is seeking to determine the potential cost benefits it may be able to get from using RFID to automate processes such as distribution center receiving, inventory counting, distribution center dispatching and store receiving.

For its initial stage, the trial will use 60,000 reusable passive tags attached to high-value womenswear bearing the House of Fraser brand. The garments' manufacturer in China will attach the tags. A single reader will be deployed at the manufacturer's plant to read and record shipment details. To automate the receipt of shipments, a second reader will be installed at House of Fraser's national distribution center in Milton Keynes, which Exel has managed since July. Whenever customers purchase the tagged clothing items, the tags will be removed at the point of sale and reused. Exel says it is developing all the software to link the system and collect and manage the data that the RFID network will produce.

Once that basic system has been proved—a process that could take until the end of this year—Exel says it will expand the trial to include passive tags attached to shipment containers to extend supply chain visibility to the garments in transit.

Labeling and security systems provider [Checkpoint Systems](#) developed the tags that will be attached to the clothing. Checkpoint integrated Electronic Article Surveillance (EAS) and RFID functions in a single tag encased in a rubber case for durability. The tags will operate at 13.56 MHz. Exel says its target price for the tag, when mass-produced, is around £1 (\$1.88); EAS tags typically are priced at £0.30 to £0.45.

Exel hopes that the trial will convince other potential customers that the technology is reliable and productive.

“It's all unproven so far. There is a lot of talk at conferences about RFID, but there are a limited number of test platforms out there. This project will give us a network platform to prove what can be done,” says Richardson.

As with its Selfridges RFID trial, Exel says that it will pay for the trial but that the retailer will assist by providing the manpower to run the trial.

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