

Tharo Offers RFID Label Applicators

Tharo Systems' new models can apply up to 58 RFID labels per minute.

By Mark Roberti

May 10, 2004—Most companies involved in RFID supply chain pilots are applying RFID labels to cases of product by hand. But companies are stepping in to help them automate the process. Tharo Systems, a Brunswick, Ohio-based bar code and automatic data capture systems provider, has introduced a new RFID label applicator.

The PA1000tZ works with the R4Mplus thermal transfer printer from Zebra. Companies need to buy the printer separately. The applicator comes in two versions: One, the PA1000t, tamps the label on; the other, the PA1000t/b, blows it on.

"There is no contact with the label that is blown on, so the RFID transponder can't be damaged," says Scott Rhue, product manager at Tharo. "We don't expect any problem with the tamp version of the applicator, but we need to do more testing."

The applicator was designed to work with Zebra's Z4M printer and therefore did not need any special modification to operate with the RFID-enabled R4Mplus Zebra printer, which encodes RFID tags based on the Class 1 Electronic Product Code (EPC) specification and verifies that the transponder is functioning. The R4Mplus also prints text, graphics and bar codes.

The PA1000t/b applicator can blow labels onto convex, concave, flat or delicate surfaces, onto either a product's top or its side. Adjustable guide rods stop the applicator's tamp pad about a half inch from the product. Then the smart label is blown on.

The applicator can print and apply 58 two- by four-inch labels per minute and up to 37 four- by six-inch labels per minute. Tharo is currently testing a version of its EasyLabel software that can be used to program the RFID tags. Rhue says the software will be released by mid-June and will likely support Printronix's RFID label printer as well as Zebra's (the applicator is not designed to work with Printronix printers).

The tamp label applicator costs \$6,500, which includes a stand and large-capacity unwind and rewind reels, which reduce the number of times you need to change label stock. The blow applicator is \$6,900, including the stand and large-capacity reels. Both applicator models are available immediately from Tharo resellers.

Last month, Markem, a provider of marking and coding systems for product identification, introduced a label printer-applicator (see Markem Makes Smart Labeler).

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