

Accu-Sort Devises Labeler

Accu-Sort Systems' new FAST Tag system is designed to automatically verify, place and track RFID labels on cartons and pallets.

By Jonathan Collins

June 3, 2004—Long-time automatic-identification systems provider [Accu-Sort Systems](#) has launched FAST Tag, a solution for verifying, placing and tracking RFID tags on cartons and pallets. According to the company, its FAST Tag helps meet a rising demand.

“Manufacturers are realizing they can’t put tags on manually, but there is a huge void in the market for getting tags on boxes automatically” says Michael Kuhno, product manager of FAST systems development at Accu-Sort, which is based in Telford, Pa. The company’s Flexible Automation Solution Tools (FAST) suite of manufacturing and distribution solutions includes modules for product labeling, automated sorting, production counting, data management and system maintenance.

Rival companies [Markem](#) (see [Markem Makes Smart Labeler](#) and [Tharo Systems](#) (see [Tharo Offers RFID Label Applicators](#)) have both launched their own RFID label applicators that offer similar functions.

Accu-Sort’s FAST Tag system is based on the company’s existing automated bar code labeling solution. That means that its RFID equipment can be integrated with Accu-Sort’s material- and data-handling systems that work with bar codes. According to the company, its bar code systems already scan all shipments to Wal-Mart’s distribution centers as well as shipments to Target, Toys “R” Us and a range of other retailers. FedEx, UPS and the U.S. Postal Service are also Accu-Sort customers.

The FAST Tag system comprises several modules, available separately, including the Labeljet 262/263 printer and the Labeljet 210 RFID label applicator from Accu-Sort’s sister company [Videojet Technologies](#). Accu-Sort maintains that the greatest benefits come from deploying the full system, which the company can install and customize for each application.

Cartons moving through the FAST Tag RFID system are first identified by means of a bar code scanner or camera monitor. Cartons can also be defined by batch. Accu-Sort’s own software, running on a local or remote PC, controls the system and can connect to an existing production controller, warehouse management system (WMS) or enterprise resource planning (ERP) application.

The FAST Tag system establishes if an RFID tag is required on each carton and controls the printing and application of the tag. Key to the RFID Tag system, says Accu-Sort, is the ability to quickly test and verify each tag before applying it to the carton. Invalid tags are wound to a waste reel, ensuring that no bad tags make it into the supply chain.

“Tag yield is still a problem, and we’ve seen it as low as 50 percent. We have a patented way to ensure that bad tags don’t get attached and are removed from the process as quickly as possible,” says Troy Herman, Accu-Sort’s business unit manager for RFID.

The tag applicator in the system ensures that tags are attached to the label with whatever offset required. Following the attachment of the RFID tag, the system can also place a barcode label over the top of the label. By tracking the carton on the conveyor belt using either tachometers or photoelectric sensors, the system's final verification process makes sure the right tags are on the right boxes.

The company uses its own RFID reader inside the FAST Tag unit. "We are a reader manufacturer, and so we will be tag agnostic and completely flexible when it comes to reading any tag out there," says Kuhno.

The current reader works with Class 0 or Class 1 EPC tags but will be upgradeable to the planned Generation 2 EPC standard.

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