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GS1 Publishes European EPC RFID Guide for Retailers, Suppliers

June 9, 2008—Part of the challenge for companies selling any new technology is getting people to understand not just the benefits of using that technology, but also all of the

complexities around implementing it. RFID is particularly problematic because there are questions regarding the business benefits of employing it in open supply chains, as well as others about the performance of RFID systems, and about standards.

I think many people get some of the main areas where RFID can deliver value—asset tracking, promotions management, inventory management and so on. But it's been more difficult explaining the benefits of the standards GS1 and EPCglobal have been creating for those looking to use radio frequency identification in open supply chains. I am often asked why a company needs to use Electronic Product Codes (EPCs) instead of their own serialized numbers, as well as what the EPC Information Service (EPCIS) does, and how it differs from the electronic data interchange (EDI) currently being used.

GS1 in Europe has thankfully addressed some of the common questions people have, in a recently published document titled *The European Guide to Implementing EPC RFID for Retailers and Their Suppliers*. The guide was prepared with the help of several companies in Europe: Carrefour, a large French retailer; Henkel, a large German cosmetics and adhesives producer; Metro Group, a large German retailer; Rewe Group, the second-largest German food trading company; and the European divisions of three multinational consumer packaged goods companies—Kraft International, Procter & Gamble and Nestlé.

The guide answers several basic questions those new to EPC anywhere in the world would have, such as: "What are the main benefits that companies are trying to achieve by using the technology?" It also refers to other materials, such as background on EPCglobal standards, EPCglobal's guidelines for using EPC in consumer products, and a "cookbook" available to EPCglobal subscribers. The cookbook, a collection of papers written with the help of early adopters, provides additional detailed information on how to deploy EPC technologies and

standards.

Some questions specifically deal with European issues, such as the frequencies that can be employed for EPC systems in Europe. I found the most valuable material at the end of the guide, in answers to these questions:

- We use a GS1 bar code. If I put on an RFID tag in addition, do I need to change the current GS1 identification key?
- What is EPCIS and how does it work?
- Does the EPCIS replace EDI?

Many end users in Europe and around the world have asked me similar questions, and I have not always been able to answer them with authority, so the guide will be valuable in providing a basic understanding of EPC standards for a wider audience. No doubt, it will not answer every question people have. But it will help them realize that EPC standards go way beyond just enabling tags and interrogators to communicate. There is a whole suite of standards that allow companies to share data securely across open supply chains.

RFID Journal has always been a big supporter of EPC standards, because we believe having a standardized method for sharing RFID data among companies will drive huge efficiencies and greater collaboration. We're starting to see that vision become a reality now—and these guidelines will help others see more clearly how such a vision can be implemented to the benefit of their company.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below. To read more of Mark's opinions, visit the RFID Journal

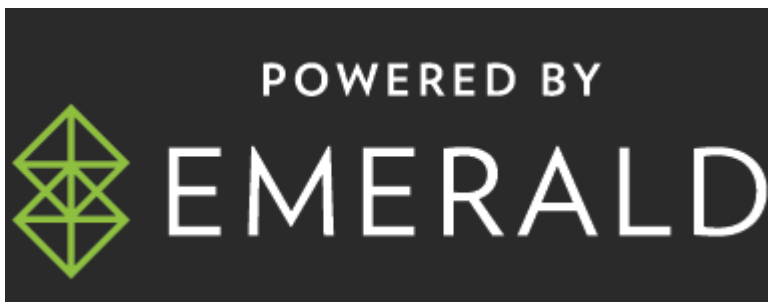
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