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Managing RTIs

European companies in almost every sector use returnable transport items (RTIs) to carry a variety of assets within their own facilities or through the supply chain, yet only a few actually know how many of these often expensive items are in circulation or where they are located. Myriad companies have demonstrated the business case for managing RTIs with RFID, and the application has been recognized as a fast and

easy way to reduce costs.

But most RFID implementations to manage RTIs are based on proprietary identification schemes or technology, and, therefore, the infrastructure cannot be used with supply-chain partners or for other internal applications. To enable businesses to get more value from RTI applications, GS1 Switzerland and some European companies established, in 2011, a working group called "RTI Management Using GS1 Standards." The goal was to standardize RTI processes, technology, identification schemes and infrastructure.



The group developed a technical solution based on GS1 standards, to support and simplify the handling and transport of RTIs, including boxes, containers, crates, dollies, pallets and trolleys; it does not apply to sea freight containers. The solution is explained in a guideline called "The Management of RTIs by GS1 Standards," which is available (in English and German) to all GS1 members.

The group recommends identifying RTIs with two ultrahigh-frequency Gen 2 RFID tags and GS1-128 bar codes, using the GS1 key sGRAI-96 as the unique identification number. The key is also available in a human-readable form. EANCOM is used as an infrastructure for the exchange of commercial data, and EPC Information Services to track and trace the items.

The core of the guideline is a description of 36 "to-be" processes, designed to help all companies within the supply chain—RTI manufacturers, RTI owner/pool operators, businesses

shipping and receiving RTIs, and RTI carriers—manage these assets more efficiently. The processes include procurement of new and existing RTIs, ordering and delivery of goods using RTIs, and return of RTIs.

The guideline also documents significant business benefits that can be achieved by using standards to manage RTIs, and allows companies to calculate their potential savings. In addition to reducing the number of transport items that go astray and production downtime due to those missing items, benefits include a decrease in administrative costs on receipt of goods and a reduction in expenses in the search for RTIs. Companies that implement standards to manage RTIs can expect a fast return on investment, possibly within several months.

In addition, the guideline demonstrates how to implement these standards, and shows which standards relate to each function, for companies considering a modular implementation.

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