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## RFID Gets Visual

Years ago, I wrote in this column that identifying and tracking things with radio frequency identification technology was only the beginning. I predicted that people would dream up applications that no one was thinking about at the time. And one of the best parts of my job is watching that happen.

A good example is seeing visual RFID tags come to fruition.

Companies have been working for at least 10 years to develop tags that can display data dynamically. Last week, we wrote about E.Leclerc, a supermarket in Saint-Jean-du-Falga, France, that is employing an Electronic Shelf Labeling (ESL) system that employs RFID to communicate pricing information to the labels (see [An E.Leclerc Supermarket Automates Its Pricing](#)). Some 30,000 labels provided by Altierre, a technology firm located in San Jose, Calif., can change automatically, thereby eliminating the time-consuming process by which staff members previously had to manually print and swap out printed labels on store shelves.



Electronic shelf labels have been around for a while, but those using light-emitting diodes (LEDs) require expensive wiring to power the devices and transmit information. Altierre's solution utilizes active RFID technology to send data to the displays, so prices can be updated dynamically without the need for a lot of expensive wiring.

Omni-ID has developed the ProView Visual Tagging System, which won the RFID Journal Award for Best in Show at RFID Journal LIVE! 2012 (see [RFID Issues Instructions On the Fly](#)). Omni-ID's tags feature a bistable LCD screen with an active ultrahigh-frequency (869 MHz to 928 MHz) RFID tag and an EPC Gen 2 passive inlay. When a charge is sent to particular areas of the screen, the crystals change position, showing a darker side that can represent numbers, letters or other images. The tags do not require constant power to display the image, so

battery life can be much longer than with LED displays.

Omni-ID's tags are designed for supply chain and industrial manufacturing uses, to display messages to employees. I know, you thought RFID was designed to automate processes and take people out of the loop. And that is true for many applications. But there might be times when you want to send workers a notice letting them know, for example, that a trolley needed to go to a specific dock door, and then later provide an update instructing them to bring the trolley to a different door instead. (You can learn more about Omni-ID's solution by attending a free webinar, Visual Tagging: The Next Generation of Auto-ID, on June 28, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM EDT).

These kinds of innovations open many new opportunities. One possibility is dynamic pricing, so if, for instance, produce or milk is approaching its sell-by date, systems could dynamically reduce the price to move the goods. If the price of visual technology falls, one could imagine dynamic packaging, in which a message flashes as a consumer picks up an item. Perhaps skiers could upgrade their lift ticket from their mobile phone, and a badge on their jacket could automatically display their updated privileges. Or an event that issues RFID ID badges to attendees could feature message boards that display a personalized message when a particular individual approaches.

I still believe today what I believed many years ago. We have only just scratched the surface of the value that RFID technology can deliver.

*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 Blog, the Editor's Note archive or RFID Connect.*



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