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RFID in Europe: A Special Case

It would be nice if deploying RFID technologies were the same in all parts of the world, so global companies could develop a cookie-cutter approach and smaller companies could learn from their best practices. Unfortunately, that's not the case. Take Europe and North America, for example. Regulations governing

the use of the radio spectrum and the operation of RF devices differ in these regions. Supply chains and business practices are also different.

Long before many North American companies had heard of RFID, European companies were using high- and low-frequency RFID technologies to track reusable containers within their own operations. Car immobilizers were developed in Europe. European ski lift operators were pioneers in using RFID for ticketing applications. And Europeans have embraced RFID, or contactless, smart cards.



But as European companies look to use UHF EPC in their supply chains, they face new and unique challenges. The European Union's regulatory authorities have only allotted a small sliver of the radio spectrum for use by UHF RFID systems. In North America, UHF RFID systems can use 26 MHz of bandwidth, compared to just 2 MHz for Europe. So if a company has many readers, or interrogators, in the same location, they will all compete to use the same narrow band, thereby creating bottlenecks—think of data from tags as cars driving on a two-lane highway in Europe, compared to a 26-lane highway in North America. Simply put, European companies are not going to get the same performance from their UHF systems as their North American competitors.

Yet, companies such as Metro Group, Tesco Stores and Ahold USA are moving ahead with UHF EPC deployments. Why? They need to use the technology that is the standard for tracking goods in the global supply chain. And they are finding benefits. One

area where there looks to be a compelling near-term return on investment (ROI) is tracking returnable transport items (RTIs), which are more widely used in Europe than in North America. In the longer term, these companies are looking for many of the same benefits as their counterparts in North America: increased supply chain visibility, reduced inventory, fewer out-of-stocks and so on.

RFID Journal has always strived to cover these issues for our large readership in Europe, and for our readers who do business with European companies. In fact, one of our first case studies was about how Marks & Spencer deployed RFID in 2003 to track more than 2 million reusable trays used by its suppliers; it was then, and remains today, one of the world's largest supply chain deployments of RFID. But to better understand and report on the unique technology and business challenges faced by European companies, we appointed Jonathan Collins to be our Europe Editor. Jon was based in New York and has done an excellent job reporting for our Web site and writing features for our print publication. Now, he will cover developments in Europe from London.

In addition, *RFID Journal* has added an annual European executive conference to its roster of events, so our readers can hear directly from those who have deployed RFID systems in Europe and ask them the questions that are on their mind. The first RFID Journal LIVE! Europe will be held Oct. 10-12 in Amsterdam. For this premiere event, we have a stellar lineup of early adopters who can speak objectively and authoritatively about RFID deployments and the issues that are specific to Europe.

John Clarke, chief technology officer at Tesco, will discuss his company's deployment of EPC technology and the challenges of using UHF technology in the supply chain. Gerd Wolfram, managing director of MGI Metro Group Information Technology, will talk about the progress Metro is making with its EPC deployment. James Stafford, head of Marks & Spencer's RFID

efforts, will talk about the results his company has seen in its trials involving the tagging of garments. Erwin Veer, global RFID coordinator for Ahold, will discuss the benefits of tracking RTIs. And John Hawkins, director of technology for pH Europe, a container rental company in the United Kingdom, will explain how using active RFID tags from RF Code delivered value to his company and helped it better serve its customers.

RFID Journal LIVE! Europe will also inform attendees about the latest technology developments that will help European companies solve the challenges they face in deploying UHF EPC systems. Many of the sessions will cover the solutions that are emerging from collaborative work between end user companies and researchers at European universities. We've invited Elgar Fleisch, research director of the Auto-ID Lab at the University of St. Gallen, and other researchers to discuss their work and how it will benefit end users of RFID technologies in Europe.

For those new to RFID, the event will feature a preconference explaining the basics of RFID, including how tags of different frequencies behave, the difference between active and passive tags, regulator issues in Europe and much more. If you're using RFID, you can't afford to miss it. To view the full agenda, [click here](#).

The deployment challenges in Europe for those using UHF EPC technologies are real, but the opportunities are equally real, as is the strategic imperative for many companies to use technology that looks to become the standard in the global supply chain. In print, online and at our events, we'll continue to provide information on the European companies that overcome the challenges of UHF EPC and achieve an ROI. And, of course, we'll continue to write about how European companies are achieving benefits with other types of RFID technologies, as well. I feel this benefits not just our readers in Europe, but also our readers who do business with Europe.

Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below.



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