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Wipro Seeks Expanded RFID Role

Software and IT services provider Wipro Technology says it has developed a number of RFID tools to help its retailer customers better understand the potential costs and benefits of their RFID deployments.



Bhanu
Murthy

The company, which provides software development and IT services to some of the world's largest 100 retailers, including Best Buy, Marks and Spencer and Home Depot, says its experience with a number of RFID trial deployments in Europe has already given the company a strong grasp of the potential for RFID in the retail supply chain. That experience includes developing the software to manage item-level RFID tagging at a U.K. clothing chain.

Recently, Wipro developed software that will schedule the correct number of cashiers to meet demand at the Metro Group's RFID-enabled Extra Future Store, in Rheinberg, Germany. Once the software is deployed, which is set to be happen within the next few months, customers can opt to have the bar code on their loyalty card scanned as they enter the store. The software will use those customers' shopping history to calculate when they are likely to reach the checkout register. The software will then assign staff to work the sales terminals so there will always be enough cashiers to meet customer demand, while freeing up staff to do other work when they are not required to process sales transactions.

Wipro maintains that its RFID software and services can be customized from applications that Wipro has already developed. "Products are 70 to 80 percent ready and then customized for individual customer requirements," says Bhanu Murthy, vice president, retail vertical at Wipro Technology, in Bangalore, India.

As an aid to its potential RFID customers, Wipro says it has developed its RFID return-on-investment (ROI) engine—a software program that can calculate the potential costs and returns for companies planning to deploy RFID. “This give a more accurate picture of potential cost than anything so far,” says Murthy.

The program uses a number of parameters, such as the number of products to be tagged at case or palette level, to calculate the cost of any initial project. It can also be used to determine the cost and ROI implications of extending a deployment over additional products or distribution centers.

“Most retailers are adopting a wait-and-see approach to RFID, but they still want to know what adoption will cost them and, as they move in that direction, how much it will cost, for example, to move from 5 products to 10 products or from 10 to 20 warehouses,” says Murthy.

In addition, Wipro says, there are other keys areas in RFID deployment in which it can play a major role.

“The industry is a long way from standardized tags and reader performance. We will help customers understand the physics of RFID, about the effects of tag orientation and how difficult it is to track and trace in particular environments and with particular product materials,” Murthy says.

In order to do this, the company will set up a full-scale RFID lab on its corporate campus to give its RFID team better insight into the physics of RFID such as the frequencies, the orientation, materials, interference and reading speed. Wipro also plans to deploy an RFID system in a store the company operates on its campus, where 6,000 Wipro employees work.

“The 6,000 people at our Bangalore campus will soon be able to buy RFID-tagged apparel from the store,” Murthy says. The objective, he says, is to provide Wipro with first-hand RFID deployment experience to better help its clients understand

RFID technology and its uses.

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