Fresh Expressions! Ontario's Produce Industry News

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RFID and The Produce Industry – Imagine That!

If you are using the 407 ETR, filling up at Esso with their Speedpass system, buying clothing at the Gap, or wondering how your luggage is tracked when travelling, then you're experiencing RFID technology!

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)

is an automatic identification method, that stores and remotely retrieves data using tags (a.k.a. transponders). An RFID tag can be attached or incorporated into products, animals, or people for the purpose of identification using radio waves.

In practical business terms, imagine your people never making an error while picking or shipping an order. Imagine your computer knowing the new location of a moved pallet – automatically. These cost saving performance improvements are only a few of the benefits of RFID.

Photo courtesy of WaudWare Inc.

Upsides and Downsides of RFID

If your volume is high in terms of the number of transactions, RFID can likely be justified now. Good RFID technology candidates are produce businesses that are:

- shipping over 500 orders a day
- dealing with several
- warehouses and many
- transfers between them
- experiencing significant picking and shipping errors
- the equipment has to be fine tuned
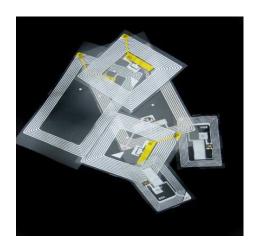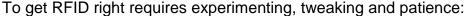- continuous tests must be
- performed to achieve high read

- rates
- striving to eliminate manual
- inventory counts
- choosing the right frequencies means experimenting with tags and readers.

However, there is often a downside with evolving technologies.

In the case of RFID – the downside is time and cost. The RFID challenge in the produce industry is trying to read through something that has a high liquid content (i.e., watermelons, oranges, berries). To get RFID right requires experimenting, tweaking and patience:

While some envision RFID as a replacement for older barcode technology, others believe RFID may never completely replace barcodes, because of cost issues and the advantages of having more than one independent data source on the same object. But there's no getting away from the obvious - once RFID is working …it's incredible! Imagine the possibilities!

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