

TECHNOLOGY

Improving Lives

RFID Is Coming: How Can All Businesses, Large And Small, Harness The Power Of This Little Chip? ㊦

(NAPSA)—Picture this: You're in a grocery store and prices are instantly updated with new specials. Your cart has a computer display with your shopping list, which is updated as items go into your cart. Bulk food costs are automatically calculated. And when you are finished there is no checkout line to wait in. You bag your items, the store automatically charges you via your preferred method of payment and you go.

While this shopping experience is a futuristic one, the technology that will enable it is on the way: radio frequency identification (RFID).

RFID technology uses radio waves to track objects without human intervention, using an embedded microchip about the size of a grain of sand. These microchips have the potential to replace bar codes and revolutionize retail shopping and inventory control.

While you're unlikely to find an RFID tag on a pack of gum today or anytime soon, RFID is beginning to revolutionize the shopping experience by creating greater efficiencies in the supply chain. Those efficiencies eventually translate into well-stocked store shelves, improved customer services, shorter checkout lines and—potentially—lower prices, as store employees spend less time receiving and managing inventory.

RFID Isn't Just For Big Companies

While large retailers like Wal-Mart Stores Inc. are on the leading edge of RFID, mandating the use of the technology by their sup-

pliers large and small, it's also important for even the smallest suppliers to think not only about how they can respond to such mandates, but also how to leverage the technology for their own benefit.

Mandates coming from these larger retailers are an opportunity for smaller suppliers to identify what they need to do today to leverage the power of this technology when it becomes mainstream.

RFID Is a Matter of When, Not If: Are You Prepared?

If you own a small or medium-sized business—or make IT investments on behalf of one—you owe it to yourself, your employees and your customers to prepare for the transition to increased automation. Here are a few things to consider:

- Recognize the requirements of your business partners and needs of your customers. Be aware of upcoming RFID deadlines.
- Identify business processes where greater efficiency is needed, and explore how RFID technology can provide better insight into your business and improve inventory management, order fulfillment and forecasting.
- Talk to an IT consultant to assist with your hardware and software questions, and take steps toward an infrastructure that is capable of supporting RFID.

There are very few things more damaging to sales than a reputation for being out of what the customer wants.

For more information on RFID-enabled technology, please visit http://www.microsoft.com/businesssolutions/scm_chip.aspx.