

ESD.290
March 1, 2005
EPC Policy and Strategy Assignment

Assignment: Write a reply to the following e-mail from a concerned trade body executive. Your reply should be clear, compelling, comforting and non-technical, but also balanced, accurate and technically correct. Covering all these points should take around 500 words. I will be looking for a thoughtful reply that generalizes the problem, explores it, and suggests practical solutions. This is based on a real e-mail, so think of this assignment as a practical case study.

Dear RFID Expert,

I know there is a perfectly good and simple answer to this question, but I've yet to figure it out. Lets say a clothing product has been purchased by a consumer in a store using EPC systems..the sale is completed and the EPC TAG is NOT killed. Later, the consumer is wearing the article in another store....The other (competitor) store "reads" the still functional EPC TAG....

What "rights" would the competitor have regarding reaching the history of the clothing article sold at the original retailer? I assume the point where the article was originally sold might have the only "right" to go backwards through the history of the product, including any personally identifiable information associated with the product????

Yes, other EPC equipped businesses may be able to read a TAG, but where should they be able to go in search of a history on the product? Wouldn't there be some database access controls at several levels and built around rules concerning who and why a product history might be needed? Or, is anyone - business or consumer - able to simply look back at ANY EPC TAG?

The point being that as a retailer (in a Minority Report movie scenario) could TAGS passing within "earshot" of their systems be "read", but once a product is "sold", wouldn't there be some "lock" or controls as to who could trace the history? If I am standing at a checkout position of the future wearing clothes containing TAGS from previous purchases, either at the current store or others, wouldn't my inventory system know they were not from that stores inventory or already purchased? If, again as in Minority Report, I'm walking through a Mall and various store readers are "advertising" to me based upon the "reads" from my TAGS...and the only thing they see is "Levis Jeans" with no access to that pair of jeans history, is there a problem?

Yes, I can only imagine the "clutter" of a thousand TAGS "strolling" within a Mall environment, but perhaps as a retailer, I may only be filtering my reads to look for passing TAGS with certain items those customers walking by might be interested in within my store or my "offers"? I would have no "right" to any other information regarding that TAG beyond the article it represents???? Where am I wrong on this thought?

THANKS!

Joe Jones, CEO, Grocery Marketing International