MAIDENFORM®
A BRAND TO COUNT ON

CASE STUDY

Global apparel manufacturer adopts EPC®-enabled RFID item-level tagging to meet trading partner needs and improve efficiency.

CHALLENGE

When a trading partner required that radio frequency identification (RFID) tags be placed on Maidenform bras, the company stepped up to the challenge, taking decisive actions to make EPC-enabled RFID tagging part of the retailer’s order fulfillment process.

SOLUTION

With support from GS1 US™ Solution Partners, Maidenform implemented item-level tagging in its distribution center. Using GS1 Standards, an EPC RFID tag is attached to each garment and encoded with a Serialized Global Trade Item Number® (SGTIN®) that uniquely identifies the item and its attributes. The SGTIN is linked to the garment’s barcode that will be scanned at the retail register, giving Maidenform greater visibility of items throughout its supply chain.

BEST PRACTICES

• ADOPT GS1 STANDARDS. Maidenform made a strategic decision to use GS1 Standards. This ensured its investment in RFID tagging would satisfy the trading partner’s requirement as well as any future requirements by other retailers. Maidenform also takes advantage of the data provided by GS1 Standards for accurate order fulfillment.

• CREATE A TEAM OF EXPERTS. Maidenform assembled a core team from across its supply chain to gain multiple perspectives and inputs. Another critical step was choosing experienced RFID technology partners certified in GS1 Standards. This provided the Maidenform team with the knowledge base they needed to work through the implementation and resolve any technical issues.

• PARTNER WITH RETAILERS AND EMPLOYEES. Maidenform worked closely with the retailer to test and confirm its new RFID tagging process, updating them each step of the way. The company emphasizes the importance of engaging and training the employees who will be working with the new process, in order to ensure a successful launch.

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—MAIDENFORM TEAM
CASE STUDY: MAIDENFORM—FEBRUARY 2012

Maidenform has long been a believer in the value of GS1 Standards, having adopted Universal Product Codes (U.P.C.s) for all its garments ever since barcodes were introduced in retail commerce. In 2011, when a trading partner required that Maidenform place RFID tags on all its bras, the company made sure GS1 Standards were adopted to leverage its RFID technology investment while satisfying any future requirements by other retailers.

Maidenform senior leadership initially sponsored the upfront investment in RFID in response to the retailer’s compliance requirement, understanding the use case and long-term benefits associated with EPC-enabled RFID tagging. “Although we implemented item-level tagging in our distribution center, we strongly believe the benefits will come with its future expansion to tagging at the source,” says a member of the Maidenform team.

Maidenform is a brand consumers can count on—committed to be in the right channel at the right time. When the consumer needs a Maidenform white bra in a 36B, she needs to find it every time, regardless of the store she chooses. RFID is the right technology to fulfill on that commitment. And as RFID tagging of items becomes a retail technology of choice, Maidenform is committed to work collaboratively with more retailers as well.

STEPPING UP

Maidenform assembled a core team from across its organization—representation from warehouse management, distribution engineering, information technology and senior management. The company decided to implement EPC RFID tagging in its Fayetteville, North Carolina distribution center to meet the short-term deadline for compliance.

Maidenform realized that choosing the right RFID technology partners was critical for the initiative’s success. After a formalized evaluation, Maidenform chose software provider CYBRA Corporation, a GS1 US Solution Partner, to be part of its team. CYBRA recommended and worked with other GS1 US Solution Partners, Zebra Technologies for printing and Alien Technology for the readers, to achieve an end-to-end stable solution.

“CYBRA assembled the components like the printers and scanners, using its EdgeMagic software as the ‘glue’ to connect them. We also worked closely to design the new environment for the new RFID tagging service area, and to troubleshoot process and technology issues,” says a member of the Maidenform team.

Equally important for the initiative was each partner’s experience with GS1 Standards. CYBRA, Alien Technology and Zebra Technologies are all certified in GS1 Standards—giving them the expertise to enable the proper use of the GS1 Standards, including EPCglobal® RFID standards.

SHAPING HISTORY

Unique to the intimate apparel industry are the number of attributes used to classify its products. For example, a Maidenform bra has attributes for size and dimension, as well as those for color and style. These product identifiers and the combinations of attributes give Maidenform many stock-keeping units (SKUs) to manage and add exponentially to what an RFID tag must communicate.

Since the introduction of the RFID item-level tagging process, Maidenform fulfills the retailer’s orders as they normally would. However, instead of sealing the items in the cartons once fulfilled, the team diverts the cartons and its items for EPC tagging.

“The garments are sent to a ‘value-added’ services area comprised of RFID work stations where EPC tags are applied,” explains CYBRA’s vice president of Solutions. “The Maidenform operators scan each item’s U.P.C. barcode and the CYBRA EdgeMagic software does a database look-up and assigns an SGTIN that uniquely identifies the item and its attributes. The SGTIN is encoded in the EPC RFID tag and is also printed on the EPC label in a human readable format. The SGTIN containing all the item’s attributes are linked to its U.P.C. that will be scanned at the retail register.”

The encoded RFID tags, which are cut automatically by the Maidenform operator attaches an EPC-enabled RFID tag to each bra.
printer, then slide into the operator’s hands and are attached to the garments. As the last tagged garment goes into the box, a “ping” tells the operator that validation is complete and the carton can continue on to shipping.

One of Maidenform’s key operational requirements was the time it took to scan the U.P.C. to the output of an RFID tag to attach to the garment. It had to be less than two seconds. This objective has been achieved: Maidenform is able to reliably print at that speed—and for the number of garments typically packed.

While forecasts vary throughout the year, Maidenform estimates it will tag two million items annually for this retailer alone. And as other retailers’ items are added, Maidenform’s long-term solution will be to shift the RFID item-level tagging to the source since it is not sustainable in the distribution center.

**CREATING A PIECE OF THE FUTURE TODAY**

Maidenform management supports RFID item-level tagging as a “piece of the future” that is here today—something that must be leveraged for the business and the industry. The company’s goal is to get a repetitive process in place at its manufacturing source to gain efficiencies and control costs. And with greater visibility of items within its supply chain, Maidenform anticipates gains in managing its inventory.

“We learned a lot from the RFID tagging initiative—lessons we are applying as we gear up to support additional retailers. In fact, we are in the process of selecting a partner to apply integrated tags—combining the U.P.C. and RFID data—to embed in our sourcing process to alleviate the need to tag in our distribution center,” says a member of the Maidenform team.

Maidenform shares its top lessons and advice:

**TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE DATA.** “We made a strategic decision to use the CYBRA software and GS1 Standards to validate and ensure the accuracy of each individual carton before releasing it to the shipping dock,” advises a member of the Maidenform team.

**CREATE A TEAM OF EXPERTS.** Maidenform chose its team members and solution partners wisely. “When you have all the right people involved with the right skills, problems are easier to resolve,” says a member of the Maidenform team. “When we ran into a problem, we would literally get all partners together on the distribution center floor to troubleshoot the issue. Our partners and internal team helped us work through the process as well as resolve some major technical issues. As a result, we made modifications to the layout of the RFID services area.”

**ENGAGE THE PEOPLE IN THE NEW PROCESS.** “People signing up to work the RFID tagging process need to fully understand the job,” says a member of the Maidenform team. “These types of initiatives involve people as well as technology, so you need to give them adequate time and training to learn and get used to the new process. This should not be overlooked.”

**PARTNER WITH THE RETAILER.** Maidenform worked closely with its trading partner to test and confirm its new process, updating them each step of the way. “We had about three months to get our RFID tagging process in place, so frequent communications and collaboration with our retailer was a very important piece of the initiative,” says a member of the Maidenform team. “And we’ll continue to partner heavily with our retailers to make RFID tagging mutually beneficial.”

**GET STARTED SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.** With this RFID initiative, Maidenform has gained invaluable experience. “We implemented the RFID initiative because we knew we had to do it for this specific retailer, but we know it’s an investment for the future,” says a member of the Maidenform team.

CYBRA adds, “Manufacturers need to start RFID tagging now, when the pilots are smaller and more manageable. Retailers will soon require full RFID compliance, necessitating tagging at source. EPC management is going to be a huge undertaking and choices for implementation may be limited and far more difficult to integrate.”

Maidenform is aware that the full measure of its RFID-tagging story has yet to be written. “While we are still in the infancy stages of implementing RFID item-level tagging, we made significant progress to advance up the learning curve with the RFID initiative,” says a member of the Maidenform team. “Maidenform is an early adopter since the future of RFID and its anticipated benefits is fast approaching.”

**BENEFITS FOR BOTH**

The symbiotic benefits of RFID item-level tagging for both retailers and manufacturers are being cataloged as more and more retailers understand the upside impact. On retailers’ floors, RFID tagging means that when they sell products, replenishment orders are readily generated so the next consumers will find products in the sizes and colors they need, resulting in store loyalty from the consumer.

Another benefit is the swift accumulation of trending data enabled by RFID tagging: retailers are able to see in a matter of hours or days that apparel in “deep plum,” for instance, is selling exceptionally well, enabling them to send in replenishment orders while notoriously fleeting apparel trends are in full swing. Manufacturers of deep plum items are able to alter production schedules and increase sales revenue because consumer behavior has been verified at the cash register.
CONTACT US

To learn more about EPC-enabled RFID item-level tagging and how GS1 US can support your company, contact GS1 US at +1 937.435.3870 and/or EPCReadinessProgram@gs1us.org.

ABOUT MAIDENFORM

During its 90-year history, Maidenform Brands, Inc., has grown into a global intimate apparel company with a portfolio of established, well-known brands, top-selling products and an iconic heritage. It designs, sources and markets an extensive range of intimate apparel products, including bras, panties and shapewear. It sells its products through multiple distribution channels, including department stores, national chains, mass merchants (including warehouse clubs), others (including specialty retailers, off-price retailers, foreign distributors and licensees), and company-operated outlet stores and websites. www.maidenform.com

ABOUT GS1 US

GS1 US is a not-for-profit organization that brings industry communities together to solve supply-chain problems through the adoption and implementation of GS1 Standards. More than 200,000 businesses in 25 industries rely on GS1 US for trading-partner collaboration and for maximizing the cost effectiveness, speed, visibility, security and sustainability of their business processes. They achieve these benefits through GS1 US solutions based on GS1® global unique numbering and identification systems, barcodes, Electronic Product Code-based RFID, data synchronization and electronic information exchange. GS1 US also manages the United Nations Standard Products Services Code® (UNSPSC®). www.gs1us.org

ABOUT CYBRA

Headquartered in Yonkers, New York, CYBRA Corporation is a leader in barcode and RFID technology for IBM Power Systems and other major computing platforms. MarkMagic™ Bar Code Labels, RFID Tags and Forms Software is used by thousands of customers worldwide, helping them to easily integrate barcode, RFID technology and electronic forms into their business systems. CYBRA’s EdgeMagic® is an integrated RFID control solution, helping customers build any type of RFID system, from complying with the full range of RFID mandates to closed loop asset management RFID applications. CYBRA is a GS1 US Solution Partner. www.cybra.com

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