



Q&A

Simon Phelps, European Sales and Marketing Director at ITL – Intelligent Label Solutions

Tell us why it was important to be at this year's RetailExpo?

RetailEXPO is still the main UK event for showcasing the latest trends and innovations in retail technology and as such it attracts a large number of visitors interested in the products and solutions ITL is offering. It's a fantastic opportunity to showcase what we do and talk to customers, not only to sell, but also to gain a better insight of what their current challenges are.

What did you bring to the show, what type of delegates or potential clients visited your stand?

This year our focus was on promoting our integrated RFID solutions, aimed mainly at retailers and brand owners who are setting out on their RFID journey and need a supplier who can provide them with an end-to-end solution, including software, tags and global source tagging. We had some great names on the stand eager to understand more about what RFID can offer and how we can help them.

What are the latest technological innovations within labelling and product identification?

I think everything is still RFID-centric – whilst the key driver continues to be improved inventory accuracy, there are so many other proven uses for the technology that can bring about quick wins such as quicker payments, easier item locating and more accurate loss prevention. When combined to provide all these benefits together, RFID is a really powerful solution.

How do you see this retail sub-sector at the moment, what's happening in the market?

Market conditions are tough, with consumers perhaps less loyal than in the

past and fierce competition for basket spend. This is forcing the market to re-look at how they operate, both in terms of sourcing and providing customer experience.

On one hand, this can create a 'shutters down' scenario where retailers block large capital expenditure and monitor costs really carefully. Interestingly though, the retailers most likely to come out from this difficult trading period the least bruised are the ones brave enough to look at the new technologies available like artificial intelligence and RFID and adopt them to help reduce long term cost and drive up sales. Right now I would say survival will require retailers to drastically evolve in terms of what they sell and how they sell it.

What retailer pain points are you specifically looking to help with – and what are your solutions?

Aside from the obvious margin and footfall headaches that retailers are facing, I would say that our customers are faced with three main challenges; environment, convenience and consumer experience. Quite rightly, there is a huge emphasis on reducing the environmental footprint of fashion, especially around producing more sustainable packaging, whilst at the same time, consumers have become more demanding and they simply don't have to put up with second best.

If a retailer can't give them what they want, when they want it then they will shop somewhere else that can. And even then, they still want a positive experience that leaves them feeling enriched. I'm thrilled that ITL, and labels and packaging generally, are able to contribute to success in each of these areas and we have worked hard as a company to create solutions that address these challenges specifically. The ITL solution I'm most excited by is intelligent,

which is ITL's patented product re-engineering solution, aimed at minimising waste in the production process. The great feature about the solution is that in reducing waste, we are reducing cost so the retailer is making instant savings that can then be re-invested back into adopting more environmentally friendly raw materials that brands and retailers have always wanted to use but not been able to afford them. It's such a simple concept, but if used correctly, can revolutionise labelling and packaging design and get the industry to align their thoughts finally.

Where do you see things going in the next few years?

There's no doubt that we are going through some of the most profound changes ever seen in retail, but whilst that creates a lot of nervousness, I think it also creates a lot of opportunity and I'm energised by that. Everyone is going to have to work that little bit harder and act more innovatively to remain competitive, but this plays to our strengths as experts at what we do and partners in our approach to customers.

What can we expect from ITL-Group for the rest of this year?

This is going to be another busy year for us as we balance our rapid regional expansion - we have recently opened a brand new eco-factory in Ethiopia and a dedicated sales office in Germany to manage our growing customer base in Northern Europe - with a number of key RFID customer breakthroughs that we look forward to announcing soon. We will be releasing the latest version of Reflect, ITL's own cloud based RFID software, in August and we have a new website due to go live anytime now, that captures better not just what we do but also how we do it.