November 2000

Reduced Space Symbology- Big News for Small Product Identification

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In a little more than 25 years, the Universal Product Code has revolutionized the grocery industry and has been responsible for driving enormous costs out of the grocery supply chain. Its worldwide reach laid the foundation for the EAN•UCC System, which today creates unprecedented efficiencies in 23 different industry sectors.

But despite these impressive achievements in global commerce, two grocery categories have yet to realize the full potential of this product identification system: produce and variable measure, which encompasses products such as meat, poultry, deli, and seafood items. Barriers such as perishability and space-constrained limitations have prevented these categories from fully leveraging the power of the EAN•UCC System.

Reduced Space Symbology™(RSS) represents a new supply chain solution for small item identification. While other grocery categories have had full access to the benefits and efficiencies of the EAN•UCC System, produce and variable measure products suffered from a significant "information disadvantage." RSS will close that information gap.

With the utilization of RSS, produce and variable measure products will no longer be the weak information links in the grocery supply chain. This new symbology will give these two grocery categories the opportunity to utilize deeper levels of product identification information.

The new RSS bar code (see example above) is stacked and omnidirectional, allowing space for more information, including supply chain details, sell-by dates, weight, and value over the current $99.99 limit. RSS will mean increased information for the produce and variable measure categories. Instead of just scratching the surface, RSS will allow users to go deeper and peel away layer after layer of detailed product information.

The use of RSS will enable full implementation of category management, providing more complete and detailed pricing and SKU analysis. The grocery retailer will finally have access to consumer purchasing patterns of specific brands of produce and meat/deli

product. Inventory will also be better managed with the establishment of more effective and efficient replenishment programs with suppliers.

With increased concerns about consumer safety and product traceability issues, there is a growing need to include more data on products such as deli items, meat, poultry and seafood. Technology has not existed that could support bar coding of more data without sacrificing valuable and limited label space. Now, RSS will allow products in these categories to be tracked back to the specific supplier, ensuring higher levels of consumer safety.

Front-end accuracy and transaction speed will also increase with RSS. Manual keying at the checkout will be eliminated, thus saving time and eliminating errors. The checkout counter will deliver more convenience, greater accuracy and enhance customer confidence and satisfaction.

The UCC has organized an extensive Users Group comprising some of the food and grocery industry's leading retailers and suppliers to assess the utilization of RSS in the grocery store. Lab testing has begun and the first in-store pilot will be launched at Dorothy Lane Market in Dayton, Ohio.

Today, the food industry is more competitive than ever before. Profit margins are razor thin, and companies are challenged to find innovative ways to reduce costs. The Uniform Code Council's RSS initiative will give food and grocery companies the technology to extract more information out of the produce and variable measure categories to fully leverage the bottom-line benefits of the EAN•UCC System.

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