



# TAG TEAM

Labels are a vital component in the merchandise mix. Besides containing information, labels strengthen brands – a major contribution to the brand and marketing mix. As we find, they've come a long way...

**L**abelling is moving fast into the future and it is important to keep an eye on what's coming up. In a report from Labelexpo Global after the Labelexpo Americas held in September last year, the label industry was reported as 'being still young' and that there were 'opportunities available to everyone in equal measure'. Every year sees growth.

*NZRetail* asked SATO managing director Paul Ryan for his predictions on future labelling trends. Here are his five picks:

#### **1. RFID to the fore**

Increased demand, a decrease in the price of the technology and growing support for the EPC Standard will see RFID labelling gain a further foothold. Expect to see more EPC being used both as security and identification, and it will become the preferred labelling choice for apparel, high value products and perishable food items. RFID traceability labelling will also become more widely used in the food and produce sector for 'farm to fork' traceability.

#### **2. Retailer-led compliance labelling**

New Zealand is one of the few countries that don't label items according to a retailer's standard and at present many have to re-label items or pallets, creating unnecessary work and expense. However, New Zealand retailers will follow their overseas counterparts and insist on labelling that fits with their supply chain demands.

#### **3. Environmentally-friendly labelling**

The growing consumer demand for

environmentally friendly and/or sustainable products will lead to an increase in liner-less and recyclable liner labels. (See comments by Bruce Hadley below.)

#### **4. Dual-purpose product and shelf labelling.**

Expect general merchandise retailers to shift to a food retailer model of a standard bar-code with shelf labelling indicating price to the customer. This shift will assist with compliance and scrap the need to mark down the price on every item



**Above** Investing in quality EAS tags is as important as the initial EAS hardware investment – shown here a tag by Leading Solutions.

**Right** Print quality comes under scrutiny at the Labelexpo Americas.

**Inset Below** The SATO HT200 is very handy being portable and ideal for markdowns.

which is costly, time-consuming and fraught with error.

### 5 Decline in price gun use

The trusty hand-labeller/price gun – for many years the weapon of choice for marking down prices – will be sidelined in favour of portable thermally- or laser-printed price tags/labels. This new technology will help retailers comply with legislative requirements, produce better looking-labels and speed up check-out efficiency.



### ENVIRONMENT

Eco-friendly and eco-looking labels are having a massive impact on garment branding, says Bruce Hadley, general manager of Image Label Systems (New Zealand) Ltd., which provides branding, compliance, merchandising, source tagging and item identification labeling solutions.

“We’re noticing that the fashion retail market is becoming more eco-aware and many top manufacturers want to give their product and brand a bit of eco-cred with the labelling they use.”

Rising to the challenge, Image Label systems is sourcing more eco-looking labelling surfaces and trims such as natural-looking cardboard, cotton fabric, rope ties, ribbon and string. Cotton fabric labels are particularly popular.

“Cotton fabric labels are particularly popular.”

“There’s a lot of interest in cotton label surfaces, both woven-edged and split

canvases. People seem to love the rough-textured, uncoated quality of pure cotton labels for decoration or even hang-tags or sew-on patches.”

Another trend with the streetwear brands is the distressed or ‘beat-up’ tag which has the look of being faded, chewed-up, rolled-up and generally beaten to bits. “A major brand recently asked us to print the tags, get them wet, wrinkle them into a ball and stuff them all in a bag – un-flattened.”

### SECURE INVESTMENT

Pay peanuts and you’ll end up with a monkey; scrimp and save on your EAS (electronic article surveillance) system tags and labels and you’ll end up with a dog, says Mark Harvey of Leading Solutions.

When retailers buy an EAS system, they tend to focus on the hardware (the pillars, posts and gates) because it’s the ‘big ticket’ item, but paying close attention to the quality and performance of the hard and soft tags used is paramount to maximizing the return on investment.

“Investing in quality tags and labelling goods is of equal if not greater importance than your initial EAS hardware investment.” He says retailers balk at paying too much for the small consumable RF and AM soft tags.

“But we know, by testing a number of hard and soft tags, that retailers are unwittingly tagging valuable goods with (cheap) soft tags which, in some instances, don’t work or perform poorly.”

Some soft tags and labels fail to activate the EAS door alarm, and some are easily shielded by thieves preventing activation of the alarm on exit. Also, some hard tags do not perform reliably in the field of sensitivity – making it easy for a thief to walk through the security posts without activating the alarm. Harvey’s advice is to test your supply chain and tags regularly and to keep up with EAS developments.

“EAS systems have been around for a long time and quality manufacturers are always looking to improve their performance. Be sure to understand the capability of ‘next generation’ hard



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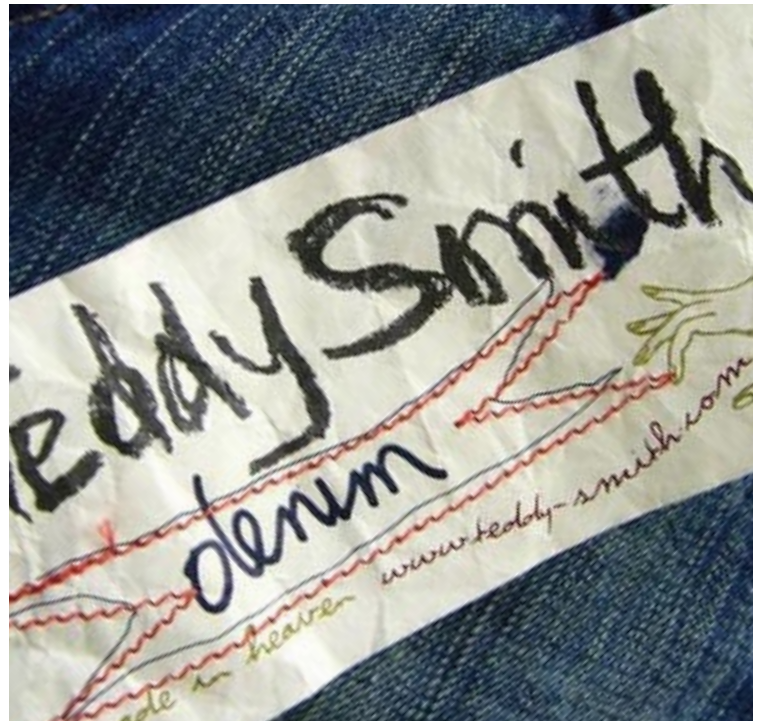
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**Above** Looking like a hand written label, Teddy Smith hang tag by Image Label Solutions.  
**Below** More like a sample swatch than a label – swing tag for Replay by Image Label Solutions.

tags and 'intelligent' tags before investing in further security measures."

Secured new 'anti-shield' RF soft tags from Japan are available in New Zealand plus a versatile range of hard tags suitable for products from sports equipment, optical products, liquor, clothing and more.

"There's always room for improvement, and it's wise to make sure you're getting the best performance from your system." ■

By **Lynda Gray**, an award-winning freelance writer based in Alexandra and a regular contributor to *NZRetail*.



### NOTE IT

There are four Expo/Summits being held by Labelexpo Global this year. They are:

- Global Digital Label Summit 2009: 24–25 March in Barcelona;
- Label Summit Latin America 2009: 28–29 April in Sao Paulo;
- Labelexpo Europe 2009: 23–26 Brussels; and
- Labelexpo Asia 2009: 8–11 December.

Go to [www.labelexpo.com](http://www.labelexpo.com) for more information.