Logo-Antenna Based RFID Tags for Advertising Application

Khaled ElMahgoub 1, Tamer Elsherbeni 1, Fan Yang 1, Atef Z. Elsherbeni 1, Lauri Sydänheimo 2, Leena Ukkonen 2

1 Center of Applied Electromagnetic System Research (CAESR), Department of Electrical Engineering, University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677-1848, USA
kelmahgo@olemiss.edu, taelsher@olemiss.edu, fyang@olemiss.edu, atef@olemiss.edu

2 Rauma Research Unit, Institute of Electronics, Tampere University of Technology, Kalliokatu 2, Rauma 26100, Finland
lauri.sydanheimo@tut.fi, leena.ukkonen@tut.fi

Abstract—In this paper we provide the basis of using radio frequency identification (RFID) tags for advertisement. Two RFID tags that apply to the 866 MHz and 915 MHz operating frequencies, respectively, were designed based on the logos of two universities participating in this project. Several fabrication methods were used to build the RFID tags on different substrates. The experimental results exhibited favorable read ranges and radiation patterns. This work demonstrates the applicability and design flexibility of RFID tags for many advertising applications.

Index Terms—Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), advertising applications, active radiation pattern measurements, tag read range.

I. INTRODUCTION

The sales of company products thrive off innovative advertising propagation. Thus, the purpose of Logo-RFID tags is to stimulate an emotional reaction and generate a favorable response towards a company by representing their advanced capabilities. Therefore, Logo-RFID tags are an immense asset for companies because of their new perspective for advertising that has never been used in marketing.

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) is a technology which uses RF signals for automatic identification of objects. RFID tags are used for many applications in various areas such as electronic toll collection, asset identification, retail item management, access tracking systems and many others. An RFID system consists of two basic parts: a reader (interrogator) and a tag (transponder). An RFID tag can either be an active tag which has a battery or a passive tag which is battery-less. A passive tag consists of an antenna and an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC) known as a chip. A passive back-scattered RFID system operates as follows: the reader transmits modulated signal with periods of unmodulated radio frequency (RF) carrier, which is received by the tag antenna. The RF voltage developed on the antenna terminal during unmodulated period is converted to DC. This voltage powers up the chip, which sends back the information by varying its complex RF input impedance. The impedance typically changes between two different states, a conjugate match impedance and a mismatched impedance, effectively modulating the back-scattered signal [1].

The idea of using text as a meander line antenna in RFID tags has been discussed before in [2]. In this paper the idea of using logo-antenna based passive RFID tags for both identification and advertising purposes is investigated. RFID tags consisting of logos from two universities were designed, simulated, fabricated on different substrates, and measured. The implemented substrates included paper, thin transparent film, polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and fabrics which are popularly used in the advertising industry. The measured tags gave desirable performance and read a range of nearly 12m at both 866MHz and 915MHz, the European and US frequencies. While
the RFID tags were activated, their radiation patterns were measured for both bandwidths.

II. LOGO ANTENNA DESIGN

An RFID tag consists of two parts, an antenna and a chip. For maximum performance the antenna input impedance must be the conjugate match of the chip’s impedance [3] which is usually capacitive impedance and depends on both the operation frequency and received power level [4]. To compensate for the capacitive part of the chip’s impedance, a matching loop is needed in tag antenna designs [5].

Generally, during the design of an efficient RFID tag several parameters must be determined, (1) the operation frequency and required bandwidth [6], (2) the type of chip and its impedance, (3) the chip’s minimum operating power, (4) the substrate parameters according to the fabrication process [7]. These issues will be presented in the following design procedure.

A. The Logo Tag Design

Our design process started by combining the logos of two universities, The University of Mississippi (UM) and Tampere University of Technology (TUT). To design a symmetric antenna, “TUT” was aligned horizontally and “UM” was positioned vertically, as shown in Fig. 1. The main controlling parameter in our RFID tag was the letter ‘M’ which had an inductive loop for the tag design. By controlling the shape of ‘M’ the input impedance of the antenna could be matched to the conjugate of the chip’s impedance.

The design was simulated using Ansoft HFSS (high frequency structural simulator) [8]. The tag was designed on a substrate with \( \varepsilon_r = 2.33 \), thickness 0.1 mm, copper with \( \sigma=5.8 \text{ MS/m} \) and thickness 17\( \mu \text{m} \). The type of chip used for our RFID tag was the Alien gen2 and the chip impedance is 17-135j\( \Omega \) at 866MHz and -11dBm power level. Two final designs corresponding to the US and European frequencies were developed and their dimensions are shown in Fig. 2.

These designs were achieved by conducting parametric studies to determine good initial values for optimization. Quasi Newton optimization was used to determine the final values.

To match the input impedance of the antenna to the conjugate of the chip’s impedance, the size of the letter ‘M’ was decreased to get the needed induction. Design
(b) is obtained from shrinking design (a) and modifying the letter ‘M’ to operate at a higher frequency.

B. Simulated Results of Power Reflection Coefficient and Input Impedance

The power reflection coefficient and the input impedance of the antenna were calculated, as shown in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4. The power reflection coefficient was calculated using the following equation:

\[ |\Gamma|^2 = \left| \frac{Z_c - Z_a^*}{Z_c + Z_a} \right|^2 \]  

(1)

where \( Z_c \) is the chip impedance and \( Z_a \) is the antenna impedance. This is a general formula used for complex nominal impedance; the scattering parameters for complex nominal impedance were proved in [9] to be as follows:

\[ a = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{R_a}} (V + Z_a I), \quad b = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{R_a}} (V - Z_a^* I) \]  

(2)

The normal power reflection coefficient formula can’t be used while the nominal impedance is complex, because this might lead to having the magnitude of the reflection coefficient greater than 1.

The center frequency for design (a) was 857MHz and for design (b) was 898 MHz while the -10dB bandwidth for design (a) was 2.89% and for design (b) was 3.37%.
C. Measurements Results

All measurements were conducted using the Tagformance device [10]. The measurements were based on an electromagnetic threshold technique, in which the frequency was changed from 830 MHz to 990 MHz in a step of 1 MHz. At each frequency the transmitted power was increased by 0.1 dB until the tag was activated and properly responded. The minimum transmitted power to activate the tag was measured at each frequency. The device can calculate the read range by using free space Friis formula [11] and taking into account the path and cable losses and also the antenna gains. The read range is calculated using the following equation:

\[
 r_{\text{max}}(f) = \frac{\sqrt{\text{EIRP}}}{P_{\text{min}}L_{t}} \quad (3)
\]

Where EIRP is the effective isotropic radiated power, \(P_{\text{min}}\) is the minimum transmitted power to activate the tag and it is measured by the device, \(L\) is a factor taking in consideration the cable and path loss, and \(G_{t}\) is the transmitting antenna gain [4].

Figure 5 shows the measurement setup. The tag was mounted over a foam board at height \(h = 1\) m and at distance \(d = 1\) m from the Tagformance antennas the ground and side wall were covered by absorbers. To measure the radiation patterns for the tag while it is operating the following procedures were used: For the x-z plane, horizontal polarized reader antennas were used and the foam board was rotated around the y-axis in x-z plane by changing the ‘\(\beta\)’ angle by a step of 15 degrees as shown in Fig. 5. For the y-z plane, vertical polarized reader antennas were used and the tag was rotated so that its x-axis became the vertical axis. The board was rotated along the x-axis, by changing the ‘\(\beta\)’ angle by a step of 15 degrees.

The Tagformance measured the minimum transmitted power to activate the tag. These values were used at each angle to plot the measured radiation pattern in each plane.

Fig. 5. The measurement setup for RFID tags.

Fig. 6. The measured and simulated radiation pattern for different plane cuts at 866 MHz.
Figs. 6 and 7 compare the measured data to the simulated radiation patterns based on HFSS simulation in both frequencies, and it can be noticed that the measured and the simulated data are in good agreement. Differences could have occurred due to the resolution of the measurement device by increasing the transmitted power (0.1dB), and the 15 degree increment tag rotation.

D. Using Different Substrates in Fabrication Process

The RFID tags were fabricated using three different techniques: manual cutting using copper tape, etching using aluminum and copper, and screen printing using silver conductive ink. Each method was used on four different substrates: paper thin transparent film, PET and fabric. The components of the fabricated tags are shown in Table 1. The multiple substrates and conducting materials were used to prove the flexibility of the logo design for advertising applications. More than 40 tags were fabricated and measured. The best tags for each substrate and conductive material were chosen as prototypes if mass production is needed. Their read ranges are recorded and compared in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tag No.</th>
<th>Substrate</th>
<th>Conductive Material</th>
<th>Fabrication process</th>
<th>Read Range[m]</th>
<th>Frequency of operation[MHz]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>PET</td>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>Etching</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thin film</td>
<td>Sliver Ink</td>
<td>Screen Printing</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thin film</td>
<td>Sliver Ink</td>
<td>Screen Printing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Thin film</td>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>Manual cutting</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Thin film</td>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>Manual cutting</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thin film</td>
<td>Aluminum</td>
<td>Etching</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>Sliver Ink</td>
<td>Screen Printing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fabric</td>
<td>Sliver Ink</td>
<td>Screen Printing</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fabric</td>
<td>Sliver Ink</td>
<td>Screen Printing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. CONCLUSION

In this paper the technique of using the RFID tags for advertising application was confirmed. An example of this application was implemented by a sample logo tag. The tags were simulated and fabricated using different substrates such as fabric and printing paper and different conducting materials which are widely used in advertising applications. The performance of these tags were measured and compared well with simulation results. The tag was originally designed using PET and copper as conducting material which is the reason for producing the highest performance (longest read range). Future designs can be modified for different substrates and conducting materials to obtain better results. This paper provides substantial proof that RFID logo tags could be used for both identification and advertising applications.

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REFERENCES


Khaled ElMahgoub received the B.Sc. and M.Sc. degrees in electronics and electrical communications engineering from Cairo University, Egypt, in 2001 and 2006, respectively. Currently, he is working towards the Ph.D. degree in the Department of Electrical Engineering at the University of Mississippi, USA. His current research interests include RFID systems, FDTD, Antenna design and Numerical techniques for electromagnetics. Mr. ElMahgoub is a member of IEEE and ACES society.

From 2001 to 2006, he has been teacher assistant at Cairo University, and since 2007, he is a research assistant at the University of Mississippi.

Tamer Elsherbeni currently working towards his B. Sc. in Electrical Engineering with RF/Wireless emphasis at the University of Mississippi. He was selected to participate in the NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program at The College of Optics and Photonics at University of Central Florida in the summer of 2009. He also received the Science, Mathematics, And Research for Transformation Program (SMART) scholarship in 2009. His current research interests include RFID systems, measurements and fabrication techniques for electromagnetic application, wireless power and infrared systems.

Fan Yang received the B.S. and M.S. degrees from Tsinghua University in 1997 and 1999, and the Ph.D. degree from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2002. From 1994 to 1999, he was a Research Assistant in the State Key...
Laboratory of Microwave and Digital Communications, Tsinghua University, China. From 1999 to 2002, he was a Graduate Student Researcher in the Antenna Lab, UCLA. From 2002 to 2004, he was a Post-doc Research Engineer and Instructor in the Electrical Engineering Department, UCLA. In August 2004, he joined the Electrical Engineering Department, The University of Mississippi as an Assistant Professor and was promoted to Associate Professor in 2009.

Dr. Yang’s research interests include antenna theory, designs, and measurements, electromagnetic band gap (EBG) structures and their applications, computational electromagnetics and optimization techniques, and applied electromagnetic systems such as the radio frequency identification (RFID) system and concentrating solar energy system. He has published over 100 technical journal articles and conference papers, five book chapters, and two books entitled *Electromagnetic Band Gap Structures in Antenna Engineering* and *Electromagnetics and Antenna Optimization Using Taguchi’s Method*.

Dr. Yang is a Senior Member of IEEE and was Secretary of IEEE AP Society, Los Angeles chapter. He is also a Full Member of URSI/USNC. Dr. Yang serves as the Associate Editor-in-Chief of the Applied Computational Electromagnetics Society (ACES) Journal. He is also a frequent reviewer for over twenty scientific journals and book publishers, and has chaired numerous technical sessions in various international symposiums. Dr. Yang was a Faculty Senator at The University of Mississippi, and currently is a Member of the University Assessment Committee.

For his contributions, Dr. Yang has received several prestigious awards and recognitions. In 2004, he received the *Certificate for Exceptional Accomplishment in Research and Professional Development Award* from UCLA. Dr. Yang was the recipient of *Young Scientist Award* in the 2005 URSI General Assembly and in the 2007 International Symposium on Electromagnetic Theory. He was also appointed as The University of Mississippi *Faculty Research Fellow* in year 2005 and 2006. In 2008, Dr. Yang received the *Junior Faculty Research Award* from The University of Mississippi. In 2009, he received the inaugural IEEE Donald G. Dudley Jr. Undergraduate Teaching Award.

Atef Elsherbeni received an honor B.Sc. degree in Electronics and Communications, an honor B.Sc. degree in Applied Physics, and a M.Eng. degree in Electrical Engineering, all from Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt, in 1976, 1979, and 1982, respectively, and a Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering from Manitoba University, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, in 1987. He was a part time Software and System Design Engineer from March 1980 to December 1982 at the Automated Data System Center, Cairo, Egypt. From January to August 1987, he was a Post Doctoral Fellow at Manitoba University. Dr. Elsherbeni joined the faculty at the University of Mississippi in August 1987 as an Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering. He advanced to the rank of Associate Professor on July 1991, and to the rank of Professor on July 1997. On August 2002 he became the director of The School of Engineering CAD Lab, and the associate director of The Center for Applied Electromagnetic Systems Research (CAESR) at The University of Mississippi. He was appointed as Adjunct Professor, at The Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science of the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science at Syracuse University on January 2004. He spent a sabbatical term in 1996 at the Electrical Engineering Department, University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and was a visiting Professor at Magdeburg University during the summer of 2005 and at Tampere University of Technology in Finland during the summer of 2007. In 2009 he was appointed as Finland Distinguished Professor by the Academy of Finland and TEKES.

Dr. Elsherbeni received the 2006 School of Engineering Senior Faculty Research Award for Outstanding Performance in research, the 2005 School of Engineering Faculty Service Award for Outstanding Performance in Service, The 2004 Valued Service Award from the Applied Computational Electromagnetics Society (ACES)
for Outstanding Service as 2003 ACES Symposium Chair, the Mississippi Academy of Science 2003 Outstanding Contribution to Science Award, the 2002 IEEE Region 3 Outstanding Engineering Educator Award, the 2002 School of Engineering Outstanding Engineering Faculty Member of the Year Award, the 2001 ACES Exemplary Service Award for leadership and contributions as Electronic Publishing Managing Editor 1999-2001, the 2001 Researcher/Scholar of the year award in the Department of Electrical Engineering, The University of Mississippi, and the 1996 Outstanding Engineering Educator of the IEEE Memphis Section.


Dr. Elsherbeni is a Fellow member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and a fellow member of The Applied Computational Electromagnetic Society (ACES). He is the Editor-in-Chief for ACES Journal, and an Associate Editor to the Radio Science Journal. He serves on the editorial board of the Book Series on Progress in Electromagnetic Research, the Electromagnetic Waves and Applications Journal, and the Computer Applications in Engineering Education Journal. He was the Chair of the Engineering and Physics Division of the Mississippi Academy of Science and was the Chair of the Educational Activity Committee for the IEEE Region 3 Section.

Lauri Sydänheimo received the M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees in electrical engineering from Tampere University of Technology (TUT). He is currently a Professor with the Department of Electronics, TUT, and works as the Research Director of Tampere University of Technology’s Rauma Research Unit. He has authored over 120 publications in the field of RFID tag and reader antenna design and RFID system performance improvement.

His research interests are focused on wireless data communication and radio frequency identification (RFID).

Leena Ukkonen received the M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees in electrical engineering from Tampere University of Technology (TUT) in 2003 and 2006, respectively. She is currently working at the TUT, Department of Electronics as Senior Research Scientist leading the RFID research group. She has authored over 60 publications in the field of RFID antenna design and industrial RFID applications.

Her research interests are focused on passive UHF radio frequency identification (RFID) antenna development for tags and readers.