

Excursion to METRO Group

On the 9th December 2009 we visited the METRO Group: First the RFID Innovation Center in Neuss and then the METRO Group Center in Düsseldorf.

The METRO Group is one of the biggest trading companies in Europe. The Innovation Center is a subsidiary company of METRO.

In the Innovation Center they showed us a new technology called RFID. RFID stands for Radiofrequency-Identification. Furthermore we talked to the sustainability manager and we visited the sale market in Düsseldorf.

In Neuss we learned what RFID chips can be used for actually and in future. These small chips will be very important for enterprise resource planning and logistics.

This technology allows data transfer and registration automatically via radio waves. It is also combined with sensor technology to create a wide range of new applications which we have no idea of actually.

For example you can program these chips to show you what is missing in big or closed boxes where you normally can't look inside. Also goods can be localized: It is good for theft-protection. So it is much more easier to follow the way of this stolen product and – least but not least – to the thief.

In the Future Store they showed us how easy buying is in future. Provided if these RFID chips are placed on every single product.

Furthermore they showed us a Kitchen In Future – or how it will be in future: For example they showed us a fridge. In this fridge are stored products fitted with RFID chips. Also in the fridge is a sensor which can register the data of every single chip in it. On a screen you could see which goods are available in the fridge e.g. how many eggs or how many litres of milk, the date of "best before" and more.

They want to improve the fridge that it sends automatically e.g. an email to a supermarket: They will send you the missing eggs or milk or some other missing goods. Then you don't have to buy things on your own. It would be easier and you have more spare time.

After that we visited the sustainability manager of METRO, Louise Darnley, in Düsseldorf. She showed us a presentation about Sustainability. She said that it is important to be and to act sustainable with the focus on three sections: Economic, Environment and Social

My group was responsible for this application area and so we had prepared many questions about her topic Sustainability at METRO.

So she explained us what METRO Group is doing for sustainability. At first METRO tries to minimize their waste and decontaminate it. They sorting and recycling their waste.

Metro Group tries to use as much renewable energy as possible to release the environment and for that they use solar energy. But L. Darnley said also that METRO is under big pressure of their customers, because they want the latest gadgets and the coolest brands by lowest prices. So it is very complicated to have a consistent look on the environment, but they try to. But there is too much energy needed to feed their demand. She said "through small steps we can make a big difference". Then we asked her what a sustainability manager is doing the whole day. She said that she has to do research and fact finding about sustainability in her company. Also she has to give some presentations and to explain why sustainability is important. She is responsible for communications between METRO and customers or some other counterparties too.

Another question was how does she make sure that the customers know that METRO Group works sustainably. She explained that they often communicate with the customers and make them sure that METRO works sustainably. So they use the internet to give some information and METRO offers a printed report about sustainability which the customers.

Then we interrogated how they make sure that everybody at METRO Group works sustainably and how do they know that there is no forced labour. She said that METRO visits their suppliers and see if they work sustainable. But they couldn't be sure that there is no forced labour or child labour. I think this answer was her own opinion and not the political correct answer.

At the end we asked how many people work for sustainability at METRO. She said that they are ten to twelve people fulltime working for sustainability plus many engineers working for METRO Group.

I think it was great that she was so honest and tell us her own personal position and not the political correct answer and so it was very interesting. I liked it really much. Then we had been invited to lunch – and it was very delicious.

Afterwards we went to the sale-market and we could ask some questions about economical things and facts. Also we could ask some questions about the products, the way how these products come to the market and how these products are sold. They showed us how the products are transported and deported in the market. We saw that the market is installed in a huge hall and had been astonished that there is such a wide range of different products.

All in all it was very interesting at METRO, because METRO is a very big and important company. I think our field trip to METRO showed us in detail how such a big company is managed in special sections and – of course – how they try to release the environment.

Written by Julia Schenk