

Traxus Releases EPC Director

New middleware product works to provide a common RFID reader interface so that business applications don't need to be reconfigured for different readers.

By Jonathan Collins

July 29, 2004—RFID implementation and systems integration services company [Traxus Technologies](#) has a new middleware offering, EPC Director 2.0, designed to connect EPC readers from a number of companies to existing back-office systems.

EPC Director 2.0 adds a layer of middleware to an RFID deployment that the company says will ensure that even if readers in the deployment use a variety of reader interfaces to present data to back-office applications, such as warehouse management system (WMS) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) applications, the data presented is in a uniform format.

Differences in the way readers from different vendors operate and present the data collected can mean more work for the IT department of a company that has a mix of readers in its network, says Traxus. For example, the "GetTagData" command in a Matrics reader to retrieve tag information is different than the "GetTagData" command in an Alien reader. EPC Director 2.0 provides the common interface so that a corporate IT department does not have to learn how each reader operates.

"This software insulates business applications and back-office software from reader interface changes," says Paul Nasto, senior vice president of consulting at Traxus, which is based in McLean, Va.

According to Traxus, EPC Director 2.0 has been re-architected from software product called Tag Katcher, which Traxus acquired in October 2003 when it bought Tag Katcher's developer, RFID Wizards. Naming its first updated version of that software EPC Director 2.0, Traxus added new functionality such as filtering and zoning and extended support to both Windows and Linux operating systems.

The software works by translating data from a number of reader interfaces into any one of three data types: JDBC, a Java-based standard for database-independent data connectivity; XML (extensible markup language), a common information formatting standard used to share format and data; or plain flat files, i.e., a readable text file.

The company says its product was developed in Java, so it opted to use the JDBC interface instead of the ODBC interface. The JDBC interface provides a method to directly input information into a JDBC-compliant database such as Microsoft Access, Microsoft SQL, Oracle or Sybase. The XML feature allows connection to XML-compliant back-end systems such as WMS systems from Red Prairie and Manhattan Associates. The flat file translation provides the most basic level of data type for any back-end system to receive.

EPC Director V2 can output all three data types simultaneously, so a user can choose to input data directly to database and WMS systems while creating a flat file transaction log, a simple record of all actions recorded by the RFID network, to be used as a backup, says Nasto.

According to Traxus, the software supplied by various reader vendors to move data from their equipment to back-office systems varies from vendor to vendor and even from model to model from the same vendor.

Those differences in reader interfaces can mean significant additional work for companies as they upgrade readers and are forced to make changes to the way their business applications handle data that comes from those readers.

“Even if a company has opted for a single reader across their RFID deployment, a year from now, when new versions of readers are swapped in, changes will have to be made in the way the data shared with other applications. In addition, the old readers will still be used as spares that can be swapped in without taking down the RFID network, and that means having to support two different reader interfaces,” says Nasto.

EPC Director 2.0 supports readers from [Alien Technology](#), [ThingMagic](#) and [Matrics](#). Traxus says it will add support for readers from [SAMSys](#) and other vendors over the rest of the year as it maintains and upgrades the product.

Priced at \$300 per license, which allows for the installation of the software on one PC, EPC Director 2.0 runs on Microsoft Windows XP, Windows 2000, Windows NT and Linux operating systems. (A 15-day free trial version of the product can be downloaded from the EPC Director Web site: www.epcdirector.com.) Licenses for 5, 25, 100 and an unlimited number of PCs are also available. Users can pay an additional \$99 annual maintenance fee per license to receive connection capabilities for other reader vendors and additional reader interfaces.

Traxus also says it will offer the software in OEM form for both reader manufacturers and application vendors to add to their offerings to ensure the interoperability of their products.

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