

MicroMain RFID-Enables Software

XM asset management software now includes middleware so companies can use RFID to monitor work orders, maintenance and inventory.

By Jonathan Collins

Aug. 18, 2004—Asset and facility management software provider MicroMain has added RFID capabilities to its XM asset management software through a partnership with RFID middleware specialist Cathexis Innovations. MicroMain will integrate Cathexis's RFID Engine middleware with its MicroMain XM so that work orders, preventive maintenance, asset and fleet management, inventory control and other processes can be monitored using RFID.

Pocket PC handheld computers running the RFID-enabled XM mobile software will now be able to collect and write data to RFID tags attached to items that need regular maintenance. According MicroMain, using RFID tags in place of bar code labels when recording the maintenance history of an item offers significant benefits and potential savings.

“Bar codes can fall off or be damaged so that they can't be read. Even though RFID tags are more expensive, if the tag can be read reliably for the life of an item, that can mean significant savings over having maintenance staff spending 30 minutes looking for a bar code that has fallen off,” says Pat Conroy, president of MicroMain, which is based in Austin, Texas.

In addition, using RFID tags can extend the usefulness of handheld computers used for tracking assets. Unlike bar codes, which require that asset-related data be stored on the handheld device, RFID tags can hold an item's entire maintenance history.

“There is a limited amount of data that can be stored on a Pocket PC. With tags, an entire maintenance history can be stored and read each time work is carried out or a check made,” says Conroy.

MicroMain says the main adjustments it had to make to its products were adding support for the additional information that RFID can generate and enabling PocketPCs to be able to write to the tag as well as read it.

Cathexis, which is based in St. John's, Newfoundland, in Canada, integrated its RFID Engine software into the MicroMain XM software. Its RFID Engine middleware will enable the XM software to not only recognize and maintain data collected using RFID but also filter the RFID data produced by the RFID capabilities. The filtering capabilities of the RFID Engine improve the integrity and reliability of the RFID information being used by MicroMain XM. The Cathexis middleware filters out unnecessary information such as invalid or redundant reads so that the core functionality of the XM product remains unchanged. “That's one of the key value propositions behind using the RFID Engine,” says Steven Taylor, president at Cathexis.

Cathexis will also support Micro Main's RFID offering by providing technical support to MicroMain so that MicroMain can assist its customers with selecting the most suitable readers and tags for each deployment.

RFID-enabled MicroMain XM is available starting about \$6,000, which includes server, client, and mobile

software licenses. Hardware such as Pocket PCs, RFID readers and RFID tags will be available separately. Customers will buy RFID tags and readers from MicroMain to ensure compatibility with its system, but they can buy Pocket PCs through their vendor of choice. All MicroMain products are designed so customers can implement them on their own, according to the company, but many customers prefer that MicroMain provide implementation services. Working with Cathexis, MicroMain will offer implementation services including systems integration for the RFID-enabled MicroMain XM.

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