

VeriSign Initiates Two EPC Services

The company that will manage the EPCglobal Object Name Service directory has launched two new services to help boost ONS adoption.

By Jonathan Collins

Sept. 29, 2004—VeriSign, the Mountain View, Calif.-based company that will manage the EPCglobal Object Name Service (ONS) directory, has launched two new services to help boost the adoption of ONS and the development of applications that will link with its ONS services.

“We want to help drive usage and interoperability with the EPCglobal network,” says Brian Matthews, vice president of VeriSign directory services.

Under the EPC Network system, each company will have a server running its own ONS, and each server will point computers looking up EPC numbers to information stored on something called EPC Information Services (EPC IS)—servers that store information about products. Companies may maintain their own EPC Information Services or subcontract it out. With its two new releases, VeriSign is offering ways for companies to pursue either option.

Launched at the EPCglobal US conference in Baltimore, the new offerings comprise the free EPC Application Developers Program and a fee-based EPC Starter Service.

The EPC Application Developers Program that gives companies and individuals free access to application programming interfaces (APIs), documentation and the development tools that can help them build connections between their systems and the EPCglobal network. The EPC Starter Service offers companies a way to skip applications development for the time being and instead outsource their pilot ONS services to VeriSign.

VeriSign says it expects its managed service will prove to be a popular alternative for companies deploying RFID systems that are interested in the potential for linking their deployments with the EPCglobal network. “Companies are now looking for a low-cost, low-risk way to research EPC networking requirements just as they have done over the past 12 months with tags and readers,” says Matthews.

Using a managed service will let companies begin to identify and quantify the value of track and trace information related to RFID-tagged products in their supply chain, according to VeriSign.

The EPC Starter Service includes access to a private piloting environment hosted by VeriSign with data security and continuity suitable for multipartner pilots, technical documentation and product support. It is priced at \$10,000 to sign up and \$4,000 for each month or at a flat of \$50,000 for a one-year contract. The service is intended only for trial RFID deployments, and VeriSign says there are restrictions on the number of reads, the amount of data and other variables that the service will support.

Companies will have to connect their RFID pilot network to the EPC Starter Service themselves, but VeriSign

says it has already developed integration software for ERP applications from SAP, Sun and IBM but that it will develop integration middleware for customers that need integration to other applications not covered by its existing integration software as part of its service contract.

Choosing the managed service starter kit, says VeriSign, also provides a way for companies to test the EPCglobal Network without having to invest in products in which the standards development process for aspects of the network is still ongoing, such as Discovery Services and how data is authenticated within the EPC IS.

The EPC Application Developers Program gives software developers a resource to a test software that will be able to integrate a company's own RFID network with the EPCglobal Network.

The goal is to support software developers working for a range of companies including software application vendors and systems integrators as well as in-house developers at companies deploying RFID in their supply chain.

VeriSign maintains that, like its managed service offering, the EPC Application Developers Program provides a way to work with the emerging EPCglobal Network while standards are still being developed within EPCglobal.

The Application Developers Program is available via a Web portal (epcdev.verisign.com) that includes implementation guides, sample code, and documented APIs. The site also provides message boards and links to other useful resources.

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