

RFID Middleware Goes Light

Northrup Grumman releases a simplified middleware product focused on one thing: delivering RFID data to applications in the correct format.

By Jonathan Collins

Dec. 20, 2004—Targeting companies that want to run a stripped-down, light version of RFID middleware, the IT arm of defense and government contractor Northrup Grumman launched its Illuminos RFID software-development kit.

Northrup Grumman's new software-development kit enables companies to deploy middleware that ensures that data from RFID readers is delivered to applications in the format each application requires. Unlike other RFID offerings, however, Illuminos does not carry out any filtering or other additional functionality.

"A lot of companies just want middleware to deliver source data to their existing applications in the correct format. We believe there is a market niche for this," says Keith Reynolds, manager of business development at [Northrup Grumman Information Technology](#), which is based in Herndon, Va.

According to Northrup Grumman, customers for Illuminos are likely to be suppliers looking to meet RFID shipping mandates from retailers and the U.S. Department of Defense. Based on its experience as one of the largest suppliers of systems to the military, however, Northrup Grumman believes that its new product will see strongest demand from DOD suppliers.

The Illuminos kit enables companies deploying RFID networks to quickly connect RFID readers to their existing enterprise applications such as a warehouse management system, says Reynolds "The software can be installed, set up and running in a matter of hours. Customers just have to select from a menu what readers they are connecting to," he says.

So far the software will connect to readers from Matrics, Alien and Intermec, although other readers and other RFID hardware such as printers will be supported as the kit develops. At present the software supports EPC Class 1 and Class 0 readers but can be upgraded to support EPC Gen 2 standard ratified this week by EPCglobal.

When sold to end users, Illuminos is priced at \$5,000 deployment site. The company is also offering the software-development kit to reader manufacturers to enable them embed Illuminos middleware in their own product firmware. That pricing, says Northrup, will be based on a royalty fee.

Northrup Grumman, which has been involved in RFID since the U.S. Army first trialed the technology in 1992, also says it will use the software as part of its integration services offerings for companies looking to deploy and integrate RFID into their operations. According to the company, the Illuminos product grew out of Northrup Grumman's systems integration work and its work to become certified suppliers of specific vendors' readers. The company is certified to deploy both Intermec and Matrics readers, and it is working on similar qualification with Alien.

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