

HP to Offer RFID Services in Japan

Hewlett-Packard is teaming up with Internet Initiative Japan and IIJ Technology to develop and market EPC RFID services in Japan.

By Jonathan Collins

Aug. 18, 2005—IT giant Hewlett-Packard (HP) has teamed up with Japanese Internet services provider Internet Initiative Japan (IIJ) and its systems integrator subsidiary IIJ Technology (IIJ-Tech) to promote and market EPC RFID services in Japan. The companies say they have been discussing a potential alliance for a year, but are launching their efforts now because EPC RFID technology is gaining momentum in the Japanese market.

“It is a good time to launch,” explains Shigeki Ohtsu, IIJ-Tech’s general manager of technology development, “because in Japan, practical studies into the utilization of RFID technology have moved into high gear after permission was granted for the use of UHF band for RFID.” In April 2005, the Japanese government cleared 950 to 956 MHz spectrum for RFID use.

Next year, the three firms jointly plan to deliver RFID consulting, implementation and management services to Japanese companies. Based on network elements of the EPCglobal technology, these services will include such functions as Object Name Service (ONS), which directs enquiries about an EPC number to where information on the item associated with the code is; EPC Discovery Service, which allows companies to search for every interrogator that has read a particular EPC tag; and EPC IS, which stores EPC data and provides EPCglobal members access to that data.

The three-company alliance will see IIJ providing EPC network infrastructure over its Internet backbone network, IIJ-Tech offering systems integration and consulting services, and HP Japan delivering the HP RFID Noisy Lab Japan, as well as its own RFID-enabled supply chain management systems. The lab will aim to showcase the potential uses of RFID within a working environment.

All three companies are members of EPCglobal, and IIJ engineers participate in EPCglobal’s Software Action Group and its Business Action Group. HP is a cochair of the Asian Adoption Program Working Group, established by EPCglobal to promote deployments of EPC in the Asia region.

In Japan, where EPCglobal deployment lags behind that of the United States, Japanese solution providers and end users with U.S. branch offices have shown the most interest in the technology. The new alliance says it will initially target supply chain management deployments for fast-moving consumer goods. According to IIJ, the real drivers for RFID in Japan are logistics visibility and inventory management. Therefore, the group will develop special offerings to meet those needs.

HP and IIJ say they plan to research what practical and technical problems need to be solved in implementing EPCglobal RFID in Japan. They will then design their RFID offerings accordingly. The companies plan to demonstrate the prototype of "global real-time supply chain management" for international logistics next year.

In developing the RFID Noisy Lab Japan, HP will work with logistics companies Toyo Kanetsu Solutions K.K. and ThreeQ Co., as well as factory automation specialist IDEC Controls. The Noisy Lab, which will be located in Toyo Kanetsu Solutions' warehouse facility in Kisarazu, Chiba, is set to open at the end of 2005.

In January, HP, IIJ and IIJ Technology will use the lab to deploy prototypes of their EPC offerings, but a date for launching the commercial services has yet to be determined. "We anticipate that RFID will be deployed in Japan largely in 2007," says Ohtsu, "and we intend our services should be provided to our customers in the early stage of RFID deployments in Japan."

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