

ITU Eyes Role in RFID Standards

After holding a workshop in Geneva, the ITU is set to lend a hand in the development of worldwide RFID standards.

By Jonathan Collins

Feb. 16, 2006—More than 100 representatives from professional standards bodies, telecommunications companies, the RFID industry and academia attended a recent workshop of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva, Switzerland. The purpose of this workshop, entitled "Networked RFID: Systems and Services," was to determine what role the ITU needs to take to help assure the successful adoption of RFID and sensor technologies. Open to all ITU member nations and their citizens, it took place at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG) on Feb. 14 and 15.

According to the ITU, the workshop and its findings reinforced the organization's belief that it has a role to play in developing technical standards to ensure that the adoption and deployment of RFID networks is widespread, and that the global telecommunications network would be able to support those standards.

"RFID is moving from closed systems of reader and tag to where we need a network capable of sharing the data," says Pierre-André Probst, who headed a number of sessions at the ITU workshop and is also chairman of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) Study Group 16. The study group is responsible for standards involving multimedia systems, terminals and applications. "Billions of tags creating data to transmit over a network means a significant change in traffic for the network to handle. That will require new network capabilities, and there are specific new requirements as we move toward an Internet of things."

The ITU acknowledges that such standards bodies as ISO, ETSI and IEEE, as well as industry groups including EPCglobal and Near Field Communication (NFC) Forum, have already begun work in this area. Still, the organization believes it could play a role in improving and strengthening cooperation between these groups and others. Exactly how the ITU will develop this role, building on the experience of the workshop, is still under discussion—however, Probst hopes to have initial proposals ready within a month.

The workshop raised several areas for the ITU to examine. These included network and service architecture, requirements for machine-to-machine communication, security, information service protocols, interoperability, data format, radio frequency spectrum allocation and network performance and quality of service. "Our main concern is to see the network requirements and capabilities developed to support the move from simple RFID applications toward more-complicated devices that include sensors," says Probst.

With regard to determining a globally accepted spectrum allocation, Probst says the ITU is already considering plans to address the RFID spectrum issue at the ITU World Radiocommunication Conference, to be held in Geneva in October 2007.

Written and audio presentations made at the "Networked RFID: Systems and Services" workshop are available at ITU's Web site.

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