

RFID News Roundup

BEA announces RFID enterprise server upgrades; GS1 Argentina supply-chain center offers RFID learning; Puerto Rico's RFID toll system exceeds expectations; Singapore Polytechnic developing EPC system for industry; 3M joins RFID Consortium; PEAK upgrades SAP software in solutions center.

Sept. 22, 2006—The following are news announcements made during the week of Sept. 18.

BEA Announces RFID Enterprise Server Upgrades

BEA Systems announced this week the release of BEA WebLogic RFID Enterprise Server 2.0, which comes with a number of upgrades and services not offered in the earlier 1.0 version of the RFID software. "With this release, we have a product line with an overall theme on centralized RFID data management," says Ken Traub, CTO of RFID and edge servers at BEA Systems. The enterprise server platform is designed to enable end users of RFID to grow their deployment from one or two pilot sites to a larger network of RFID tagging and reading sites. A company would run BEA's Edge Server RFID middleware, or another provider's middleware, at its various RFID-enabled facilities, while operating the enterprise server at a central location, linked to remote sites via the Web. The enterprise server uses a serialized management service to assign blocks of EPCs to be encoded to tags at the tagging sites, as well as a centralized repository for storing all RFID events (or tag reads) collected at each site. In addition, it has a module for sharing tag data with trading partners. The repository is built on EPCglobal's EPC Information System (EPCIS) protocol for storing and sharing EPC data with business partners. (The EPCIS is in its final working draft and should be ratified as an EPC standard soon.) The enterprise server also offers users a reporting engine that can be utilized to generate a record of when and where specific items are tagged and read throughout the supply chain, or to run reports on a number of other metrics. The platform will be available in the fall. Pricing information has not been released.

GS1 Argentina Supply-Chain Center Offers RFID Learning

GS1 Argentina, the Argentinean branch of the global standards body GS1, launched last month a training center for supply-chain professionals called Centro de Entrenamiento para la Automatizacion (CEPA). The 3,500-square-foot center is a learning center for companies interested in supply-chain technology applications, such as EPC RFID and reduced space symbology (RSS) bar code. The center contains a virtual retail store—including a point-of-sale system and a stockroom—as well as a distribution center with a conveyor system. The center utilizes RFID equipment from Alien, Intermec, Sato, Sirit, Symbol, Tyco-Sensormatic and Zebra. Consumer packaged goods manufacturers, logistics providers, and pharmaceutical and apparel companies are visiting the center to learn how they can use RFID to optimize their supply-chain processes. Visitors from GS1 or EPCglobal Argentina can visit the center for free, while others must pay approximately \$10 per visit. CEPA provides tours to groups from single member-companies, including consultations with CEPA staff, for about \$100 for groups of five people (non-member firms pay about \$140). CEPA also provides two- to three-hour training courses on specific applications (such as how to deploy item-level RFID tagging systems) for approximately \$100 per person for GS1/EPCglobal Argentina members.

Puerto Rico's RFID Toll Adoption Exceeds Expectations

The Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority (PRHTA) launched an RFID-enabled cashless

payment system for toll collection in 2004. Since then, toll collection has surpassed 80 million tag transactions. The eGo system uses adhesive 915 MHz passive tags, readable from up to 31.5 feet (9.6 meters) away, with 2 kilobits of read-write memory. The system was originally slated for 19 lanes and has been expanded to 45, exceeding expectations for success. Puerto Rico is a cash-based society in which few consumers use credit cards, relative to other regions in which electronic toll collection has been used. In deploying the eGo system, PRHTA worked with technology vendor TransCore to reengineer the payment-system architecture so users could prepay their eGo accounts, which they debit each time they drive through a toll collection point, rather than link them to a credit account. In just over two years, the number eGo tags issued exceeded 400,000, well ahead of PRHTA's initial five-year goal of 300,000. The number of retail outlets where drivers can purchase eGo tags and replenish accounts (including gas stations and drug stores) has also grown from 15 to 140. The PRHTA's RFID toll payment system is growing more quickly than some similar systems in the United States, TransCore says. The TransCore eGo tag is also used for toll collection in Georgia, Texas and Washington; in Shenzhen, China (see RFID Speeds Border Crossings); and by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency.

Singapore Polytechnic Developing EPC System for Industry

Singapore's Republic Polytechnic school says it has partnered with Singapore home-furnishings company Aussino Home Fashions, as well as technology solutions provider NEC Solutions Asia-Pacific, to develop what it calls the region's first RFID-enabled supply-chain management solution for the retail industry based on the electronic product code (EPC) standard. Fong Yew Chan, director of Republic Polytechnic's school of engineering, will establish an RFID test facility, working with NEC and Aussino to explore how RFID technologies can improve the home-furnishings company's inventory process. NEC will provide the technical framework for the project and develop and test the system for Aussino's supply chain system. Aussino expects the RFID system to increase efficiency, while reducing labor costs and administrative errors. The company hopes it will allow supply-chain partners to track products and improve turnover of Aussino inventory through improved stock replenishment.

3M Joins RFID Consortium

The RFID Consortium, a group of companies looking to establish a patent-licensing pool for RFID technology, announced this week that 3M is joining its ranks. The global technology firm says it has intellectual property in the RFID field and essential patents relative to the EPCglobal Generation 2 standards. Established last year, the organization recently named Licensing Corp. as its administrator (see RFID Consortium Names Patent-Pool Administrator). The licensing program will enable RFID Consortium members to receive royalties on RFID hardware and software using their intellectual property. By facilitating RFID product manufacturers' access to essential patents, and by providing 3M and other patent owners the opportunity to receive fair compensation for those patents, the consortium hopes it will help speed the production of RFID hardware and software, as well as the adoption of RFID technology.

PEAK Upgrades SAP Software in Solutions Center

RFID software and services firm PEAK Technologies has equipped its RFID Solutions Center in Columbia, Md., with the SAP Auto-ID Infrastructure Release 4.0 component of the SAP NetWeaver platform. This will help ensure that customers visiting the test center who use SAP's NetWeaver platform in their manufacturing, warehousing or distribution center operations can experience comprehensive and up-to-date testing and device integration. The SAP Auto-ID Infrastructure integrates RFID technology with supply-chain processes, allowing companies running SAP solutions to comply with tagging mandates levied by retailers and the DOD.