EPCglobal Announces EPC Software Certification, RFID Deployment Tool

The organization has awarded EPCglobal certification marks for software based on the Reader Protocol and Application-Level Events standards.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

Oct. 18, 2006—As EPCglobal US's annual user conference kicked off at the Los Angeles Convention Center on Wednesday, EPCglobal announced the launch of its new software certification program. The organization also awarded 11 software vendors with EPCglobal certification marks for software based on the two existing EPC software standards: the Reader Protocol (RP) 1.1 and Application-Level Events (ALE) 1.0. In addition, EPCglobal announced the release of a new tool, the EPC Implementation Tool Advisor, designed to help small and midsize businesses build out their EPC deployment road maps.

Software Conformance Testing
EPCglobal says that to earn a conformance mark, software must work in predictable ways, as defined by EPCglobal standards. By standardizing software, the organization claims it will protect end users' investments in RFID software and help them "implement EPC/RFID programs easier, faster and for less cost."

Certified for Conformance with the EPCglobal Reader Protocol (RP) Standard	
PRODUCT	*COMPANY*
Reader Service	7iD Technologies
rPlatform (RP)	Supply Insight Inc.

Certified for Conformance with the EPCglobal Application Level Event (ALE) Standard	
PRODUCT	*COMPANY*
Acquisition Service	7iD Technologies
WebLogic RFID Edge Server	BEA Systems Inc.
ETRI REMS (RFID Event Management System)	Electronics and Telecommunications Research Institute (ETRI)
iMotion	GlobeRanger Corp.
iTag-AS	MetaRights Ltd.
RFID Manager Enterprise	NEC Corp.
NTT Comware RFID Middleware	NTT Comware Corp.

Setu	**Skandsoft Technologies Private Ltd.**
rPlatform (ALE)	**Supply Insight Inc.**
TIBCO RFID Interchange	**TIBCO Software Inc.**
True VUE Site Manager/ Enterprise Manager	**Vue Technology Inc.**

Thirteen products from 11 companies were recently awarded the EPCglobal Software Compliance Certification Mark.

The reader protocol is a standardized communication protocol between readers and middleware enabling a middleware platform to recognize and communicate with any reader complying with the same protocol. Before it was developed, middleware providers had to use custom code to link readers from different manufacturers, adding cost and complexity to end users' RFID deployments. The ALE protocol, used in middleware as a standard interface for filtering and consolidating EPC data from interrogators, provides a standard instruction set for how readers filter and collect tag data. Many software providers that make middleware for EPC deployments have built their products using the reader protocol and ALE standards.

MET Laboratories, EPCglobal's EPC standards-testing partner, conducted the tests, using test cases provided by EPCglobal. Sue Hutchinson, director of industry adoption for EPCglobal US, says the software action group members that authored and tested the standards devised the conformance-test criteria for the ALE and reader protocol during the standards development process. She was very pleased with the results of the test and says the establishment of software-certification testing is important because it shows that EPC deployments are no longer focused only on hardware. "People are really starting to think about the entire EPC stack" of technology, she notes, adding that the software conformance tests demonstrate that software standards are not only real, but testable.

In total, 11 companies were granted ALE conformance certifications. Two of these, 7iD Technologies and Supply Insight also received the reader protocol certification. 7iD Technologies is a German startup with a developed reader networking platform able to link up to 200 fixed and mobile RFID readers through a central controller. Supply Insight is a Connecticut middleware provider with an emphasis on serving the Department of Defense's supplier community, which must comply with the DOD's tagging mandate.

EPCglobal began hardware certifications last year. To date, it has awarded more than 35 conformance and interoperability certificates for Gen 2 chips, interrogators and printer-encoders. As with the hardware tests, further software conformance testing will be conducted as vendors submit or resubmit their products. This will be followed by interoperability tests and certifications.

Implementation Tool

According to Mike Meranda, president of EPCglobal US, the impetus for developing the Implementation Tool Advisor grew out of watching hundreds of companies implement EPC RFID systems in the past few years and seeing different patterns emerge, based on factors such as the company's industry and size, and which department within the organization had been charged with deploying the technology. Based on this information, the group felt it could aggregate important guidance, via this tool, for small and midsize businesses just starting the process of implementing the technology.

Bob Celeste, director of adoption tools for EPCglobal US, says EPCglobal worked with early EPC RFID adopters in its community to build the tool around their experiences and key findings. "We queried our advisor base this summer to work with them and see what areas they felt they needed help with in their implementation," says Celeste.

The tool is a piece of software that anyone will be able download from EPCglobal US's Web site starting next

week. To use the software, an operator establishes a profile by responding to a series of questions. Based on the responses to these questions, the tool builds out the user's particular business goals with respect to RFID and EPC, then provides a list of critical steps and implementation checklists. It also directs the user to appropriate white papers, instructional documents and other sources kept within a searchable repository called the EPCglobal KnowledgeBase, accessible through the EPCglobal US Web site.