

IBM Launches Software for Sharing RFID Data

WebSphere RFID Information Center is designed to let users share RFID-derived data regarding the location and status of shipments in real time, and to facilitate the creation of electronic pedigrees.

By Beth Bacheldor

Dec. 15, 2006—[IBM](#) has announced the availability of its new data-sharing software, based on [EPCglobal's](#) emerging Electronic Product Code Information Services (EPCIS) standard. The software, which IBM calls the WebSphere RFID Information Center, is designed to facilitate the exchange of RFID data among trading partners, government agencies and other entities.

The software has been in development for several months, and several companies have already been testing the software in RFID pilots. Among these firms are [AmerisourceBergen](#) (see [AmerisourceBergen to Conduct HF/UHF RFID Pilot](#)) and [Cardinal Health](#) (see [Cardinal Health Deems RFID Pilot a Success](#)). Consumer packaged goods company [Unilever United States](#) has also tested WebSphere RFID Information Center, along with a hosted RFID data-analysis application from [T3Ci](#), to exchange RFID information with several retail customers (see [Unilever Expects Big Gains From Its RFID Data-Sharing Trial](#)).

The WebSphere RFID Information Center is based on EPCIS, currently a working-draft standard, which serves as a communication mechanism between applications and data repositories so companies can effectively exchange and query data from within their own RFID processes, and also with partners. Earlier this year, EPCglobal completed its testing of prototypical software based on the EPCIS specification (see [Interop Tests Bring EPCIS Closer to Standard](#)). According to Pete Settles, a spokesman for the organization, EPCglobal expects the EPCIS standard to come up for ratification in early 2007.

IBM's EPCIS-compliant software includes a data repository able to send and accept XML-based data feeds of RFID information via a set of interfaces defined in the EPCIS draft standard. Two key elements are a capture interface that instructs RFID middleware to share RFID data with the EPCIS data repository, and a query interface that allows other organizations—such as a supplier or government regulator—to query the database remotely.

"This is really going to change the way we currently use RFID," says Christian Clauss, WebSphere RFID Information Center's product manager, "because it allows us to share RFID data all across the supply chain."

WebSphere RFID Information Center incorporates a feature called Shipment Verification—a Web-based user interface designed to let trading partners determine how their shared supply chain is operating. "For example, they will be able to see where their shipments are, which arrived on time, which arrived in a delayed fashion, and which are missing," says Clauss. "What we are trying to do is put a user interface in front of two trading partners that gives them a shared view of how the supply chain is working."

Initially, Clauss says, IBM will focus its sales and marketing of the WebSphere RFID Information Center on the pharmaceutical industry, because that's where much of the interest for RFID data sharing has been. "That

is a market that has severe problems, such as drug counterfeiting, that it is trying to remedy," he says.

For several years, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has advocated the use of RFID tagging at the item, case and pallet levels to track and trace pharmaceuticals as a means of fighting counterfeit drugs. The FDA wants companies within the pharmaceutical industry to institute electronic pedigrees, which record where a drug is manufactured and how it is distributed. For e-pedigrees to work, however, a number of companies, from the drug manufacturer to the pharmacist, will need to share data electronically as products move through the supply chain.

RELATED_ARTICLES Other industries are also testing the WebSphere RFID Information Center, Clauss says. An overseas transportation and logistics company, which Clauss declines to name, is testing the software with one of its customers, a manufacturing company, and customs agencies. The test, he says, is designed "to track shipping containers on the high seas and share that information between the manufacturer, the shipping container company and customs officials that need to clear those shipping containers."

The WebSphere RFID Information Center is now available. Pricing is dependent upon licensing, volume and implementation requirements.

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