

Hexaware Using EPC RFID for IT Assets

The Indian IT services company is using the technology to automate the tracking of its computers and those of its clients.

By Claire Swedberg

Jan. 1, 2007—Indian IT services company Hexaware Technologies is using RFID technology to track its assets and those of its clients. The company has begun a limited deployment in its Mumbai office, using Fluensee AssetTrack software system to track the location and activity of those assets.

If the early deployment is successful, Hexaware plans to roll out RFID hardware and AssetTrack software in its other locations in India.

Until now, Hexaware has used paper stickers printed with serial numbers to manually track assets, including desktop computers, laptops and servers, says P K Sridharan, executive director of Hexaware Technologies. In addition, the company has been using spreadsheets to record asset transfers between locations. But this system was time-consuming and did not meet Hexaware's needs.

"It has been the company's aim to provide the best global practices to its clients," says Sridharan. That includes gaining certifications. "Hence we have even implemented CMMI Level 5 and BS7799 as some of the quality and security initiatives." These initiatives were developed for software projects to plan, organize and identify what needs to get done to run the project.

"We selected AssetTrack as it has the capability to acquire data automatically using both bar codes and RFID tags," Sridharan says. "This enables us to identify and track assets for our clients."

"With any large company, you need to keep track of IT assets," says Chris Brumett, Fluensee's vice president of operations. "It becomes more critical in India." That is because an IT company operating in an Indian Special Economic Zone (SEZ) or tax-free zone is required to provide documentation proving an asset belongs to the company's clients rather than to the company itself. With this documentation, an IT company does not have to pay Indian taxes on those items. Companies such as Hexaware often provide IT services for finance companies based in the United States or elsewhere.

"We have our development centers, which are located in SEZs," says Sridharan. "Under the government regulations for these zones, we are required to keep accurate inventory of all imported assets, including asset transfers between locations. The current manual system is slow and error prone. AssetTrack will automate the process and improve data accuracy."

With the AssetTrack system, when an asset arrives at the Hexaware facility, an employee there attaches a 915 MHz EPC Gen 2 passive RFID tag to it and uses a handheld RFID reader to scan a new RFID tag and associate that tag with the asset's serial number or bar code, which can also be scanned. That data, which includes the RFID number, serial or bar code number, description of the asset and the company that owns it, is then stored in the Web-based AssetTrack system, which can be accessed by Hexaware, its clients or the Indian

government. "The system is 100 percent browser based," Brumett says. Hexaware, he says, "can provide visibility on specific levels," he says, allowing clients, for example, to view the location and activity of their assets but no one else's.

Hexaware will use handheld RFID interrogators for inventory validation. To do so, employees will bring the interrogators into offices and capture RFID numbers of all the equipment in each room, thereby alerting management if a piece of equipment is missing. If the company is looking for a specific asset, an employee will use a handheld to do an audit, by walking through all the offices and receiving an alert from the reader when the specific asset is located.

The trials have includes two or three stationary readers, says Brumett, as Hexaware continues to identify where its chokepoints are and where the readers are most necessary. If the devices are stationed at exit/entry doors, they can send an alert if an item is taken off the premises or arrive at some other location.

RELATED_ARTICLES Fluensee is providing the software and integration services, Intermec is supplying the handheld readers and Symbol Technologies, the stationary readers. Hexaware is testing Symbol 915 MHz EPC Gen 2 tags to determine how well they operate around the metal-rich environment of IT assets.

Hexaware has 5,000 employees worldwide and three centers in India, but is testing the RFID system at its Mumbai facility initially. "Certainly in future we can apply the learnings to subsequent rollouts," Sridharan says.

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