

GS1 UK Launches Nationwide RFID Pilot

The trial's purpose is to enable participants to share RFID-related data by means of applications based on EPCglobal's EPCIS standard.

By Claire Swedberg

Oct. 31, 2007—In an effort to bring RFID users together across the United Kingdom, [GS1 UK](#) is launching a pilot that will enable participants to share RFID-related data by means of applications based on [EPCglobal's](#) Electronic Product Code Information Services (EPCIS) standard. EPCIS is an EPCglobal standard for sharing EPC-related information between trading partners.

GS1 UK is offering the pilot service based on EPCIS software provided by [BEA Systems](#) and hosted by [British Telecom Auto ID](#). The service features a set of EPCIS data repositories that can be updated and accessed via the Internet, together with various reports based on the repository data, accessible online. GS1 UK hopes to attract businesses across multiple industries to work together on their RFID deployments.

Several companies are preparing to join the pilot, says GS1 UK's senior consultant, David Weatherby, though they are still in the discussion stages at this point. The trial will extend into mid 2008, he explains, with each user able to create, access and share the use of its own EPCIS Web site, where it can store data related to RFID reads. The goal of this pilot, Weatherby says, is to bring businesses together as they develop RFID pilots and move to deployments.

"In the U.K., there is already a fair amount of activity in RFID," Weatherby says. However, he adds, "in most cases, companies are building business cases around their own applications. We're trying to drive that further into the supply chains and get people talking to each other." Often, Weatherby notes, companies conducting independent RFID pilots develop proprietary systems that do not lend themselves to data sharing with other supply chain members.

EPCIS-based applications could bring those parties together, Weatherby maintains, by acting as a hub for all RFID-related data. During the pilot, each user will be able to direct EPC data specific to product movements to its own EPCIS site, hosted by BT Auto ID at no cost, with assistance from GS1 UK. Participants will then be able to share that data with those approved to enter their site.

Eventually, Weatherby says, GS1 UK may consider providing a free, permanent Internet-based EPCIS repository service to smaller companies unable to afford their own individual sites. The companies could then update data within their EPCIS repository online, run reports from the repository data and allow business partners to access selected information.

There are presently about 18,000 GS1 members in the United Kingdom, Weatherby says, many of which are smaller companies. "It's very important that smaller companies be able to participate," he states—otherwise, larger companies could also suffer because they often share supply chains with smaller firms that might not be able to afford their own RFID network. GS1 has yet to decide, however, if it will offer an Internet-based EPCIS repository for smaller companies free of charge.

Pilot participants, meanwhile, will be able to store data at the EPCIS Web site at no cost, though they must invest in their own RFID hardware, including tags and readers, as well as software to operate that hardware. For a fee, Weatherby says, BEA can provide edgeware to push data onto the EPCIS repository. He says he hopes to see a large number of participants using the pilot results to aid them in their efforts to launch RFID deployments in the future.

Once the pilot is completed in 2008, Weatherby hopes companies will examine their results and decide to build a permanent EPCIS site, and to use that site to manage their supply chain and exchange EPC data with trading partners.

RELATED_ARTICLES Companies from all industries are encouraged to join, Weatherby says. Those already expressing interest include members of the fresh produce supply chain and the oil and gas industry. Users can share data about when a product leaves the manufacturing site, arrives at a distributor, is in transit and arrives at a retailer.

EPCIS is already in use by logistics providers between several ports in Asia and the United States. GS1 Hong Kong, together with EPCglobal Hong Kong, conducted a 2004 pilot with Japan's Ministry of Economics, Trade and Industry, using EPCIS to track containers between Hong Kong and Japan. A second phase of the pilot tracked shipments traveling from Shanghai to Los Angeles.

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