

Financial Consortium Publishes RFID Standards for IT Assets

The organization hopes to see the standards' adoption among all types of firms that maintain data centers and must track a large amount of IT equipment.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

Dec. 18, 2008—The Financial Services Technology Consortium (FSTC), a New York-based organization comprising North American financial institutions, technology vendors, research groups and government agencies, has published a set of standards for implementing RFID-based systems to track IT assets within data centers.

Though the standards were set by the financial industry, the FSTC is encouraging their adoption among all types of firms that maintain data centers, and that must track large numbers of IT assets.

In July 2008, the consortium announced its intention to develop RFID asset-tracking specifications for banks (see Banking Group to Set RFID Roadmap), and kicked off this effort by hosting an open meeting for banks, RFID tag manufacturers and service providers, as well as makers of IT assets. At that point, some member banks were already undertaking efforts to track IT assets in their data centers by means of passive EPC Gen 2 tags. Earlier this year, Wells Fargo and Bank of America established RFID tracking systems in their respective data centers (see Wells Fargo Banks on RFID and Bank of America Deploys RFID in Data Centers), and—according to FSTC's chief of staff, John Fricke—so had Citibank. All three banks, Fricke says, follow practices spelled out in the newly published documents.

After that initial meeting in July, Fricke says, the special interest group FSTC formed to develop the RFID roadmap met weekly in order to establish requirements and guidelines on which all of the IT asset manufacturers, RFID vendors and banks could agree and find mutually beneficial. Later, at a meeting in Chicago this fall, the SIG met with a larger group that included several banks' IT asset suppliers, in order to address additional questions. After this meeting, says Fricke, "everybody seemed pleased, and we agreed to put out this [documentation]."

The FSTC has issued two documents that lay out the functional requirements and numbering scheme for tagging IT assets, both of which are available for download on the FSTC site. The numbering scheme for identifying IT assets is compatible with GS1's Global Individual Asset Identifier encoding scheme, which has also been incorporated into EPCglobal's RFID tag data standard.

The overall goal of the FSTC's efforts is to provide the financial industry and the IT asset suppliers with a common set of tools and a standard format for utilizing RFID to identify IT assets, regardless of which bank has ordered a particular asset.

Many IT asset suppliers that serve banks are already members of EPCglobal, Fricke says. Those that are not, he notes, will need to become members in order to be assigned a company prefix that is part of the numbering

scheme (this allows the unique identifier assigned to each asset to trace back to its manufacturer). According to Fricke, EPCglobal is offering discounted membership fees to these firms as an incentive.

One of the newly released documents—"FSTC RFID Basic Functional Requirements—Data Center Asset Tracking"—calls for the EPC Gen 2 passive tags to be pre-encoded and applied by the manufacturer, then attached to the front face of the asset so it can be easily seen. The labels must include a human-readable version of the identifier and a one-dimensional bar code of the number, as well as a 2-D bar code, if space permits. The tag must be readable from a distance of 3 feet using a handheld interrogator, and from 6 feet with a fixed-position reader.

RELATED_ARTICLES The document also calls for manufacturers to begin integrating the RFID tags into the IT asset chassis "in a ruggedized, tamper-proof fashion," though it does not specify when this is expected to take effect, nor does it provide any other details regarding this transition.

Fricke hopes other industries that maintain data centers will adopt this framework for tracking assets as well. "Any company that has a data center that wants to keep up with their assets," he states, "can use this to speed up the process of inventory and tracking."

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