

RFID for Wearable Computers

IBSS partners with Xybernaut to aid the development of RFID applications that run on mobile devices.

By Jonathan Collins

Dec. 17, 2003—Software vendor Integrated Business Systems and Services (IBSS) has teamed up with wearable computer specialist Xybernaut. Their goal is to certify that RFID applications developed using IBSS's Synapse platform will run on Xybernaut's wearable mobile computers.

"Everyone understands that RFID and EPC will drive major business process changes, and these could well require more mobile systems," says Don Futch, vice president of business development at IBSS.

The new agreement between IBSS and Xybernaut will focus on co-marketing a package that includes hardware, operating systems, applications, services and support suitable for a wide range of target industries where RFID is critical. Xybernaut's mobile, wearable computers operate hands-free. They feature a voice-activated, high-power processor and a VGA flat panel color display or a head-mounted with an eyepiece through which the user sees a video color display.

IBSS's Synapse development environment makes it easier to build applications that connect with a variety of different input devices (such as RFID readers and Xybernaut terminals) and back-end databases and inventory systems. It is designed to allow the quick development and deployment of dynamic, distributed, real-time software applications suitable for supporting specific and niche system requirements. IBSS sells Synapse-built applications directly through its own consulting service or to OEM customers that use Synapse to develop applications for various industry vertical markets.

IBSS says that it is still examining the potential markets for IBSS's development software combined with Xybernaut's mobile computers, but one example of a potential RFID deployment with Xybernaut hardware would be a system that enables Federal Emergency Management Agency response teams to track the arrival and distribution of supplies using RFID tags, readers and Xybernaut's portable computers. IBSS software would be used to design the application that connects these devices and tracks the inventory of supplies.

The company maintains there will also be demand in the enterprise supply chain management market for a mobile flexible RFID management system.

"Even when there is an RFID implementation standard set out—as with Wal-Mart—there will still be a need for RFID systems to operate with a collection of technologies [different types of RFID readers and computing platforms]. That is what Synapse will allow," says Futch.

Although IBSS has already established compatibility of Synapse with RFID equipment from a range of vendors including Intermec, the company has yet to see Synapse-built software deployed in an RFID environment. IBSS says, however, that a trial with one implementation involving reusable shipping pallettes is well underway.

IBSS counts Fruit of the Loom, Motorola and NCR as customers for custom-made applications built using Synapse system deployed with bar codes at the palette and item level. Xybernaut's biggest customers and deployments include the U.S. Defense, State, and Transportation departments, and Hilton Hotels and Resorts.

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