

Paxar Unveils New RFID Label Printer

The supplier of Monarch-brand products has introduced a label printer and teamed to offer software to help companies achieve Wal-Mart compliance.

Jan. 28, 2004—Paxar, a White Plains, N.Y.-based provider of bar code printers, labels and tags for the retail supply chain, has developed a new RFID label printer, the Monarch 9855. Paxar has also teamed with Cybra, a bar code and forms software company based in Yonkers, N.Y., to offer Wal-Mart suppliers the means to integrate the 9855 printer into their business systems.

The Monarch 9855 printer, which was demonstrated at the recent National Retail Federation Convention & Expo in New York, has a built-in Class 1 Electronic Product Code (EPC) reader from Alien Technology. The reader can write a serial number to a label's embedded Class 1 EPC tag, confirm that the serial number was written accurately and then print the label. If for some reason the EPC tag is inoperable, the reader will print black bars on the label to show that it should be discarded.

"The printer uses what Alien calls its two-board reader," says Lori Porter, Paxar's product line manager for tabletop printers. "In December, Alien came out with a one-board device that's about the size of a PCMCIA card. We're working to integrate that with our printer."

The reader with a single circuit board is smaller but delivers the same performance as the larger device. The smaller size will enable it to be integrated into the Monarch 9855 without moving as many internal printer components around. In the current version, Paxar installed the reader near where the label emerges from the printer and removed the "peel module," a mechanism that takes the backing off a self-adhesive label so it's ready to be applied to a pallet or case when it comes out of the printer.

Porter says that Paxar plans to support both Class 1 and Class 0 EPC technology, and that it will also eventually support the Class 1, Gen 2, EPC protocol. Wal-Mart has indicated that it will require suppliers to use Class 1, Gen 2, tags on products when the specification is complete and vendors begin delivering products based on the spec. Paxar says the Monarch 9855 will eventually work with RFID tags from Matrics, which plans to introduce a read-write version of the Class 0 EPC tag. The Monarch 9855 is expected to be available in production quantities by midyear. Paxar didn't disclose pricing.

Paxar is working with software partners to provide RFID-enabled solutions. The relationship with Cybra is one of the first announcements. Cybra offers MarkMagic/400 Barcode Label and SM@RT Forms Software. This middleware connects bar code printing systems to IBM iSeries computers (formerly known as the AS/400), which are commonly used by businesses. Version 5.1 of the middleware, which can be purchased through Paxar or directly from Cybra, enables users to write to an RFID tag and print a bar code on the label using data directly from an IBM iSeries host.

The company is also working with partners to develop a label applicator that will write to the RFID tag and print the label before applying it to a carton or case. Integrating the print engine with the label applicator is tricky because the machine has to avoid damaging the connection between the RFID antenna and microchip as the label is moved into position and applied. The company didn't say when it might have an applicator on the market.

Paxar is a member of EPCglobal, the agency managing the emerging standards for RFID. The company has systems engineers and consultants that will help consumer goods suppliers understand RFID requirements being established by large retailers so suppliers can achieve compliance quickly. It says it is well positioned to provide these services because its Monarch-brand products, which include printers, labels, price tags and hangtags, are used by 90 percent of the top 100 U.S. retailers and their supply chain partners to identify, track and price all varieties of consumer goods.

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