

# Is EPCglobal Foundering?

Complaints among end users, political infighting among vendors and the loss of its president have some people wondering about the future of the organization charged with commercializing EPC technology.

By Mark Roberti

Apr. 19, 2004—Over the past couple of months, I've heard more than a few complaints about EPCglobal. *RFID Journal* has steadfastly refused to publish rumors, a policy we will continue to adhere to. But I think it's worth addressing some of the concerns, even if they are not substantiated, because the resignation of EPCglobal president Margaret Fitzgerald has been taken by some people as a sign that things are going badly at the organization that is promoting adoption of EPC technology.

A number of issues have been raised, and they, in turn, raise questions not just about the way EPCglobal is being managed, but also about the behavior of end users and vendors. Some insiders say there is a turf battle going on between the Uniform Code Council, which runs EPCglobal U.S., and EAN International, which is setting up EPCglobal chapters around the world. There are suggestions that the process of developing the UHF Gen 2 protocol, which will replace the current Class 1 and Class 0 protocols, has become overly politicized, with vendors pushing their own technologies. And there's talk that end users are blocking the adoption of a single EPC numbering scheme because they don't want to spend money to change their existing software systems.

It's been suggested that Fitzgerald resigned because the UCC is trying to dominate EPCglobal. I can't confirm whether this is true. I've never met Fitzgerald, but I did hear that she was concerned that the amount of travel the job required was having an adverse effect on her family. Whether there is more to her departure than the explanation given—personal reasons—is irrelevant. What matters is that EPCglobal UCC and EAN work together to promote EPC technology. They need to move quickly to find a permanent leader who can continue building the organization and keep the momentum behind EPC.

It's hardly surprising that the development of the Gen 2 spec has become politicized or that end users all want an EPC numbering scheme that suits their needs. *RFID Journal* anticipated these issues in the January 2004 issue of our print magazine (see [The Ugly Year Ahead](#)). The development of a single global numbering scheme is an extremely ambitious goal, and no one ever said it would be easy.

So to answer the question in the title of this opinion, No, EPCglobal is not foundering. It's going through a growing process that is inevitable with a young international organization trying to bridge the differences between many different groups. EPCglobal succeeded in getting the vendors to agree on an way to handle intellectual property (see [Patent Progress](#)). That was a significant achievement, and there is no reason to believe that EPCglobal won't work through the same process and achieve a consensus on UHF Gen 2 and on the EPC numbering scheme.

Nevertheless, it's not hard to imagine these efforts dragging on, particular if the UCC and EAN are distracted by the search for a new president. A delay in developing the Gen 2 spec and the numbering scheme could

have a negative impact on EPC adoption. EPCglobal's board needs to step up and make sure that work on these issues is expedited and that momentum is not lost. I would also humbly suggest that all involved look past their short-term interests and focus on their much larger long-term interests. UCC, EAN, end users and vendors will all benefit if we can achieve a single, global numbering scheme. No one benefits if the effort is sabotaged by shortsighted politics.

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