

EPC Aid for U.K. Companies

The U.K. authority for EPCglobal is launching a range of services to support British companies in implementing RFID and Electronic Product Code technology.

By Jonathan Collins

Apr. 23, 2004—E.center, the U.K. authority for EPCglobal and for the EAN.UCC numbering system and technology used on product bar codes, is developing a new range of services to help British companies develop implementation plans and business cases for deployment of RFID networks, especially those involving Electronic Product Code (EPC) systems. Brought together under the EPCglobal Gateway moniker, the new services will be unveiled at e.centre's upcoming conference, "EPCglobal—Making RFID a Reality," which will take place at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London on April 28. The conference, e.centre says, will provide attendees the opportunity to hear about other companies' RFID-deployment experiences and to learn what steps they need to take to achieve their supply chain goals.

The EPCglobal Gateway services will comprise daylong seminars, regular online news bulletins, a help-desk facility and a Web-based discussion forum. Many of the services will be restricted to U.K. members of EPCglobal, the nonprofit organization created by the Uniform Code Council and EAN International to commercialize EPC technology.

"EPCglobal is a new organization and not set up to deal with global inquiries. Each local organization is there to deal with local issues, and we believe we can help U.K. companies with these new services," says David Lyon, head of EPCglobal marketing at e.centre.

Hosted on the e.centre Web site, the discussion forum will let EPCglobal members exchange information and opinions on issues relating to RFID and EPC implementation. The Gateway Help Desk, staffed by e.centre consultants and accessible by both telephone and e-mail, will answer technical questions regarding RFID deployment, as well as enquiries on EPCglobal. Like the forum, the help desk will be available only to EPCglobal members.

EPCglobal membership is available in the U.K. through e.centre—the U.K. arm of the EAN International standards body. More than 16,000 companies are already members of e.centre and are qualified to join EPCglobal. The group says all of its new services will be available to all of the U.K.'s EPCglobal members, both those seeking to deploy RFID networks and those that manufacture RFID equipment.

"Of all EAN's members, the U.K. members are quite advanced, given the RFID adoption plans at Tesco's and Wal-Mart's Asda stores. Those retailers are pushing their suppliers [to implement RFID systems], and there is a desperate need for RFID deployment and support information as their suppliers struggle to understand their next step," says Lyon.

The planned seminars, which will be held in London, will outline the basics of RFID and advise companies on developing an implementation plan and business case for deployment. The cost to attend a seminar is £300 for an individual from an EPCglobal member company, £375 for someone from a nonmember company. Each

seminar will accommodate around 20 attendees and be hosted by senior executive consultants from both the e.centre and Cambridge University's Auto-ID Lab. The first seminar will be held on June 1, 2004, with others set for September and November.

In addition to the help desk, online forum and seminars, e.centre says, the Gateway initiative will include regular e-bulletins on the latest developments in the technology. These bulletins will be e-mailed to e.centre members as well as to nonmembers that fill out an online subscription form to receive the e-bulletins.

Next year, e.centre also plans to launch a service that accredits U.K. EPC solution providers. Currently under development, this new service will complement EPCglobal's plans to certify equipment internationally, according to e.centre.

The organization believes that the accreditation of EPC solution providers will reduce the amount of time an end user spends while researching which providers to consider and will give the company more confidence in its choices. The accreditation process will require a solution provider to sign a code of practice, to undergo training and to pass an examination of EPC-related skills and capabilities. This process, says e.centre, will help deepen and broaden a provider's understanding of EPC technology and demonstrate its commitment to and understanding of the technology.

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