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## **EPCglobal Reaches Out to Small and Midsize Businesses**

In an effort to increase its enrollment among small and midsize U.S. businesses that have thus far remained on the sidelines of RFID implementation, nonprofit standards group EPCglobal US announced yesterday that it is reducing its enrollment and subscription fees, as well as offering

additional services.

The organization made the announcement during the first day of the RFID Journal LIVE! 2009 conference, being held this week in Orlando, Fla. The cost of enrollment at EPCglobal US is being reduced by 60 percent, while new one-on-one advisory services and special interest group activities will be offered to members as well.

Reflecting the current economic recession, the changes are intended to make registration more accessible for financially strained companies, says John Seaner, EPCglobal US' VP and general manager. That facilitated registration will include lower subscription costs, as well as advisory services in which EPCglobal personnel will meet with companies at their own sites for two-day training programs regarding RFID implementation. EPCglobal US is also organizing special interest programs in which businesses can collaborate to develop RFID-enabled business processes, best practices or pilots to test the technology.

Prior to the fee reduction, Seaner says, the initial enrollment with EPCglobal US could be daunting for smaller companies; the upfront cost could run as high as \$100,000, though the rate was typically less. With a 60 percent reduction in fees, however, that enrollment cost is considerably lower. "With the economy the way it is, we wanted membership to be affordable," Seaner says, so that companies could justify the cost. With the reduced fee, businesses will pay an enrollment cost starting at \$300, as well as a subsequent annual subscription fee.

The second change involves service offerings. EPCglobal US members can now receive a visit from the organization's RFID experts, offering a two-day advisory program in which a company can learn how to use RFID technology, receive information sufficient to begin making decisions regarding solution providers, and find out how to encourage or assist

supply chain partners (retailers or product suppliers) to employ the same technology.

“We want to take them from not even knowing what they don’t know,” Seaner says, “to an even playing field,” in which EPCglobal US members understand RFID well enough to discuss it with technology vendors and be able to make informed decisions. In this way, he explains, the vendors no longer have to educate customers, but can instead spend their time describing why their RFID hardware or software meets each client’s needs. The cost of such an advisory session ranges between \$3,000 and \$5,000.

EPCglobal US is also offering special interest group programs, organized and hosted by its RFID experts, with the goal of bringing together companies with similar needs so they can develop industry best practices, share problems, challenges and solutions, and develop plans for solutions such as sharing pilots.

The standards organization hopes to increase membership beyond many of its initial members. These have typically included larger companies, many of which have been involved in RFID deployments such as those undertaken by Wal-Mart Stores’ Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club divisions. “We have a lot of diversity,” Seaner states, “but we realized, at the same time, that we have underserved an area that includes the small- to medium-sized companies.”

Seaner cites electronics manufacturer Conair as one example of how companies can benefit from the advisory programs EPCglobal US now offers. Conair used the organization’s advisory program, he says, whereby EPCglobal’s experts evaluated its RFID technology needs and provided advice as to further steps the firm could take.



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