Printer-Encoder Supports XML

Label printing specialist Zebra Technologies has added support for extensible markup language (XML) to its new high-end RFID smart label printer-encoder, the R110Xi. The company claims it is the first to offer such capabilities in a printer-encoder.

Chris Hook

XML provides a standard for information identification that enables the exchange of data between manufacturing systems and enterprise applications. Because XML is emerging as a suitable standard for application-to-application transactions, Zebra believes peripherals should also start supporting XML data exchange.

“There is an increasing expectation in the industry for a standardized way to connect peripherals and enterprise applications,” says Chris Hook, director of RFID market development at Zebra Technologies, which is based in based in Vernon Hills, Ill. Zebra’s printers and printer-encoders have traditionally used the company’s own ZebraLink connectivity software to exchange data with enterprise IT applications. The new XML-enabled connectivity software, however, will provide an alternative to using ZebraLink software and at no extra cost, says Hook.

Zebra rivals, such as Printronix, maintain there has been little customer demand for XML support because existing printer software works fine with the vast majority of enterprise applications and because most enterprise applications do not currently support XML-based data exchange.

Oracle, SAP and other providers of enterprise resource planning, warehouse and supply-chain/logistics software are developing XML-based platforms to support data exchange in a standard format for their customers. With XML-enabled

printers, Zebra maintains that companies will be able to simplify and speed the integration of its equipment with those XML-enabled enterprise applications and control the operation of the printer/encoders without the need for additional connectivity and data translation middleware and hardware such as printer servers.

“XML means feeding data directly from the application to the printer, and by simplifying that connection and removing layers used to enable that, clearly there is a value proposition with this collapsing of the [software] stack,” says Hook.

Those cost savings will come by eliminating the need for middleware licenses and printer server hardware as well as by reducing software maintenance costs. As customer demand grows, Zebra plans to add XML support to its other printers, although the company has not established a timeline for doing so, says Hook.

Aimed at the high end of the market and intended for use in industrial, mission-critical applications, the new R110Xi printer-encoder has an integrated Matrics EPC Class 0/0+ RFID reader-encoder and supports Matrics EPC Class 0 and 0+ Matrics tags. It can print using thermal transfer or direct thermal techniques. In addition to supporting XML, the R110Xi can use the company’s existing ZebraLink printer management software to connect with enterprise applications. The unit is priced at $4,495 and available immediately.

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