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Vendors to Offer Global Tracking

June 14, 2002 – WhereNet Corp. is going global. Or rather, it's taking its real-time location system global. The Santa Clara, Calif., company has teamed with SkyBitz, of Dulles, Va., to offer a system for tracking cargo containers on trucks, rail cars or ships.

The WhereNet Constant Visibility Solution (CVS) integrates WhereNet's local area wireless tracking system with SkyBitz's Global Locating System (GLS) to offer tracking, monitoring, and security applications for mobile cargo containers.

WhereNet's real-time location tracking system uses a transmitter that broadcasts the position of an asset to antennas connected through an 802.11b wireless network. The system can track semi-trailers in a yard or parts bins in a manufacturing plant.

The company saw marine terminal operators as a significant potential market because of their need to track thousands of containers in a defined area. But many terminal operators are also shipping companies, which wanted the ability to track not just goods in the terminal, but also in transit, says Dan Doles, president and CEO of WhereNet.

A customer introduced Doles to SkyBitz. After doing some due diligence, Doles felt the partnership would be a good fit. SkyBitz has developed a global locating system that uses existing satellites to track assets more cheaply than the global positioning system. GLS was originally backed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA.

The system uses faster calculations and simpler protocols than the global positioning system for communicating with satellites, which means the transmitter can broadcast in shorter bursts, conserving battery life and reducing the overall cost to the customer.

"As we got to know more about their technology, we found that it was fairly compelling in terms of the ability to use a very low power transmitter," says Doles. "If you look at the ability to track mobile assets, battery life is critical. They have a unique way of doing low-powered tracking, which is similar to our technology."

WhereNet CVS will include a single box with two transmitters

that can be mounted on a cargo container to provide both local and wide-area tracking. Doles says the two companies are working to integrate their mapping software, so customers can use one system to track goods.

With the system, terminal operators can automate check-in and checkout from the yard, or loading and unloading from ships. Every gate transaction is time-stamped and captured by the WhereNet database, providing real-time information that trigger reactions by personnel or other software systems.

The WhereNet system also handles telemetry data, so it can monitor data from sensors on terminal operating equipment and notify the terminal operator when there is an accident notification, or when a machine needs preventative maintenance.

Doles said the system doesn't yet include electronic seals to notify operators when a container has been compromised. But the system can be set up to trigger alarms and alerts to notify personnel when, for example, a container is moved into unauthorized areas, or if one is moved when it shouldn't be moving. And the system can track personnel when they come on and off site and to verify operator identification on container handling equipment.

The CVS system is available immediately. Pricing is based on the configuration requirements of a customer's system and the size of the terminal. Doles said no one is piloting the system yet, but he hopes to announce the first marine terminal using the system in a few months.



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