

The Challenge

Today, libraries using RFID systems based on the ISO 15693 and ISO 18000-3 standards are, in principle, able to purchase ISO standard RFID tags from a variety of vendors and to program these tags using the conversion/programming software supplied with each vendor's RFID system. They are not limited to purchasing RFID tags from their RFID system supplier.

However, while libraries are able to purchase ISO tags from multiple vendors, the lack of a tag data model means that no interoperability exists between ISO systems. More broadly, the lack of a standards framework for library RFID also prevents a library from purchasing hardware and software components from a variety of RFID vendors and integrating these into a single RFID system for their organization. Clearly, this outcome is not what Australian libraries expect from standardisation.

Standards Bodies

Standards Australia, with its links to ISO, the International Standards Organisation has taken an interest in this situation within Australian libraries. Standards New Zealand has also become involved. Standards Australia is committed to enhancing the social, environmental and economic well-being of all Australians. In part this is achieved by setting standards that ensure products are fit-for-purpose and perform in the way they are intended.

What's being done

In June 2005 a working group was formed under the auspices of Standards Australia to analyse the situation and develop a proposal for an RFID tag data model. This data model would describe a standardised way in which library information is to be stored in an RFID tag's memory.

In order to ensure that the Australian Working Group was adequately resourced, 3M Australia agreed to sponsor the time and expenses of the chairperson. To date the Working Group has held several meetings and is currently finalising its formal proposal document which aims to not only achieve interoperability at the tag level, but also to pave the way for a fully open RFID systems architecture. The Working Group considers this open systems model to be the ideal end goal for the future of RFID in the Australian as well as global library communities.

The members of the Working Group are:

- Alan Butters – Principal Consultant – Sybis (Chair)
- Brian Dunne – Senior Technical Specialist – 3M Australia Pty Ltd
- Jan Wild – Sales Manager ANZ – DA Library Technologies
- Craig Anderson – Director, University Library – RMIT University
- Peter Dart – Information Services Director – Pearson Australia Group
- Christine Mackenzie – Chief Executive Officer – Yarra Plenty Regional Library
- Lynn Regan – Manager, Library Services – Baulkham Hills Shire Council

- Leona Jennings – Coordinator, Library Services Management Projects – Gold Coast City Council
- Janifer Gatenby – New Business Development Manager – OCLC PICA (corresponding member)

The members of the Working Group have a great deal of experience within the library and publishing sectors, are drawn from the vendor and library professional communities and have strong links into library professional organisations such as ALIA and VALA.

Timeline

The Working Group's draft report was presented to Standards Australia at a meeting held at the National Library of Australia on August 15th 2006. The committee responsible broadly endorsed the proposal of the Working Group that a flexible object oriented data model created by existing standards would be in the best interests of the Australian library community.

During October 2006, members of ISO (including Australia) will vote to accept a new project aimed at developing an internationally standardised data model. Standards Australia will submit the proposal document from the Australian Working Group as an input to the development process. Several other working groups from around the world are also expected to submit proposals on this issue.

Standards Australia will also nominate a National Expert to represent the interests of the Australian library community at the ISO meetings at which the new standard will be developed. Australia is not obliged to accept the data model that results from this new standard but it is hoped that, with adequate representation, an outcome suitable for Australian libraries will be achieved.

The Benefits

The library community has long recognised the benefits of standardisation and open systems. The Working Group and Standards Australia is committed to working toward these goals in the context of library RFID systems. The time is opportune while the penetration of the technology is still low within the global library community. Adopting standards will provide the interoperability which will enable improved productivity and lay the foundation for library cooperative activities in the future.

The proposal of the Australian Working Group is aimed at developing a data model for use in RFID tags within libraries while at the same time laying a foundation for a future which will include increased interoperability at the component level within RFID systems. The proposal points the way toward a situation where a library will be able to select individual components from multiple vendors and integrate these into a single RFID system for their organisation.

More Information

For more information on this issue please contact Standards Australia WG IT-19-01-02 Chairman, Alan Butters on T: +613 9878 6447, or email: alan@sybis.com.au