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LOGMARS is moving along....

....in the formulation of recommended plans for the automation of "logistics data processing through the use of symbology" for the U.S. Department of Defense (SCAN Sep 77, Jan 78, Mar 78).

At a June 29 meeting, some very significant decisions were made by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (OASD). OSAD approved a LOGMARS prototype test program designated as Milestone 4. This is a major step along the way toward full implementation.

A summary of these decisions:

1. Code 39 has been adopted as the bar code symbol to be used for the test. The selection was made after consideration of OCR-A, Codabar and UPC/DS (Distribution Symbol). It was emphasized that this selection was made for the test period only, and is not necessarily a long term commitment. LOGMARS plans to continue to monitor OCR-A and Codabar for any changes which will meet their minimum requirements of full alphanumeric and both portable pen and moving beam scannability.

2. The various test locations which will use bar codes and scanners may include the vendors (for source marking) and DOD Receiving Depots, Consolidation Points, Aerial Ports and end users.

3. The LOGMARS initial test plan is scheduled for completion in October 1978. If approved, Invitations for Bid will be solicited from industry for an independent review of the plan prior to implementation. The intent is to be sure these very significant tests will be workable and provide meaningful results.

4. A Director will be appointed to administer the test program.

5. The final results, including a full report and recommendations, are due December 1979.

SCAN has been carefully tracking LOGMARS because of the potentially enormous effect it will have on industry--as well as government operations, of course. Over and above the large number of systems and equipment that scanner equipment manufacturers would supply to keep the DOD running, the effect of the system applications would be widely felt. It has been estimated that the DOD buys well over one million different line items, and there is hardly an industry that won't be affected if vendor marking becomes a requirement.

As to the selection of Code 39....

....by the government group, this was seen by many as almost inevitable. It is the only alphanumeric bar code available. Although OCR-A meets that particular criterion, it is not nearly as flexible and bar code scanners are still much cheaper.

Intermec, the designers of Code 39, have been promoting it for years and recently issued specifications on the code's dimensions, configurations and printing tolerances. Technically called the 3 of 9 code (Intermec has trademarked the name Code 39), it is not proprietary to any one company. Many scanner and imprinter manufacturers have built Code 39 into their equipment capability and there seems to be more and more interest. There are a total of 43 characters, each consisting of 5 bars and 4 spaces. Of these 9 elements, 3 are always "wide" and 6 are "narrow." The nominal character densities run from 3 to 9.4 per inch.

The potential applications are extremely varied. It will be of particular interest to see the extent to which the LOGMARS choice will affect industry decisions. Intermec believes Code 39 is the answer to code standardization so scanners don't wind up looking at a half dozen labels with various code configurations on a single carton.

There are current tests under way in the United Kingdom....

....similar to the work being done by the Distribution Symbology Study Group in the U.S.

Thames Case Ltd., and two other major UK manufacturers of outers (shipping containers), are testing the printability of bar codes on corrugated board. The emphasis is on evaluating results under normal production conditions rather than under controlled conditions. They are concerned with what happens on the factory floor rather than in a test tube environment. There has been informal coordination and exchange of information with other European countries and the U.S.

The UK group completely rejects the DCI Distribution Sumbol. They see no need to work with a bar code which involves 4 different bar widths which, they feel, make the printing and color contrast requirements much more stringent.

J. W. Hawkins of Thames Case emphasizes the importance of coordination on this matter between the U.S. and Europe. He sees the ultimate bar code as one that will be specified by the casemakers themselves based on minimum size, dimensional tolerances, direction of bars, color contrast, etc. The scanner manufacturers would then be given this information to produce a scanner that will read what the casemakers can print.

The assumption, of course, is that the product manufacturers will have no difficulty in adapting to whatever symbol is decided upon. This will be a totally different approach from any system design we've ever heard of before. The printer/converters plan to determine the symbology It will be interesting to see the reactions of the hardware manufacturers and the product suppliers to this approach.

Question: How can Freedom of the Press....

....affect the form in which the EAN symbol is to be placed on products sold in the supermarkets in Europe?

DISTRIPRESS, the multi-national European association of periodical wholesalers is wrestling with that problem now. Most members of the organization seemed prepared to go along with the UPC version of the symbol used in magazines (with the Supplemental Code to designate issue). But Germany had a problem. Retailers in Germany, by law, have no discretion as to the periodicals they sell or the price they charge. The EAN symbol on magazines and newspapers, therefore, was to be coded so the scanner was to read the encoded price only.

This places certain restrictions on the numbering systems and on the decode logic in the store scanners. So DISTRIPRESS is still trying to work out a uniform system that will satisfy everyone's needs.

The EAN Executive Committee turned down an earlier proposal, and so DISTRIPRESS tried again at their July 4 meeting in Frankfurt. This latest recommendation looks like the UPC version, but Germany is still hanging on to its special wrinkle because of its unique Freedom-of-the-Press laws.

It could be worse. Italy could ask for man-readable numbers to be in Roman numerals.

David Collins of Computer Identics....

....is continuing to mount pressure in every direction to bring back Automatic Car Identification (SCAN July 78).

On July 26, Collins appeared before Congressman Rooney's Subcommittee investigating Freight Car Shortages to make his case. If ACI were in full use, according to Collins, there would be better utilization of rolling stock which would partially alleviate one of the worst shortages of freight cars in many years.

Collins presented a similar story to the Senate Subcommittee on Freight Car Shortages, seven years ago, but it's been downhill for ACI ever since.

John Hill left Computer Identics on 8/1....

....to head up a new group at Eaton-Kenway. Eaton-Kenway is a leading company in the field of automated systems for material handling and control, supplying such equipment as control systems, stackers, cranes and driverless vehicles.

Hill will be Vice President and Manager of the Automated Systems Development (ASD) group. ASD will combine the departments of Sales Engineering, Control Systems Design and Development and Account Management. It will function as a consulting group to develop systems for corporations not having complete internal resources for their own automated systems development work.

Hill has been chairman and a driving force in the Automatic Identification Manufacturer's Section of the Material Handling Institute and is particularly

concerned that his move might be interpreted as a vote of "no confidence" in the scanning industry, and in particular, Computer Identics.

"Not so," he says. "Computer Identics is doing very well, and I am still very high on the future of bar code scanning."

An unanswered question, for the moment, is whether this move will involve any increased involvement by Eaton-Kenway in scanning as part of their installed systems.

Those retail grocers who have installed UPC systems....

....are dealing with reality, and not pie-in-the-sky. This was evident at the seminar/workshops conducted by the National Association of Retail Grocers (NARGUS) in Atlanta in mid-July.

Some of the points that were made:

- An educational program directed at consumers and legislators is needed to hold off price marking legislations still under consideration in many states.

- Store methods must be improved to install easy-to-read shelf tags which must also reflect price changes immediately.

- Accuracy can be even more important than savings due to price removal.

- Scanners can be used to improve productivity and labor scheduling.

- Educate the media to "accept the positive" rather than searching out the one negative consumer, who is then featured on the TV evening news.

The Federal Trade Commission....

....gave Giant food the go-ahead last month to sell scanner-generated data to food manufacturers.

With over 50 stores equipped with scanners, the data generated by this chain could be a significant representation of consumer purchasing in its market area.

But V.P. Don Buchanan says that Giant has no current plans to market the data. They will be exploring various possibilities and only wanted to be sure there would be no problems with the FTC.

COMMENT

By the way, whatever happened to the idea that this was one of the benefits that would accrue to the manufacturers whose cooperation was so essential to the success of the program. There was talk way back that this information would be made available to the suppliers at cost. It's not a bad idea!

Even the prosaic "J" hook....

....is being changed so that the UPC symbol can be displayed.

Trion Industries, which calls itself the world's largest manufacturer of these display hooks, has patented a design with a label holder up front. A printed pressure sensitive label or tag can be affixed with the unit price, item description and UPC or other bar code displayed. This design can facilitate automatic inventory count using wand scanners, and also helps to keep the right merchandise on the right hook.

We are always suckers for a good acronym. This one is called the FISH hook-- for Front Information Safety Hook. List prices are about $50/C with appropriate trade discounts.

The UPC scanner installation count....

....as of the end of June 1978 totals 318 stores. This includes 27 new installations in June and a 2nd quarter total of 65.

The scorecard by equipment manufacturer now looks like this:

	2ND QUARTER		TOTAL	
	#	%	#	%
IBM	22	34	160	51
NCR	29	45	95	30
Datachecker	7	11	36	11
Sweda	6	9	17	5
Univac	1	1	10	3
	65	100	318	100

NCR continues to lead with new installations, and there are estimates that they will be pulling close to IBM by year end.

UPC may be affecting some manufacturers....

....in ways that were not anticipated.

A recent survey was conducted by the U.S. General Accounting office of the progress made by Sweden in the standardization and modularization of packaging. Part of the study was to determine the cost to U.S. manufacturers if such a program were established here. Obviously, a major part of the implementation costs would fall on the manufacturers. One company cited in the report stated he "was still waiting for widespread use of the UPC code he has been talked into putting on his products, and he was therefore not eager to explore modularization."

It might be a wise move for the supermarkets to acknowledge the cost and effort expended by the manufacturers to get into the UPC program. This would be a good time to explore some means to show the suppliers that it was not all in vain, as far as they are concerned.

Avery Label is marketing a new....

....electrostatic bar code printer through its Automatic Identification Systems/ Industrial Products Division.

Called the Avery Nomax, it is a patented device using an electrostatic print-
ing process. Avery claims the Nomax yields unexcelled precision, and since
the bar widths are continuously variably, virtually any bar code format at any
density may be printed.

The standard model prints at 180" per minute on a maximum 3 3/4" wide label.
Bar height maximum is 2". The price of the unit ranges from $15000 to $25000
depending on optional features selected.

Avery is not ready to talk about sales applications, but promises to keep us
posted.

The Department of Defense LOGMARS group....

....has published a Glossary of Terms related to bar codes and scanning.
Its stated intention is "as a reference document for LOGMARS members, contacts
and activities which may test data automation techniques in the LOGMARS
project."

> *COMMENT*
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> *It is an excellent effort, spanning 8 pages, and could surely be used as a
> standard by industry as well. Trade organizations, such as the Automatic
> Identification Manufacturers and the Symbol Manufacturer's Association,
> should immediately consider the document for adoption. These groups
> should also be called on to review the Glossary for accuracy and possible
> recommendations as to revisions or additions.*
>
> *Copies are available from LOGMARS, Department of the Army, Office of the
> Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Washington, D. C. 20310; Attn:
> SDSTO -TP-P.*

Rapistan wants it known....

....that the Sick Optik Electronik system using punched tab cards over re-
flective material on tote boxes (SCAN July 78) is not new.

Rapistan does not claim to be the first to use the system, but they did in-
stall one for the Navy in Norfolk, VA in 1969--and it is still in operation.

Can you top this?

New equipment from Intermec....

....includes a Model 9153 Multiplexer ($2475) and Model 9220 Reader ($932).
Sixteen Readers, each with a satellite terminal, can be located up to 2,000
feet remote from the Multiplexer and data input is via keyboard or bar code
readers (Code 39, of course).