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In what promises to be....

....a very exciting, and very visible, application of bar code scanning, the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee has chosen bar coding as the method for enforcing security at the 1984 Summer Games. There will be over 300 Computer Identics' scanners installed, according to David Collins, C/I's President and CEO.

Much has been written about the potential security problems at the Olympics. The choice of bar codes to identify the athletes and all support personnel is yet another demonstration of the reliability and accuracy of this method of data capture. We do not have any particulars regarding the system details, but more information will be emerging during the coming months. (Does anyone have any advice they can offer Computer Identics on how to dispose of 300+ slightly used scanners next August?)

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*                      LATE BREAKING NEWS ITEM                                *
*                                                                             *
* January 28.....Symbol Technologies started court action today               *
* against Spectra Physics, charging infringement under Symbol Tech's          *
* patents on hand-held laser scanners.  Neither company would make            *
* any comment at press time, Spectra claiming they have not even seen         *
* the papers.  Spectra has been producing this product for Intermec,          *
* MSI Data and others.                                                        *
*                                                                             *
* On June 17, 1983 Symbol Tech announced the issuance of its initial          *
* patent with 46 claims covering any "hand-held laser scanner with a          *
* trigger that reads bar codes at a distance" (SCAN Jul 83).  At that         *
* time the company indicated discussions were being held with Spectra         *
* Physics and Metrologic with a view toward licensing.  Apparently            *
* these discussions broke down leading to this legal action.                  *
*                                                                             *
* We anticipate additional comments from both companies in the weeks          *
* to come.                                                                    *
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Other happenings at Computer Identics since they went public (SCAN Jan 84):

- Robert Shallow has been named Senior Vice President in charge of sales and marketing. Shallow has been with C/I since May '83. His relationship to Collins goes back to their days at Sylvania, a few decades ago, when both were involved in the railroad Automatic Car Identification program. More recently, he was a business consultant.

- Ed Andersson is now VP/International and will be implementing the company's more aggressive pursuit of offshore business (Ed may be more familiar to you as the current chairman of AIM). He has been with C/I for many years.

- The new VP/Manufacturing is also a C/I veteran (8 years). Steve Fabbri was promoted to that position from his previous job as Director of Manufacturing.

Based on the technical reports....

....and evaluations of the bar code reading state-of-the-art it received, the Health Industry Bar Code Council (HIBCC) is moving in the direction of adopting a dual symbology. Under the proposed plan, those products marked with the UPC symbol for other markets will be acceptable in the hospital environment; others will have the option to choose UPC or code 39.

A key factor was the report at the January 11-12 meeting by the representative of the AIM Technical Symbology Committee that "auto discrimination" is currently feasible; i.e., the bar code reader can selectively read whichever symbol it sees without operator involvement. There is no evidence, according to the report, that there would be any increase in the substitution-error or the no-read rates if dual symbologies were allowed.

Comment

This, however, does highlight the continuing problem of the unavailability of results of controlled studies on reading error rates. Other than the LOGMARS study, and the general, non-documented, feedback from UPC scanning operations, there is very little hard evidence to go by. We are aware of two very important and definitive studies currently under way by two of the largest and most respected companies in the world. Both are major users of bar codes, and both are presently conducting scientific, controlled studies which could be of major importance to the industry.

We choose not to identify these companies by name -- but we know they will get to read these comments. We urge them to go public with their information. Parts of their tests include specific brands of scanning equipment, and we can understand why they may be reluctant to publish those names. But stripped of any company identification, these reports could be most valuable to the health industry and to other major industry groups involved in this technology.

As expected, the LOGMARS Coordinating Group....

....substantially adopted the proposed revisions to Mil Std 1189 at their January 24-25 meeting (SCAN Jan 84). The unofficial document will be circulated to interested parties and, in effect, can be implemented immediately. Meanwhile the

standard will wend its way through final approval and printing prior to being officially distributed.

The LCG is not going to ignore other comments and suggestions from industry sources. The offer by AIM to conduct an informational seminar will be further explored; and steps are being taken to alert using agencies to report any bar coding errors, non-scannable symbols, and other system problems.

It is estimated that over 50% of all goods being received by the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) is now bar coded, and the amount is increasing monthly. The proportion of bar coded materiel at GSA depots is not available, but is reported as growing significantly.

In one of its first moves....

....into bar code scanning, Recognition Equipment, Inc. (REI) announced a new OCR Wand/Bar Code Reader. According to the company, this unique product uses a single hand-held input device to scan OCR and bar code information interchangeably without operator intervention. The unit will read OCR fonts such as OCR-A alphanumeric and Multifont Numeric; and bar codes including UPC/EAN, code 39 and interleaved 2/5.

According to Bob Drew, General Manager of the REI OCR Wand division, "The dual symbol capability establishes a new standard in the data entry marketplace. The user can now have the best of both worlds for item marking and data capture using the combination of OCR and bar code marking technologies."

In its recent financial report (F/Y 83 ended 10/31/83) REI reported net income (after taxes but before extraordinary items) of $3.6 million on $117 million in sales. This compares to a $14 million loss last year on $112 million in sales. President and CEO William Moore, Jr. reports a significant reduction of debt, improvement in equity, and good progress to "turn the company around. We have passed through the survival and stabilization stages and have positioned the company for a return to growth. We can now take advantage of the opportunities available to the company."

It will be interesting to see if the new product described above presages a move by REI into bar code scanning in addition to their strong position with OCR.

Every so often....

....there is a defensive treatise written comparing OCR to bar code reading. It usually starts by saying "OCR and bar codes should not be viewed as competing technologies, etc., etc." An article in the Jan/Feb 1984 issue of Bar Code News started that way, and then proceeded with a host of unsubstantiated and irrelevant comparisons:

- OCR is easier to print.

- OCR can record up to four times the data in a small label compared to bar codes.

- Although less accurate than bar codes, OCR is 50 times better than operator-keyed data.

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- If both OCR and bar code are well printed, then the first read rates on both are comparable.

- And, condescendingly, it's true that OCR does not have battery-pack, portable units and cannot scan if not in contact with the surface of the code.

The article concludes with a list of applications best suited to OCR, many of which are really questionable.

Actually we have always been inclined toward the position stated by Carl Helmers in an editorial from the same issue of Bar Code News. Some excerpts:

"Both optical character recognition and bar codes are keyless data entry techniques in which an optically-sensed pattern is recognized and converted into data...Optical character recognition requires a two-dimensional graphic method of scanning for meaning...Bar code recognition is the one dimensional subset of the more general optical character recognition technique. Bar code is a funny subset -- unlike typography and fonts, designers of bar code systems are not necessarily constrained by history and the requirements of human-readable codes...But it is still character recognition -- the characters we are recognizing are composed of bars and spaces of different widths in one dimension...The bar code field is being presented with a veritable tidal wave of new technologies -- microprocessors, integrated linear array optical scanning semiconductors, microcomputer systems, inexpensive data base hardware and software...As of today, bar code is the clear winner in many technological contexts..."

Comment

Bar code rarely seems to meet OCR head-to-head in any important applications in the marketplace. Why then do the proponents of OCR feel it necessary to draw these distorted and non-factual comparisons? There is a definite, distinct and, at the moment, large market for OCR, and the companies in that industry would best spend their time promoting their strengths.

In a very "modest" announcement....

....Bar Code Industrie (Paris, France) has announced the opening of its New York office and entry into the US market. This may mark a significant step in the development of non-US bar code scanning companies as they expand their markets. There have been very few foreign companies offering equipment in the US non-retail scanning marketplace.

And Bar Code Industrie is not just slipping quietly onto the scene. Dubbing itself the "world champion in adapting bar code reading equipment to individual needs," the company takes direct credit for making France the "best equipped European country, applying bar code reading systems to various and original uses." And are you ready for the "Mindreader: the gifted child for the new generation of bar code reading systems"? The company claims higher performance and a much cheaper price than competitive equipment. The New York office is managed by Jeremy Metz. Initial plans are to hire 10 people, build first year's sales to $2 million, and then to establish manufacturing facilities in this country.

In a recent interivew with Edouard David, President of the company, (SCAN I/E Oct/Nov 83) he described the history of the company and its growth as a European

distributor of Intermec products. Late last year the management team of the company, then called Intermec/France, bought out the 19% stake held by its Intermec/US partner and formed the new Bar Code Industrie. According to David, the strength of the business has been its ability to custom build decoders to interface with different French electronic point-of-sale terminals. The company claims to have held much of the Intermec business and gained some major new contracts, notably with NCR, in France.

Bar Code Industrie, Inc., 575 Madison Avenue, Suite 1006, New York, NY 10022; 212/605-0490.

It is now official....

....and you may obtain your copy of the new ANSI standard MH10.8M-1983 titled "American National Standard for Material Handling -- Bar Code Symbols on Unit Loads and Transport Packages". Our congratulations to Mike Noll and Allan Gilligan, co-chairmen, for seeing this difficult task through to completion.

This standard describes the requirements for the generation of bar code symbols for use on transport packages and unit loads. Dimensions and tolerances of the printed bar code symbol are specified, and limits on reflectivity are provided. Methods for scanning bar code symbols are outlined, and the orientation and placement of bar code symbols on transport packages and unit loads are specified. The parameters for bar code symbol film masters are also specified.

Copies may be obtained for $7.00/each, plus $2.00 for handling at the American National Standards Institute, Inc., 1430 Broadway, New York, NY 10018.

There is a pending....

....Air Force Request For Proposal for a "wholesale shipping system" that includes lots of bar code scanning equipment, and the government is looking for additional responsive bidders. At a pre-proposal conference on December 22, 1983 only two companies showed up. The original closing date of January 16, 1984 was therefore extended while the search broadened for more interested bidders.

In addition to a complete computer system, terminals and character printers, the proposal includes a large number of bar code printers and laser scanners. There are four additional systems included in the proposal, which the government reserves the option to buy at a later date.

These details were supplied by Automated Business Systems Consulting (A.B.S.C.) a company providing assistance to potential government bidders for a fee. For an up-front payment of $200, plus agreement to pay one-half of one percent of the contract if successful, the company will send you details of the proposal.

A.B.S.C., 99 Varee Drive, Warner-Robins, GA 31093; 912/922-8048.

Continuing its efforts....

....to turn the company around from its lower-than-expected F/Y 1983 results, MSI Data is reporting improved sales and earnings. For the third quarter of F/Y 84 (ended 12/25/83) sales were up 12% to $15.5 million, and earnings increased a

substantial 50% to $1.2 million or $.48/share (all compared to the same quarter last year). Total backlog was $13.5 million up from $11.2 million last year. MSI also declared a regular quarterly dividend of $.10/share, the 28th consecutive quarterly dividend by the company.

Herb Espeland is the new Vice President/Operations replacing Murray Robinson who left the company. Espeland spent the last 14 years in operations with Century Data Systems, a Xerox company.

Sales opportunities are not....

....just limted to consumer goods these days. Hewlett Packard is offering a 30% discount off their regular price of one of their newest bar code readers. It is being offered as a special "Bar Code Evaluation Kit For a Limited Time Only".

The kit contains the H/P bar code reader, a sealed-tip wand, RS-232-C cable with connectors and female adaptor, print samples, and literature on bar code technology, systems and H/P products.

The Evaluation Kit has been designed to help introduce the use of bar codes to potential users evaluating various methods of data input. The ready hook-up accessories make it suitable for anyone with an RS-232-C port in their computer or terminal.

The complete kit costs $795 and the offer at this price expires February 29, 1984 (available only in the U.S. through your local H/P sales office).

The first shot....

....out of the cannon for SCAN-TECH '84 has been fired by the Automatic Identification Manufacturers. Now that everyone has broken out his 1984 calendar, the time, place and plans can be noted:

also conferences

* December 4-6, 1984

* Cincinnati (OH) Convention-Exposition Center

* Unlimited exhibit space available for each exhibitor

* Seminar facilities for 1,000 attendees, with an "Executive Level" Track for managers who want to learn the overall benefits

* 3-day session for "Systems Implementing" organized as an Automatic Identification University

For further details, particularly for those wanting favorable exhibit space: SCAN-TECH '84 Show, AIM, Inc., 1326 Freeport Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15238; 412/782-1624.