SCAN newsletter

The management Newsletter for all industries involved with bar-code scanning and related technologies.

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In the December 1984 issue....

....of Health Industry Scanning News, there was an interesting article exploring the implications of the Health Industry Bar Code Council position on multiple symbologies and codes. Editor Tom Swift made a telling point in "The Question of Symbology" in which he explored the various decisions and compromises that developed during the early phases of the HIBC.

While it seems as if Code 39 was adopted as the symbol of choice, and the primary symbol defining the product, he asks us to consider the following:

- The primary symbol code can vary between 8 and 20 alpha-numeric characters and is represented by code 39.
- The alternate primary symbol code, based on the UPC, NDC or NHRIC number codes (with some added characters), is also in code 39.
- The standard UPC code and symbol is an acceptable, although not recommended, alternate.
- Codabar has been the symbol of choice for the blood banks for many years.
- There are indications that the UPC Shipping Container Symbol, using Interleaved 2/5, will be acceptable for those opting for the UPC inner package.
- Swift suspects that code 93 may come up for inclusion by those who want a more dense alpha-numeric symbol.

Comment

We count 5 possible symbologies representing at least 4 coding schemes with variable length, all to be integrated into one operating hospital system. It is not our intention here to render an opinion as to whether or not it will work. The situation is different from every other industry-wide application--UPC, automotive industry, DOD LOGMARS--which established rigid uniform standards. It opens up new hardware, software and systems challenges which will undoubtedly affect not only the hospital industry, but standards and specifications for many other system applications.

And while we are on the subject....

....of the health industry bar coding, there are a number of current activities that should be noted:

- A new bar code standard is under development by the Health Care Providers Applications Standard Committee. This standard will reflect in-hospital applications and will identify coding schemes for documents and other in-house labeling for such items as pathology, patient ID and blood samples. The draft is expected to be out for comment soon.

- Regional conferences are continuing. The first was in Los Angeles February 18-20; the next two will be held April 1-3 in Chicago and June 10-12 in Philadelphia. The conferences include seminars and showcase exhibitions. Exhibit space is still open for Chicago and Philadelphia.

- A new HIBCC newsletter, Health Industry Lines, published its first issue January-February 1985. It will appear bi-monthly distributed to members of the HIBCC sponsoring organizations.

- A 12 minute video tape and descriptive literature are available describing the HIBC program, its background and potential benefits.

HIBCC, 111 East Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60601; 312/644-6610.

In a move to aggressively....

....implement a symbology testing program, the AIM Technical Symbology Committee has prepared and sent out a request for proposal with draft specifications to several educational institutions and large independent testing laboratories. The detailed 7 page document describes the scope of the tests: symbol characteristics; scanning and decoder situations (including various manufacturers' equipment and autodiscrimination settings); experimental design; and the format of the results.

The proposal anticipates that eight test operators will test seven symbologies on eight pieces of equipment; there will be 3.8 million characters read for each symbology on each scanner/decoder combination. Quoting from the text of the proposal:

> "In determining read and error rates over many hundred thousand read attempts, these tests are designed in a manner that cuts across the particular strengths or weaknesses of certain types of symbols, scanners and decoders and thus may be predictive of the symbology's actual reliability in "real world" application. Another goal of these tests is to establish equivalent statistical bases for comparing the security of otherwise equally useable symbologies. The aim of these tests is to obtain values for the read and mis-read rate of the subject symbology over a characteristic spectrum of scanning situation."

Rich Bravman (Symbol Technologies) co-chairman of the Technical Symbology Committee told us that his committee feels strongly that these tests are necessary and feasible. But not all members of AIM agree. The Technical Steering Committee, made up

of the executive officers of five of the leading companies in the industry (SCAN July 1984), indicated at their last meeting that a study of this size and scope was commendable, but probably beyond the economic capability of the organization. In their role as advisors to AIM, they suggested further investigation before commitment.

The responses to the request for proposal will suggest which approach may by correct.

Following in the parade....

....of industries which have officially adopted bar codes, the aluminum industry formed a Bar Code Task Group in mid-1984. Since August 1984 the group has been developing two draft standards. The code 39 standard was undertaken to address the differences that the Aluminum Association Group perceived among the previously published standards -- ANSI, LOGMARS, et al -- with an appendix that the organization hopes will answer many user questions. This standard was sent to Association membership on February 11 with a mail ballot. The package ticket standard, based on the AIAG Shipping Label, will be released a few months later.

The minutes of the February 12-13 meeting of this Bar Code Task Group suggest a very active committee establishing liaison with AIAG, AIM, UPC and ANSI and moving ahead smartly to get bar coding up and running in the aluminum industry.

Along with its standards-drafting and other activities, the group is dedicated to educating their industry about bar code technology. As part of its educational program a seminar has been announced for March 13-14, 1985 to take place at the Aluminum Association Headquarters in Washington, DC. There will be speakers from both the aluminum and bar code industries.

Contact Connie Robinson, Aluminum Association, 818 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20006; 202/862-5100.

Hugin Group plc,....

....the UK based EPoS equipment supplier, is positioning itself to become a major force in the retail sector throughout the world. A major step in this direction is the recently announced negotiations for the purchase of Sweda International from Litton. Hugin Group is a fairly new entity, formed when a consortium purchased Hugin Kassaregister from the Swedish conglomerate, Electrolux (SCAN/IE Sep/Oct 83).

Last year, Litton announced plans to sell its business systems division, including Sweda, as part of a corporate strategy to focus its attention on three core areas: advanced electronic and defense systems, industrial automation, and geophysical services. A letter of intent was signed by Hugin Group and Litton on 17 Jan 85. The transaction is still subject to negotiation and the completion of a definitive purchase agreement and approval by the Boards of Directors of both companies. The deal is likely to be completed by mid-March. The agreement would involve a cash payment to Litton and the establishment of Litton as a minority shareholder in the Hugin/Sweda business. The total value of the transaction was not disclosed.

The purchase of Sweda neatly fits in with Hugin's strategy for growth which includes increasing market share and distribution strength, and opening up new territory. According to David Pope (chief executive), "The opportunity to buy Sweda International enables all this strategy to be achieved in one operation".

The Hugin & Sweda International operations overlap in the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Germany and Sweden (the original base of both companies). Pope predicts that considerable synergy will be derived from the combined European operation, and will probably make Hugin/Sweda the biggest vendor of EPoS and ECR equipment in the European market.

In North America, the existing operations overlap in Mexico. Hugin has little more than a toe hold in the United States, whereas Sweda has 6.5% of the UPC scanning installations. Sweda's turnover (sales) in the United States possibly exceeds the total present turnover of Hugin Group. Sweda International also operates out of Argentina, Canada, Spain and Switzerland, all countries where Hugin does not trade.

Still to be clarified: how Hugin's deal to handle the Datachecker scanner will be worked out. On paper this still runs until 1990 (SCAN/IE Aug 83). However Datachecker/DTS is carving out its own identity and it seems likely that Hugin/Sweda will do the same.

AIM/Europe has been....

....established with 33 founder members from eleven countries. The companies do not just represent bar coding but also radio frequency and OCR. At the inaugural meeting held in Brussels on January 25 a draft constitution was accepted, the structure and membership criteria agreed, and Council and Officers elected. The constitution for AIM/UK was selected as the basis for the AIM/Europe rules. Full membership will be granted to companies which distribute, but do not necessarily manufacture, automatic identification equipment.

The organization structure is based on a territorial concept. Europe has been divided into seven regions, each with the potential for setting up its own national/territorial AIM affiliate. Each such affiliate would then become a member of AIM/Europe. AIM/UK thus became the first organizational member of AIM/Europe. A few multinational companies justify direct membership in AIM/Europe, irrespective of the country in which their offices are situated. The territories and their representatives on the Council are:

AIM/UK	M. Marriott	Numeric Arts, UK
Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal & Greece	S. Peters	Intermec Barcode, Switzerland
Benelux	E. van den Bergh	Egemin, Belgium
France	M. Grolee	Master Code Int'l, France
Germany	G. Wippern	F & O Electronic, W. Germany
Italy	N. Karadjov	Systel Int'l, Italy
Scandinavia	O. Hiden	Swedot, Sweden

Representatives of multinational companies complete the 10 person Council: Eduoard

David (Barcode-Industries, France); Nicholas Driesen (Cintrak Europa, England); Paul Berge (Symbol Technologies International, Belgium). The officers of AIM/Europe are: Paul Berge (Chairman), Gerhard Wippern (Vice Chairman), Olof Hiden (Hon. Treasurer), Ian Smith, of ISM Marketing (General Secretary).

Not least among the tasks ahead is the planning work for SCAN-TECH Europe 85. This is scheduled for November 25-29 in Utrecht, the Netherlands to run side-by-side (but independently) with Logistica, a major materials handling exhibition.

A special education pack....

....produced by the ANA (UK EAN affiliate), has been successfully field tested in 100 schools and will soon be available for all of Britain. The ANA's objective is simple: To promote interest in EAN bar coding with the younger generation. It is aimed at middle and secondary school children (8 - 14 year olds) and is used in general studies, geography, computer studies (try cracking the code without the EAN specification) and home economics.

The response from the teachers taking part in the trial has been unanimously positive. The ANA has now had 10,000 copies of the pack printed for wider use for all schools wishing to have it. The pack consists of: a wall chart showing all EAN related activities; a world map highlighting all UPC and EAN authorities; teaching aids with definitions of terms, descriptions of article numbers and bar codes and why we need them, and suggested classroom projects.

Comment

What an excellent idea! The presentation is so clear that the pack has been found useful for explaining the EAN system to executives. It might be worthwhile if a few copies found their way to North America as part of another education program: to show that the EAN system is gaining worldwide acceptance and to spur efforts for full EAN/UPC compatibility. We fully support this effort to spread the word.

Last year it was....

....an epidemic of carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS). This year it's discrimination against left-handed clerks. And what, you may ask, do these seemingly unrelated events have to do with one another -- much less with bar code scanning?

CTS is an injury caused by rapid and repetitive movements of the wrist. Those movements can cause inflammation and damage to the nerves in the wrist resulting in numbness, tingling and pain. There were some reports that supermarket checkout clerks in scanning stores were experiencing this problem. So far, the reports seem to be unsubstantiated, but there had been requests for government investigation.

Of more immediate note: if you now operate a retail establishment with scanning at the checkout, and if one of your employees insists on moving products across the scanner with her left hand, don't argue with her. Jewel Food Stores will have to pay southpaw Crystal Sagen $136,700 because she insisted it was easier and faster

for her to work left handed. The store manager disagreed and harassed her till she quit. "Discrimation" she cried, took them to court and won.

Intermec is agressively....

....pursuing its ambitious program, started last year, to acquire and integrate its US distributors into the corporate fold (SCAN June 84).

The first major move was accomplished in January 1985 when agreement was reached with Promark, the distributor serving the Mid-Atlantic states. Under the terms of the agreement, Promark will become completely dedicated to products and systems for bar code data collection; in March 1985 its new name will be Intermec Mid-Atlantic; and Intermec will acquire an increasing ownership in a sequence of stock exchange transactions which are based on performance of the new company. Completion of the acquisition is expected to take a number of years.

We spoke with president David Allais about this unique plan to build a national sales organization. He believes the concept of a gradual buy-out of distributor organizations is a new one, and that its uniqueness is particularly suitable to Intermec's plans and capabilities. Within the next 12 months, according to Allais, almost all of the distributors will carry the Intermec name and most will be signed up to an agreement similar to the Promark contract. These units will become Intermec's sales and service centers providing staff to support systems hardware and software applications, backed up with full maintaince and repair service. To provide direct support to this new Intermec technical center concept, the company recently set up its own Corporate Technical Center.

Allais is fully aware of the challenge to meld the entrepreneurial personnel of the independent organizations into a corporate environment. He feels the transition period and the buy-out incentives will provide the initiative and enthusiasm necessary to make it work best for everyone. By its very nature, he anticipates that each of the acquisition deals will have to be customized to suit the individuals involved.

Last month, we reviewed....

....the financial reports of Intermec, Symbol Technologies, Telxon and Imtec, each with substantial gains over previous year's figures. This month it's Computer Identics' turn, with a 75% annual sales increase and impressive earnings turnaround:

Computer Identics	3 months ended Dec. 30		Year ended Dec. 31	
	1984	1983	1984	1983
Revenue ($000)	2,978	2,089	9,964	5,748
Net Income ($000)	168	(490)	653	(937)
Net Income/Share	.04	(.28)	.15	(.61)

The company also announced a new Label Data Processor, LDP-6, a real-time bar code

data management controller. The LDP-6 interfaces with mainframes in real time through local area networks. It maintains data for sortation assignments; generates picking lists, shipping manifests, bills of lading, and management reports. Up to 4,096 bar code scanners will operate with this system.

Computer Identics, 5 Shawmut Rd, Canton, MA 02021; 617/821-0830

A new compact....

....programmable data collection terminal has been introduced by MSI Data. According to President Charles Strauch, it "provides maximum productivity at the lowest possible cost".

The MSI PDT II features a 24 column integral printer and enhanced communications capabilities. It is small -- 6.7 inches by 3.8 inches -- weighs less than 18 oz, and has several bar code scanning options. Custom programs can be written for the unit making it possible to switch data collection routines by changing program modules. Communication is accomplished using a built-in acoustic coupler that connects to a handset, or a standard RJ-11 jack that allows the terminal to automatically dial a number stored in memory, or answer a host computer calling to "poll" the terminal.

According to Strauch the MSI PDT II has been designed for inventory taking, field services reporting, hospital data collection, electronic ordering and payroll reporting. Memory size is 8-16K alpha, or 16-32K numeric. Prices range from $525 to $625 depending on configuration and quantity.

MSI also announced the appointment of H.H. Simeroth as VP Engineering, responsible for all product development, as well as software and hardware engineering functions. He replaces William Bowers, chairman and co-founder of MSI, who had been filling in at that job for a few months. Bowers continues as chairman of the board. Simeroth comes to MSI from Datacard Corp. and Eagle Computer, where he held similar positions. This seems to be part of the reorganization of the company that has been taking place this past year.

MSI Data, 340 Fischer Ave, Costa Mesa, CA 92626; 714/549-6000.

Barcode Label Services....

....of Vierlingsbeek, The Netherlands claims to have a unique bar coding product. Robert van der Laan (Managing Director) tells us that BLS has developed a system to manufacture fabric labels with woven sequential bar codes. The product is likely to be of interest to laundries, hotels, hospitals, and any large institutions involved with rental of clothing or linen or inventory control of uniforms and industrial wear.

The process can weave bar codes in the following symbologies: EAN/UPC, Two of Five, Interleaved 2 of 5. Density is constant, fixed by the standard 0.8mm (0.030 inch) woven width of the narrow bar. Readability is said to be excellent with laser scanners and reasonable with hand held light pens. The major advantage of the

woven label is its durability compared with printed labels. It can be fixed using hotmelt adhesive or can be stitched into position. The woven labels can be produced sequentially or randomly to a customer's requirements. Price depends on the precise specification but ranges between 250 and 500 Dutch florins ($70 to $140) per thousand. BLS also supplies sequential bar coded aluminum labels, which can be supplied with self adhesive backings or plain for riveting, welding, or fixing with industrial adhesive.

Barcode Label Services, Overambt 7, Postbus 30, 5820 AA Vierlingsbeek, The Netherlands; Dutch phone: 04781 - 1793; Telex: 20010 PMS

A high speed graphics....

....thermal printhead has been introduced by the Graphics Instruments Division of Gulton Industries. It will print UPC and EAN bar codes; has 150 dots across 50mm (2 inches); prints a single bar code module width of 0.33mm (.013 inches); has a 4 millisecond cycle time permitting a print speed of up to 3.25 inches/second. Samples are currently available with production scheduled for August. Prices range from $162.50 (1-9 pieces) to $101.56 (over 100). Contact Ken Smalley at 201/548-6500.

As is the case....

....with many expanding technologies, they often spawn satellite endeavors -- some of which can be quite surprising. Thus we read with interest about Bar Code Baloney or one man's attempt to bring bar codes to the deli business. The driving force behind this new effort is none other than the enfant terrible of this industry.

Harry Burke claims he has succumbed to a curious syndrome which occurs every time he attends a seminar on bar code scanning. He finds himself uttering the word "baloney" over and over as the speakers attempt to educate their unsuspecting and naive audiences on bar codes. He proceeds in his most irreverent manner, slice by slice, to describe the baloney he believes we are being forced-fed on the subjects of symbologies, autodiscrimination, printing, reading and complete systems.

There is no way we could render the contents or flavor of his 25-page paper in a family publication such as this. He encourages readers to copy and pass along his document to other interested parties. To get an original from the source, try contacting Harry Burke, NCR Data Pathing Division, 752 San Aleso Ave, Sunnyvale, CA 94086; 408/734-0100. Ask him for a copy of Bar Code Baloney or How The Bar Code Community Actively Cuts Its Own Throat. I don't guarantee he'll send you one, but you will enjoy the conversation. His most recent serious publication is the Handbook of Bar Coding Systems (SCAN Sept 84).

The majority of the exhibition....

....space for AIM UK '85 (London 17 - 19 April) has been sold, but there are still some booths left. For further information about the 2½ day conference at the Novotel Exhibition Center contact ISM Ltd, The Old Vicarage, Haley Hill, Halifax, West Yorkshire, England HX3 6DR.

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