The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) is pleased to announce the development of a new voluntary product specification that will enhance the usability of barcode scanners. The new specification creates a standardized scanner data format that can be adopted by barcode scanner manufacturers. The result is that end users and system integrators will be able to create applications that can use scanners sold by any participating vendors. This feature will allow customers greater flexibility to mix-and-match scanners from different suppliers into their applications.

The problem comes about as a result of the way that shipping label data is encoded by ISO 15434: Information technology - Automatic identification and data capture techniques - Syntax for high-capacity ADC media. This international standard specifies a transfer structure, syntax, and coding of messages and data formats when using high-capacity ADC media, such as 2D bar codes. When shipping data is encoded in accordance with ISO 15434, it can include embedded “control” codes that are used as data field separators. Scanners from different manufacturers can output these characters differently, so applications have to change to accommodate those differences. The new specification provides a standardized way for the scanner to output these control codes in a common XML format, so that an application can be the same for all scanners.

The specification was crafted by an ad hoc committee of ANSI Service Group 8 (SG8), Work Group 2 (WG2). This group is responsible for maintenance of the material handling standards that specify the creation, placement, and data content of shipping labels. The ad hoc committee was comprised of members of AIDC equipment manufacturers, system integrators, and Government and commercial end users from the following companies: ATIS / Alcatel-Lucent; ATIS / Telcordia; CDO Technologies; DoD Logistics AIT Office; Intermec Technologies; Motorola; Northrop Grumman; Q.E.D Systems; and the USAF AIT Program Office.

According to Mark Reboulet, Program Manager for Air Force AIT and chairman of the SG8/WG2 committee, “This specification is a direct result of cooperation between manufacturers and system integrators, and demonstrates the standards process in action. The common data output format will simplify design for system integrators, and also allow users to choose the equipment that best fits their needs. It’s a win-win for the entire data collection industry.”