Global Businesses Align on Providing Accurate Product Data to Consumers

- Multinational firms collaborate to improve trustworthiness of product data in mobile and Internet product searching
- Companies include brand owners, retailers and technology providers

LAWRENCEVILLE, N.J. (Nov. 16, 2010) – More than a dozen corporations representing hundreds of billions of dollars in global commerce are working together to address a growing need for accurate product information accessed via mobile devices and the Internet. The Business to Consumer (B2C) Alliance was announced today by its facilitators, GS1 US and GS1 Canada, not-for-profit organizations that are part of the global GS1 standards body.

The alliance is composed of representatives from leading product brands, technology providers, and retailers. The current list of participants includes: AT&T; Cisco; The Coca-Cola Company; IBM; The J.M. Smucker Company; Johnson & Johnson Consumer Group of Companies; Kraft Foods; The Kroger Co.; the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Auto-ID Lab; Microsoft Corp.; NeoMedia Technologies; PepsiCo, Inc.; Premier healthcare alliance; Procter & Gamble; and Scanbuy, Inc. Companies interested in joining the alliance can visit www.GS1US.org/B2CAlliance.

The National Retail Federation (NRF) is also participating, contributing its knowledge of retail operations, including global retail-specific standards, to the group.

In research done by the Auto-ID Lab on behalf of the B2C Alliance, more than 10 percent of searches for information about allergens, nutritional characteristics or other data returned incorrect or incomplete results.

"The number of people searching and shopping with smartphones is growing in the triple digits with no signs of slowing," said Sanjay Sarma, professor of mechanical engineering at MIT and co-founder of the Auto-ID Lab. "At the same time, sources are proliferating. It's essential that any shortcomings in this area are addressed today."

Search results for product data may be inaccurate due to several factors. One is the large number of possible data sources, including unauthorized "crowd-sourcing."

"Providing accurate information about our products is a critical part of building trust with our consumers," said Werner Geissler, Vice Chairman, Global Operations, Procter & Gamble (NYSE: PG). "Leveraging GS1 standards, like the bar code, will allow this information to be delivered to consumers via internet and smartphone applications when and how they want it. Brand owners are the best source for this information, and we support the B2C Alliance in this important initiative to improve the shopping experience."

Alliance participants first convened in March 2010 to discuss the state of publicly available product data, and decided to form the alliance and work together to improve it.

"Kroger supports the work of the alliance because we believe it is good for our customers, associates and business," said Chris Hjelm, chief information officer, The Kroger Co. (NYSE: KR).

"Today's consumers are demanding more detail about products, and the B2C Alliance participants recognize the importance of providing trustworthy information to promote consumer confidence," said Bob Carpenter, president and CEO, GS1 US.

Alliance participants have split into working groups to develop the most significant scenarios, or "use cases," in order to define the logistical requirements, with GS1 standards as a foundational element.

The scenarios include a parent searching for allergen information; a do-it-yourself remodeler who needs precise dimensions of an appliance; a shopper checking on whether a product has been recalled; a buyer who needs further instructions on product usage; and an eco-conscious person checking on a product's origins.

Work done by NRF's Mobile Retail Initiative will be factored into additional scenarios related to mobile shopping and payments. These rely on NRF retail standards, which complement GS1 standards and can be integrated into systems that coordinate inventory, financial, and customer-relationship data.

The alliance is also developing a product data framework that technology providers could use as a pre-approved route to help ensure the source of data is trustworthy. Technology and service providers are working closely with brand owners and retailers on the framework to develop an operational proof-of-concept model that will demonstrate how the framework would serve consumers.

"This Alliance is a great step forward in giving the consumer, verified content for the products they are interested in", said Mike Wehrs, president of Scanbuy. "We see scans from virtually every product category, so clearly the consumer is interested in getting easy access to valuable information right from their mobile device."

The alliance is actively pursuing additional participants. Interested parties can visit www.GS1US.org/B2CAlliance.

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About GS1 US

GS1 US, a member of GS1, is a not-for-profit organization that brings industry communities together to solve supply-chain problems through the adoption and implementation of GS1 standards. More than 200,000 businesses in 25 industries rely on GS1 US for trading-partner collaboration and for maximizing the cost effectiveness, speed, visibility, security and sustainability of their business processes. They achieve these benefits through GS1 US solutions based on GS1 global unique numbering and identification systems, barcodes, Electronic Product Code-based RFID, data synchronization, and electronic information exchange. GS1 US also manages the United Nations Standard Products and Services Code® (UNSPSC®). www.GS1US.org

About GS1 Canada

GS1 Canada is a member of GS1, the world's leading supply-chain standards organization. As a neutral, not-for-profit organization, GS1 Canada enables its more than 10,000 members – trading partners of all sizes from over 20 sectors across Canada – to enhance their efficiency and cost effectiveness by adopting electronic supply-chain best practices.

About GS1

GS1 is a neutral, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the design and implementation of global standards and solutions to improve the efficiency and visibility in supply chains. GS1 is driven by more than a million companies, who execute more than 6 billion transactions a day with the GS1 System of Standards. GS1 is global, with local Member Organisations in over 100 countries and a Global Office in Belgium. More info at www.gs1.org.

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