

OASIS, ebXML, EWG

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Ritual XML Reminders

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Disclaimer

I am speaking only for myself: an individual OASIS member and Chair of the OASIS Process Advisory Committee. This is a report and not a formal representation of the OASIS board of directors.

XML is...

A simplified subset of SGML (ISO 8879) developed by a cross-industry group organized and led by Sun Microsystems

- Builds on 30 years of research and 14 years of standardization
- Widely deployed (as SGML) in major industrial settings
- Powerful data modeling -- no limits on namespace or structural depth
- But small enough for Web browsers

XML is not...

XML is not a language but a metalanguage

- It is designed to support the definition of an unlimited number of languages for specific industries and applications
- All XML languages can be processed by a single lightweight parser
- Without standardization, however, this can lead to chaos

XML is "syntax, not semantics"

- Tags have no predefined meaning
- Unlike HTML, XML by itself conveys only content and structure, not presentation, behavior, or meaning
- The meaning of XML languages must be specified outside of XML itself
 - Operational semantics: programs, servlets, applets, scripts, stylesheets...
 - Definitional semantics: prose, namespaces, ontologies, UML diagrams...

Any one of these, or a combination of them, can serve to specify an XML language.

The industrial function of XML

XML is a framework for developing an unlimited number of special-purpose data languages.

XML allows people sharing a common data exchange problem to work out an **open solution** to that problem.

- Without interference from third parties
- Without dependence on large software vendors
- Without bindings to specific tools
- Without language restrictions
- In a way that lets anyone with a similar problem use the same solution

XML is about collaboration

XML provides a standard framework for making agreements about communication.

- Industry DTDs
- Industry schemas
- Industry namespaces

But it doesn't make those agreements by itself!

The XML trade-off

XML trades off

- Performance
- Centralized control
- Uniformity

in order to get

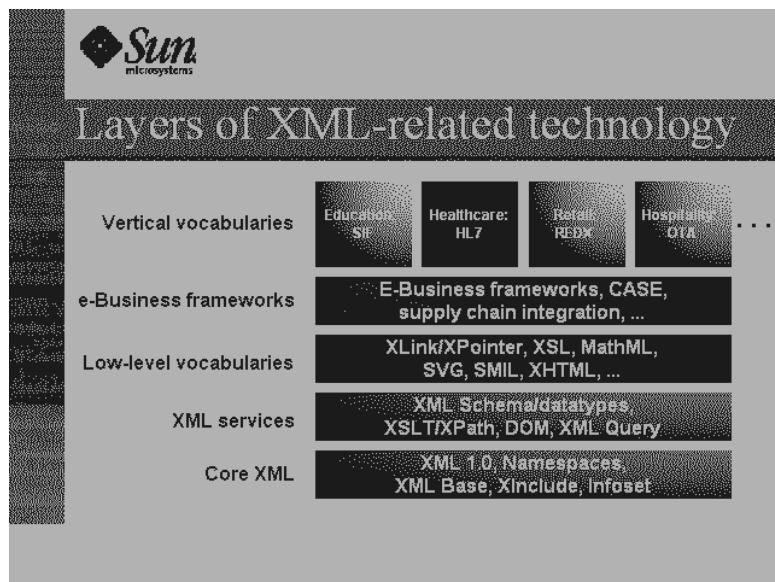
- Persistence
- Distributed control
- Asynchronicity
- A structure obvious to both humans and machines
- A certain kind of readability (like source code)
- Very low cost of entry (Word macros)
- Complete internationalization

XML is a data definition language for the third world. Surprisingly useful ad hoc applications can easily be programmed by intelligent non-experts using cheap tools.

Forums for Collaborative XML Development

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Overview: What needs to be standardized



The XML standards landscape

- Vertical industry consortia (hundreds of them, including RosettaNet)
- Horizontal industry consortia: W3C, OASIS, JCP, ...
- Open standards bodies
 - Ad hoc forums: xml-dev, etc.
 - Grass-roots organizations: IETF, **OASIS TCs**
 - National/regional bodies: ANSI, JIS, BSI, AFNOR, ..., CEN
 - International bodies: ITU, ISO, IEC, JTC1, **UN/CEFACT**
- Open source projects: apache, linux, gnome, ...

OASIS

The Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards is dedicated to the standardized, open exchange of structured data.

- Non-profit corporation founded in 1993 as SGML Open
- Open to everyone, even individuals (USD 250)
- Run by an elected board of directors
- Supported by XML vendors and their customers: Sun, IBM, Microsoft, HP, Adobe, Oracle, Software AG, SAP, Novell, Xerox, Boeing, Visa...
- Works on specific applications of XML (e.g., DocBook, Security)
- Provides a neutral venue for cross-industry XML standardization efforts
- <http://www.oasis-open.org/>

XML.org

XML.org (<http://xml.org/>) is a free XML registry maintained by OASIS.

- Universally accessible
- Vendor-neutral
- Based on international standards
- Built by Documentum and Sun with help from IBM, Oracle, and SAP
- Not an ebXML registry (too early)

The OASIS TC process

- open
- legally accountable
- democratic
- flexible
- scalable
- language-neutral

The goal is to put the definition of business standards in the hands of the people who will have to use them.

Key procedural features of the OASIS TC process

- Hard-core majority-rule process (RROR)
 - Covers every contingency
 - Resolves competing corporate interests
- Determinate committee membership rules
 - Prerequisite for voting and reconsideration
 - Copied from ANSI
- Innovative email features
 - TC can authorize the chair to poll the members and form motions

Life after Vienna

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The ebXML project teams

(The old names are used here deliberately.)

- Business Process
- Core Components
- Transport/Routing and Packaging
- Trading Partner Agreements
- Registry and Repository
- Requirements
- Technical Architecture
- Proof of Concept
- Quality Review
- Marketing, Awareness, and Education

An obvious allocation of work items

BP and CC to EWG/X12

TR&P, TPA, RR to OASIS TCs

Architecture, POC, QR, Marketing can be
OASIS/EWG/X12 JCs

Status

OASIS is working with CEFACCT leadership (CSG)
to consider the best way to proceed with the ebXML
items of work.

The missing item of work: XML syntax

- Specific XML syntaxes are not a work item of ebXML (decision of the Steering Committee in Brussels)
- ebXML and X12/EWG BP/CC are "syntax neutral"
- But we must have concrete standard XML syntax to enable wide use and cheap commercial software
- Given a concrete XML syntax for business, users will adopt it

Entrenched chaos

Users are rushing to adopt various existing XML business syntaxes.

- cXML
- xCBL
- RosettaNet PIPs
- OAG
- BizTalk
- various other ad hoc dialects

Once adopted, these existing vocabularies will be very hard to dislodge.

Right vs. real

- Betamax vs. VHS
- OSI vs. TCP/IP
- SGML vs. HTML
- BP/CC vs. early business dialects

Immediate availability and low cost of entry will always win over elegance and completeness.

Averting chaos

Here's my plan.

1. Put vendor expertise into a genuine standards process.
2. Lead users into adopting the designated standard.
3. Evolve the standard into the right thing.

An OASIS submission

- A group of vendors donates XML experts (Sun, SAP, Commerce One, Netfish, Ariba, webMethods, CSW, DataChannel, Contivo, Arbortext, Bowstreet, SoftQuad)
- Commerce One and SAP donate their Common Business Library core elements
- We align the core elements with the ebXML/X12/EWG CC definitions
- We build specific ebXML-compliant XML document structures in conjunction with EWG/X12
- We continue to incorporate ongoing CC development in EWG/X12
- We implement the ebXML context mechanism
- The standard continues to evolve in light of the frameworks developed in CEFAC

Two possible venues

1. Do the work in an OASIS TC
 - Fast process
 - Existing infrastructure
 - Vendors are comfortable contributing resources
 - Could share meeting schedule with the ebXML infrastructure TCs
2. Do the work in EWG
 - More international participation
 - Existing channel to ISO TC 154
 - Better representation of business expertise
 - Would need to meet more often than EWG

Prerequisites

1. OASIS TC

- Establish standards-track liaison with TC 154
- Establish working liaison with X12/EWG BP/CC
- Recruit interested X12/EWG members sympathetic to the goal

2. EWG working group

- Establish a "T" SWG ("XML Syntax") at EWG in Rotterdam 9/2001
- Adopt the OASIS TC process in the terms of reference
- Designate the OASIS experts as initial voting members of the SWG (to secure technical resources)
- Include interested X12/EWG members sympathetic to the goal

If you're interested

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