

## ECMA Approval of Microsoft's C# Will Not Affect Java

David Mitchell Smith

The European Computer Manufacturers Association (ECMA) has approved Microsoft's C# programming language, but this approval will not give C# Java's ability to operate on all computing platforms.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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### Event

On 13 December 2001, Microsoft announced that ECMA has approved as standards Microsoft's C# programming language and the Common Language Infrastructure (CLI) that it runs on.

### Analysis

Microsoft presents C# as providing .NET developers with many of the benefits of the Java programming language. However, Gartner expects Microsoft to target C# and its .NET Framework not only at Microsoft developers but also at Java in an attempt to dampen Java's growing critical mass among developers. Accordingly, the ECMA approval represents a victory of sorts for Microsoft. In 2000, Sun Microsystems pulled its own Java ECMA submission and opted instead for its community process. Thus, in a small way, Microsoft has shown that it has gone further to make C# a language that's "open" to all developers. For most people, though, Java remains open enough.

Microsoft made a related move in June 2001, when it established the Shared Development Process (SDP) to facilitate industry participation, cooperation and feedback on key development initiatives, starting with C# and CLI. SDP indicates that Microsoft realizes it won't be able to single-handedly drive the next generation of Web service models, best practices and standards. The success of any vendor offering Web services will depend, in large part, on its ability to create a critical mass of grass-roots support. However, Microsoft needs to do much more work to lay the technical foundations for a workable shared (i.e., community) development structure. Most importantly, serious cultural changes must take hold within Microsoft to support this effort fully. Microsoft has historically benefited from nearly complete control over its own technology vision.

ECMA's approval does little to give C# the key characteristic of Java — its ability to operate on all computing platforms. CLI is a subset of the .NET Framework including Common Language Runtime (CLR) and base classes, the part of the .NET platform that is ultimately responsible for managing the runtime environment for applications compiled to Microsoft intermediate language (MSIL). Without all of CLI, the potential for C# on other platforms remains largely academic.

ECMA has made C# a formal standard, but enterprises make few decisions on the basis of formal standards. The bigger issue is whether .NET itself will run on platforms other than Microsoft's, and Gartner sees little business incentive for Microsoft to want to promote all of .NET on alternate platforms. Even with efforts such as Ximian, without fully functional .NET, the potential of C# and CLI remains extremely limited. As a result, Gartner predicts little or no impact on Java.

**Analytical Source:** David Smith, Internet Strategies

### Need to Know: Reference Material and Recommended Reading

- "Microsoft's Shared Source Plan Will Need Commitment" (FT-13-9863) SDP will likely be either the dawn of a new era for Microsoft or an embarrassing misstep if the software giant retrenches to its former business practices. **By Mark Driver**
- "Microsoft Web Services: A PC-to-Internet Platform Shift" (C-14-9007) Microsoft draws a line between what is a minimal set of open technologies and the rest of the technology, which it keeps proprietary and leverageable. **By David Smith**

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