

XML Content Standard Could Challenge Microsoft

Rita E. Knox

The Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS) seeks to advance open XML-based file specifications for office applications. If OASIS succeeds, Microsoft will face greater competition.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 20 November 2002, the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS) announced that it has formed the new OASIS Open Office XML Format Technical Committee to advance open XML-based file format specifications for office applications. Committee members include Arbortext, Boeing, Corel, Drake Certivo and Sun Microsystems.

Analysis

Although the outcome of the OASIS initiative may be interesting and useful, it will be incomplete, because Microsoft is not a participant. Microsoft has a virtual monopoly in the office application market. The OASIS committee's aim is to establish standards for data interoperability among applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, charts and graphs, while retaining high-level information for editing. If it achieves this aim, content (regardless of form) will be created in any application, opened from within any other application and edited as needed. The eventual goal is to enable interchange among any type of application, including databases, search engines and Web services.

Vendors are backing the initiative because they have a vested interest in loosening Microsoft's stranglehold on the market — particularly in the face of Microsoft's XML-based Office 11, which is scheduled to be launched in mid-2003. Microsoft's absence also may be due to OASIS's intellectual property policy for participation (royalty-free, and reasonable and nondiscriminatory licensing), which may make Microsoft reluctant to participate when it is about to release its XML-aware product suite. The involvement of Boeing is significant because it provides user endorsement and strong user input to the committee's work.

Gartner will closely monitor progress on this standard's activity and flag any significant changes in direction. Microsoft would be threatened by its success, which would create greater competition by freeing enterprises from having to select a single vendor as their office application provider.

XML file interchange among multiple office applications will be available from one vendor by year-end 2003 (0.6 probability). Reliable (that is, lossless) XML file interchange for more than one office application will be available from at least two vendors by year-end 2005 (0.7 probability). By year-end 2008, XML file interchange will be based on semantic descriptions like Context Inspired Content Architecture or Extensible Business Reporting Language (0.6 probability).

Analytical Source: Rita Knox, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Can Language Help Build XML-Defined Standards?" — To illustrate the necessity of standards for XML-defined specifications, we describe how a "linguistic" model might be applied to standardizing the fields of a financial transaction. **By Rita Knox**
- "GAO Report on XML Adoption Challenges Breeds Confusion" — Although the General Accounting Office's report on XML is a clear sign of the standard's importance, the proposed strategy for developing and managing XML-based standards needs to be rethought. **By Rita Knox**

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