Power Players Propose Web Services Transaction Standards

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The specifications for standardizing Web services-based transactions to be submitted to OASIS by Microsoft, IBM and others will provide a mechanism for managing complex multistep transactions in a distributed system.

News Analysis

Event

On 16 September 2005, BEA Systems, Hitachi, IBM, Microsoft and others submitted a charter to the Organization of the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS) to establish a Web Services Transaction (WS-TX) Technical Committee to refine, and enable industry collaboration on, three transaction specifications: WS-Coordination, WS-AtomicTransaction and WS-BusinessActivity.

Analysis

Significantly, two key vendors in WS standards efforts — IBM and Microsoft — (along with other leading players) are helping to create an OASIS committee that will ratify Web services transaction standards. Transactions are one of the remaining key pieces in the Web services standards puzzle.

WS-TX will create a standards-based mechanism for managing the outcome of complex multistep operations in a distributed system. The standards will enable Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) and its extensions to act as an internetworking protocol for message-based and loosely coupled systems. This will allow organizations to extend the messaging paradigm throughout the enterprise and to business partners and customers. The transaction framework will also support existing transaction-processing workflows and enable other coordination systems to interoperate in heterogeneous environments while continuing to use proprietary protocols.

Transactions (along with reliability and security) are the foundation of most modern systems, and enterprises expect their infrastructure to provide these functions. The WS-TX standards will allow SOAP to fulfill its promise of becoming an application- and implementation-neutral mechanism for achieving consistent application outcomes across message interactions. The WS-TX standards will be a key enabler for SOAP, because they will encompass a discrete set of functionality demanded
by users. In turn, this will trigger higher adoption rates for SOAP and for implementations based on Web services standards.

**Recommendations**

- IT organizations and vendors should monitor the development of WS-TX standards, which Gartner expects won't be ratified until well into 2006.
- Start planning to use the WS-TX standards to address the challenges faced when building loosely coupled environments.
- Once the WS-TX standards enable SOAP and its extensions to act as an internetworking protocol for message-based systems, consider using the messaging paradigm in the development of distributed systems, especially those that are enterprisewide or span corporate boundaries.

**Analytical Sources:** Charles Abrams and Daniel Sholler, Gartner Research

**Recommended Reading and Related Research**

- "How to Strategically Select Web Services Specifications" — When selecting Web services standards and specifications, remember that vendor-backed specifications or de facto standards may ultimately win out over those ratified by standards committees. **By Charles Abrams, David Mitchell Smith and Whit Andrews**
- "Power Players Advance Web Services Security Standardization" — Expect the Web services security standards submitted by IBM, Microsoft and others to be ratified and included in products by end of 2006. **By Daniel Sholler, Charles Abrams and Ray Wagner**

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