New Standard Will Make Content Repositories Interoperable

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EMC, IBM and Microsoft have proposed a standard for making enterprise content management repositories interoperable. This standard may succeed where other standards have failed, but it will take time.

News Analysis

Event

On 10 September 2008, EMC, IBM and Microsoft announced that they have developed a Web services protocol, called Content Management Interoperability Services (CMIS). CMIS governs the exchange of content between enterprise content management (ECM) repositories. The vendors plan to register CMIS with the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS). Alfresco Software, Open Text, Oracle and SAP helped to test CMIS.

Analysis

This proposed standard addresses a key challenge: Over the years, organizations have deployed multiple ECM systems in different departments, and they have accumulated still more systems via mergers. Users can’t easily access the content in other systems’ repositories. Organizations now have enterprisewide strategies for content management, so the demand for interoperability between repositories has grown. Content management standards such as Open Document Management API (ODMA), Java Specification Request (JSR) 170, JSR 283 and Web Distributed Authoring and Versioning (WebDAV) have achieved limited adoption. Some of these standards have been too narrow while others have been too complex. Therefore, organizations must use customized adaptors or connectors to federate and consolidate ECM platforms.

CMIS is in the early stages of development, and OASIS will likely not ratify version 1.0 until year-end 2009. However, Gartner believes that the CMIS standard could succeed because:

- EMC, IBM and Microsoft have demonstrated a strong commitment and leadership. They have worked together on CMIS since October 2006.
- The contribution of Alfresco, Open Text, Oracle and SAP indicates that CMIS will receive wide support among ECM vendors.
CMIS takes a service-oriented architecture (SOA) approach and uses Web services standards, such as Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) and representational state transfer (REST), to provide options for interoperability.

ECM products will not incorporate CMIS until at least 2010. Until then, organizations will still need to use custom adaptors and connectors to make ECM systems interoperable. Even after OASIS ratifies CMIS, ECM platforms that are not SOA-enabled will not support the standard. Adoption of CMIS may be slow, and we believe the long time frame leaves a high probability of disruption.

**Recommendations**

**Organizations with multiple repositories and ECM systems:**

- Strongly consider the CMIS standard when it reaches the market. It will help to integrate disparate ECM systems.
- Review your ECM licensing agreements. Problems can occur if content in a system with a limited set of users is opened up to a broader group of users through this interface.

**Recommended Reading**

- "Key Issues for Enterprise Content Management Initiatives, 2008" — ECM can boost productivity, encourage collaboration and make information easier to share, but ECM projects can be complex and costly. **By Mark Gilbert, Regina Casonato and Karen Shegda**
- "Hype Cycle for Content Management, 2008" — This report captures the maturation of technologies that were just concepts a few years ago, and highlights technologies such as e-discovery and content analytics that are emerging. **By Rita Knox and Mick MacComascaigh**

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