

## Long-Awaited E-Business XML Specs May Spur Online Business

Wes Rishel

If made into standards adopted by the industry, newly issued e-business XML (ebXML) specifications will help enterprises to secure business transactions over the Internet as well as to discover services and metadata.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

---

### Event

On 14 May 2001, the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS) and CEFACT, the United Nations body for facilitating trade, announced that participants in the ebXML initiative approved a set of XML-based specifications designed to streamline online business. Completed after 18 months of work, the specifications offer a set of building blocks that standards development organizations (SDOs) can use to define business standards based on XML.

### Analysis

These ebXML deliverables include seven technical specifications and 18 other documents that address the following critical areas of Internet business transactions:

- **Business processes** — how an SDO will define a business process, including the identification of documents that comprise messages, trading partner roles and the sequence of message exchanges between trading partners.
- **Common business objects** — a catalog of about 150 objects (e.g., names, addresses and exchange rates) that can be common elements of actual transactions.
- **Collaboration protocol profiles** — a specification that a trading partner would use to define which business processes it supports, which roles it performs within the business process and the technical parameters necessary to establish secure communications.
- **Registry** — a searchable repository of trading partners and their collaboration protocol profiles. This specification describes how a trading partner finds another that offers a service of interest and how the two partners' collaboration protocol profiles are combined to form the basis of a collaboration protocol agreement.
- **Secure messaging service** — a specification that can finally give enterprises a single, standard way of exchanging business transaction messages over the Internet (to replace vendor- or industry-specific specifications now in use). It extends SOAP to address confidentiality, authentication, integrity, nonrepudiation and ability to include attachments (e.g., a digital image that describes a catalog entry).

Each of these deliverables now passes to OASIS or CEFACT to be further developed and adopted as standards. That process may last until 1H02, depending on the specification and organization. SDOs may then apply the ebXML-derived standards and methods to creating industry-specific business process specifications for supply chain management and other forms of commerce. Other industry-specific SDOs — e.g., Open Travel Alliance, Health Level 7 and RosettaNet — may also choose to adopt some of the ebXML specifications when creating such standards.

All of this work means that ebXML will have little immediate impact on enterprises looking to streamline the processes needed to establish trading partner relationships. Such enterprises must continue to rely on proprietary specifications or create new ones as needed through bilateral negotiations.

The ebXML secure messaging service, however, can have an immediate impact. It fills a gap created by the inability of the Internet Engineering Task Force to bring its Electronic Data Interchange-Internet Integration (i.e., EDIINT) specifications to fruition. Enterprises can implement

the secure messaging service quickly and with only minor dependence on other ebXML specifications. Its adoption will complete the electronic business infrastructure that Gartner calls the "digital dial tone." Enterprises should exert influence on vendors to implement this specification and establish it as an official OASIS standard.

**Analytical Source:** Wes Rishel, Healthcare Technologies

## REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

---

Corporate Headquarters  
56 Top Gallant Road  
Stamford, CT 06902-7700  
U.S.A.  
+1 203 964 0096

European Headquarters  
Tamesis  
The Glanty  
Egham  
Surrey, TW20 9AW  
UNITED KINGDOM  
+44 1784 431611

Asia/Pacific Headquarters  
Level 7, 40 Miller Street  
North Sydney  
New South Wales 2060  
AUSTRALIA  
+61 2 9459 4600

Latin America Headquarters  
Av. das Nações Unidas 12.551  
9 andar—WTC  
04578-903 São Paulo SP  
BRAZIL  
+55 11 3443 1509