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Applications Will Drive XML Acceptance

Once we have newly structured Web documents powered by XML tags, how will we share them and the data contained within them? The unfolding answer appears to be through metadata, as well as a host of industry-specific applications, followed by a surge of e-commerce and Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) efforts.

Resource Description Framework

Internet: http://www.w3.org/Metadata/RDF

XML's most important application will probably be the Resource Description Framework (RDF), which will let applications describe to each other not only the data in each document but also new data fields and classes. RDF defines relationships between XML data otherwise left undefined, such as whether the data's position in a document is important.

Netscape's Aurora, a future piece of the Communicator browser, reportedly will use RDF to store bookmarks, mail preferences, and local file and channel identification.

RDF consolidates several earlier, similar metadata syntax efforts, including Web Collections, developed by Microsoft and IBM; Meta Content Framework, developed by Netscape; and XML-Data, developed by Microsoft.

RDF benefits will include better search engines; being able to describe the content and content relationships available at a particular Web site, page, or digital library; facilitation of knowledge sharing and exchange; content rating for child protection and privacy protection; being able to describe collections of pages that represent a single logical document; and being able to specify intellectual property rights of Web pages.

Channel Definition Format

Internet: http://pushconcepts.com/microsoft.htm

Microsoft's proposed CDF is an XML application that allows Web publishers to control push technologies. It has been submitted to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Among other things, CDF can be used to specify channels, the information they provide, and their update schedules. The hope is that CDF will help make different push technologies interoperable by doing away with proprietary push technology: Using a CDF-compliant receiver, people could get content from different, previously incompatible kinds of sites (which also would have to comply with CDF, of course).

Open Financial Exchange

Internet: http://www.onestandard.com/developers_ofx_specification.html

OFX is a framework for exchanging financial data and instructions among financial institutions and their customers. It allows institutions to connect directly to their customers, without an intermediary. OFX integrates Microsoft's Open Financial Connectivity, Intuit's OpenExchange, and CheckFree's electronic banking and payment protocols.

OFX, which is based on SGML, predates XML and was at the time of this writing incompatible with XML, lacking end tags. Microsoft says OFX will soon be based on XML.

XML/EDI

Internet: http://www.geocities.com/WallStreet/Floor/5815

Electronic Data Interchange has for years struggled to take existing paper documents exchanged between companies and automate them. XML just might make EDI fly. XML/EDI is an effort to provide a standard format for XML documents to describe different types of data -- for example, loan applications, invoices, or health-care insurance claims, with gateways to existing X12 and EDIFACT systems.

Open Software Description Format

Internet: http://www.w3.org/TR/NOTE-OSD.html

Automatic software distribution, like EDI, has been around as a concept for years. OSD, jointly submitted to the W3C by Marimba and Microsoft, is a set of XML tags for describing software packages and their dependencies, and for dealing with software running on multiple platforms.

Chemical Markup Language

Internet: http://www.venus.co.uk/omf/cml/doc/tutorial/xml.html

Chemical Markup Language (CML) started out as a Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) application but was recently upgraded to XML. It describes molecular and crystal structures, analysis spectra, and other chemical objects.

Mathematical Markup Language

Internet: http://www.w3.org/TR/WD-math/

MathML is an XML application for describing mathematical expression structure and content. It would properly display mathematical characters and equations within browsers for the first time since the Web was invented.

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