They Used to Call It Publishing-Electronic Business XML

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3428

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In previous issues of Against the Grain, we have addressed XML in the Chaos column (see ATG v. 10/96 p. 75 ff.), touting its benefits and describing the many players attempting to use it for electronic data interchange (edi). The result, as we feared, was a wide variety of XML/EDI formats, no two of which looked or functioned exactly alike.

As reported, a sub-group of American National Standards Institute (ANSI)-Accredited Standards Committee X12 finalized a report on how one should approach the development of XML tags for the existing ANSI X12 standards, while groups as well known as Microsoft and as unknown as an individual in Germany developed their own tagging structure.

On November 17-19, 1999 a meeting was called which, I hope, will end the confusion and create a set of meaningful XML/EDI standards. The sponsors of that meeting are the United Nations subgroup that is responsible for the EDIFACT EDI format and OASIS (the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) with a mandate to undertake a 15-18 month program of work. Their “Agreement” states:

“The purpose of ebXML initiative is to research and identify the technical basis upon which the global implementation of XML (Extensible Markup Language) can be standardized. The goal is to provide an open technical framework to enable XML to be utilized in a consistent and uniform manner for the exchange of Electronic Business data in application to application, application to person and person to application environments.

The scope of ebXML initiative is to develop and publish, in the public domain, relevant and open technical specifications in support of domestic and international EB exchanges.”

Delegates from over 120 standards organizations and companies from 17 countries participated in the meeting, which took place at the San Jose, CA offices of Sun. As a result of two days of intensive interaction, 8 working groups were formed with the goal of bringing this all together into an integrated global XML solution for the exchange of all electronic business data.

I am one of those who hope that the results of this effort will be the standards that we’ve all been waiting for. To keep up with their progress, take a look at www.ebxml.org or www.ebxml.com!

Group Therapy
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The current year of receipt, but we do need to reconcile payments, including supplemental payments, within the fiscal year ledger. The local online system ledger is separate from the University’s ledger from which the actual payments are expended. We have been paying one-line renewal invoices to our major vendors for several years.

If your institution cannot change from this auditor’s suggestion of paying for subscriptions in the same year you receive them, perhaps your vendor could help by billing you for all supplemental charges before the end of your fiscal year. In addition, include an inflation amount with your annual payment to the vendor. These two procedures may bring the annual payment closer to what the two halves of the fiscal year will equal. This may result in a credit for you with the vendor. We have ended with credits in some years. The credits were easily applied to cover supplemental charges, or applied to the next year’s invoice.

It would seem very difficult to be exact in your accounting without being in control of supplemental charges, inflation, cancellations, and new titles added. Short of the vendor allowing you to pay in July for the previous January to June and the current July to December periods, it may be worth pointing out to the University’s Finance Officer the imperfections of the auditor’s recommendation. The lack of control over extra costs, and the impossibility of balancing the local books leaves me feeling much more insecure than paying for a calendar year’s subscription from the fiscal year ledger that started six months earlier. This recommendation shows no real appreciation of the business of library acquisitions.