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They Used to Call It Publishing-Electronic Business XML

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They Used to Call It Publishing — Electronic Business XML

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In previous issues of Against the Grain, we have addressed XML in the Chaos column (see ATG v. 10#6 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 sub-group 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 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!

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