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They Used to Call It Publishing — Electronic Business XML

by **Sandra K. Paul** (President, SKP Associates, Managing Agent Book Industry Study Group, Inc.) <Sandy@SKPAssociates.com>

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 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 from page 64

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