



Active Blog Open Source

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XML Open Document Standard VS Microsoft

In today's world we use *.xls files for spreadsheets, *.doc files for word processing, mdb for database, and *.ppt for powerpoint. Then there is *.htm for internet files, shtml if the internet file is fancy, jpg gif tif and bmp for pictures, each requiring a different program to open edit and save. And it has to be the right program or it simply won't work. And still, none of these will open your accounting package.

What the world needs now, instead of world peace, is a way to create open, view, and save any file with any program, and that is where XML, the open document standard comes in.

The Open Document Standard or XML (Extensible Markup Language) is a flexible way to create common information formats and share both data and the format on a network, the Web, and elsewhere. For example, lets say you want to compare computers before making a purchase decision. If the computer makers agreed on a standard or common way to describe their computers (processor speed, memory size, and so forth) and then describe the product information format with XML, then such a standard way of describing data would enable a consumer to use a program to read each computer maker's Web site, gather data, and then make a valid comparison. XML can be used by anyone that wants to share information in a consistent manner. This same principle could be applied to any form of data and allow retrievals, reporting, and data manipulation in very creative ways. In addition, proprietary data type support would no longer be a criteria for purchasing specific software like Word, Excel, or PowerPoint. Since the data files are now a common entity, program selection would be determined solely by price and functionality.

As such, the tea leaves are looking not so good for Microsoft's who has solely controlled the desktop formats for word processing, spreadsheets, and database for the last decade and a half. In fact, if they don't hurry, Microsoft could conceivably find their Office suite slowly moving into the dumpster next to WordStar, VisiCalc, Lotus 1-2-3, and dBase. Mind-boggling as it may seem, it has occurred many times before -- who would have thought that any of those predecessors would stumble? I don't think that'll happen in this case, at least not so quickly, but it's certainly a risk unless Microsoft changes direction. Office is 40% of their revenue, and one of the primary reasons people use their operating system (which accounts for most of the rest of their non-investment income).

Case and point: According to David Wheeler, "As noted in [ZDNet](#), the State of Massachusetts is backing the *OpenDocument* standard as the standard format for office applications, text documents, spreadsheets, charts and graphical documents like drawings and presentations. All Massachusetts agencies are expected to migrate by January 1, 2007. ...

This is big news. Currently most people exchange office documents using Microsoft's binary formats (known as .doc, .ppt, and .xls), but now that the XML technologies are available and more mature, many are switching to an XML-based approach. There is general acceptance in the information technology community that for office documents, XML or Open Document Standard format will eventually replace the obsolete binary formats".

I wouldn't suggest tossing your Microsoft Office, but I would suggest keeping an eye on XML development and products like OpenOffice.org, a Open Source alternative with full XML support.

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Report From: ISO rejects Microsoft OOXML but the battle is far from over
by Ephraim Schwartz InfoWorld 9/4/07

"While Microsoft lost round one in its campaign to gain ISO approval of its OOXML [Office Open XML]file format, it is best to remember this is still early in the game, especially when it comes to battles over standards.

What the ISO membership really did when it rejected fast track status for OOXML as a standard was say to Microsoft wait in line like everybody else. We don't care if you are a celebrity this will go through normal, not expedited, channels.

Now, Microsoft will have to respond to the objections or comments from the members on the OOXML specifications.

Despite the fact that some of the objections to OOXML sound serious-- the Brazilian contingent alone raised 60 objections-- for Microsoft that may be in the famous words of Ralph Kramden, "a mere bag of shells." [For you youngsters out there that means it is trivial.]"

"The real question is what will this delay mean to Microsoft and OOXML?"

My personal feeling is Microsoft has time. ODF [Open Document Format], its open source rival, is still in its nascent stage. Given even a year's head start over OOXML, ODF will have an uphill struggle, to understate the size of the battle, before it is ever able to seriously challenge the huge Microsoft Office installed base."