

UBL Group Liaison Committee Report

UBL Group Meeting
Menlo Park, 29 October 2001

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Chair, UBL Group & Liaison Committee

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Who We Are

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The UBL Group

- 2/2001: Started as a proposed OASIS CBL TC
- 3/2001: Held up by OASIS due to concern for OASIS/CEFACT MoU issues
- 4/2001: Met in Palo Alto to discuss what to do; decided to try for creation of an XML Syntax SWG of EWG with fallback to OASIS if that failed
- 6/2001: Attempt to create EWG SWG failed
- 8/2001: Met in Montreal, formed subcommittees, decided to go for OASIS
- 9/2001: Some of us went to the EWG meeting in Rotterdam
- 10/2001: This meeting

Why We're Here

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The immediate problem

Users are rushing to adopt various existing XML business syntaxes.

- cXML
- xCBL
- RosettaNet
- OAGIS
- various other dialects

The existence of multiple business languages is a serious interoperability problem. But once adopted, these existing vocabularies will be very hard to dislodge.

A plan for averting chaos

1. Put one of the *existing* XML b2b libraries into a genuine standards process.
2. Populate the process with XML and business domain experts.
3. Persuade other groups working to standardize XML business grammars to join the common effort.
4. Modify the default library as necessary to achieve consensus.
5. Lead users into adopting the standard "Universal Business Language" (UBL)
6. Evolve the standard UBL as we gain experience.

Requirements for a Universal Business Language (UBL)

- Optimized for Internet b2b
- International in scope
- Applicable across any sector or domain of electronic trade, transport, and administration (purchasing, payments, logistics, transportation, statistical reporting, social administration, healthcare, etc.)
- Interoperable with existing EDI systems
- Based on a core library
- Unencumbered by intellectual property claims
- Already proven to work in actual electronic marketplaces
 - Proven implementability
 - Easy testability

Additional requirements for success

I believe that to succeed, UBL must offer a way into electronic commerce for small businesses operating in traditional commercial and legal environments.

Implications:

- Instances must be human-readable
- Documents must plug in to existing business relationships

Why we're starting with xCBL 3.0

1. xCBL 3.0 represents four years of work that we don't want to start over from scratch.
2. xCBL's IP is unencumbered. *This is really important.*
3. xCBL 3.0 reflects experience gained in EDI, RosettaNet, OBI, and ebXML.
4. Microsoft and SAP are basing systems on xCBL.
5. Many vendors already have xCBL code for use in adapters.
6. The owners of xCBL are willing to put it into a real standards process for the benefit of the industry and to work within that process to advance the industry standard.

In the software business, this is as good as it gets.

Basic concept

The basic idea is to review xCBL line by line in harmony with semantic definition work taking place in the United Nations and to make whatever modifications are necessary in light of experience with other syntaxes:

- X12 and EDIFACT
- RosettaNet
- OAGIS
- cXML
- Bolero
- et cetera

The details of this process need to be defined in committee.

Getting to UBL

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Constructing a business language

To achieve the next level of e-commerce implementation, we need to standardize a common business language. Examples of what needs to be standardized:

- Date
- Weight
- Price
- Address
- Telephone number
- Party
- Purchase order
- Shipping notice
- Invoice

Document components

- Atomic components
 - Date
 - Weight
 - Price
- Aggregate components
 - Address
 - Telephone number
- Core blocks
 - Party
- Documents
 - Purchase order
 - Shipping notice
 - Invoice

Context drivers

"Standard" data components change structure when put into different contexts.

- Business process
- Industry
- Product type
- Geographical region
- Regulatory environment
- Role (vendor, customer, etc.)

Context example: address

Even such a simple data item as an address will change depending on the context.

- Addresses in Japan are different from addresses in the United States
- Addresses in the auto industry are different from addresses in other industries

UBL Group Liaison Committee

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Committee meetings

- Chair: Jon Bosak
- Desultory attendance by unofficial representatives of:
 - Joint Core Components (X12 and EWG)
 - RosettaNet
 - OAGI
 - EIDX
 - XBRL
 - SDMX
- Preliminary talks with:
 - X12

Basic plan (in progress)

Big problem: travel. An organization to deal with this:

- Technical Committee (TC): meets by mail until the travel situation improves; maintains SC membership
- Subcommittee (SC): meets by phone. Examples: Core Library SC, Purchasing SC, Payment SC; Tools & Techniques SC, Schema Rules SC; Publicity SC, Scheduling & Liaison SC
- Input committee (IC): appointed by SC to meet in person with corresponding committees of "host organizations" (X12, EWG, RN, OAGI, etc.)

I will be working on this further during the week (administrative track).

Questions needing an answer this week

- Do we agree with the suggested organization?
- Which potential hosts should we approach?
- Am I authorized to submit formal proposals to those hosts?

Upcoming future contacts (representing OASIS TC)

- 8-9 November: MoU Management Group (Ft. Lauderdale)
- 12-13 November: EIDX/CompTIA/RNUG (Scottsdale)
- 6-7 December: OASIS/OMG/etc. interop meeting (Orlando)