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SEPTEMBER NEWS CLUSTER:

A MONTH IN THE LIFE OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB CONSORTIUM

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Most people would agree that the World Wide Web Consortium (or the W3C, as it is universally referred to) is the organization by which all other consortia are measured. Despite earning such respect, it is not likely that anyone will ever precisely emulate it, due to its novel structure, varied work product and diverse interests. For example, while it has chosen not to pursue formal accreditation as an SDO (it refers to itself as an "international industry consortium"), it has all of the positive process attributes that people commonly associate with such a body. And while it is funded through significant corporate dues, it is hosted by three non-profits (the MIT Laboratory for Computer Science in the US, the European Research Consortium for Informatics and Mathematics, headquartered in France, and Keio University in Japan).

What does it create? Go to its site, and you will find specifications, guidelines, software and tools. Who does it serve? While it has 450 member organizations that pay the bills, it also welcomes public participation and views itself as a custodian of a critical global resource. And finally: what is its mission? "W3C supports universal access, the semantic Web, trust, interoperability, evolvability, decentralization, and cooler multimedia."

Got all that? All in all, a different sort of standard setting entity. Herewith, a brief profile of some of its more important attributes:

- **Globally Representative:** Unlike national standards bodies and many consortia that purport to be international (but in fact draw most of their membership from a single country -- often the United States), it is not only hosted in three countries, but also conducts many of its meetings in diverse locations around the world.
- **Stable:** Unlike most consortia, it has a significant budget, dedicated staff, and a nine-year history.
- **Capable:** The W3C has a team of over 60 researchers and engineers working around the world on W3C projects, exclusive of the myriad employees of member companies that are similarly engaged on a full or part-time basis.
- **Productive:** Since its formation, the W3C has advanced over 40 standards to "Recommended" status; many more are in process in more than 30 active Working Groups.
- **Respected:** It is acknowledged to have a process that is highly effective in creating non-proprietary, quality standards. It also maintains liaison relationships with 33 different international consortia and SDOs, in order to maximize the efficiency and utility of standards of diverse kinds.
- **Principled:** As demonstrated by its three-year, marathon effort to wrestle a patent policy to the ground that would permit the Web to remain royalty free, it has remained dedicated to fulfill the mission that it was created to achieve.
- **Vision:** More like an open-source project in this respect than either an SDO or a consortium, it has a leader who is acknowledged to be the father of its domain area, and who continues to envision new dimensions for that domain.
- **Socially Conscious:** Unlike most consortia, it includes aspects of social responsibility in many facets of its operations, seeking to make the World Wide Web truly World Wide in its utility and accessibility.

- **Egalitarian:** Like an SDO, a consortium and an open-source project all rolled into one, it accepts the views of anyone – individuals as well as companies, open-source zealots as well as corporate strategists.

All of which is not to say that the W3C has not had periods in the past where some found it to be less effective than it is today, or that everyone shares Tim Berners-Lee's current vision of a semantic web. Or that its rather dry website may not surprise first-time visitors (it more closely resembles the "engineers only" web presence of its more low-profile cousin, the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) than the virtual front door of most standards body sites). And finally, it is hardly immune from the commercial machinations of its own members, who (rightly) recognize the enormous commercial value that will arise from standards-based commercial opportunities, such as the advent of Web-based services.

Be all of that as it may, it is always both interesting and necessary to pay close attention to what the W3C is up to. Sometimes it is easy to miss the important news that emanates from the organization, simply because there is so much activity that proceeds in so open and step-wise a fashion. W3C has a multi-stage technical development process, which includes public comment periods and releases of pre-commercial specifications for testing in the field. Even at the end of this process, rather than sounding the trumpets and announcing a "standard," the W3C issues a "Recommendation."

All of this process is announced by means of releases and web pages (with abstracts), the language of which smacks more of a technical journal than classic public relations jargon. As a result of the large number of initiatives that are under way at any one time is a continuous stream of updates as numerous work projects progress through the various stages of the W3C process, morphing their way from ideas to final, implementable work product.

Because of this steady stream of status checks, we have decided in this issue to present a sampling of just some of the announcements issued by the W3C in the last 30 days, in order to give some insight into this unique organization – a month in the life of the World Wide Web Consortium.

During the 30 days ending September 12, 2003 (in other words, while most people were finishing up their vacations, celebrating the last holiday weekend of the summer, and getting their children back to school), the W3C made 14 announcements, covering a wide variety of topics. Nine of those announcements reported on the advancement or release of 20 different technical process drafts, while one related to the release of completed work product (Amaya 8.1, a Web browser and authoring tool available in binary and source code form). Others reported on upcoming appearances by W3C staff at conferences and meetings, invited participation in a survey to determine the future course of a discontinued project (Libwww, a free, highly modular client side Web API written in C for Unix and Windows) and calling a meeting to discuss the fall-out from a crucial patent case impacting the Web.

All in a month's work at the W3C. Here, in greater detail, are some of the more interesting announcements issued by this most interesting of standards organization.

Ontology and OWL: Tim Berners-Lee's vision of the "Semantic Web" is not the easiest construct for a layperson to understand. And even among those that do comprehend the concept are those that find it to be an unfortunate diversion for the W3C. Like so many visions that are scoffed at, however, this one is beginning to coalesce and become real (or virtually real, anyway). The following article focuses on the advancement of "OWL," an ontology language and a crucial component of the Semantic Web, to "Candidate Recommendation" status by the W3C. CR status, the near-final stage in the multi-step process that permits a W3C specification to morph from concept to final "Recommended" status, means that the specification is regarded as being "essentially stable" and ready for implementation. The following article describes this latest development.

The Semantic Web is Closer Than You Think **By Kendall Grant Clark**

XML.com - August 20, 2003 -- Last year I wrote an article for XML.com, "[If Ontology, Then Knowledge: Catching Up With WebOnt](#)," in which I introduced the W3C's web ontology language effort to the XML

developer community. As a result of a long journey filled with hard work, the W3C's web ontology language, now called OWL, was advanced to W3C Candidate Recommendation on 19 August. While there is a lot of talk these days about the Semantic Web being the crack-addled pipe dream of a few academic naifs, in reality it's a lot closer to realization than you might be thinking. Now I want to be clear about this point: I'm not suggesting that we stand on the brink of a fully achieved, widespread Semantic Web. I am suggesting that some of the major pieces of the puzzle are now or will soon be in place. OWL, along with RDF, upon which it builds, are two such very major pieces of the Semantic Web puzzle.....[Full Story](#)

For full W3C information on OWL, see: <http://www.w3.org/TR/owl-features/>

For an overview and an array of supporting bibliographic and other helpful links, see: <http://xml.coverpages.org/ni2003-08-19-a.html>



Why the W3C is Different: *While many US-based consortia purport to be global, few have made the degree of commitment to act accordingly that the W3C has demonstrated. Similarly, its technical agenda is expressly committed to maintaining equal access to the Web for all throughout the globe. As such, the W3C represents an interesting evolutionary hybrid: a consortium that acts like an accredited standards development organization when it comes to achieving consensus -- but which also sets its own course rather than seeking accreditation. The following announcement by the W3C illustrates how its socially conscious agenda affects its technical program.*

Character Model for the World Wide Web 1.0 W3C Internationalization Working Group (I18N WG), Working Draft

W3C, August 20, 2003 --The goal of this document is to facilitate use of the Web by all people, regardless of their language, script, writing system, and cultural conventions, in accordance with the W3C goal of universal access. One basic prerequisite to achieve this goal is to be able to transmit and process the characters used around the world in a well-defined and well-understood way. Topics addressed include character encoding identification, early uniform normalization, string identity matching, string indexing, and URI conventions. Some introductory material on characters and character encoding is also provided.....[Full Story](#)

For an extensive library of linked documents on Markup and Multilingualism, see: <http://xml.coverpages.org/multilingual.html>



What did you say? *Although specifications get implemented in bits and bytes, those who set them still need to interact verbally. As a result, there is the potential for standards groups working in the same technical neighborhood to talk past each other, resulting in confusion at this most traditional of all levels of communication. To address this situation, the W3C has gone to the top of the standards stack to release a glossary of words relevant to the work of its Device Independence Working Group.*

Glossary of Terms for Device Independence

W3C, August 25, 2003 -- This first public working draft provides a glossary of terms used in other documents produced by the W3C Device Independence Working Group (DIWG). The World Wide Web is the universe of network-accessible information. The Web is becoming accessible from a wide range of devices including cellular phones, TV, digital cameras, and in-car computers. Dedicated to ensuring that the Web universe is not fragmented, the W3C Device Independence Activity is working to ensure seamless Web access with all kinds of devices, and worldwide standards for the benefit of Web users and content providers alike.....[Full Story](#)



Now what? One role of consortia that is often not appreciated is their ability to provide a forum for the discussion of how to deal with patent assertions that threaten the ability to implement standards. Recently, Microsoft suffered an expensive defeat in a patent suit brought against it by a company called Eolus (see "A Disturbance in the Force" under The Rest of the News/Intellectual Property, later in this issue). In the face of that most feared of all bugaboos – a patent that could entitle its owner to level a tax on the Web -- the W3C released a report, issued an invitation to its members and others to discuss the situation, and set up an archived mailing list to permit the dialogue to continue.

W3C Holds Ad Hoc Meeting on Recent Court Decision, Launches Public Discussion List

W3C, August 28, 2003: W3C invited its Members as well as other key commercial and open source software interests to attend an ad hoc meeting hosted by Macromedia on Tuesday 19 August in San Francisco, CA, USA. Participants discussed Eolas v. Microsoft and US Patent 5,838,906. W3C has created the public-web-plugins@w3.org archived public mailing list for discussion. Please [refer](#) to the report from Steven R Bratt, W3C Chief Operating Officer.



Somebody's got to think about this: While the typical electronic device consumer may not realize it when she turns off her PC, leaves her desk and switches on her PDA to access the same webpage, authoring the content at that page such that it displays properly represents a technical challenge. Even less obviously, accessing the same page via a LAN instead of a cable modem presents additional technical issues. With connectivity expectations and options becoming ever more diverse, the W3C has turned its attention to making web content authoring independent of the device that accesses that content.

Device Independence Working Group Notes Published

W3C, September 1, 2003 -- The Device Independence Working Group completed work on two Working Drafts and has published them as W3C Working Group Notes. "Device Independence Principles" describes Web access "anytime and anyhow" from user, authoring and delivery perspectives. "Authoring Challenges for Device Independence" are considerations and implications for building universally accessible Web content and applications. Visit the [W3C Device Independence](#) home page.

For extensive background, references and annotation, see: <http://xml.coverpages.org/ni2003-09-02-a.html>



Quick: How many years ago was the Web invented? Although it may be hard to believe, note bene the numerical designation of the next International World Wide Web Conference, to be held in New York City, and co-sponsored by the W3C. WWW2004 is hoping to attract original research papers on topics such as Search, Security and Privacy, Mobility and Wireless Access, Data Mining, and TB-L's own favorite topic, the Semantic Web.

WWW2004: The Thirteenth International World Wide Web Conference

The CoverPages, September 5, 2003 -- A Call for Participation has been issued in connection with The Thirteenth International World Wide Web Conference (WWW2004), to be held May 17-22, 2004 in New York. The technical program will include refereed paper presentations, alternate track presentations, plenary sessions, panels, and poster sessions. The main three-day conference is preceded by two days of special topical tracks, tutorials, and workshops; a Developers Day follows.....[Full Story](#)