EDITOR'S NOTE

SUPPORT THE SEMANTIC WEB

Since the advent of this journal we have made it our goal to provide useful information to our readers. At times, we have also tried to bring what we believe to be important points of view regarding standards to the attention of readers, hoping to legitimate topics of discussion, or to shed light on events, issues or trends that we believed were under-reported in the media (or had not been reported at all).

With this issue, we are addressing a topic which we believe to be important not just to those who are involved in standards, but quite simply to everyone in the world: the future of the Web.

The Internet and the Web are already the basis upon which almost everything directly or indirectly is accessed and managed. Their importance to human existence, Third World advancement, and almost every facet of life can be expected not to level off in the future, but to expand exponentially.

Today, we have an opportunity to take the Web portion of this invaluable resource a significant step forward by implementing the Semantic Web standards that have been in the making for some years within the W3C. If these standards are widely used to encode, locate and utilize data, then the Web will become a richer and more fruitful resource upon which the world may rely. If we do not, then other, less structured efforts directed towards enhancing our use of the Web will certainly proceed, but a major opportunity will have been lost.

This issue therefore has a cause: to support the efforts of Tim Berners-Lee and the W3C to promote the implementation of the Semantic Web. In doing so, we have not tried to ignore the practical or architectural concerns that have been raised by some regarding the design of the Semantic Web or the prospects for its broad adoption. In fact, we interviewed a variety of knowledgeable sources (CEOs of some of the best-known consortia, corporate standards directors, consortia technical directors, and those involved in product development), and without exception all expressed at least some reservations regarding how successful the Semantic Web will be. But significantly, the most common concern was not whether the Semantic Web could "work," but whether the effort to make it exist would be undertaken, absent a clearer value proposition for those that would need to provide the time, effort and cash to bring it into being.

Having the Semantic Web, then, is a bit like not having global warming: few may get rich, many will pay, but ultimately all will benefit. It is in this spirit that we support the Semantic Web, and the reason why we urge you to do so as well.

Further to that goal, in our Editorial we review the concerns that have been expressed regarding the build-out of the Semantic Web and the creation of the tools needed to make use of it, and conclude that the Semantic Web will happen – not (initially) from the top down, but from the bottom up, as a critical mass of work is done through the type of spirited innovation, experimentation and conviction that has typified the work of the open source community.

In our Feature Story, we are honored to present a comprehensive, unedited, exclusive interview with Tim Berners-Lee, the creator of the Web and the visionary behind the Semantic Web as well. In this interview, Tim explains why he believes the Semantic Web must happen – and why he thinks it will.

In our Trends Story, we describe how the forward progress of human knowledge has accelerated dramatically each time that advancements have been made in our ability to *learn, share, archive and integrate* the *information, discoveries and ideas* of individuals. We then demonstrate how the continuing development of the Web will result in a new explosive phase of growth in human knowledge and potential. In so doing, we underline the stakes that ride on supporting the deployment of semantic technology in order to make the Web as valuable and useful in our own lifetimes as we are capable of making it.

In the months ahead, we will add new features to ConsortiumInfo.org to help you follow the further development and advancement of the Semantic Web.

Finally, to close on a lighter note, this month's Blog entry reports on the role of government in providing standards-based reference materials to society – and on some of the surprising materials you can buy.

As always, we hope you enjoy this issue.

Best regards,

Andrew Updegrove
Editor and Publisher