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GesmerUpdegrove<sup>LLP</sup>

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE:

### On the Road to Geneva

Two and a half years ago, some of us learned a new three letter combination: "ODF." Today, tens of millions of people are familiar with that acronym, as well as another: "OOXML." The former is short hand for the OpenDocument Format, an OASIS developed and ISO/IEC JTC1 unanimously adopted standard that enables documents created in one compliant software package to be easily exchanged with another. A variety of proprietary and open source products, both traditional and Web-based, support ODF

OOXML stands for "Office Open XML," a specification that describes the XML-based structure of Microsoft's Office 2007 suite. OOXML was adopted by Ecma last year and then also offered up to ISO/IEC JTC1, where it has had a stormy ride. Last year, OOXML failed to garner the necessary votes to gain approval at the end of a "Fast Track" review period, accumulating 3,522 comments along the way. OOXML is implemented in Office 2007, and to a greater or lesser degree is being incorporated into other products, primarily for the purpose of interoperating with Office.

On February 25, dispositions proposed by Ecma to those comments will be reviewed by National Body representatives in Geneva, Switzerland, and on March 29, the final fate of OOXML in JTC1 will be determined, although not the outcome of the commercial battle that will continue to rage in the marketplace between Microsoft, on the one hand, and industry giants such as IBM, Sun, and Google, on the other. The continuing adoption of ODF has also become a *cause célèbre* among proponents of open standards, open source software, and (how to say delicately?) those that do not have great affection for Microsoft.

I first wrote in detail about ODF in September of 2005 when I dedicated an issue of this eJournal to that topic, calling it [Massachusetts and OpenDocument: the Commonwealth Shows the Way](#). As the title indicates, I believe that "open document formats" are vitally important, and in the months thereafter, I have dedicated more than [100 blog entries](#) to reporting on this story as it continued to evolve.

Why do open documents matter? Quite simply, because our continuing ability to access the documents will determine whether the future will have access to the past – a real concern as we become more beguiled by the advantages that new technologies offer, without paying adequate attention to what we sacrifice when we

transition away from the less nimble and compressible, but far more stable and durable storage media of the past. For an illustration of this tradeoff, you may wish to read the *Consider This* piece from that past issue. It's titled [Clay Tablets, iPods, and Evo/Devolution](#), and makes for a light, but still sobering read.

Which brings us to this new issue on open document formats. In it, I attempt to present the ODF – OOXML saga in a variety of perspectives, beginning with the **Editorial**, which notes that the traditional standards adoption process has been overwhelmed by the effort to "Fast Track" a 6,000 page specification, which garnered 3,522 comments and a 2,300 page comment disposition document, and a storm of contentious lobbying and debate as well. My editorial calls for an overhaul of that process, if it is to remain relevant and useful to the IT industry. It also calls for greater transparency in a process that affects us all.

My **Feature Article** seeks to dive beneath the ODF-OOXML conflict in order to explore the wider technical, competitive and political context in which this standards war is being waged. In doing so, I suggest that while bitter, this competition is but a skirmish in a more systemic reordering of the influence and market position of the Great Powers of information technology.

As you may have guessed from the above, the shooting war between the advocates of ODF and OOXML makes for quite a story. Not only is the story line itself intriguing, but the ongoing events illustrate how new technologies and the great companies that rely upon them rise, fall, compete and evolve, profoundly affecting our lives along the way. Many journalists agree, and coverage continues to widen around the world.

Needless to say, it has captured my interest as well. In the course of reporting this saga, I have interviewed many of those most closely involved, as well as read thousands of articles and many primary resources. The result is a new writing project that I launched at the end of November – an eBook in process, with the working title of *ODF vs. OOXML: War of the Words*. I've posted five chapters at my blog to date, and will continue to add new ones every week or two. The first chapter is included as this issue's excerpt from **The Standards Blog**.

The **Consider This** essay for this issue explores a different theme, which is the mysterious ways in which the most successful Web projects draw people from all over the world. Google has launched yet another one of its on line project trials in (thus far private) Beta form, offering knowledge experts the opportunity to experiment with different models of on-line collaboration. It will be interesting to see what may evolve from this intriguing beginning.

Finally, I'm pleased to share the latest site redesign launch at ConsortiumInfo.org. Yesterday, we pushed the new pages live at the **Standards MetaLibrary**, bringing the same clean new look and feel of Standards Today to this unique Web-based research resource. If you've never visited the MetaLibrary before, take a moment now to become familiar with it. And if you know of worthwhile work that is not

already included in the over 1,000 articles available through the MetaLibrary, please let me know.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Andrew Updegrove  
Editor and Publisher  
2005 ANSI President's  
Award for Journalism

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