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## EDITOR'S NOTE:

### A Standard for a Digital Age

*Zettabyte: noun; (a) 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 bytes = 1000<sup>7</sup>, or 10<sup>21</sup>; (b) the amount of new data made available on the Web each year.*

It is now some decades since the phrase "Information Age" entered our language. What led to the coining of the phrase was the transition of the United States from a manufacturing-based, blue collar, industrial economy to one driven by services and office jobs – and hence the production of information rather than tangible goods. Computers played an important part in that transformation, but in the days of mainframes, that role was in the background.

With the arrival of the Internet and the Web, the phrase "Digital Age" replaced the Information Age in common parlance. That semantic distinction recognized, among other revolutionary transitions, that access to electronic information could become universal. And indeed, with mobile computing devices now replacing cell phones as affordable mass-market products, digitized information is becoming accessible to almost everyone, even in the Third World. This new ability to exchange information everywhere has the capacity to truly transform lives around the globe.



Accomplishing that enormously beneficial goal takes more than an Internet connection, though. Just as was the case with the Internet and the Web, it takes standards to permit the universal creation, storage, searching, and sharing of the richer and often more complex information to be found in lengthy documents, rather than simple Web pages. One standard in particular stands head and shoulders above all others in this respect, and that's what this issue is about.

That standard is the Extensible Markup Language, or XML. Just a decade after its creation, XML is the foundation upon which an ever-expanding family of markup languages and related schema (hundreds of them) has been built. Without XML, digitized text would still be almost as unmanageable as it was when found only in tangible media, warehoused in libraries and records rooms.

In this month's Editorial, I expand on the significance of XML, while noting that the task of realizing the promises of the Digital Age will not end with its development. My **Feature Article**, as usual, takes a deeper dive, examining the origins of XML,

explaining how it operates, and surveying the many language and schema progeny that it has spawned. I follow with an **Interview** with Tim Bray, one of the co-editors of XML and someone who has helped to realize its promise in the years that followed. Tim gives his own first-hand take on how XML came about, and why it matters.

In my **Standards Blog** entry, I bring us back into the rough and tumble of the real world of commerce and standards (in this case, for eBook readers). The eBook example demonstrates that while you can lead an industry to XML, only market pressures can ultimately force a dominant player to implement it. Happily, I think that it will only be a matter of time before the implementation of open, XML-based standards becomes ubiquitous in this niche as well.

I close this issue with some ruminations on a different kind of format – the wonderful, multi-faceted, ever-evolving musical genre that is Jazz. In this month's **Consider This** essay, I riff on the easily traceable evolutionary thread that runs from jazz musicians to computer engineers, and from jazz standards to open source software. Not so? Read it and decide for yourself.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue. But either way, it's always great to hear what you think. Let me know, why don't you?

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

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