



OASIS DITA Technical Committee Forms to Advance XML Standard for Authoring Reusable Content in Documents

BOSTON, MA, USA; 12 APRIL 2004 -- International standards consortium, OASIS, announced plans to advance the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA), a document creation and management specification that builds content reuse into the authoring process. The XML architecture defined by the new OASIS DITA Technical Committee will be used to design, write, manage, and publish technical documentation in print and on the Web.

"DITA embodies several interesting information architecture concepts related to XML-based authoring and content management, including a clever transclusion mechanism that supports document component reuse," said Robin Cover, editor of the Cover Pages, a reference site for markup languages. Cover has tracked the progress of DITA through several revisions and views the decision to bring the specification into an open collaborative forum as a very positive development. "Given the elusive Holy Grail of semantically constrained content reuse, DITA represents a unique contribution; the architecture deserves the attention of a wider group of reviewers and developers."

Focusing on the 'topic' as a conceptual unit of authoring, DITA will extend existing content markup to represent domains of specialized markup common across sets of topics, e.g., hardware vs. software. Larger documents can be created by aggregating topic units. Content referencing combines several topics into a single document or allows content to be shared among topics.

"With DITA, the distinction between reusable content and reusing content disappears," said Dave Schell, convener of the OASIS DITA Technical Committee. "That's because DITA's strength lies in a unified content reuse mechanism that enables an element to replace itself with the content of a like element elsewhere, either in the current topic or in a separate topic that shares the same content models."

Don Day of IBM, proposed chair of the OASIS DITA Technical Committee, added, "DITA goes beyond standard entity reuse to allow reused content to exist in a valid XML file with a DTD. The net result is that reused content gets validated at authoring time, rather than at reuse time, catching problems at their source."

By enabling definitive semantics, DITA will allow more automatable processes, consistent authoring and better retrievability and applicability to specific industries. Through the use of a common specification, DITA content owners will benefit from industry support, interoperability, and reuse of community contributions. At the same time, through specialization, content owners will be able to address the specific requirements of their business or industry.

OASIS DITA Technical Committee members include representatives of Arbortext, Innodata Isogen, IBM, and others. The group brings together XML tools vendors, consultants on Information Architectures and Content Management Systems (CMS), and users of the DITA Document Type Definitions (DTD) and Schemas. Participation remains open to all organizations and individuals; OASIS will host a mail list for public comment.

Industry Support for DITA

Arbortext

"DITA presents an innovative solution to several thorny problems of developing XML applications, especially in the publishing arena, and we at Arbortext enthusiastically support the new OASIS DITA Technical Committee," said Paul Grosso, VP Research for Arbortext.

IBM

"DITA establishes a platform for information development that lays the foundation for content collaboration. DITA is an XML-based architecture with a modular design and built-in extension mechanisms that usher in a new era of collaboration for the design, reuse, and processing of content," said Dave A. Schell, chief strategist for IBM's information development community, commenting on IBM's recent donation of DITA to OASIS and the formation of an OASIS Technical Committee for DITA.

Innodata Isogen

"Innodata Isogen finds that the DITA architecture fits very well with the technical approaches we've used for many years in addressing our clients' requirements for managing complex systems of modular information. We see DITA-based solutions as a key component of robust, large-scale XML-based information management systems – especially in global enterprises or vertical industries where interoperability and re-use among different groups is a requirement," said Eliot Kimber, Senior Systems Analyst, Innodata Isogen.

About OASIS

OASIS (Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) is a not-for-profit, global consortium that drives the development, convergence, and adoption of e-business standards. Members themselves set the OASIS technical agenda, using a lightweight, open process expressly designed to promote industry consensus and unite disparate efforts. OASIS produces worldwide standards for security, Web services, conformance, business transactions, electronic publishing, topic maps and interoperability within and between marketplaces. Founded in 1993, OASIS has more than 2,500 participants representing over 600 organizations and individual members in 100 countries. <http://www.oasis-open.org>

Additional information:

OASIS DITA Technical Committee
<http://www.oasis-open.org/committees/dita>

Cover Pages Technology Report:
<http://xml.coverpages.org/ni2004-03-29-b.html>

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