



August 6, 2001

## Vitria VCML Best Choice for an E-Business Data Standard Bridge Solution

*Ken Vollmer*

### Catalyst

Analyst observation

### Question

What is happening in the area of e-business data standards?

### Answer

A key decision is pending related to the adoption of an Extensible Markup Language (XML)-based standard as the official “bridge” solution to support e-business data exchanges. According to the joint Accredited Standards Committee (ASC) X12 and UN/EDIFACT Working Group (EWG), a “bridge” solution is needed because it may take years to fully develop the Joint Core Components (JCC) functionality that will provide the semantic foundation to support electronic data exchanges in a hybrid X12 EDI and XML format that can be included in the Electronic Business XML (ebXML) framework.

The open question is which data standard should serve as the foundation for the bridge solution? At the moment, two alternatives appear to be under consideration, **Commerce One**’s Universal Business Language (UBL), which is based on the vendor’s xCBL data format, and **Vitria Technology**’s Value Chain Markup Language (VCML), which is based on the XEDI data standard it acquired from its recent acquisition of **XML Solutions**.

At first glance, the UBL option would appear to be a good alternative for those organizations that have decided on Commerce One’s technology to support e-procurement and/or marketplace efforts (of either a private or industry consortium nature). However, while xCBL was a good choice for the less complicated indirect materials purchasing, discussions with various vertical industry insiders indicate that the xCBL functionality was not sufficient by itself for total replacement of the majority of the more complicated EDI transactions currently supporting many vertical industry functions, including procurement of direct materials. The problem revolves around the limited number of transaction sets (around 50) and defined data elements (less than 10,000) that xCBL supports.

In comparison, the XEDI functionality that Vitria Technology has obtained contains full functionality for all of the existing X12 transaction sets (329 base transactions and more than 4,100 version and industry-specific variants) that include more than 100,000 unique data elements. The higher level of documents and data elements in the XEDI environment is a critical factor since there is a significant chance for the loss of data when translating from a traditional EDI document into xCBL due to the fact that, in many cases, there is no corresponding document or data element to translate into.

The reason for this disparity in the depth and breadth of functionality between xCBL and XEDI is that xCBL was originally designed to support horizontal e-procurement applications. And even though Commerce One

has been working to add more transactions and data elements to expand its data exchange capability, it still has a long way to go. In contrast, XEDI was designed from the start to duplicate all of the existing EDI transactions in use across many vertical sectors, such as manufacturing, retail, health care, insurance, grocery and many others.

Since the objective of the X12 and UN/EDIFACT effort is to eventually converge on a joint XML and X12 solution that provides the best of both worlds, the logical choice would be to adopt the bridge solution that offers the widest base of implemented organizations, the largest set of useable transactions and the largest number of defined data elements that can be used to alter or create new business transactions. To do otherwise would make no sense.

The decision on which data standard to support is clear for those clients that have not already adopted Commerce One's xCBL into any of their e-business applications. The depth of functionality provided in VCML and the breadth of vertical industry expertise that it includes make it the best choice for supporting future ebXML standards convergence efforts. However, clients that have already adopted xCBL technology as a component of their e-procurement or marketplace initiatives should also support the adoption of VCML as the bridge solution to a fully functional ebXML environment since it offers the most robust alternative to effectively supporting both the legacy EDI environments that are crucial in many vertical industries and newer forms of e-business that have evolved during the last two to three years.