Simply XML

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Simply XML June 2016 Newsletter

This is the Simply XML Newsletter written by Doug Gorman, CEO of Simply XML, often under the counsel of his canine colleague, Frank. We welcome our new friends from Lavacon, STC, and MIT ICT. We hope you enjoy these newsletters, but if you want to opt out, please unsubscribe at the bottom of the page. We would love to hear your comments and you can email us at hello@simplyxml.com.

Have a great day!

The Elephant in the Next Room

by Doug Gorman

Frank: Hey, Doug. We've been hanging out for quite a while in the Tech Com room. It is OK in here, but I'm getting a bit itchy.

Doug: I know, Frank. In this room most of the people are technical and we have certainly learned a lot. They speak "Techie" including XML, DITA, and other languages that used to be foreign to us. We can now understand them, for the most part.

Frank: Remember when we worked for Information Mapping, with a focus on structured writing?

Doug: Yes, I remember. Almost no one spoke Techie. Our customers wrote important documents like policies and procedures, white papers, training materials, and user guides. We taught them structured writing and gave them some limited tools, called macros to help them format their writing. Our customers were very good at desktop publishing (DTP). But DTP took too much time and there are new tools that make content authoring, shared storage, and publishing much more efficient. Well, Frank, all these people in the Rest Of The Organization (ROTO) are in a huge room next door.

Frank: Do you know that, like you, I sometimes sneak back into the ROTO Room, where there are a lot more people and where they don't speak Techie? There are soooo many people in there doing different things and writing stuff with Microsoft Word. That room is hundreds of times larger than the Tech Com room.

Doug: Yes the ROTO Room is very large and I know that a few of our direct Partners from the Tech Com room go in there and make friends by showing our product Content Mapper. But many go into that room and come running back to the Tech Com room with a look of fright on their faces. Some come back in tears when they can't speak any language other than Techie. They try to tell the people in that room about how cool DITA is and how much can be accomplished with a traditional XML editor. But it is Greek to the people in there.

Frank: People in this Tech Com room are amazed that you can go back and forth, seemingly at will, between the two rooms. Maybe it is time to tell them what you know about "The Elephant in the Next Room."

Doug: The Elephant in the next room is named "Organizational Productivity." He is a big guy who thrives in all sorts of nooks and crannies of the organization. He knows that most of the people in that room are measured on a host of varied tasks and functions that are not viewed as technically related. They will use technology if it helps them do their jobs better, but they don't want to understand the bits and bytes, or DITA, or S1000D, or <reltables> of the latest technology. So

when the Elephant sees someone speaking Techie without taking the time to understand the culture and real needs of the ROTO Room, he roars and sends them back into the Tech Com room.

Frank: Is there any hope?

Doug: There is always hope, Frank, and some of the people in the ROTO room also want to use technology, but in a stealth sort of way. They want technology to be simple and easy and largely invisible. There are people who want reusable content and flexible publishing and even XML and DITA, but they know they can't lead with XML, or DITA, or with a traditional XML editor. They have to meet the rest of the organization (ROTO) where they are at.

Frank: Hey, look Doug, there are a couple of our new friends from the Tech Com room moving cautiously and mixing with the people in here. I see the guy from Oxygen talking about Web-based authoring and the Stilo guys teaching someone how to use AuthorBridge. Jan from FontoXML is here. And there's Jason from Quark making some new friends in here.

Doug: Yes Frank. Some of our friends are listening and helping the millions of non-technical people in this room to better manage the content supply chain. They are doing it without talking Techie. And they will be welcome in the ROTO room. Working together we all have something to offer to ROTO. And it will make XML a behind the scenes standard and the world a much better place for content to be created, managed, and used productively.

Frank: Thanks, Doug. Some day we are going to tell them about the Marketing room and the Elephant that is in there.

Doug: That will be a story for another day, Frank, here's a cookie!

Darwinian XML Musings

By Doug Gorman
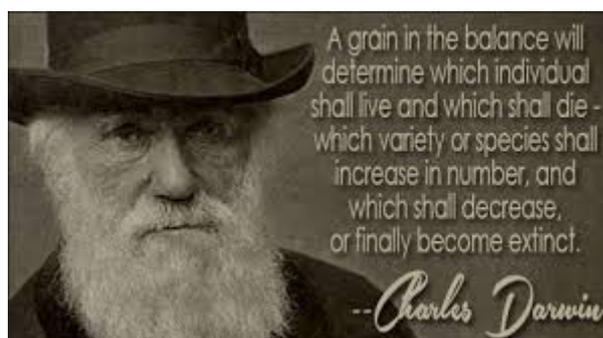
It has been conference season for the last couple of months. Lavacon Dublin, the STC Summit, and the MIT Information, Communication and Technologies (ICT) Conference have me thinking about evolution and natural selection including the unexciting, but important issue of Metadata. I admit that I have not got it figured out yet. But I have some thoughts.

Metadata Dimensions

Metadata is information about the content. Metadata is important for two main purposes. It is needed when an author searches to find content for potential reuse. It is also essential for conditional publishing to let the information consumer get just in time, just enough content, on the device of their choice. Metadata (sometimes called properties or attributes) can be applied at the level of a document, topic, section, image, or something else.

Metadata Time Travel

Going back in time, during the 1980's, I worked at Computer Corporation of America where organizations were putting numbers, records, and fields into database management systems (DBMS). There is a time-independent link to content management here because the idea was to harness control and efficiency by letting multiple computer programs access the same numbers, records, and fields.   The switch, from what had been "flat files" to a reusable database made a huge difference in speed and efficiency. In the process of moving to a DBMS, metadata was used to describe the nature of numbers, records, and fields. In some ways, metadata was as important as the data itself because it played such an important role in access.

Today's Tech Pubs

Today, Tech Pubs uses Metadata for the same purposes. The DITA standard has a well-developed system of standard Metadata along with the option of specialized Metadata. It works for technical publications and there are many consultants who will, of course, help. At the recent Lavacon Conference one of the industry Gurus discussed the difficult problem of Metadata at the corporate level. She described significant efforts undertaken to define and establish a corporate Metadata Taxonomy.

Here's My Issue

I just don't see how we can come close to pre-specifying a comprehensive Metadata taxonomy at the corporate level. I believe that the reuse of content is sometimes difficult because of both nuanced audience requirements and subtle author prejudices. I am inclined to think that after a broad Metadata taxonomy is specified, a useful Metadata taxonomy needs to evolve. And as Darwin asserted, evolution and natural selection happen but are not planned. It may be important and even critical for authors to understand the function, mindset, and prejudices that were behind the

content available for reuse. How are we going to capture all possible variations of Metadata required for great content across the enterprise? Answer: I don't think we can do this at all, and never in a static structure.

Smartest Guy in the Room at MIT's ICT

Needless to say, there were a lot of smart presenters, participants, and exhibitors hanging around the MIT ICT conference. The 3-D printing companies certainly have some great toys.   Neil Gershenfeld, Director, MIT's Center for Bits and Atoms was in a class by himself with his discussion of the impending emergence of a new computing architecture. After reviewing the work of a number of early computer scientists he discussed how digital computing had pretty much replaced analog computing. He said that at first this shift had seemed totally logical and comprehensive. But he declared that there were a lot of computing applications where analog computing is superior to digital computing and that its broader death has been largely premature.

In response to a question about what is next, he went on to discuss an emerging computing paradigm that was more biologic than digital. He said that computing structures and materials will soon evolve themselves with internal intelligence to become useful. Drawing us from computing to biology, he talked about the formation of earth and that hydrogen and oxygen became water. Primitive cells emerged and evolved to become amoebas. Subsequently they evolved to become, quite recently, animals and plants, then humans. Some cells have specialized as arms or eyes. And so he said it would be in the next generation of computing. Computing systems would be smart enough to evolve without human planning or intervention. Most attendees realized they were in the room with a true genius. (More information on Neil Gershenfeld here: http://ng.cba.mit.edu/)

Implication for Metadata Taxonomy

And so I've been thinking that this is exactly what needs to happen with Metadata at the enterprise level. I believe that content systems need to learn and evolve as Darwin stated. Based on Simply XML's experience, the importance of structured content and structured markup is much more than an XML issue, or a DITA issue. It is a usability and value issue. I will check with Neil (if I run into him at the coffee machine), but I believe that true content evolution will happen at the level of a cell of content that is a level above the DNA of DITA or S1000D or XML in general.

Content Evolution

 Evolution will improve the life of content with a focus on the following content structures:

Human Need	Information Type
What someone needs to do	Procedure or Task
When to do something	Principle, Policy, Rule
How something works	Process

Knowledge	Concepts, Facts, References, Images
Consistency	Templates, Fragments, Tables, Structures
Specialized or technical understanding	Industry or domain-specific content

Evolution will further improve the use of content when modern processes and a realistic XML architecture allows information consumers to get just enough of the right information at the right time on their device of choice.

Simply XML's Prediction

As they become even more granular and complicated to meet the niche requirements of technical publications supporting massively complex systems, XML architectures risk extinction unless they achieve simplicity. Lightweight DITA, including its attempt to keep DITA and XML in the background, offers hope for the enterprise. Now is a critical time for markup. Like other examples in history, if markup cannot adapt and evolve to be relevant at the enterprise level in the new age of business 4.0, it will go the way of the dinosaurs.

Simply XML believes that products like Content Mapper, related technologies, and modern processes will emerge to force DITA and XML to the background. These modern tools will allow organizations to focus on true improvements to the content supply chain. Lightweight DITA has the potential to start meeting these evolutionary requirements.

And our advice remains…… Keep It Simple, Smart-person.

Action Requested:

Please let us know what you think about this. You can send us an email: hello@simplyxml.com.

And may you and your content evolve in a truly superior and satisfying way. Thanks.

Simply Tips and Tricks

All of our newsletters provide quick tips and tricks to help you simplify the XML world and beyond. Our tip for June focuses on new people and growth at

Simply XML..

In Life:

Why not try to meet some new people
this summer (or for those of you below
the equator.... non-summer!) Explore
how different people have different
skills, hopes, and dreams to add
richness to your life.

In Simply XML:

We welcome James Clutterbuck to the
Simply XML team. He is a software
architect who wrote his first program at
age 7. James lives in Canada
and brings years of experience and
wisdom with .NET, XML, DITA, and
other relevant technologies.
I predict that we will all learn a thing or
two from James. I am certain he will
have a very positive impact on our
product and our customers. Welcome
aboard!

There's a reason we call it Simply XML.

Simply XML provides simple, easy to use solutions for creating and publishing XML content. Creating, managing,
and publishing content with our XML editor, Content Mapper, minimizes costs and ensures efficiency across your
organization. Learn more at www.simplyxml.com.

> Request a Free Trial of Content Mapper

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