To XML or Not to XML: That's Not Even the Question Any More

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Panelists:
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For the purposes of this session, moderator David Silverman urged attendees to consider that SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language) and XML (Extensible Markup Language) are essentially the same. Both allow the publisher to generate multiple outputs from a single document. Examples of multiple outputs include printed pages, PostScript, PDF, SGML, XML, HTML, and e-book files. It is important to note that XML is not a set of codes, but rather provides a way to define a set of codes. Furthermore, no set way of coding in XML exists.

Silverman outlined one way that his company can use XML in a workflow: copyedit the original manuscript file and code with XML tags; and transform the coded file to a composition system with PDF (for print) and XML as possible outputs and/or to HTML or XML for Web applications. Silverman demonstrated this workflow by using a translation tool called XSL that his company developed to convert XML to Quark with Autopage tags for pagination and to HTML for the Web.

Consultant Dale Waldt emphasized that publishers should move to XML only if it is

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necessary. He discussed how employers are experiencing a shift in employee recruitment, retention, and skill development as markup languages become a critical path in publishing. A shift is occurring in technology that is driven by competition, economic changes, new thinking, and new attitudes toward employers and employees. Flexible technology enables customer-driven requirements. Rapid development has shortened development time from years and months to weeks and days. A reliance on integration and alliances within and between companies is causing new opportunities and new stresses. Companies need to leverage others' resources and systems to reduce development times and costs. Customers are now looking for value-based development by examining whether it's worth it to build an entire system that completely meets their needs, costs more than they want to pay, and takes longer than they want to wait, or to go for a 90% solution for less money and in less time. The problem of legacy systems haunts us as we integrate old systems with new systems. "Back office" functions of fulfillment and accounting are paramount in e-commerce. Versatility is a hallmark of success.

Key employees will embrace innovation, relationship-building, and technical skills. Employers determine the skills needed for a position and set out to recruit the best person for the job.

Robert Reich urged publishers to ask two questions: "Could I use XML for this business process?" "Do I need to use XML?" XML's value lies in the ability to repurpose and reuse data. He explained that content-management systems (CMSs) are concerned with elements on a page, such as authors' last names, authors' last names in reference citations, and authors of extracts. XML tools are still developing, and standards are being written. He noted that no good way is available for dealing with mathematics in XML, so mathematics must be rendered as a graphic and imported into a file in order to display it. He summarized the value of CMSs by noting that such systems manage the relationships of elements within documents. The demonstration of the CMS that his company developed was canceled when time expired.