

## Update on XML and SGML

Speakers:

**Dale Waldt**

**aXtaive minds**

**Pittsford, New York**

**Tiffany Veon**

**The Clarinda Company**

**Clarinda, Iowa**

Reporter:

**Liz Haberkorn**

**American Society for Cell Biology**

**Bethesda, Maryland**

Transporting one's data onto the Web can be not only time-consuming but also rather risky. Dale Waldt made that all too real to the audience by painting horrific scenarios in which adapting an electronic system could be comparable to "changing the wheels on a moving bus". Not only do you have to be careful when supervising such a task, but you also have to prepare for all that can go wrong and do your best to avoid it.

One way to prepare yourself and your business is to sit down and figure out what sort of process is best for your viewers and your data. Waldt pointed out that "XML language is used to create a whole new language." He showed a skeletal outline of a few models; for example, a simple model that is easiest for both clients and audience to follow is one that involves tags to organize the information, and a more complex

model is one that deals with relational tables to sort out the information and place it in the appropriate spaces.

It is important to understand how the data will be used and how they will appear in all their consumable forms, such as print, Web, wireless devices, and other electronic formats. The details needed to support each distribution format are largely the same but have some substantial differences. It is important to identify all the necessary details in formatting needed

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to support all intended uses. An extreme example would be trying to send an entire chapter to a wireless device, such as a cell phone or pager; it might be better to add some detail—perhaps identifying the abstract, title, and author specifically—so that this subset of data can be passed to wireless users while the entire article or chapter is made available to Web users.

Formatting XML data presents some interesting challenges. Web-based con-

sumption (reading) is limited to screen presentation and resolution but has some unique advantages, such as links. A different set of formatting instructions for a given XML source file format is needed for each presentation style or format. Different ones are needed for printing the material, delivery on the Web, and delivery on a wireless device, but all can act on the generic structure of the XML document. Effective presentation is important for user understanding.

Waldt and Tiffany Veon cited numerous ways in which transferring from a manual database to XML is worth the hardships. Overall, it makes conducting business easier for employees and gives viewers more options for obtaining information. Consider how much work it is to convert a printable document into one that is optimized for consumption on the Web or in other electronic forms. XML helps make the transformation into different delivery forms easy and often completely automated, thus eliminating costs and delays in "repurposing" the information. Each year, as more systems and models are created, more advantages are discovered and less time is consumed by everyone involved (programmer, client, and users). This session served as a brief summary of the options available for XML use and of how to use the Web to advantage. 