

Competition and OpenXML

I think the competition argument states the business case for opposing OpenXML. OpenXML **enables greater competition** among vendors who offer information services based on Microsoft Office systems. It is easy to see why vendors with substantial MS Office binary system practices would oppose OpenXML.

Using data from "old" Microsoft Office versions, isn't quite like pulling teeth (your own) but not far from it. There is lots of that data around and years of revisions and service packs haven't been kind to it. And so long as using that data remains difficult, the pool of vendors who can provide a value add to that data remains fairly limited.

The impact of Microsoft converting to an XML based format for the Office suite and enabling that format as a target for legacy files isn't hard to imagine. Such a format would allow anyone who knows a bit of XML and XSLT to extract, add-to and/or manipulate data held in the new Microsoft format. But, you don't have to imagine that, it has already happened and is called OpenXML.

OpenXML means that a wide variety of companies, both large and small, can now offer all sorts of innovative data services based on the new MS format. So, if you are a large, expensive and not very nimble company providing such services against the binary format, what would you do? Right in one! The best answer is to oppose OpenXML in governments, in standards bodies, anywhere you can find it.

What is doubly ironic is that the EU has been played into supporting one of the most anti-competitive positions imaginable, in the name of promoting competition. OpenXML does promote competition, just not the sort that some people are interested in promoting.

And what of OpenDocument? If Microsoft has its wits about it we will see broad support for OpenDocument based applications out of Redmont. Neither OpenXML nor OpenDocument are the final word in document markup proposals. Both address some issues better than the other. Fostering a healthy co-evolution of both will increase Microsoft's ability to satisfy ever growing user demand for better document semantics. Not to mention supporting a vast competitive value-add market for data generated using its products in a variety of formats.

Vendors with static and pinched views of "my" versus "your" format misunderstand the nature of markup as a format. Markup is representational and no one markup format defines the nature or "truth" of a document. It would be entirely reasonable to have an OpenXML and OpenDocument format "view" of a single document for multiple purposes. If we work hard enough, those views should be seamless transpositions that are transparent to the user. Users, if you recall, are the people we claim to be serving with our formats.

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