

B2Bwatch: All that Matters in B2B. Week of April 3, 2002, Vol. II, #3

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A free compilation of news and analysis of the B2B industry, presented by the B2B analysts of The FactPoint Group (www.factpointgroup.com). The FactPoint Group is a Silicon Valley research, consulting and publishing firm focused on four areas: Web services, B2B portals, wireless and e-business adoption.

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ATTENTION THOUGHT LEADERS

XML Web services—Great Leap Forward or pure hype?

The FactPoint Group is conducting a Web survey on Web services for a forthcoming report. In addition to sharing their opinions, participants will get a summary of findings. Rate vendors. Identify benefits. Reveal barriers to adoption. Click here to take the survey: <http://production3.voxco.com/IntWeb.dll/online/orc/webservices1>.

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**** The Java Question Nobody Asked

By Tim Clark

A peculiar moment came last week during the JavaOne developers conference during a press briefing by Java executives from Sun Microsystems. As the briefing was wrapping up, a Sun executive asked whether anyone had questions about conflicts between Java and XML.

Nobody did, but the four executives, including Java inventor James Gosling and Java business chief Rich Green, hijacked another question to send a message Sun clearly wanted to deliver: Is Java in conflict with XML?

No, said four different Sun execs, not once but twice each, in case anyone missed the answer to a question that nobody asked. In following XML for the last nine months—ironically Web services first really grabbed my attention at the JavaOne show in June 2001—I don't recall anyone suggesting a conflict between Java and XML. Clearly someone at Sun picked up a whiff of that sentiment however, because one its marketing messages was that Java is not only compatible with XML but the best way to implement XML.

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The Fortune 500 has gone Portal. The FactPoint Group just completed a report on valuations and trends for corporate Portals. Learn how General Electric, Daimler Chrysler, Covisint, Boeing, Dell Computer, Delta Airlines, Owens Corning and other major players value their Portals. For information, contact Dave Kaplow (dkaplow@factpointgroup.com).

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Sun is playing a bit of catch-up in Web services, those reusable software components based on XML and a number of other standards. Web services also comprise the latest theater for Sun vs. Microsoft posturing, and it's getting a little tiresome.

They're acting like a couple of 14-year-olds, and immature ones at that. Sun's not participating in a Microsoft-IBM initiative called Web Services Interoperability organization or WS-I (www.ws-i.org) because 1) It was invited to join at the last minute and 2) it isn't being offered a board seat and "founder" status. ("I'm not coming to your party because you didn't invite me soon enough.")

And Microsoft is staying away from the Sun-driven Liberty Alliance (<http://www.projectliberty.org>), an effort to create a standard for online authentication. Microsoft's proprietary Passport scheme (which has millions of users) likewise vouches for the identity of an online user. Microsoft says it's interested in joining Liberty Alliance but only if Sun stops saying nasty things about Microsoft. ("I'm not coming to your party because you said mean things about me.")

The core problem is that these two adolescents aren't talking to each other at the highest levels. ("I won't speak to you unless you apologize first.")

Would Internet users be better off if Sun and Microsoft grew up? Of course, but civility may be too much to ask of top executives whose companies battle fiercely and don't like each other. Neither side misses a chance to take potshots, and Sun has sued Microsoft for billions over Microsoft's successful effort to crush Netscape.

What computer users (and the industry) need is an agreement to disagree at the top while letting lower level employees interact with the other camp. If the technical people worked together, some of the looming issues around Web services (to mention just one area) might be addressed and mutually resolved. That would help everyone.

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The FactPoint Group is winding up a multi-client research product on XML Web services. Some 30 early adopters of Web services will be interviewed on which applications and value propositions have driven their usage. We'll identify the industries where XML uptake is greatest. Data from an online survey on Web services are included. For a prospectus, contact Tim Clark, tclark@factpointgroup.com.

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For devotees of XML Web services, the current issue of Business Week includes a long on-stage interview with Scott McNealy from a BW conference. It may explain in part Sun's current industry-trailing posture on XML Web services:

"We still have so much work around the world just getting people to be Java browser-enabled. We don't need to get them smart Web services, we need to get them to the browser, first. Then we'll get the little services talking to each other so that my gas station app talks to my auto app to my airplane apps. All of these silly little examples of Web services. Let's get people so that they can at least access their information."

Anybody still wonder why Sun lags in Web services? It's tough to build momentum within a company behind Web services when the CEO is not only glib but wrong. On a daily basis, I access our corporate version of SharePoint, Microsoft's collaborative Internet service, through my Windows applications. That's because Microsoft Windows XP, my operating system, includes Microsoft's browser, Internet Explorer. Given the history, I don't much like the idea of having IE bundled, but it sure is convenient.

McNealy also misses the point in labeling the current state of Web services as "silly." Some mighty big organizations are doing some quite serious things with Web services—a car rental agency tracking cars, a state agency qualifying unemployed workers for jobless benefits, a chemical firm spinning out its logistics operation as an independent operation. Sure, so far many Web services are trivial—getting stock prices or weather reports—but few people characterize them as anything but demos. Web services won't prove to be right for every situation but in the right circumstances they can be valuable.

To finish up this month's ramble on Web services, let me encourage you to participate in an online survey about XML Web services. The FactPoint Group is working with Outsource Research Consulting, a quantitative research firm, to supplement FactPoint's interview-based research with the Web survey, to get a broader sample. In return, we'll provide a summary of findings when our report comes out later this month—plus you'll get to shape the outcome as a participant.

Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential; your responses will only be used in aggregate. To share your feedback, click here:
<http://production3.voxco.com/IntWeb.dll/online/orc/webservices1>.

This newsletter and the Fat Butterfly discussion forums hosted by Dynapolis Internet Services—<http://www.dynapolis.com>. Visit <http://www.dynapolis.com/b2b.html> to sign up for the Fat Butterfly email discussion and a link to the Web archives.