

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In 1878, a 19-year-old Polish student named L. L. Zamenhof attempted to bridge the language chasms created over the centuries by introducing a language he called Esperanto. At this point in Zamenhof's brief lifetime, Poland was a part of the Russian empire, and his town's population was comprised of four major ethnic groups: Russians, Poles, Germans, and a large group of Yiddish-speaking Jews. Zamenhof was saddened and frustrated by the many quarrels between these groups. He supposed that the main reason for the hate and prejudice lay in mutual misunderstanding, caused by the lack of one common language that would play the role of a neutral communication tool between people of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Zamenhof's project, which he called Lingwe uniwersala, or universal language, was the birth of the language of Esperanto. While pursuing a career as a medical doctor, Zamenhof continued to drive his vision toward reality with the firm belief that people have an inalienable right to communicate.

Some of Zamenhof's founding principles included a) Esperanto was an additional language, not a replacement for a people's chosen, and often religiously guarded, native tongue; b) in its design, Esperanto needed to be inclusive of many different types of languages in construction and usage, but different enough to ensure it stood on its own (read non-proprietary); and c) Esperanto would never be "owned" by any entity; rather, it would be treated as a fully open language standard that could be shared and enhanced by anyone who wanted to contribute to the cause.

Beyond this being a fascinating standalone subject, the parallels to the IT data chaos that we've created since the '60s in the world of computing are astounding. The world of multi-platform commercial data computing, which has created a Babel-like "confusion of data," is approaching 50 years old. But with the exponential crescendo of data-sharing brought together by the Internet, the problem, while perhaps not as dramatic, is just as pervasive as that which Zamenhof sought to solve.

Attention all IT managers, CEOs, even CFOs who miserably care about the wanton explosion of cash being spent on migration and conversion projects—Esperanto for data is available in the form of eXtensible Markup Language (XML)!

The founding principles of XML are remarkably similar to the spirit of Esperanto. First, XML is intended to be a bridge, a "black-box" translator between differ-

ent data representations. It isn't intended to replace; it's intended to provide data exchange with what you already have. No data conversion or migrations are necessary. Second, authored and administered by an independent Internet standards organization called the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C, www.w3c.org), XML is non-proprietary. You can safely bet your business on this movement without locking yourself into a vendor's future or controlling interest. And third, in keeping with the current rage toward computing democracy evidenced by Linux, XML is an "open" project. This means that anyone with an interest can and should contribute to the definition and efforts to shape it into the tool that's needed to bridge the gaps of data.

In a recent briefing we were providing for a customer, the CIO cut to the chase with one question: "Are you saying that my Java (or .NET) applications can simply exchange data with the mainframe, without migration and conversions, and without my Java guys learning the mainframe?" Beautifully said—the answer is yes.

Now XML implementations don't happen by magic; you don't just "install" XML and suddenly everything is interchangeable. But if your IT department is still discussing or actively involved in yet another platform/data migration or application rewrite without fully giving the XML and Web Services capabilities careful consideration, chances are critical time is being spent and enormous dollars are being wasted.

The point here is to make sure executives everywhere are taking their IT management to task to ensure they fully understand the potential and exhaust the possibilities at least in theory of XML and Web Services before embarking on another approach. Being uninformed isn't an excuse.

Zamenhof had a beautiful vision to fundamentally change the world for altruistic reasons that are easy to agree with. It's even inherent in the word he chose for its name; the word Esperanto translated to English means "hopeful." Martin Luther King Jr. left us with yet another of his inspiring thoughts: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." There's hope yet for this data confusion.

That Sums it up. **ME**

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IT's Tower of Babel