z/Bottom Line

ERIC L. VAUGHAN

"28"

AMENDMENT XXVIII TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

SECTION 1.
The right of people to have complete and unilateral access to information, without regard for type of hardware, operating system, data storage format, programming language, or interface, shall be ensured by joint cooperation of all providers of IT solutions.

SECTION 2.
All data shall be transported using a single, common communications protocol.

SECTION 3.
All data shall be accessible by using a single, common interface.

SECTION 4.
All data shall be exchanged in a common format, and accessible and understandable by any Information Systems architecture.

SECTION 5.
Any computer program may be accessed by any other computer system, regardless of the program's source language or operating environment.

SECTION 6.
Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Maybe it should come to this.

The next amendment to the U.S. Constitution could guarantee the rights of people to have free and unrestricted access to information, at least by ensuring that those subject to its jurisdiction would adhere to the aforementioned principles.

This is not a call for a repeal of the recent and necessary passage of privacy laws. Indeed, the increase in the availability of information has created new challenges in ensuring that access is protected.

Rather, the proposed 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution aims to solve the rampant computing anarchy created over the last three decades. If someone "should" have access to information, we must ensure they "can" obtain the information.

Stability is on the horizon, however. The essence of computing is very simple, and if you peel back the layers of white papers, architectures, and buzzwords, you'll find computing performs four functions:

- **Exchange information.** Moving data between electronic devices involves the need to swap information with other computer networks, both local and wide.
- **Present information.** People need some sort of presentation of the data, as everything else is in a format that only the electronics understand. This includes printed reports, data on a screen, audio, video, and even Braille devices.
- **Store information.** From flat-file to hierarchical to relational and data warehousing, billions of dollars have been made and spent in the pursuit of the best way to store data.
- **Process information.** Although multi-lingual in implementation (e.g., COBOL, Java, Visual Basic, and RPG), they all accomplish the same end result: manipulating, changing, combining, comparing, and deciding.

Ubiquitous computing has transcended the IT community to involve the worldwide population at large. They want information. They want it now. They want access to it without training, knowledge of data formats or even where the information resides.

No problem.

TCP/IP delivered the common method of exchanging data between all platforms, and rid the world of the spaghetti of communication protocols. Although mainframes were the last to embrace TCP/IP, it is now the defacto standard.

Once we could exchange data across the computing world, finding a common presentation was critical, and the Web browser emerged as the universal interface. Now mainframe shops are moving quickly to rid themselves of the 3270 screens that give the impression of an antiquated system and are looking to "Webify" as quickly and easily as possible.

This leaves the storage and processing of the data. Too many languages and too many proprietary ideas of how to store the data have created a "Tower of Babel" when it comes to sharing across architectures. And this is not what the "Creators" intended.

The Good News is the emergence of XML. With XML, and the implementation of Web services, all data, whether VSAM, DL/I, Oracle, or an ASCII text file, can be easily accessed without knowledge of the original format, database, or even platform. XML and Web services also provide the ability to share programs across platforms with a blind eye to the program language and nuances of the source code.

Mainframe systems have a rapidly increasing range of choices for XML implementation. With the majority of the world's data under the care of mainframe systems, we should lead the way in embracing this powerful new way of serving data and program resources.

XML has the ability to solve the last two remaining challenges of Universal Computing. Then, the true power of what we've collectively built over the years can begin to be harvested. The economic benefits of sharing what we have rather than trading it in for a new "Trophy System" could be awesome. And people can share what they want most.

All in favor say "I" – for Information. That's z/Bottom Line. z

About the Author

Eric L. Vaughan is president and CEO of illustro Systems International, LLC. He has more than 20 years of experience in the IT industry and is leading illustro in its focus on helping IT managers find answers to their existing investments.
Voice: 214-800-8900 • e-Mail: evaughan@illustro.com