

SoftQuad XMetaL 3.0, Seybold “Hot Pick”

At this February’s New York Seybold conference, SoftQuad’s XMetaL 3.0 was one of ten products honored as a “hot pick” by conference organizers. Why? The simple answer is XMetaL’s set of new technical features. A more complete analysis of XMetaL also requires a look at Corel Corporation (with its long-anticipated acquisition of SoftQuad) and Corel’s own strategic announcement at Seybold, DEEPWHITE. Let’s start with XMetaL itself.

SoftQuad’s XMetaL is one of two major, industry-recognized native XML authoring tools (the other is ArborText’s Epic). SoftQuad has a long tradition of developing structured authoring tools, starting with Author/Editor for SGML, HoTMetaL for HTML, and XMetaL for XML. SoftQuad products share common design themes. First, support text standards without compromise. Second, provide different views of structured documents, allowing authors to see only as much complexity as they wanted. Third, make customization and integration with other enterprise systems as easy as possible. XMetaL 3.0 carries these design goals to new heights. It is the first XML authoring tool to support XML schemas, providing rich data-typing support beyond what’s possible with Document Type Definitions (DTDs). Up to 80-90% of SoftQuad’s customers, including Cisco and Microsoft, put schema support at the top of their wish lists last year. Other features worthy of mention include XMetaL’s integrated HTML and PDF preview and revision marking. SoftQuad claims these previews are easily configured for any schema or DTD. XMetaL also offers a Quick Style dialog box based on cascading style sheets to enhance visual formatting.

Few customers use XML authoring tools “out of the box;” most want these tools to resemble word processors or data entry forms. The ability to customize XML tools, as quickly and inexpensively as possible, is key. XMetaL has always facilitated this. Version 3 goes lots further, with a new forms toolkit and Java API. The US Congress now uses XMetaL, customized to have the same look-and-feel as their previous application for tracking legislation. Integration into existing content infrastructure is also easier now, with support for WebDAV for file-based document sharing under Windows. Documentum and Interwoven, along with other content management vendors, have already integrated XMetaL support into their systems.

What about the Corel connection? Slow industry adoption of XML authoring has choked vendor revenues and has hurt SoftQuad seriously. Corel’s acquisition promises a fragile lifeline, but treating XMetaL as just another product offering wouldn’t be sufficient. Corel sensed this and has bet its future on DEEPWHITE. DEEPWHITE is Corel’s plan to deliver enterprise-class content solutions based on XML and other open standards. Strategic acquisitions, including SoftQuad, are an essential part of this plan. Enterprises incur big costs in the creation, management and distribution of content. By adopting an easily implemented XML strategy at the start of the content lifecycle, corporations can greatly reduce these costs while increasing the opportunities for new products. SoftQuad’s XMetaL is poised to play a key role in the DEEPWHITE strategy, provided Corel –with its own long-suffering financials-- can deliver DEEPWHITE products before it too gets deep-sixed.