



HOME • ABOUT EMEDIA MAGAZINE • SUBSCRIBE • ADVERTISE • CONTACT US



information insider

ePublishing in a Post-Monopoly World

Robert J. Boeri
Martin Hensel

EMedia Magazine, May 2000
[Copyright © Online Inc.](#)

Microsoft enjoys monopoly power." Judge Penfield Jackson's finding, repeated throughout his November 5 ruling, marks an undeniable turning point in the way we compute and publish. It will no doubt take a while for its full impact to play out, but it is already reasonable to ask what the ruling's effect will be on publishing tools and vendors, whether for optical media or the Web. You can throw darts at the computing alphabet and every dart would land on an area of change. Here's where our darts landed in an initial analysis to sort out safe directions in future tools and technology bets: Web browsers (and XML), word processing, and streaming multimedia. Each of these areas may be poised for change providing choices based on standards rather than Microsoft's market dominance.

Bill Gates recently stated that there are two key factors to Microsoft's continued success: Windows 2000 and XML. In fact, a chastened Microsoft may find that its most astute product strategy may be to provide the best implementation of industry standards including XML--something, ironically, that perhaps only Microsoft has the resources to do.

browse, but don't buy

After downplaying the Internet, Microsoft was quick to purchase a Web browser and then improve, bundle, and integrate Internet Explorer with Windows. Netscape's Navigator, functionally richer and initially for-purchase only, slowly lost market share to the free Microsoft alternative. But today, it's IE 5 that has an integrated XML parser and support for the Document Object Model; Netscape's, as of this writing, is only a promise. In fact, whenever you point a 4.x Netscape browser at XML content, the best it can do is to transfer control to Explorer. Why, therefore, consider any browser rather than Explorer, and why target XML Web development to anything but Explorer? After all, Microsoft has worked elbow-to-elbow with

other vendors on the World Wide Web consortium (W3C), and has pledged complete support for XML and its companion standards.

However, Microsoft hasn't hesitated to bend or twist these standards when it was certain its extensions were superior to the standard (sometimes they were). Look closely at a recent debate about "data islands" proposed by Microsoft. To expedite the use of XML within an HTML document, Microsoft implemented a reasonable-sounding approach. To begin adding pockets of XML onto your HTML Web pages, users simply bound each island with elements named and `<\XML>`. All XML-impaired browsers will simply ignore such data islands as they do non-HTML tags today.

What's wrong with this Web picture is that the XML standard itself prescribes use of the name "XML" in any XML element name. And XML-aware browsers are required, by the XML standard, to stop processing any document containing illegal XML.

Although Internet Explorer will doubtless continue to support Microsoft-proprietary extensions, it looks like Explorer will be a safe bet for true compliance with the body of XML standards. Netscape has promised that Navigator 5.0 will support XML too, so any standards-based XML work should be safe.

choose your words perfectly

It's not surprising how a mediocre cash cow like MS Word in the hands of a monopolist can dominate a market. Unable still to express complex tables as well as WordPerfect for DOS did back in the early '90s, Word will also not provide XML support in Office 2000. Other products, notably Corel's WordPerfect Office 2000, ArborText's Adept 9.0, and SoftQuad's XMetal, do support XML. If you're developing XML documents, watch for increasing capabilities from these vendors to import styled Word documents into XML. A chastened Microsoft, knowing the value of XML, will either follow suit in time to upgrade Word or back off and allow these vendors to flourish, removing some of the risk of choosing a non-Microsoft vendor. Besides, if they are truly XML-standard, the risk is minimal.

SMIL: you're on internet camera

Where does Microsoft land on the use of the only W3C-released Web multimedia standard, the Synchronized Multimedia Integration Language (SMIL)? As often happens, a nimble upstart (RealNetworks) beat Microsoft to the product punch with a player that implements SMIL. Microsoft's reply: An early draft standard, HTML+TIME, that is superior and supported by Internet Explorer 5.0. (Just what we need: another major difference in browser behavior.) However, an upgrade to SMIL, SMIL-Boston, is now in draft stage and promises to incorporate whatever value HTML+TIME adds, but under an expanded and compatible SMIL standard.

Will Microsoft blink? Microsoft's beta version of Internet Explorer 5.5 professes support for the emerging SMIL-Boston standard (and thus, by implication, to SMIL). If you're building Web (or optical storage) content around SMIL, again, you're probably safe sticking with the standard.

Will a post-verdict Microsoft be forced to channel its energies into making better, standards-compliant products? Perhaps this is a case where lawyers can actually improve our publishing options.

Robert J. Boeri (bboeri@world.std.com) and **Martin Hensel** (mhensel@texterity.com) are co-columnists for Information Insider. Boeri is an Information Systems Publishing consultant at a Boston-area insurance company. Hensel is president of Texterity, Inc., a Newton, Massachusetts-based consulting firm that builds SGML-based editorial and production systems for publishers, corporations, ecommerce services, and type-setters.

Comments? Email us at letters@onlineinc.com.



[\[EMedia Home\]](#) [\[Subscriptions\]](#)

Copyright © 2000, [Online Inc.](#) All rights reserved.
info@onlineinc.com