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IMS releases new spec that connects digital content across the Web for eLearning

Business, Government, Digital Libraries, Higher Education, and K-12 to benefit from expanded power to discover, retrieve, store, share, and deliver digital information and training

Burlington, Mass. – March 10, 2003 – IMS Global Learning Consortium (IMS) today announced the release of its new Digital Repositories Interoperability (DRI) specification. DRI v1.0 defines a specific set of functions and protocols that enable diverse eLearning components to communicate with each other. These functions and protocols draw on XML technologies such as SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol) and XQuery, and established technologies such as Z39.50, developed by the library community. The specification acknowledges a wide range of content formats and is applicable internationally to both learning object repositories, as well as to other traditional content sources such as libraries and museum collections. The specification is available to the public without charge at <http://www.imsglobal.org>.

“The IMS DRI Specification is very important to corporate training, government, and education as well as to emerging performance support applications. DRI enables interoperability and discoverability across all of the applications and software tools in the eLearning supply chain.

With DRI we can exchange and re-use content,” said Tom Barefoot, Chief Operating Officer of Learning Objects Network, Inc., an Internet infrastructure company enabling secure commerce in high value digital content.

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Easier access to digital content

In a word, DRI enables interoperability, providing an immediate benefit to the international community of educational content publishers and users by facilitating easy exchange of content and interaction between systems. A key feature of the specification is that DRI includes existing search technologies (Z39.50) that have successfully served the library community for many years.

“This combination will enable a broad dissemination of third-generation publishing technologies such as Web Service for content brokerage and personalization – making DRI a Copernican revolution for publishing in the digital era,” said Fabrizio Cardinali, Chief Executive Officer of Giunti Interactive Labs, the New Media and eLearning Company of the Giunti Publishing Group and a leading European R&D company for eLearning, e-Publishing, and mobile communication.

International scope

In keeping with other IMS specifications, DRI encompasses user needs across education and training sectors and geographic regions. DRI was developed by an international group of technical experts from higher education, government agencies, corporations, libraries, and learning management system vendors.

Neil McLean, Director of IMS Australia, commented, “The DRI specification marks the first step in creating a globally accessible network of digital assets of relevance to learning communities. The challenge now is to extend the specification to ensure effective access management at the institutional level.”

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DRI Evolves from eLearning community

Building on specifications for meta-data and content packaging, the DRI recommends XQuery for XML Meta-data Search and simple messaging using SOAP with Attachments over HTTP for interoperability between repositories and learning management and content authoring systems. Recommendations also include use of unique identifier technologies such as DOI, Open URL, and PURL and future development of search intermediaries to provide common search across repositories using XQuery, Z39.50, or SQL. The DRI specification package includes an information model, a best practices guide, and a binding document.

Using tools from the Library community

In building a specification for digital library interoperability, the DRI group looked to the existing practices of actual libraries. For decades academic libraries have used internationally recognized standards such as MARC and Z39.50 for classifying, storing, managing, and retrieving massive amounts of information resources. The DRI work group also included participants from OCLC, a global library cooperative offering services for libraries and their users.

Lorcan Dempsey, Vice President, Research at OCLC commented, “DRI embraces current library practice as well as emerging approaches in the online learning space. The library community has had considerable experience building services layered across distributed repositories and has earned considerable understanding of the issues that need to be addressed for such services to work well, such as meta-data consistency, controlled vocabularies, and digital archiving. Yet the

community has had much to gain from the DRI development process with its focus on managing complex objects, content packaging, and providing support for rich learning experiences.”

Fretwell-Downing Informatics (FDI), a leading supplier of standards-based software solutions to libraries worldwide, was another primary contributor to DRI v1.0.

Robin Murray, FDI Managing Director said, "We are involved in several initiatives which demonstrate the rapid convergence of the digital library and eLearning communities. The release of DRI marks an important milestone in the development of mutual understanding between the two communities. The strength of DRI lies in its clear definition of the problem space, its re-use of existing standards and best practices where appropriate and its forward-looking approach to emerging technologies. It will prove a useful reference point for building standards-based and interoperable products in this arena."

About IMS

The IMS Global Learning Consortium develops open technical specifications to support distributed learning. All specifications developed by IMS are available to the public without charge through the IMS website. IMS is a non-profit organization supported by a worldwide consortium that includes 50 Contributing Members and 60 Developers Network subscribers. The IMS in Europe foundation supports activities among European members. Information about IMS specifications, on-going activities, and membership is available at the IMS website

www.imsglobal.org.

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