

THE GILBANE REPORT

Content Technology Works!

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XSL-FO: READY FOR PRIME TIME?

It's hard to believe it has been close to 20 years since the first attempts started to build a standard that would support the application of formatting characteristics and rules to descriptive markup. The ISO standard, DSSSL (Document Style Semantics and Specification Language) was a mammoth 10-year effort, and even the dramatically less ambitious US DoD Output Specification (known more widely but inaccurately as the FOSI – for Formatting Output Specification Instance) was a multi-year endeavor by a large number of developers and subject matter experts. Back then it was difficult to convince either IT or programmers that this was a difficult or even interesting problem. It is still difficult, but happily there is now plenty of interest fueled by the years of exponential growth of XML content we can confidently predict.

We haven't been directly involved in these efforts for quite some time, but the industry is fortunate that many experts who were involved have continued to play an active role and have been joined by a diverse, talented, and generous group to work on this problem as part of the W3C's XSL-FO (Formatting Objects) committee and elsewhere. It is time for us all to pay more attention to how far we've come and what we still have left to do.

This month we are happy to welcome publishing technology industry veteran Thad McIlroy as a contributor. Thad has spent a lot of time looking at XSL-FO to see how he should advise both his publishing and software vendor customers, and takes a frank, refreshing, and illuminating look at XSL-FO from the perspective of the user.

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