XML on the Front End: Connecting People & Processes in B2B E-commerce Environments

This month we welcome back Mary Laplante as a contributor. Mary’s article dovetails nicely with our analysis of e-commerce evolution in Volume 7, Number 10. In that issue we emphasized the similarities between B2B (business-to-business) and B2C (business-to-consumer) technology developments. Mary reminds us that there are also important differences. For example, where B2C solutions initially targeted human interaction with web pages and largely ignored integration with back-end systems, B2B solutions have done just the opposite — they have focused on the interaction between back-end systems and mostly neglected how humans interact with these systems.

As B2B systems become more integrated the growing number of many-to-many interactions become increasingly unwieldy. Humans need direct and easy access to these systems and processes to manage them. Because all the major B2B vendors are using XML to facilitate application and information integration, it seems obvious that we should expose this XML to humans via a browser to accomplish the required access. Mary builds a convincing case for connecting people and processes in B2B environments sooner rather than later.