Group Submits Interoperability Spec to W3C

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The SML standard proposed by a group of 11 major vendors is designed to streamline interoperability between management applications.

Eleven major network, systems and applications providers on March 22 submitted a specification to the World Wide Web Consortium designed to advance interoperability between management tools.

The group, consisting of BEA Systems, BMC Software, CA, Cisco Systems, Dell, EMC, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Intel, Microsoft and Sun Microsystems, delivered the Service Modeling Language specification they had honed over the last eight months to the W3C to turn into a standard.

The specification provides a common modeling language for a consistent way to define elements that make up a service, including applications, servers and networks, according to Ed Anderson, director of Microsoft's Dynamic Systems Initiative, in Redmond, Wash.

It gives a consistent way to communicate how those infrastructure elements and other IT resources are described in XML to allow enterprises to more holistically manage the services that ride on top of those elements, he said.

The companies also submitted a companion specification that defines how to share SML models between management applications, dubbed the SML Interchange Format.

SML goes beyond the Distributed Management Task Force's existing Common Information Model, which provides a standard way to instrument systems for real-time management by representing a "much richer set of data elements, including the interrelationship between system components," Anderson said. "It can represent policies and process elements in an orchestrated environment as well," he added.

The group of companies envisions mappings between different models, including SML and CIM, according to Wayne Adams, senior technologist for EMC, in Hopkinton, Mass.

To date, management software vendors have offered little in the way of interoperability between their products. Although some have implemented limited sharing of management data, the process for achieving such integration is cumbersome and requires significant individual customization.

SML allows vendors and enterprises to create a hierarchy of resource models from reusable building blocks, rather than requiring specific descriptions of each service. The SML modeling information can be used by a range of management functions, including deployment, configuration management, patches and updates, as well as service-level, availability and capacity management.

The vendors said they hope to continue to contribute to the specification as it winds its way through the W3C standardization process, which could take up to 24 months.