SWAD–Europe Deliverable std 3.10: Dissemination and Exploitation: Developer Outreach Report

This document summarises SWAD-Europe's work on developer outreach after the first year of the project, noting trends and issues that arose during collaborations with Semantic Web developers.

Workshops and Online Discussion

The SWAD-Europe Web site reports on the details of the project's activities. These include face-to-face workshops as well as virtual workshops and discussion, using email, Web, Wiki, Weblog and IRC chat technologies. Technical findings and proposals of the project have been disseminated to the Semantic Web developer community, in particular through the W3C RDF Interest Group and related fora.

Key Issues

This is a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis, based on the SWAD-Europe project team's various interactions with developers regarding Semantic Web technology, and on the author's experiences in chairing RDF Interest Group discussions between 1999-2003. This document does not attempt to reproduce a summary of each SWAD-Europe workshop; for details of these see the listing of reports on the SWAD-Europe site.

These observations focus on the need to identify concerns, trends and opportunities regarding the developer community's view of "Semantic Web" technology.

Note: this version of the document focusses on findings derived from active participation in Semantic Web discussions and SWAD-Europe developer workshops. As such it has built-in biases. Participants in this work may be early adopters, unrepresentative in terms of skills, language ability, knowledge of W3C/standards etc.

Terminology variation across developer groups - The terminology relating to the "Semantic Web" causes some confusion. Unlike "RDF", "XML", "RDF/XML", "OWL" etc., the phrase "Semantic Web" appears to evoke a variety of expectations and associations, since it is not the name for a specific, formally specified technology. In particular, many developers with background in the AI and Knowledge
The following brief conclusions can be drawn:

- XML and RDF are now well known and understood as technologies, and many developers consider both technologies to be useful tools in their portfolio; however, the 'big picture' of how they can be combined effectively in the "Semantic Web" is still emerging, and there is some variation in the way the phrase "Semantic Web" is popularly understood.

- There are significant unanswered questions regarding the relationship between any hypothetical RDF query work and related (existing or anticipated) W3C RDF and XML technologies. There is a significant body of work in the developer community (much of it open sourced and backed up by collaborative discussion in RDF IG fora) relating to RDF query, and significant common core functionality in existing RDF query systems. RDF and Semantic Web developers are aware of both trends and are looking to W3C to set expectations regarding next steps.