

SAKAI BOARD, SCA's & TEXTBOOK PUBLISHERS MEETING NOTES

Meeting Date: Wednesday, April 27, 1:00 – 5:00 PM

Location: Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA

Attending: David Murray, SunGuard SCT; Puneet Gupta, Metriscape; Pat Carey, IBM; Chuck Severance, Sakai; Ray Barker, rSmart; Murthy Tanniru, Foothill; Allen Noren, O'Reilly; Ashish Mathur, Metriscape; Jim Layne, Unicon; Jim Farmer, SEPP; John Blakley, Unicon; Ian Dolphin, U Hull/Board; Jon Stowe, Wiley; David Serbun, Houghton Mifflin; Ray Henderson, Pearson; Catherine Tierney, Stanford; Lois Brooks, Stanford/Board; Joseph Hardin, University of Michigan/Board; Vivie Sinou, Foothill College/Board.

Publishers provided a brief overview of the formats that they provide content (e-packs/cartridges) to WebCT and BB users. Cartridges may include a variety of learning assets, such as simple assessments and a series of PowerPoint presentations that may have links to a visual image library. The organization of content varies by learning/instructor activity. How content appears in each system also varies (icons, buttons, etc.). All this becomes part of the cartridge definition. The big markets for publisher content are writing and math, followed by general education courses - Intro psych, American history, Econ, etc.

Publishers differentiate between the content that they host in their proprietary course management systems ("premium" content) and content they made available in cartridges (add-ons/assets). Premium content was explained as highly dynamic, rich content (i.e. algorithmically driven test banks) as opposed to flat content and resources, such as PowerPoint presentations. Dynamic content may also include multiple assessment samples to help students traverse through content. This is achieved in proprietary applications - not cartridges. Use of interaction data from prior students helps track progress.

The largest type of learning object that sells with textbook cartridges is assessments. Publishers rely on their own proprietary storage types for the assessments and they convert them to a format compatible with WebCT, BlackBoard, and others (an extension of QTI). It was clearly expressed by the publishers in attendance that a common, rich profile in QTI is the biggest opportunity for standardization. The business drivers include the overwhelming investment to adapt rich content to everyone's system. Algorithmically driven test banks, for example, are not supported by QTI. The current QTI standard does not go far enough to support contemporary content, assessment and learning models. Publishers expressed disappointment that OKI did not work. Wish-list items include standards for richer content, common authentication, shared grade book, and common assignment list.

A concern was expressed that "IMS is hovering on the edge of irrelevancy." Although CMS systems "comply" with IMS QTI standards, conversions are required for each system - WebCT, BB, eCollege, desire2learn, etc., making this an expensive proposition for publishers. It was suggested that IMS bring publishers together to talk about a common format for cartridges. The question was asked if publishers would write to a common standard cartridge which allowed for richer content in a consistent way across LMS systems. The answer was an emphatic "yes."

All publishers host their own content nationally because there is no option to host rich content in a CMS. When it matters, publishers don't put content in a cartridge. The value proposition for publishers is limited. They believe that proprietary DRMs aimed at broadcast media and commercial music are too heavyweight for their needs. They won't do big things using API's from WebCT and BB. They are hopeful for better answers from Sakai because of the lack of business motivations on the part of Sakai.

An IMS group has been established that will create an entirely standards-based version of chalkbox and powerlinks. It is being led by WebCT, and followed by Sakai. Bb, WebCT, and Sakai will implement it. A demo will be given at Alt-lab 2005 will be held 20-22 June 2005 in Sheffield, United Kingdom. The goal is to get to 50% interoperability now and work toward 80% later.

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Questions were raised about metadata around content - how much and how it is represented. There is interest for internal representations of content. People are writing taxonomies for different disciplines. There are a lot of requests for customized content, with differing functionality. Discipline-specific standards seem to be emerging. It is tough to go there because it goes to the core of how people teach.

Summary of Key Next Steps by Chuck Severance:

Short term: "Dream Basic Cartridge"

- Better than QTI - richer and still common
- Repository in cartridge
 - Content
 - Index/metadata
 - Appears throughout IMS in right contexts
- SCORM modules-are there variants?
- Folders of 'stuff'
 - PPT's, etc.
- DRM
 - How do we distribute and protect?
 - Access model? (Contradiction between open source and DRM)
 - Copy protection
 - It would be nice to have a way to update content dynamically (patch)
 - Ecommerce
- Handling mathematics problems; math authoring tool, MathML, maybe ChemML

Medium term

- Tool interoperability
 - Build ecology of "beyond standards"
 - Assessment and content
 - Inside rapid innovation
 - "API" standards over web services concentrates investment
- QTI Algorithmic
 - Sounds like a great DMS effort
 - SAMigo [now called Sakai assessment] can evolve as reference implementation
 - Math symbols; MathML
 - Alt-i-Lab- June 06

Long term

- Learning centered materials with rich supporting standards
- Tracking usage and learning outcomes

Next Steps:

- Goal: Dream cartridge for June 2006 Alt-i-Lab.
- Ed Walker, CEO of IMS, is contacting publishers to organize a meeting to identify problems with existing specs and talk about a content packaging profile. Brad Wheeler, Sakai Board Vice-Chair will contact Ed to officially show support. From a big picture investment perspective for publishers, there needs to be enough traction and measurable results to make it worthwhile to reallocate resources.
- Publishers interested in joining the Sakai Commercial Affiliates program should contact Brad Wheeler.