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TITLE: Web-based Collaborative Software for PSOs

AGENDA ITEM: EWG, 5.3

DOCUMENT FOR:

Decision	X
Discussion	X
Information	

1 DECISION/ACTION REQUESTED

A proposal to SPOs to examine a web-based collaborative software to exchange information and documents.

2 REFERENCES

GSC-4/EDH(98)02 – Report on TSACC EDH Activities

ITU-T TSB Circular 182, Progress on Electronic Document Handling (EDH) facilities, 7 April 1999

SiteScape Forum: <http://www.sitescape.com>

3 RATIONALE

One of the key issues at the beginning of the Global Standards Collaboration process in the Electronic Working Group was to investigate document exchange. The Web has become an ubiquitous environment for this purpose. Each PSO and standards organisation created a web site providing access to their documents. At the last GSC meeting, Document Management, Alternatives to face-to-face meetings and Standards Development Tools has been identified as topics of interest. This proposal is to step forward and increases collaborative work among PSOs by proposing the use of Web-based collaborative software, the SiteScape Forum (SSF). Properties of this software, as demonstrated by its use by Standards

organisations in Canada and world-wide, makes it an open customisable environment for the purpose of greater collaboration among its users.

4 CONSEQUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS

By using a common Web based collaborative environment, PSO members would reduce their learning requirements, increase access to other PSO documents and allow for greater collaboration. Collaborating in developing customisation solutions for PSOs available in SSF could be shared among PSOs and reduce the costs of software development.

5 ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

How does SSF answer SPOs and SDOs needs?

To what type of collaborative work does SiteScape Forum respond?

Is it a “locked-in” solution?

Web-based Collaborative Software for PSOs

Introduction

The proliferation of web sites among standards organisations, forums and consortia and standards working group has created a new jungle for information making it very difficult for standards participating organisations and their members to keep track of work being done and where it is being done. Although the Web is a marvellous tool for disseminating information, it does not have within its infrastructure the elements for proper collaborative work. Each web site is design with a specific perspective in mind, responding to specific clientele and with characteristics proper to the host organisation.

The Telecommunications Standards Advisory Council of Canada (TSACC) presented a Web tool called the AltaVista Forum at the last GSC meeting, GSC-4. AltaVista Forum is a web based collaborative software. SiteScape has acquired the AltaVista Forum software in April 1999 and the name has been changed to SiteScape Forum (SSF). Its use is increasing among standards bodies in Canada and world-wide. This document is to inform GSC-EWG members regarding the development of SSF since the last GSC meeting and indicate the future use of SSF by standards bodies. This is a proposal to PSOs to use SSF as a collaborative working tool.

The new face of AltaVista Forum

At the last GSC meeting, TSACC was evaluating with the Standards Council of Canada version A of AltaVista Forum 98. AltaVista Forum 98A was put in place in November 1998 and is currently in use. In April 1999, AltaVista Forum changed hands. SiteScape (<http://www.sitescape.com>) acquired it. With this change, a new version of SiteScape Forum (SSF), the new name for the AltaVista Forum, was introduced (version 4.0). This new version is now in use by SSF Forums hosted by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC). The SCC is currently evaluating an add-on to the SSF called "SiteScape Forum Workflow" to allow tracking of document editing and "sign-off" allowing greater control over documents in progress.

SSF has been compared very favourably to a number of other collaborative software and groupware such as Lotus Notes, Netscape Virtual Office, ChangePoint, TeamWARE, IntraACTIVE, and WebTop. Its cost is on the low side compared to its competitors. It is highly customisable and administration is done via a Web browser.

Features of SiteScape Forum Version 4.0

Features can be grouped into three categories: User, Administrator, and Developer.

User

- **Self-registration**
Users can register themselves and maintain their own user profile.
- **Forums**
Ability to add, modify, delete documents, text, questions, URLs to main or sub-topics in public/private forums directly from a Web browser. No need for an FTP client.
- **Teams**
Ability to participate in a closed user group environment with calendar, news, chat facilities and forum facilities.
- **News**
Access to newsgroups
- **Chat**
Access to a chat facility
- **Calendar, public and private**
Access to public, team, users and own calendar. Allowed to add, delete or modify an entry. Allowed to schedule meetings and other events.
- **User profile**
Ability to modify user profile, choice of language of interaction, graphical or text interface. Need to maintain one full profile that can be linked in other forums.
- **Help files and SSF Environment can work in 9 languages**
The SSF is currently available in 9 languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese, Swedish, Finish, Dutch, Polish, Czech, and Portuguese.
- **Secure access**
Besides the normal "Name/Password" security, SSF allows administrators to choose various secure communications services.
- **Forum Tracking**
Ability to track all SSF world-wide forums and find out number of entries to review.
- **Mail notification**
Every time an item is added to a forum, the user gets a notification with a clickable link.

Administrator

- **Web based administration**

All administration work is done via a Web browser.

- **Forums and Team management**

Full control on forums and teams for adding, users, groups of users, for creating and deleting folders, etc.

- **Full facilities to allow/deny permission to users, group of users, forums, teams**

Administrator can specify various access permission to users or group of users related to forums, calendars, teams and other SSF areas

- **Add, modify and delete users**

- **Create forums, teams, calendars**

- **Customise forums, calendar and teams**

SSF provides easy customisation tools for forums, calendars and teams requiring basic knowledge of HTML

Developer

- **Advanced customisation**

SSF offers added customisation to develop specific interfaces and new modules

- **LDAP and ODBC Support**

- **Uses Tcl programming language**

- **Provides a Toolkit**

Future of SSF in Canada and in the world

At the last GSC, the main SSF user groups identified where the ISO/IEC JTC1 Canadian Advisory Committees and TSACC and some of its working groups. This number has increase significantly and is continually increasing. A list of current standards and standards related organisations is provided in Annex A. The SCC Forum is heavily used by its more than 2,000 users averaging over 120,000 hits/month.

The future and sustained development of SSF by SiteScape is making the next phase of collaborative work in standards an even better solution.

SiteScape has introduced new features to extend customisation and reliability. One of them is the Forum Add On software providing modular enhancements to the SSF. The first Add On software, Forum Workflow, is currently being reviewed and tested by the Standards Council of Canada. It provides increased collaborative capabilities to track document modifications and is likely to help in developing final

versions and balloting. Additions such as ODBC and LDAP support and new secure access could be taken advantage of.

TSACC is a member of the SCC Standards Information Service of Canada (SISC) Advisory Panel and contributes in the development and use of SSF. TSACC is currently reviewing the use of SSF by the Canadian National Organisation for the ITU.

SCC is testing the Forum Workflow for balloting and beta testing a new facility to allow response from e-mail without having to go to the Forum Web site.

Collaboration among PSOs

The value of a tool such as SSF is without dispute. Its value is such that PSOs and SDOs are either using similar tools or developing them. GSC was established to increase collaboration and one of the first working groups established was the EDH, now EWG, to review ways of collaborating among PSOs. Many venues of collaboration have been identified. At the last GSC meeting, Document Management, Alternatives to face-to-face meetings and Standards Development Tools has been identified as topics of interest. One way of achieving greater collaboration is to develop software for use by the PSOs and exchange it. Another approach is to examine available software and see if they would provide the same facilities and features at a reasonable cost. SSF is of the latter.

SSF is mainly used in Intranets and Extranets by midsize to large companies. The Standards Council of Canada and other SDOs and related standards organisations are currently using SSF to keep track of documents in progress, member's contributions and discussions. SSF is also used to achieve national consensus from NP (New work item Proposal) to IS (International Standards). There are among working groups three of them currently using secure transmission for conducting business on SSF.

Some of the key advantages of SSF are:

- Faster delivery of documents
- Better communication between SCC staff, team leaders/lead assessors, and members
- Unified and easy to learn access to information based on Web browsers
- More efficient system than using a composite of postal mail for documents or e-mail, listserv and FTP
- Constant availability of documents

One of the major stumbling blocks is document management. The number and size of documents prevent using e-mail systems as many e-mail systems have limitations on the size of attachments to e-mail. Also, it is a disservice to users

using POP mailers, especially if they are connected to the Internet via modems, even 56K modems! The alternative method for uploading/downloading documents is FTP. FTP usually requires an FTP application and can be labour intensive at the server end.

Using a JavaScript enabled browser and SSF solves many of these problems. Only one user interface (the browser) is used. Uploading of documents and related attachments can easily be done. Information is kept together. Documents are made available to all members the moment they are uploaded. A major feature of SSF is the automatic notification by e-mail of members participating in the forum or team where the document is posted. Notifications can be limited in size and documents can easily be downloaded from the Web site at the convenience of the users.

Discussions can be held using listserv/majordomo mailing lists, and for some discussions it is a better way of doing business. According to the "netiquette", one should not attach document to mailings but provide a URL, such as a SSF Web site. Having a SSF web site where members can comment directly on a document or a discussion topic provides a better trace for following up discussions. There is no need to repeat portions of message being commented on.

There are other advantages in using a product such as SiteScape Forum. An important one is availability and support for the software. Having a commercial enterprise provides some security in this matter. It is true that PSOs can develop their own solutions and share them with other PSOs. But this can only be done if the PSOs use the same underlying technology and hardware. Having a commercial product available on different hardware/software platforms allow PSOs not to be locked into a specific hardware/software solution. SSF fits the bill. It is currently available on NT and Unix platforms and later on Linux. It supports different web servers: Netscape, IIS, Apache, Purveyor.

Another important feature of SSF, is "Forum Tracking". Many PSO members participate in two or more working groups. Currently, they need to know the various ways that each working group has organised its documents and methods of work. If these various working groups were using SSF, it would start a normalised structure. With "Forum Tracking", members, using their home based SSF, would be able to keep track of specific forums of interest of other PSOs, permission required of course, connect to them and share information. This could even go to the point of merging some of the related forums if this is the wish of PSOs using them. The possibilities are endless.

Since SSF is a general-purpose collaborative tool, the PSOs could develop specific aspects that could be shared between them and increase the value and usefulness of SSF instead of developing their own "in-house" solutions. This could be the start of a new way of collaborating.

A PSO collaborative working tool

SSF has quite a large number of features that makes it an ideal collaborative working tool. A key strength of SSF is its customisability. It can adapt to each PSOs Web environment.

SSF can act as a repository of documents, a discussion group, and with "Forum Workflow" enable balloting. For PSO and SDO members, it provides an easy to use tool to upload documents.

As each PSO forums would have working groups on similar subject areas, Forum tracker would allow and ease collaborative work by providing a unified approach to accessing information.

SSF does not have a "required" format for documents. It is left to working groups and PSOs to decide what for of document exchange would exists. In fact, with the customisability of SSF, PSOs would be free to develop the next phase of collaboration, the exchange of documents in standard formats.

Conclusion

This document provides information about the SiteScape Forum, its usefulness in PSOs activities and proposes that PSOs consider SSF as a working tool for its working groups to increase collaboration among PSOs.

List of SDOs and Standards Related Organisations Using

SiteScape Forum

**Telecommunications Standards Advisory Council of Canada
(TSACC)**

Electronic Commerce

GSC-5 Planning Committee

RADio STandardisation

Working Group on Information Highway

Working Group on Privacy

Working Group on Security

Working Group on Standards Information Services

Standards Council of Canada

CAC/JTC1

Technical Committee on Information
Technology

CAC/JTC1/SC 1

CAC/JTC1/SC 2

CAC/JTC1/SC 6

CAC/JTC1/SC 7

CAC/JTC1/SC17

CAC/JTC1/SC22

CAC/JTC1/SC24

CAC/JTC1/SC25

CAC/JTC1/SC27

CAC/JTC1/SC29

CAC/JTC1/SC31

CAC/JTC1/SC32

CAC/JTC1/SC34

CAC/JTC1/SC35

Date Standard Access - ISO 8601

TEAM area

CAC/ISO

CAC/TC 5

CAC/TC 37

CAC/TC 68

CAC/TC 69

CAC/TC106

CAC/TC121

CAC/TC157

CAC/TC176

CAC/TC184

CAC/TC197

CAC/TC204

CAC/TC207

CAC/TC210

CAC/TC211

CSC/IEC

CNC/IEC	CSC/IEC/TC 74
CSC/IEC/CISPR	CSC/IEC/TC 77
CSC/IEC/TC 8	CSC/IEC/TC 82
CSC/IEC/TC 46	CSC/IEC/TC 85
CSC/IEC/TC 56	CSC/IEC/TC 86
CSC/IEC/TC 64	CSC/IEC/TC 92
CSC/IEC/TC 72	CSC/IEC/TC100

ISO/TC176 – International Secretariat**ISO/TC207 – International Secretariat**

International Organisation for Standardisation**Technical Committees**

ISO Strategies Implementation Group (SIG)	ISO/TC176/SC2/WG18/POTG
ISO/TC121/SC6 Secretariat	ISO/TC178/WG4
ISO/TC163/SC3 - Secretariat	ISO/TC207
ISO/TC163/SC3/WG2	ISO/TC207/CAG
ISO/TC163/SC3/WG4	JTC1 Business Team Electronic Commerce Document Server
ISO/TC163/SC3/WG5	JTC1-SC17-WG3 International Work Area (Travel Documents)
ISO/TC163/SC3/WG6	JTC1/SC1 – International Secretariat (Vocabulary) Public Access
ISO/TC176	JTC1/SC1 – International Secretariat (Vocabulary) Restricted Access
ISO/TC176-207 Auditing Joint Working Group (JWG)	JTC1/SC32/WG1 - Document Discussion Site
ISO/TC176-207 Joint Coordination Group (JCG)	TMB - Ad Hoc Working Group
ISO/TC176/SC2/WG18	

Other SDOs

CGSB – Canadian General Standards Board

CSA International – Canadian Standards Association International

ULC – Underwriters Laboratory of Canada

Standards Related bodies

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

PAC – Pacific Accreditation Co-operation

APLAC – Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Co-operation

Technical Committee Energy Efficiency Project

PALCAN – Program for Accreditation of Laboratories Canada

Quality Management Systems / Environmental Management Systems