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DEVELOPMENT

Decommissioning 'silos' and eliminating 'stovepipes'

Intercomms talks to Allen Brown about The Open Group's mission

Allen Brown has over 30 years of general management, operations and finance experience. He is currently the President and CEO of The Open Group, a technology-n neutral and vendor-n neutral consortium, which drives vision of Boundaryless Information Flow™ that will enable access to integrated information within and between enterprises based on open standards and global interoperability.

Mr. Brown has been with The Open Group since 1993, when he joined the then X/Open Company Limited with the dual responsibility of Chief Financial Officer and Vice President of Business Development. In this position he played a significant role in the development of the certification of conformance to the Single UNIX Specification and the licensing of the UNIX® trade mark. In 1994 he assumed the role of Chief Operating Officer and was actively involved in the merger of X/Open Company Limited with the Open Software Foundation. After the merger, as part of the integration activities, he was appointed Senior Vice President. In 1998 he was named Acting President and CEO, and later in the same year he was confirmed in his current position of the President and CEO of The Open Group.

Prior to joining The Open Group, Mr. Brown managed a consulting firm in London, which he founded in 1987. He enjoyed a mix of financial management and general management assignments, which included advising venture capitalists on investment decisions, and consulting on IT systems design and implementation. His clients included a broad range of companies and organizations in start-u up, turn-a around and growth situations, in a variety of industries including manufacturing, and distribution and retail.

In 1984 Mr. Brown co-ffounded Cambridge Venture Management Ltd, a consulting firm specializing in the provision of experienced management to small and developing companies on a part-t time basis, based in Cambridge, England. During this time he led a number of general management and financial management assignments. From 1972 to 1984 Mr. Brown worked in various financial and management accounting positions for Unilever plc and Unilever Computer Services Ltd. Mr. Brown holds an MBA from London Business School. He is married and resides in San Francisco, California and Colchester, England.

Q:Why was The Open Group formed?

A: The Open Group is a consortium comprising both the big customers of IT products and services and vendors of all sizes, bringing them together to discuss, address and resolve customer issues in the areas of interoperability. When The Open Group was founded in the 1980s, we and two other similar organisations focused on UNIX®. Now our activities are increasingly focused on other areas. We have approximately 200 members and growing. Participation is on the basis of one company, one vote. IBM, for example, counts as one member. All members are equal.

Two years ago we were working with our customer members in the Customer Council and we asked them to identify the key 'IT pain' that they were then feeling. All organisations have been trying for some time to break down boundaries and have cross-functional teams and task forces. This is something that Jack Welch of GE called the 'boundaryless organisation' for the purpose of responding more quickly to customers, reducing costs and becoming more competitive. The problem however, is that as we become more successful in having 'boundaryless' organisations, breaking down the silos or stovepipes is much more difficult. The organisation's IT systems have often been built up over as much as forty years and there are still a large number of stovepiped systems that don't talk to each other.

In order to make the organisation efficient, now that we have people talking together in a boundaryless organisation, we need information to flow in a boundaryless way too -although there is, of course, a need for security.

Q:Q: What progress has The Open Group made in achieving that goal?

A:One part of the progress is getting other organisations to address the issue in different ways. We talk about Boundaryless Information Flow™ but if you look at HP's Adaptive Enterprise and IBM's On Demand Computing they are variations on a similar theme. A lot of the work is 'adopt and adapt' existing standards so we work with other consortia and standards bodies to find ways of addressing this big challenge for our customers. We are not trying to solve the World's problems by ourselves; we are working with the OMG and others to solve them.

When you design a new IT system today, instead of just worrying about one department's requirements, it is now a case of looking at an overall enterprise architecture. You have to envision it working across the whole organisation. You have to take multiple user, management and security perspectives.

The term Architecture is not a great analogy for this, instead what we are doing is more analogous to being a town or city planner because it has to be dynamic not static.

Over the past five years The Open Group has been working on something called TOGAF (The Open Group Architecture Framework). It is not a framework in the traditional sense, it is a set of tools and information to help the information architect. The key jewel in the crown is TOGAF's Architecture Development Method, which helps with any framework of choice, through the process of building the architecture. Our members have been working on this for nine years, developing it from the DoD's DISA (Defence Information Systems Agency) TAFIM (The Architecture For Information Management).

The OMG also have something called Model Driven Architecture, which is based on UML. The key is that you can pick any architecture framework. TOGAF is the tool for helping you populate the architecture and to convert it you could use something like MDA.

Q: How do you measure your success?
A: There are a number of measures. We are now getting a steady stream of members and an increasing number of high profile organisations throughout the world downloading TOGAF documentation from our website free of charge. In

the first few months of this year there have been over 3000 such downloads. We have also certified over 100 individuals as TOGAF certified practitioners. We are seeing an awful lot of uptake and interest in this activity.

Q: Can you give me examples of the work you do?
A: The Open Group's forums bring together both customers and vendors to deal with issues of interest to them, including sharing best practices, addressing requirements, evolving and integrating specifications, and establishing policies. There are several of such forums covering architecture, enterprise management, security, real-time embedded systems, messaging, platform, and directory interoperability.

What we have found is that each member is taking an architecting approach to the challenges that they have met. For example, several of them have got together to ask how we can deal with issues of identity management. This is not a case of us trying to be a 'me-too' identity management forum. Our focus is not to compete with Liberty or Passport. What we are doing is trying to understand how to live with these competing standards and different approaches. So what we have done is publish a paper and to work towards creating an architecture guide on how to deal with different competing standards for identity management and what is the best way of putting them together.

Another example of our work is the work of the Messaging Forum. This is an area in which our members are really working together. The focus for this is both in terms of architecture and security. One of the challenges that our members brought into the organisation is to send secure email either to customers or within an organisation. For large organisations, for example, something a simple as an e-mail announcing where the Chief Executive Officer is going on his travels, needs to be done in a secure way. In the health care industry we are working with the Massachusetts Health Data Consortium on secure e-mail between doctor and patient.

The Messaging Forum has done two things. The first has been to adopt an architecting approach to secure messaging, establishing how to configure your e-mail client to be able to receive secure e-mail. The second is to determine what standards are already out there and to understand what has to be done to make sure that they work in the way that is needed. One of things to come out of this work has been the Secure Messaging Toolkit. We have also recognised that an existing standard, called S/ MIME, is good but often the products claiming to operate it do not conform to its standards, and that customers are looking for assurance of conformance and interoperability. What we have done is launch a certification programme to certify products that conform to S/ MIME standards. We have a number of other certification programmes across a number of areas.

Q: What are your future plans?
A: What The Open Group does is based on what the members want to do. What we provide is an environment in which members can work. Our mission is to drive Boundaryless Information Flow and try to get organisations to take up that vision and to live it in some way. Even if someone says we know nothing about Boundaryless Information Flow but we have got something like Adaptive Enterprise or Agile Enterprise, business on demand, then that is progress.

We recognise that there are a lot of groups out there that are already working on issues The Open Group are dealing with. One of the challenges is to ensure that we do not invent new standards but instead, make sure we exploit that which already exists, filling gaps only where gaps exist. For example, some of our members are working on something called Safety Critical Java to create a standard in that area.

Another area that is critical for Boundaryless Information Flow is system and enterprise management standards. This is an area in which we have a number of standards such as ARM (Application Response Measurement). We are finding that in these standards, the instrumentation of members' products is a key part of the boundaryless organisation and adaptive enterprise. We are moving in any way we

can toward 'boundarylessness'. In our mission statement there are a number of goals: work with customers to understand and address their requirements; work with vendors and other consortia and standards bodies to address them and to integrate rather than have fragmentation in the industry; help other consortia to operate and to provide services to other consortia so there is more consistency in the industry. We believe we have the premier certification process for certification of conformance to standards that exist in the industry and we provide that service to other consortia.

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