

**Publisher's Report on the "*Pilot to release metadata for content provided by a consortium of engineering trade information publishers*" Project, one of strand A of the JISC Metadata & Interoperability Projects (5/03). Project lead by EEVL, the Internet guide to engineering, mathematics and computing.**

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**Brief Summary of Involvement:**

Pro-Talk Ltd produces a series of eight industry-based websites and email newsletters which have the sole aim of collating and presenting manufacturers' press releases for their particular sector. The operation has been running since January 2000.

Press releases are emailed to the site editors by the manufacturers, where they are added to a database (after any necessary editing). This database then produces the relevant plain HTML web pages to add to the site each day. The entire sites, with the exception of the internal search engine, are 'static', in that no pages are generated 'dynamically'. This is intentional, as an objective of the site has always been to be as compatible as possible with any external technology, including browsers, search engines and other visitors, and to be as simple as possible. To this end, all HTML is W3C-validated, there is no Java, Flash or Shockwave, and the bare minimum of graphical content.

To create any new feature or format on the sites, additional routines are written to the page-generation process. For example, text-only versions of the pages were added at a very early stage (which can be called off by an email autoresponder), and XML-compliant summaries of every news story on the site were added at a later stage in order to create a separate site-analysis database.

Creating RSS newsfeeds was therefore very straightforward, requiring only additional output modules to be added to the system. In addition to the single "latest news" RSS file [1] for each site (updated daily), it was easy to create one for each manufacturer featured on the sites, instantly producing over 7,000 such feeds [2], of which between 100 and 200 are updated with new data each day. This was added in the hope that manufacturers themselves would take advantage of the RSS file for their own company to add their own news to their own web projects (in the past, many have still not added their own news

information to their own web sites weeks after it has been sent out to the press). No examples of this are known yet, but one enterprising manufacturer has already begun using the general feed to augment its site [3].

#### **Technical Implementation:**

Pro-Talk is a very lean organisation, so the creation of the RSS feeds was discussed and implemented within a day. No problems were encountered, although some useful criticism was provided by the EEVL team, and an improved version was implemented soon afterwards. This has been used successfully on the EEVL demonstrator website, and has been submitted to internet resources such as Newsisfree and Syndic8.

The RSS feeds have been tested successfully in desktop readers such as Awasu, and using the Pro-Talk newsletters, which have a combined circulation of over 100,000 professionals, the existence of the feeds will soon be publicised to a wider audience.

#### **Future Usage of RSS:**

Our thoughts are that RSS newsfeeds are an interesting technology but the software required to be able to integrate these into websites will need to become a lot simpler and better-known before the feeds start becoming used widely, especially in the industrial sector where Pro-Talk operates. The minimal effort involved in producing them was certainly worthwhile for the few sites which will use them for now, but we believe that widespread use of them will remain very limited in the next year or two.

#### **Comments on RSS Guidelines:**

Engineeringtalk introduced its readers to RSS in its 14 August 2003 issue, primarily from the point of view of encouraging its readers to become users of newsfeeds. In future issues (and in direct correspondence to suppliers), the newsletter intends to discuss syndication of news through RSS, as many readers have their own websites which could use such a service. For this, the EEVL Guidelines/Primer will be quoted as the recommended introduction, as soon as it has reached a release version. The EEVL RSS Demonstrator will also be quoted as an example of what can be offered.

## References:

- [1] Example: [http://www.engineeringtalk.com/indexes/latest\\_rss.xml](http://www.engineeringtalk.com/indexes/latest_rss.xml)
- [2] Example: [http://www.engineeringtalk.com/news/ade/ade000\\_rss.xml](http://www.engineeringtalk.com/news/ade/ade000_rss.xml)
- [3] See <http://www.centreline.biz>