

Interoperability: Competition in the Digital World

Moderator

Michael Jay, Educational Systemics

Panelists

Jeremy Auger, Desire2Learn

Larry Furth, Schools Interoperability Framework Association (SIFA)

Robert Iskander, VIP Tone

The panel addressed data interoperability and content portability. Jay urged the audience to just jump in: if you wait, decisions will be made by others.

Jeremy Auger is the Chief Operating Officer for Desire2Learn. The organization was founded in 1999 and now accommodates 5 million users. Its products (i.e. Learning Management Systems, Learning Object Repository) assist in the delivery of online learning for schools, colleges, universities, and corporations. The way content publishers deliver products has become increasingly complex; this trend is exacerbated by a new demand for higher granularity rather than a full book or course. There must be compatibility with LMS systems. The panel named several pros and cons of using standards, rather than applications and products that do not support interoperability.

Cons:

- Easier to switch away
- May remove competitive advantage
- Reduces opportunity for exclusivity between vendors
- If you're trying to keep new competitors out of the market

Pros:

- Selling feature
- Work together on standards
- Instrument can be better used
- Add value above the standard

Needs:

- Robust industry participation
- Wider adoption of standards
- Factor out the lowest common denominator
- Focus on building beyond

Larry Fruth is the Executive Director of the Schools Interoperability Framework Association (SIFA). Fruth talked largely about the current marketplace challenges, including the importance of meeting many assorted needs simultaneously. SIFA's 1400 members, for instance, represent many diverse industrial backgrounds, so the association must meet multiple levels of need—interoperability is necessary. SIFA has identified two key implementation concepts: horizontal and vertical interoperability.

Many social and political spheres will benefit from compatibility among applications:

- Pk12 data
- Medicaid
- Early childhood
- Healthcare
- Criminal justice

- Community support
- Teaching and learning
- Foundation in research

Fruth discussed Core SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model), which is a proposed future version of SCORM. Core SCORM seeks to achieve interoperability within the application.

Robert Iskander is the founder and CEO for VIP Tone, Inc. VIP Tone, Inc. seeks to connect all the dots for K-20 education and helps educators serving over 7000 schools. Iskander advocated robust industry participation, widespread adoption of standards and “coopetition” (cooperation and competition) among vendors to better serve the industry and its participants. Iskander described some of the forces at work in the industry:

- Market fragmentation (i.e. fragmented solutions, fragmented suppliers)
- Accountability compliance
- Slow adoption
- Integration standards
- SaaS in the Enterprise
- Open Source and Open APIs (Application Programming Interface)

Clients are looking for a portal, Iskander said—one place to go for administration, students, and teachers. He named several partnership opportunities for such products including the Vendor Centric Ecosystem (i.e. Blackboard) and the Customer Centric Ecosystem (i.e. Edutonexchange). Iskander supported a customer-centered ecosystem so the customer can be in control. Interoperability and cooperation, he said, should be working for the customer.