

ZAPTHINK ZAPNOTE™

ALTOVA *XML DEVELOPER INTELLIGENCE WITH XML SPY*

August, 2001

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Abstract

While previous versions of Altova's XML Spy product were focused on serving solely the needs of XML developers, the new version of the product adds a new market – XML content creators and users. The Austrian company hopes to bring XML spy from developer-focused IDE to a comprehensive product line that covers two major markets: developers and non-technical content users.

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XML Content Creation

Usability issues have been emerging over the past year as XML gains adoption. While XML touts "human-readability" as one of its primary advantages, humans often create XML code that is often not as human-readable as it should be. As document sizes increase, concerns for bandwidth, storage space, and processing requirements have likewise increased. In addition, e-Business needs have driven developers to create systems that can be automatically processed by machines. Developers are increasingly turning to identifiers and other machine-readable elements for encoding in their documents. These codes, while machine-readable, are unintelligible to their human counterparts. A mechanism to simplify and abstract these processes is needed.

XML Spy

Altova's **XML Spy** product is very well known in the XML developer community. It provides a graphical Interactive Development Environment (IDE) for the development of XML schema, documents, and style sheets. They were one of the first companies to support the W3C XML Schema candidate recommendation in late October of 2000. Their graphical XML document and schema development tools have been making their presence well known in the XML community.

Their 4.0 version, which was introduced in July, has a much greater horizon and scope. While previous versions of the product were focused on serving solely the needs of XML developers, the new version of the product adds a new market – XML content creators and users. The Austrian company hopes to bring XML spy from developer-focused IDE to a comprehensive product line that covers two major markets: developers and non-technical content users. While the former market area is well covered by XML Spy and other development tools, the latter area has been dominated mostly by notable document management and SGML-originating tools vendors such as ArborText and SoftQuad. However, Altova believes that they have a good chance in competing in this space, primarily due to their experience with XSLT and XML Schema. Their design goal is to provide administrators and IT users a tool for creating a working environment that end-users can use to create XML content as easily as if it was a Microsoft Word document. The object is that the end-user should never have to see the XML document itself if they don't have to. In this regard, XML Spy is addressing the usability aspect of XML, rather than the technical or development aspects of the language.

In this vein, Altova has split their product line into three major parts. The existing development environment will continue to be developed and sold as the XML Spy IDE, which continues the feature set present in the 3.5 version of the product, with expanded functionality for database connectivity and dynamic creation of schema using relational data stores. The new, content-

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user oriented product will be released as the XML Spy Document Editor, and Altova will release the XSLT Stylesheet Designer as a separate product.

XML Spy Document Editor

Of course, it is the XML Spy Document Editor that aims to provide the content-user functionality. The Document Editor leverages Altova's strength in XSLT technology as a means for providing editing and abstraction for XML documents as well as an output format for the XML content itself. This use of XSLT gives the product a graphical interface to the document model. The product allows developers to specify templates that content creators can use to develop XML documents without ever seeing the XML code itself. One of the primary features is the use of schema to abstract identifiers and other codes so that a content user can see a vocabulary term, such as "rent" instead of an identifier such as "ID230c-34Xxy". The combination of standardized XSLT used to create this visual editing environment and XML Schema used to provide the content model and as a means for real-time data validation will bring them into a competitive position in the market.

Market and Competition

XML Spy also aims to compete with the document creation market by pricing itself at the developer-attractive \$199 per user level. While the XML Spy development line is only offered on the Windows platform, over 80% of development on the desktop is on this platform, even though final XML delivery may be on an alternate platform.

In addition to competing with SoftQuad and ArborText, XML Spy faces challenges from Tibco Extensibility (XML Authority and XML Instance), eXcelon Style Studio, and to some extent the IBM Alphaworks product line. There are some overlaps with Microsoft's Visual Studio, but the goal for the Visual Studio line is an integrated environment. In any case, Microsoft has purchased many licenses of XML Spy for their internal use.

Company History

Before Altova was involved in XML, they were a software development company focused on database directory applications for European telephone companies. They investigated alternative technologies for manipulating and exchanging their phone book data in 1998 and that's how they got into XML. Effective August 2000, they have shifted their focus entirely on the emerging XML market, and now have over 40,000 installed and sold licenses, with over 1,000 evaluation units being downloaded a day.

Key Conclusions & Recommendations

- XML Spy's pre-eminence in the XML developer community bodes well for its entry and popularity in the Content Creation market
- Altova has long been a prominent supporter of W3C and other XML standards, and thus leads in the industry for their adoption of formats such as XML Schema.
- However, Content Creation is a different business with different user types and usage patterns than XML document creation. As such, users seeking a content creation solution should evaluate XML Spy in conjunction with offerings from SoftQuad, ArborText, and other "traditional" content creation tools.

Profile: Altova	(August, 2001)
Date Founded: 1992 (As Icon Information-Systems)	
Funding: Privately-held	
CEO: Alexander Falk	
Products:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• XML Spy Suite<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ IDE○ Document Framework<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ XSLT Designer▪ Document Editor	
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Related Research

- *XML in the Content Lifecycle* Report (ZTR-CL100)
- *Corel ZapNote* (ZTZN-0118)
- *HyperVision ZapNote* (ZTZN-0249)

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About ZapThink, LLC

ZapThink is an IT market intelligence firm that provides trusted advice and critical insight into XML, Web Services, and Service Orientation. We provide our target audience of IT vendors, service providers and end-users a clear roadmap for standards-based, loosely coupled distributed computing – a vision of IT meeting the needs of the agile business.

ZapThink's role is to help companies understand these IT products and services in the context of SOAs and the vision of Service Orientation. ZapThink provides market intelligence to IT vendors who offer XML and Web Services-based products to help them understand their competitive landscape and how to communicate their value proposition to their customers within the context of Service Orientation, and lay out their product roadmaps for the coming wave of Service Orientation. ZapThink also provides implementation intelligence to IT users who are seeking guidance and clarity into how to assemble the available products and services into a coherent roadmap to Service Orientation. Finally, ZapThink provides demand intelligence to IT vendors and service providers who must understand the needs of IT users as they follow the roadmap to Service Orientation.

ZapThink's senior analysts are widely regarded as the "go to analysts" for XML, Web Services, and SOAs by vendors, end-users, and the press. They are in great demand as speakers, and have presented at conferences and industry events around the world. They are among the most quoted industry analysts in the IT industry.

ZapThink was founded in October 2000 and is headquartered in Waltham, Massachusetts. Its customers include Global 1000 firms, public sector organizations around the world, and many emerging businesses. ZapThink Analysts have years of experience in IT as well as research and analysis. Its analysts have previously been with such firms as IDC and ChannelWave, and have sat on the working group committees for standards bodies such as RosettaNet, UDDI, CPExchange, ebXML, EIDX, and CompTIA.

Call, email, or visit the ZapThink Web site to learn more about how ZapThink can help you to better understand how XML and Web Services impact your business or organization.

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