

OGC's column for February 2002 GeoWorld

Title: Get Your Free Interoperability Roadmap!

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If you have been reading OGC's column in this publication over the years, you have learned how the OGC consensus specification development process, augmented now by the active testbed program, yields OpenGIS Specifications for standard interfaces and protocols that enable interoperable geoprocessing.

In OGC's first years, people often found it hard to understand the OGC story, primarily because the work was very technical and OGC's approach was (and still is) fundamentally different from all other geospatial standards initiatives. But the companies, agencies, and universities involved in the OGC process understood its value. They persevered, and now their labors are beginning to bear fruit in the marketplace.

As of January 1, 2002, there are 9 adopted OpenGIS Implementation Specifications and 11 candidate specs in the pipeline. As listed on <http://opengis.org/techno/conformance.htm#products> (select "Conforming" and "Implementing"), six software vendors currently offer 19 commercial products that have passed OpenGIS Specification conformance tests. Over twenty vendors offer 104 commercial products that use OpenGIS Interface Specifications but have not yet passed a formal conformance test. Further, we frequently hear about other implementations that have not yet been officially reported to us. The set of interoperable products grows steadily.

Where is this headed? Where do we want to go? OGC's specification and testbed process yields specifications that resolve interoperability "pain in the marketplace." But which pain gets addressed first? What is the plan? How can you begin to take advantage of this progress?

You can read the Roadmap. The OGC Roadmap is a document, until now "member confidential," that has evolved over the years in the OGC Planning Committee (previously called the Management Committee.) The Roadmap helps members and non-members understand and navigate current and planned OpenGIS Specification activity. The name change from "Management Committee" to "Planning Committee," reflects the narrowed focus of this group, which is composed of management-level representatives of companies and agencies, plus a few additional members who represent, for example, ISO TC/204, FGDC, and the OGC Technical Committee. They meet five times a year with one primary task: maintain the Roadmap.

The Roadmap is now available to the public at <http://www.opengis.org/roadmap/index.htm>. It was previously confidential because complicated dependencies weighed against public pre-announcements. But we are past that point now, thanks in no small part to OGC's Interoperability Program, a program of multiple concurrent testbeds, feasibility studies, pilot projects, and technology insertion

projects that has enabled specification development to become more controllable from inside OGC and more predictable from outside OGC. Some Roadmap information remains "member confidential," but OGC will continue to expand the range of information available to the public.

At first glance, the Roadmap provides a "plan and schedule" for OGC programs and specification development, but in reality it is much more. It encapsulates all the work that has been done in OGC, it shows what work is currently under way, and it outlines what will be done. It explains known dependencies. The visual representation of the Roadmap on the web site links to OGC documents that provide in-depth explanation. Many of these documents are OGC's formal documents: white papers, Calls for Participation in testbeds, Requests for Comment on proposed specifications, Requests for Proposals for new specifications, etc. It points to contact information for key individuals, such as the chairs of the Working Groups and Special Interest Groups, who can answer specific technical questions. Soon, the Roadmap will provide detailed technical architecture views and views by market or user domain.

In OGC, our geospatial industry is organized in an exceptional and very useful way. All the major players participate. By their will and wisdom, geoprocessing's future is bolted to the dominant advances in information technology -- in particular, you'll notice the importance of online services based on technologies such as XML, SOAP, WSDL and HTTP. Government agencies and major technology-using corporations target gaps they see in the Roadmap by sponsoring testbeds to rapidly develop sponsor-requested, market-opening "plug and play" specifications. Maintaining the Roadmap means integrating, organizing, coordinating, and adding to -- and sometimes subtracting from -- the rich mix of specification activities. Guidance for this work comes from OGC pilot programs in which collaborating communities test and experiment with commercially available interoperating products. There is tremendous value in this kind of cooperation, for both providers and users of spatial technology. Managers on both sides can not only predict, but also influence, the proliferation of specific kinds of spatial technology products and services.

We hope you find the OGC Roadmap useful, and perhaps you will discover in it a reason to become involved in OGC.

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