

AutoDESA Discussion Paper for the Next General Meeting – August 24, 2006.

Topic – STAR DTS Standards.

This paper has been provided to you prior to the AutoDESA meeting in order for you to have time to consider the subject matter. This topic will be presented at the next general meeting allowing for your questions to be answered. It is proposed that a motion will be put forward to the group that recommends AutoDESA supports the STAR XML and DTS standards. As a member, your input into this decision is required.

The Background

The adoption of XML data standards around the world within Automotive Retail has been slow. A number of barriers are present that are unlikely to be removed for many years ahead. For years now, many OEM's have exchanged data files with Dealer Management Systems and other external third parties. The general nature of this data is non-time critical and batch in nature. Many of the systems within the organisations involved are still in use today and many are not planned to be replaced at this time. For this reason, a data file standard is recommended that is better suited to batch communications, current systems and infrastructure.

The Barriers

Real-time message exchange via XML is a very new paradigm for many of us. The real-time world requires a sophisticated transport infrastructure and management fabric due to the transactional nature of the data transfer. Clearly the new paradigm will allow for greater systems integration in future when request-response actions are implemented, the use of XML technologies to simply transport a number of transactions within a single message from one entity to another is a very costly and complex technical approach. The application platform and design for many organisations within Automotive Retail have had millions of dollars invested into their creation and continued development over many years. Many of these applications are not inherently able to process and generate XML. Many implementations of XML today are achieved with 'bolt-on' XML translator software, this design gives rise to a number of issues including schema validation that are avoided when using new technology based applications.

The Requirements

When we consider the types of data transfers, clearly some are non-time critical and non-transactional in nature. A monthly Parts Master Price file for example provides no advantage to the business if transferred real-time, it tends to be large in size (>5MB before XML formation) and therefore requires an efficient transport approach. Other batch data transfers include, weekly parts stock orders, batch warranty claims and all data generated during over night or end-of-day processes. The STAR organisation has for many years recognised this and still today actively develops the Data Transfer Specifications (DTS). Today, a STAR XML Parts Master Standard is not available, however, STAR Parts Master v1.4 is available in DTS.

The Solution – 'STAR DTS'

The STAR DTS Standard is very well established and flexible CSV file format. Its adoption is very common across many OEM's and DSP's due to the simplicity of generation in addition to the many file transport options available. Currently eighteen STAR DTS Standards are available and more are in development today. Each STAR DTS Standard complies to a general set of rules, these rules cover File Naming, Record Format and Symbols for numeric data, decimal position, signed data etc. A STAR DTS Standard can have many optional record types contained depending on the business need. Within each record defined fields are organised to keep the most commonly used fields within a record up-front, this allows the record to be terminated after the last field is populated. Furthermore, if all fields in a record are not required for a particular implementation, the entire record is not included in the file. Further information will be provided during the next AutoDESA meeting including the requirements for documentation. Technical detail is available on the STAR website – www.starstandards.org (DTS Specs) for those who are interested.

If you have any questions you would like to ask prior to the meeting, please send me an email to gconnor@ford.com.

Geoff Connor
Ph. 03 93597207
Mb. 0411 043 458