Introducing The Open Group

In its debut installment, our newest column examines in depth the charter of The Open Group.

The consolidation of Open Software Foundation (OSF) and X/Open Co. under a new umbrella organization, to be known as The Open Group, was officially announced at the UniForum Conference in February. As with any such event, the announcement was merely the tip of an iceberg. Inaugurating this monthly column, we'll talk about what OSF and X/Open bring to the newly formed group and what you can expect to see from The Open Group in the coming months.

The Open Group is chartered to enhance the speed and effectiveness of open systems technology development and the development and adoption of open systems specifications. Much of the impetus for its formation came from the OSF and X/Open user organizations, which have consolidated to form the Open Group Customer Council (OGCC) of more than 300 member companies. William Estrem of 3M Corp., OGCC cochair, says, "With the creation of a strong user organization, the open systems industry is saying that the requirements of the business marketplace will be the most important factor driving technology development and specifications."

Besides the commitment of their user members, OSF and X/Open each bring a distinctive and complementary set of strengths to the combined organization.

OSF has a suite of standards-based open systems technologies, and its research organization is experienced in coordinating industry-wide collaborative research and development projects. X/Open has a process for developing and delivering open systems product specifications based on worldwide industry consensus. These product specifications are backed by the strength of the X/Open brand—a vendor's guarantee of a product's conformance to open systems specifications. The consolidation of the two organizations will ensure that the push and pull of new research and development against standardization efforts works to the benefit of the open systems industry and its customers.

The technologies OSF brings to the new organization are well-known among suppliers and purchasers of open systems.

The *OSF/Motif* graphical user interface is the worldwide IEEE standard user interface for open systems. Motif runs on virtually all computing platforms and functions similarly to Microsoft Windows. Development of the *Common Desktop Environment* (CDE), of which Motif is a component, is being coordinated by OSF.

The OSF *Distributed Computing Environment* (DCE) forms the foundation for the development and use of distributed applications in multiplatform distributed computing environments.

The *OSF/1* operating system is an implementation of the X/Open Single UNIX Specification.

The OSF Research Institute offers operating system technology for high-performance computing and a modular microkernel. These technologies have been incorporated by several companies into defense-related and commercial products. In addition, the Research Institute is a leader in World Wide Web research and the integration of DCE technology into the Web. Currently, the Research Institute has released for general use several ports of the Java programming language and a set of Web browser enhancements.

X/Open brings to the new organization

the UNIX specifications and brand;

the Motif specifications and brand;

standardized DCE specifications;

CDE specifications and branding under development;

the X/Open Federated Naming specifications;

and ongoing work in standardization of Open Database Connectivity (ODBC), distributed systems management and other areas.

Going Forward

Under the auspices of The Open Group, X/Open and OSF will coordinate their efforts to focus on three strategic areas: open systems platform development, distributed computing and the World Wide Web.

The *open systems platform* is a set of specifications and technology implementations supporting the deployment of off-the-shelf and custom applications. This platform is geared toward enterprise mission-critical server systems, departmental server systems and high-performance graphical workstations. The Open Group already owns and will continue to evolve the major interface specifications and tech-

By Amy Auman

nology implementations of the open systems platform. These specifications and technologies include

the X/Open Single UNIX Specification; X/Open SQL;

the X/Open X Window System specification;

the X/Open Motif Toolkit API;

the X/Open DCE and NFS specifications;

and the X/Open Common Desktop Environment specifications.

Over the next two years, The Open Group will deliver open systems platform security specifications, an application branding program and standard specifications for the next generation (64-bit) open operating system, CDE and Java. In the research area, The Open Group will focus on a scalable operating system technology for parallel computing that adheres to open systems platform specifications; a fault-tolerant operating system kernel; and fault-tolerant servers and realtime computing clusters. Near-term development plans call for major releases of the CDE and Motif technologies, as well as ports of the Java language to new systems and standardized complex text (non-Western language) layout capabilities for the CDE and Motif technologies.

The Open Group will focus on support for *enterprise distributed computing* through the definition of standard protocols and services and a "federation approach." This approach recognizes that the diversity of existing implementations rules out the adoption of a single strategic solution and sets out to manage rather than eliminate the diversity. Specific deliverables over the next two years include a DCE 1.2 implementation, an X/Open Federated Naming implementation and specifications for ODBC and distributed systems management.

The Open Group will focus on assisting the transition from the current Internet to one that is secure, predictable and linked to enterprise distributed computing; in other words, one that can support commercial business applications. Under development now are ports of the Java technology to additional platforms, integrations of DCE technology with the World Wide Web, and a set of tools to enhance the utility of the Web for individuals and workgroups. Slightly further down the road, The Open Group will release personal browsing assistants for the Web and enhanced integration of DCE and the Web. When the related technologies are sufficiently mature, The Open Group also will release standardized specifications for a secure Web server and for Java.

The Open Group's goal is to foster collaborative efforts toward delivery of the specifications and technology needed for successful, open enterprise computing. The Open Group aims to stay focused on the issues and technology of greatest importance to the user community. The OGCC will help to ensure this focus and invites all member companies to become active participants. **IT**

Amy Auman is manager of marketing communications programs for OSF. She can be reached at auman@osf.org.