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Web site puts XQuery coders in the zone

By Rich Seeley

Everybody needs a home and now programmers working with XQuery have one on the Web.

The xq:zone (<http://xqzone.marklogic.com/>) is sponsored by Mark Logic Corp., a San Mateo, Calif.-based developer of a database product for disparate content that makes extensive use of XQuery. The xq:zone is intended to provide help for developers working with the W3C standard for querying collections of XML data, including unstructured data, said Jason Hunter, lead applications engineer and XQuery guru at Mark Logic.

While it is intended for everyone from XQuery aficionados to novices, it would appear to be most helpful to those trying to find their way through the maze of XML standards to figure out what technology will work for database applications.

"Overall, I see with XQuery that there's three real good use cases," Hunter told XDT. "One is for transformations, which is like XSLT but done in a language that is more programmer-friendly. XSLT

can be very mind warping for a lot of people. At least, regular programmers have a harder time with XSLT than non-programmers, I think, because it's so different from procedural languages. XQuery is much more familiar to a programmer, more readily able to do transformations."

A second use for XQuery, according to the Mark Logic guru, is as an integration layer. "You use XQuery to access disparate data sources, each of which represents itself as XML," he said. "Because most content can be represented as XML, you can use XQuery script to do queries against these disparate data sources. I think that's a very exciting area."

However, Mark Logic only plays in those two XQuery areas peripherally, Hunter explained, as the company is focused on the third area: providing a large database for disparate enterprise information that can be accessed via XQuery.

The area Mark Logic is focused on is what Hunter calls "pure play," which he characterizes as "the storing of content that couldn't be stored before and accessing it in ways you couldn't do before."

Founded in 2001, Mark Logic built its Content Interaction Server "from the ground up" to provide data access to non-database data from Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, PDF files and e-mail, as well as HTML, SGML and XML documents, according to the company.

The Mark Logic product doesn't displace relational databases but works complementary to other data sources with XQuery being the common thread that can pull all the information together, Hunter said.

"So it doesn't mean you have to throw away your relational database," he said. "You have your relational database and right next to it you have your content database, and you can use XQuery as a query environment for both. You also can do it against whatever other disparate data environments you have and bring it all together with XQuery."

Although a start-up, Mark Logic claims major customers for its product, including the U.S. Department of Defense; Elsevier, one of the oldest and largest publishing companies in the world; and the famed Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

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xq:zone

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