



IMS Global Learning Consortium

Series on Learning Impact

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Technology Standards Offer Opportunities for Stronger Partnerships Between Vendors

Creating products that adhere to interoperability standards helps contain research and development costs as well as enhance their appeal to potential customers. Meeting those standards also offers opportunities for developing and strengthening partnerships between vendors.

An example of that synergy occurred at the IMS Global Learning Consortium's annual [Learning Impact](#) 2010 conference.

“Our product is really geared to allowing faculty to create content in a variety of learning management systems (LMS),” said Sue Evans, CEO and co-founder of SoftChalk, a leading provider of content authoring software for educators. “We have been adding the Common Cartridge capability to our product and last spring, at the conference, was the first time we were able to demonstrate our CC packaging feature. We wanted to see if we could take content produced on the fly during the conference and actually import it into a variety of different LMS. We were able to demonstrate that the content flowed easily into Moodle, Angel, Desire2Learn and some other systems.”

During one of the breaks, Evans was introduced to Rick Tomlinson, Product Manager, Academic Solutions for Jenzabar®, Inc., who informed her that Jenzabar's e-Racer® learning management system conformed to CC standards. “I had some content we had created on a thumb drive and suggested to Rick that we should give it a try and see if it worked in their system. He popped it in, up came the content, and away we went.”

At the EDUCAUSE conference in fall 2010, Tomlinson was conducting a presentation in Jenzabar's booth of their e-Racer LMS when it occurred to him that it would be great to demonstrate how easy it is to import content created in SoftChalk. "I tracked her down in their booth to see if we could use their product as part of our demonstration. Again, she had a couple things she saved for us in CC format and we demoed it in our presentation. The potential customers were pretty impressed and we've been using SoftChalk cartridges ever since."

Both Tomlinson and Evans said they are interested in exploring additional marketing opportunities between their two companies. "Our vision for e-Racer is to be a model of interoperability and we have placed our bets on IMS," said Tomlinson. "We think that is the way we need to go and we believe that the organization offers the best solution for bringing us all together in a common format." He added that whenever they are talking to potential customers, they talk about the fact that their offerings are IMS certified and explain the benefits of the process.

Evans said adhering to interoperability standards helps contain research and development costs. "It's one of the reasons why a small company like ours can create a product that can work easily in the various systems. If we had to write custom integration with every LMS, there isn't any way that we would be able to provide as much integration and support as we are currently able to do. It's been a big help to us."

SCORM, the standard created and maintained by the U.S. Defense Department for Computer Based Training, which also has IMS specifications as its foundation, offers users benefits. Evans said, however, they are pushing their customers toward IMS Global's Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI), which serves as the basis for their newly released platform, ScoreCenter for Blackboard. A new, easy and reliable way to track student score data into the gradebook of an LMS, Evans and her team will demonstrate the functionality of their new ScoreCenter offering at the IMS Learning Impact conference in May.

"Both SCORM and LTI are good standards, but how they are implemented is where the rubber meets the road," said Evans. "The thing I like about LTI, they give you hooks so you can get some of the functionality and build it very easily, but it also gives us a lot more control over how the software actually works. They've come up with standards for passing authentication information, for example."

One of the key differences between SCORM and IMS is that IMS standards are created and owned by the education community. SoftChalk, Jenzabar, and all of their institutional customers have had input into the IMS standards as they were created, and as they will continue to evolve. Added Tomlinson, "IMS is an industry-sponsored consortium with over 160 members around the world that are working together to make interoperability happen for the benefit of all. We have no doubt that IMS will continue to evolve and create complementary standards that we can all have a voice in their creation."

"What IMS has meant for us is a shorter time to market for our products as we've been able to build on the standards that have been implemented in the various LMS's," added Evans. "If we hadn't had the standards there to build against, it would have been a longer development cycle and we possibly wouldn't have been able to accomplish what we've been able to do."

About IMS GLC

From Innovation to Impact

IMS Global Learning is a nonprofit member organization that strives to enable the growth and impact of learning technology in higher education, K-12, and corporate education worldwide. IMS GLC members are leading corporations, higher education institutions, school districts and government organizations worldwide that are enabling the future of education by collaborating on interoperability standards and major adoption projects for the digital support of education and learning. IMS GLC also sponsors Learning Impact: a global awards program and conference that recognizes the impact of innovative technology on educational access, affordability, and quality. For more information visit www.imsglobal.org or contact info@imsglobal.org

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