Standards — Libraries, Data Providers, and SUSHI: the Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative

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The sheer amount of usage data now available to librarians who manage electronic resources represents a true “embarrassment of riches.” While the information is extensive and necessary to their operations, keeping up with it all has become a major problem. E-resource management systems now available or in development will provide tools to store and manipulate the data but may not offer much help with “intake.”

The Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (SUSHI) discussed below is aimed to solve the problem. The standard is essentially a “Web services” approach to solving the COUNTER consolidation problem. Given the market, it could conceivably become a requirement for electronic resource management systems.

SUSHI as COUNTER Companion

In response to the difficulty librarians are experiencing in making use of the COUNTER delimited reports, last summer a small group of librarians and vendors assembled and sketched out an automated protocol for moving COUNTER XML reports from providers to libraries. Later the group agreed to call the effort the Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (SUSHI). After a promising start, NISO recognized the activity in November.

The protocol is essentially a SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol) request/response Web Services “wrapper” for the XML version of COUNTER reports. In the protocol a transaction begins when a client service such as a usage data consolidation service or ILS vendor identifies itself to a data provider, identifies the customer whose statistics are being asked for, and specifies the desired report. In response, the server provides the report in XML format, along with the requestor and customer information — or an appropriate error message.

While there are a variety of possible requesters, the SUSHI model is premised on the notion that a long term solution mandates integrating usage statistics into existing library workflows, and might best be handled within the framework of an Electronic Resource Management (ERM) System. Given this background, it should come as no surprise that the librarians on the SUSHI working group are all steering group members of the Digital Library Federation’s Electronic Resource Management Initiative. In fact, SUSHI is an integral part of phase 2 of the DLF ERMI. Librarians are seeking a comprehensive solution to the management of licensed electronic resources that combines licensing, accurate holdings, orders, and statistics, among other important information from their entire life cycles. We believe models that set statistics apart from the rest of the life cycle of electronic resources are substantially less valuable, since so many factors must be considered when evaluating them.
Status of SUSHI

There are five vendors actively engaged in developing the SUSHI protocol: two content providers (EBSCO Information Services and Swets Information Services), two ILS vendors that offer ERM products (Innovative Interfaces, Inc. and Ex Libris), plus Thomson Scientific, which is working on a COUNTER statistics component that would link to their journal impact index. The initial emphasis among the development partners is on transmission of the COUNTER JR1 report.

As we write, the protocol will be offered in production within weeks at EBSCO and Swets. III is making it available in the beta version of their ERM module this month. Ex Libris will be following later this year with its integration of SUSHI in their Verde ERM product. Other vendors committed to implementing the protocol in 2006 include HARRASSOWITZ, Endeavor Information Systems, SirsiDynix, OCLC, and Serials Solutions. The Florida Center for Library Automation and College Center for Library Automation (CCLA) from the State of Florida Community Colleges are also interested.

The challenge at this point is lining up support among content providers. Beyond EBSCO and Swets, Cornell’s Project Euclid is the next content provider on the list to offer the protocol to customers. Early adopters of the protocol stand to gain a competitive edge, since Librarian colleagues we speak with are enthusiastic about the potential of the SUSHI protocol and are sure to compare it favorably when making decisions about products for purchase. SUSHI development kits are freely available for the .NET and Java Web Services environments. More information about SUSHI is available on the project page.5

Endnotes

1. COUNTER Website: http://www.projectcounter.org/articles.html.
2. In the summer of 2005, the project which would come to be called SUSHI started its investigations. Members of the team included: Ivy Anderson (California Digital Library), Adam Chandler (Cornell University Library), Ted Fons (Innovative Interfaces Inc.), Bill Hoffman (Swets Information Services), Tim Jewell (University of Washington Libraries), Ted Koppel (Ex Libris), and Oliver Pesch (EBSCO Information Systems).