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JAVA AND XML

The Genesis of JDOM

By Jason Hunter



As one of the co-developers of JDOM, Jason has gained a lot of insight into the trials and tribulations of standards development.

In the early months of 2000, before I knew [Brett](#), I found myself working with XML for a contract project and growing increasingly frustrated with DOM as a way to solve my problems. I had expectations for what a Java-based XML manipulation API would look like. DOM wasn't anything like it.

In the spring of 2000, I attended Brett's talk on DOM and SAX at the O'Reilly Conference on Enterprise Java. I was hoping he'd share with me the DOM philosophy so I could see why reality wasn't matching my expectations. Rather than clearing things up, every fifth slide in his presentation was titled "Gotcha!" and listed one more thing you had to watch out for.

After his talk we sat down together on the lawn in San Jose. It was a gorgeous spring day. I used the opportunity to ask him, and XML expert, "Why does it have to be like this?" We talked about it, and ten minutes later we decided to start an open source project to create a Java-specific XML object model. It was the first alternative to DOM in the Java world.

We worked for about a month designing the early API. We each had our role to play. Brett made sure the API was consistent with XML specifications. I made sure the API was acceptable to a Java programmer who wanted to just use XML and get on with their life. We had two private betas, then a public Beta 3.

After that, the events have all been public. Some of you have been there since the early days and have seen how the API has improved since Beta 3, gaining in XML compliance and feature set. You've also seen some truly excellent coders come to the project and help push the codebase forward. Sometimes managing an open source project feels like herding cats, but in the end there's no substitute for constant interaction with the user base, and there's nothing like finding the right programmer, usually someone you've never met before, to tackle a job.

Creating a high-profile XML project has given me an opportunity to learn XML in depth. Necessity is the mother of invention, but also of learning. On JDOM, I have the unique experience of working together with world experts on XML to solve design issues from the simplest to the most difficult and arcane.

Leading a high-profile open source project has also been useful in learning

About Brett

Brett McLaughlin co-founded the JDOM project with Jason. Brett is the author of [Java and XML](#) (O'Reilly) and publisher of the [newInstance.com](#) website.

Leading a high-profile open source project has also been useful in learning about the real-life dynamics of open source. I'd had open source experience before as a member of Apache, but it's different being a happy coder at Apache than being a responsible leader with JDOM. I used that knowledge of open source project leadership to get a day job with CollabNet where I consulted with OpenOffice.org, JXTA, and other open source projects. Practical experience in open source opens doors.

I've been quoted as saying, "The next time I dream up an open source project, I'll pick something easier than an XML API, like an operating system, maybe." I don't remember saying it, but I probably did. It sums up my feelings perfectly.

Jason Hunter (jasonhunter@servlets.com) is a consultant, publisher of [Servlets.com](http://servlets.com), author of *Java Servlet Programming*, and vice president of the Apache Software Foundation.