



A GXS Trading Grid® Radio Podcast

Channel WEDI 99.7MHz—B2B Technologies and Standards

AS3, AS4 and Beyond—Bob Heidish, GXS Global Product Manager for Communications and Connectivity, offers his viewpoints on the pros and cons of utilizing HTTPS, AS3 and MQ Series. Bob also offers his viewpoints on new standards under development such as AS4.

Steve Keifer:

Welcome to this edition of Trading Grid Radio. My name is Steve Keifer and I will be your host for today's program. Today we are happy to welcome back Bob Heidish, who is a Global Product Manager with GXS with responsibility for the Connectivity and Communications product lines at GXS, and we had Bob on an earlier podcast where we were talking about some of the trends that we're seeing in companies moving from private networking and van based communications models to more of the Internet standards. So Bob, welcome back.

Bob Heidish:

Hey Steve, good to be here.

Steve Keifer:

So I wanted to follow up on some of the good discussion we were having in the last podcast we had you join, and we started talking about some of the more popular protocols, like AS2 and secure FTP and HTTPS and all of the various different FTP variance. But one of the things that we didn't have time to talk about, I wanted to ask you about some of these other ASX standards. I know there's an AS1; I know AS2 you said was really one of the most popular ones that GXS has seen. What about AS3, it doesn't seem to me like there's been a lot of adoption for that, what's your take on that?

Bob Heidish:

Yea, I think there are a few things that can explain that. First off, for those that aren't familiar with AS3, AS 3 is a B2B inner operability protocol just like AS2 although the base transaction delivery protocol is over FTP as opposed to HTTP. So with AS3, first off if you were going to consider moving to an Internet protocol, and an inner operability protocol, you'd likely have already moved on AS2, and at this point there's no real advantage of moving to AS3. Some of the difference in functionality, AS2 is on real time so it's always on, whereas with AS3 being FTP based, you don't have that always on connection so you can do it more retrieve type model, but that's not necessarily where we're heading today in business where our information, you know, we want it to be delivered in real time. There's possibly a benefit to AS3 with large files, but you could argue that AS2 can deliver along those lines as well if it's tuned appropriately. So functionally there's no real big benefit of making the jump from AS2 to AS3, and if you're already trading with an AS2 community and you go to AS3, well who are you going to trade with? You need other partners in AS3 and there's just not that base out there doing AS3, so you would have to not only move yourself but get your community to move as well, which is, again, what's the purpose if you're already doing AS2? And the other thing, the reason I see, is there's been no market maker. So with AS2, Wal Mart came along and mandated it and really as their supplier community moved then other retailers moved and it really was this mass movement towards AS2 and this community grew and it gained widespread acceptance. With AS3 there's no one really driving it, so there's no motivating force for anyone to really move to AS3.

Steve Keifer: Interesting, so I hadn't thought about most of that. So it really does take a big hub pushing one of these protocols to drive the adoption, and in some ways I guess AS2 was so successful that there hasn't really been a need for an immediate success for based on FTP. What about, I read that there's now an AS4 standard that's either being developed or is already developed. What is AS4 and what are your thoughts on that, do you think that will see widespread adoption?

Bob Heidish: AS4 is a good concept; it's really applying the same inner operability standard, but applying it to web services or over HTTP. Something we really need is some standards around web services, although I think AS4 is going to face some of the same challenges as AS3. The drum group has already come out and stated that if you're doing AS2, there's no overly compelling reason to move to AS4 just for the move's sake. AS2 delivers a lot of the same functionality that's in AS4. And so then the next hurdle will be well is there a market maker, and at this point the AS4 is still being designed and developed but, you know, is there a market maker out there who will really push and drive the adoption of AS4, and that has to be in question. Although AS4 could have a place, if you do have some new community, I don't know maybe in a healthcare or some other community where the business file transfer is evolving and you have kind of a blank slate out there, well maybe there's room to introduce AS4 to the community and drive it across the whole community. So adding these standards around web services in general I think is a good thing.

Steve Keifer: Interesting, so I always thought web services was a much more tightly defined standard, but it sounds like from what you're saying that there's a bunch of different ways you can implement it. So, interesting on the AS3 and the AS4, but what about some of the other standards, are there any other ones out there other than FTP and the ASX series that are going to see adoption? What about things like MQ or HTTPS I keep hearing about?

Bob Heidish: MQ is a real interesting one because it's really not a B2B protocol, it's an integration middleware, but however, MQ, IBM has something like I think it's seventy percent of the market share, so it's a huge amount of the market. If you were not an MQ shop and you're not using MQ today, I wouldn't consider using MQ for my B2B protocol. However if you are an MQ shop then it would make perfect sense to try and extend that MQ connectivity out as far as you can into your B2B community, but the challenge would be, how do you extend that because you're not going to get all of your partners to do MQ. So this is where a service provider like a GXS comes into play, where we have a service where an MQ enabled customer can come into us, they extend their integration all the way into GXS' environment, and then we can help them deliver out to their partners using open standards like AS2 and FTP to get to their trading community.

Steve Keifer: I see, interesting, so if you're already an MQ shop you're being an IBM shop, or you're connecting with the US Customs or somebody else that requires MQ, that makes sense but otherwise it probably doesn't make much sense to make a big investment there versus some of the open standards.

Bob Heidish: Right and then web services, really web services are, from a standard standpoint are evolving. So it's really designed to provide an easy way to integrate the systems, but the problem with web services and B2B is each endpoint is defining their own web services. So there's still integration that's required to meet your partner's format if they're doing web services. For example, at GXS we have our own web services definition, but again it requires endpoints to conform to the GXS web service definition. So the concept makes sense but again at this point because of the lack of standards, there's still integration required with each endpoint that you're going to tie into.

Steve Keifer:

Interesting, seems very similar to the challenge we have with XML where each of the schemes can be defined by the users however they want, but maybe AS4 will help with that web services problem. Well hey, Bob, we're out of time for this session but I wanted to thank you for joining us again, you have really keen insights on the IP protocols, which our listeners will appreciate. And thanks to all of you for listening in, we look forward to seeing you on the next edition of Trading Grid Radio.

About GXS

GXS is a leading global provider of B2B e-commerce solutions that simplify and enhance business process integration and collaboration among trading partners. Organizations worldwide, including more than 70 percent of the Fortune 500, leverage the on-demand services on GXS Trading Grid® to extend supply chain networks, optimize product launches, automate warehouse receiving, manage electronic payments and gain supply chain visibility. GXS Managed Services, GXS' B2B outsourcing solution, empowers customers with the expertise, technical infrastructure and program support to conduct B2B e-commerce with trading partners globally.

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