Praxisbeitrag
eCl@ss – The leading classification system

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Abstract: The exchange of product data is an essential part of e-business: product selection, business transactions, maintenance procedures etc. rely on the availability of data about products. To ensure a common understanding and a general treatment of product data, classification and dictionary systems are used to define their essential technical parameters and/or to categorize the products. The importance of classification and dictionary systems has been recognized by major companies and industry branches. Many industry organizations have started to build their own specific classification or dictionary system, and big buyers have started to force their suppliers to use them.

1 Current state of the classification and dictionary market

As a result of this there are a growing number of classification or dictionary systems on the market. Unfortunately, many of them do not fulfil standard requirements:

- some do not conform to worldwide standards (e.g. ISO 13584)

- some do not provide a complete view of the product data; instead, they either categorize products or define technical parameters

- some are specifically tailored to single industry branches

- some do not provide sufficient industry support and maintenance structures

- some are not available via common software interfaces or in common data formats

- some do not have clear instructions or copyright regulations

2 eCl@ss fulfils the requirements of an international classification and dictionary system

To suit the needs of industry and trade, eCl@ss provides a general classification and dictionary structure which fulfils all the mentioned requirements. eCl@ss is a standard

based system that can be freely used across industry domains and that is backed by a strong industry community.

3 The eCl@ss Product

Since it started eCl@ss has been driven mainly by the requirements of industry and commerce. eCl@ss has evolved to the leading classification system in Europe and world-wide adoption is emerging. eCl@ss focuses on efficient support for all business processes throughout the entire product lifecycle. eCl@ss provides a complete product description and classification system, including a well-designed class hierarchy for categorizing products, clear multi-lingual textual definitions for the classes and a set of properties describing these classes (see figure 1).

Since eCl@ss is truly multi-lingual, suppliers benefit from using the eCl@ss product description and classification, since it means their attainable markets are extended. Engineering benefits from the very high degree of detail in eCl@ss' product description. Purchase departments of Europe's leading companies prefer eCl@ss because it is the most widely distributed and favoured e-business classification solution.
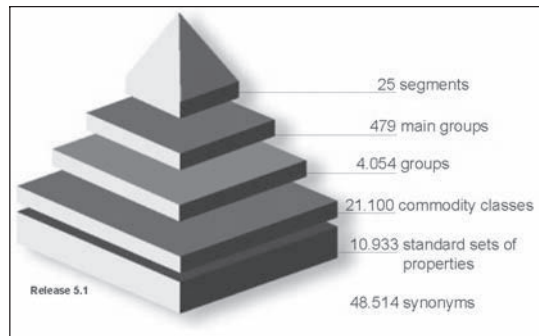

Figure 1: The eCl@ss-Structure

4 National and international standards: Basis for eCl@ss

The eCl@ss product classification and description is based on an international standardized data model, which is described in ISO 13584-42 and IEC 61360-2. Complete compliance to these standards secures the investments of eCl@ss customers and ensures support from leading software companies.

In order to secure future investments for eCl@ss users, eCl@ss complies with and uses nationally or internationally standardized properties (e.g. from the International Standardization Organization – ISO, from the International Electrotechnical Commission – IEC, from European standards, CEN, or, from the German standardization institute – DIN). Moreover, eCl@ss supports the development of an European multi-lingual product description and classification initiative.

5 Wide spread of eCl@ss

Numerous consultants and software companies have gained experience while implementing eCl@ss in several industrial sectors (i.e. automotive industry, chemical industry, ..) and support the eCl@ss standard. Well-proved processes reduce the cost of implementation and increase sustained benefits. Interfaces, tools and educational processes are well established and increase dissemination efficiency.

eCl@ss has easy, comprehensible and well defined copyright rules, and can be accessed free of charge. Thus, legal uncertainty and barriers to entering the growing eCl@ss community are avoided. Using a modern Web-based portal, retrieval of the eCl@ss' product classification and description schema is at your fingertips at www.eclassonline.com.

6 Ten reasons for using eCl@ss

The advantages of the use of eCl@ss can be summarized simply: eCl@ss …

- is based on national and international standards.

- covers all products, materials (direct, indirect) and services.

- reconciles the requirements of commerce and engineering.

- includes properties' sets for series materials.

- offers the keyword search to help casual users to find the appropriate material class (without navigating through a complex hierarchy).

- can be used for e-commerce as well as for material and facility management and product information systems.

- is available in seven languages and can be used free of charge in ecommerce. It is freely accessible at www.eclass-online.com.

- will be supported internationally – from Europe it will spread to the US and to Asia with the support of local partners.

- is backed by a solid industrial basis in Germany and Europe. This basis will be extended to the US and Asia, thus getting a worldwide support from industry.

- is broadly used in Germany and other European countries by international companies and their suppliers.