

## Book (and Software) Review:

### XML in Office 2003: Information Sharing with Desktop XML

Authors: Charles F. Goldfarb and Priscilla Walmsley

Prentice Hall, 2004

ISBN 0-13-142193-X

*By Bonnie Yelverton*

In my efforts to learn and understand XML the past year and a half I have come upon a decided lack of interest among my technical writing colleagues for the subject. Single-sourcing with XML has simply been too difficult to set up. You need a DTD or schema (or EDD in FrameMaker) before you can start writing, and style sheets to present it. It seems that XML has mostly been used in web services like on-line shopping

If tech writers are using XML, it is probably because they were already using FrameMaker with SGML earlier and have just converted their documents to the XML version.

Furthermore, if you are not using FrameMaker 7.0 as an authoring tool, you had to find some other new tool, like XMLSpy, Authentic or Veredus, which have many capabilities, but seem “geeky” to a tech writer.

#### INTRODUCING XML IN OFFICE 2003

You can't imagine how delighted I was to see this book recommended in a newsletter from [www.InformIt.com](http://www.InformIt.com), because that was the first I'd heard about the XML facilities in Office 2003. When my husband updated to Office 2003, I bought the book to see how it works. To my dismay, I discovered that the XML facilities are only in the Professional edition, so I ordered a 30-day trial version of Office 2003 from Microsoft and started reading.

One of the authors, Charles Goldfarb, has been in on XML since its conception (and birth, way back in 1998!) so he is one of the big XML gurus. Now gurus are not necessarily, by definition, good writers of introductory books. However, Goldfarb has been writing for the XML standards website, [www.w3.org](http://www.w3.org) and has his own series of excellent books, motivating and educating developers and now users in the wonders of XML. This introduction is well structured and well thought out. All the steps are well described and easy to follow. There are even tutorials to bring beginners up to speed without boring more advanced users. The only difficulty I found is that the book is so richly illustrated that some steps refer to a screen capture on a following page.

#### USING THE BOOK

**Part 1, Introducing Desktop XML**, aims to motivate you with “The reason why” it's worth your while to get the 30-day trial version and keep on reading.

**Part 2, Working with XML in Office**, has you creating XML documents in Word, using external XML data in spreadsheets, exporting and importing XML in Access and creating XML websites in FrontPage. You will be also discover

how easy it is to import XML data, like zip codes and stock market data, from the Internet. You can download all the code for the examples from [www.XMLinOffice.com](http://www.XMLinOffice.com).

## INFOPATH

An exciting new feature is a new Microsoft product, **InfoPath**, which you can use to create “smart” forms. The book provides you with a free 60-day trial version on a CD. InfoPath can become your front end to XML-enabled databases, or any other data-based XML application. (**Note:** you have to open the sample InfoPath documents in Design mode, and then publish them to your own computer to be able to see them in action.)

## XML TUTORIALS

If you have never seen XML before, there is no need to shy away. Goldfarb provides you with all you need to know in **Part 3, XML Tutorials**, in the back of the book. Each chapter in Part 2 lists the skills you need to understand and perform its activities, with a reference to which tutorial to read prior to the chapter. So, while more experienced readers can start right off, beginners do a tutorial or two in the back of the book before starting each new chapter.

## USING XML IN OFFICE 2003

I found working with XML in Office 2003 easy and intuitive. All the information you need is in the Task Pane on the right side of the screen. Just drag tags from the pane to your document. If you want to produce XML quickly, you can even use the built in Word Markup Language (which catches every bit of Word’s complicated style markup). Nevertheless, it is much better to learn what little you need to know to author pure XML in Word, which it does beautifully. XML is an open format that you can import into any other XML document in, say, FrameMaker, InDesign or Quark, so it is worth keeping it pure.

## BEYOND THE TUTORIALS

Of course the hard part is making the first decision to actually create a working document in XML. Other than in tutorials and class exercises, I have not gotten there yet. I figure it won’t be long before I update my 30-day trial to the real version. It really isn’t difficult to get started, because Office 2003 provides you with a number of templates with all the necessary schemas and style sheets, which you can modify for your own use. Now you have to figure out how to convince your employer that this is exactly what you need to make your documentation work more efficient and user friendly.

## LEARN MORE

If you want to learn more, you can check out Goldfarb’s XML series at [www.xmlbooks.com](http://www.xmlbooks.com), or subscribe to my favorite XML newsletter through [www.informIT.com](http://www.informIT.com), which regularly reviews new books on the subject and has links to many other sites..

Learn more about Single Sourcing with XML in the excellent newsletter published by the Rockley Group: <http://www.rockley.com/Bulletin.htm>