



DGI Update: Your Guide to Interoperability & Conformance Test Services

June 2008

- **COMMENTARY: Are you confusing EDI processing with AS2?**

AS2 began its life in an IETF workgroup called EDIINT, which stands for Electronic Data Interchange-Internet Integration. The intent of this endeavor was to define how current Internet standards could be used to achieve the exchange of EDI data over HTTP (the Internet). The original goal has been achieved and business transactions based on EDI over the Internet are now the norm. However, there is some confusion in the user community over the role of AS2 in the integration of EDI or other business data into their "backend" business applications. Even the "EDIINT" term implies "EDI Process-to-Process" integration, but the reality is that the "integration" part of EDI transactions is not accomplished by AS2 itself but by third-party tools (like mapping tools) and custom programming.

The AS2 specification was kept simple and focused on delivering data from one end point to another. The specification covers the security of data delivery through encryption and signatures as well as receipt handling of MDNs confirming the transport completion. The AS2 standard, seen in RFC 4130, is payload agnostic with a successful MDN only indicating that the EDI or business data payload was received by the intended recipient and unchanged and unread during transport. Thus, AS2 focuses on moving "any" business data from the end point of Company A to the end point of Company B, securely, efficiently, and in a cost-effective fashion by using the Internet.

Once the EDI, XML, binary file or other business data payload is exchanged, it can then be processed and integrated into the rest of your business system, but it is a separate action from the AS2 exchange and not part of AS2. The backend integration does not come free when you decide to use AS2 for EDI exchanges. Business integration comes with many variables, all of which can cause issues, and furthermore, most process-to-process integration efforts are custom solutions, not out-of-the-box solutions. It also comes with its own challenges, for instance, resolving EDI mapping issues, or dealing with "non-standard" EDI formats.

These backend-integration problems can sometimes be attributed to AS2 products and their interoperability. However, it must be kept in mind that AS2, as it has been implemented by the vendors per the AS2 specification, is "payload" agnostic and thus process agnostic, too. There are some AS2 vendors that offer built-in integration features within their AS2 products, but these features should not be considered part of the AS2 standard. When EDI integration issues arise, end-users

should first consider that the problem can be either a) within the business data provided by the sender, or b) the translated data produced at the sending or receiving side, or c) the integration process at the receiving side.

Drummond Group Inc. AS2 certification focuses on testing the security options as outlined in the IETF AS2 specification (RFC 4130). DGI tests for conformance and interoperability of AS2 messages when they have security applied to them, like encryption, compression, or digital signatures and other AS2-specific features such as generation and handling of MDN receipts. EDI Process-to-Process integration, or any other business data integration testing, like XML, is not part of the AS2 certification, as it is not part of the AS2 specification.

Drummond Group continues to receive questions from the user community regarding process to process business integration and these questions often assume Drummond Group's AS2 interoperability certification ensures EDI Process-to-Process interoperability. There are some AS2 vendors that offer built-in integration features within their AS2 products, but these features should not be considered part of the AS2 standard nor that AS2 certification implies that these features have been tested. AS2 has proven to be a reliable, efficient, secure way of exchanging business data, however, EDI Process-to-Process integration remains a challenge.

Executive Thought Leadership

Drummond Group is actively working on building a common global understanding of the meaning of the phrases: interoperable product and interoperability certified. Working with several worldwide testing agencies, the goal is to ensure that the software buyers know what they are getting when the term "interoperability certified" is utilized. At this time this phrase has different meanings, and depending on how the products were tested, they may not be interoperable "Out Of the Box" or interoperable at all. Given the dependence on internet commerce for our global economies and the need for interoperability of software and hardware to support this, building a common language of terms and test methodologies will allow the user consistency in the products or services branded "interoperable." Want to know more? Please send your questions to Beth@drummondgroup.com.

- **Register Now for the SAML 2.0 Interoperability Test**

SAML 2.0 is the latest version of the SAML (Security Assertion Markup Language), an XML standard for exchanging authentication and authorization data between security domains--between an identity provider (a producer of assertions) and a service provider (a consumer of assertions). SAML is an OASIS standard, with heavy input from the Liberty Alliance, which recognizes SAML 2.0 as the converged federation standard. There are more than one billion SAML-based identities and devices in use today worldwide, and it enjoys heavy use particularly in the telecommunications and egovernment sectors. More adoption information by vertical, as well as associated presentations and case studies, are available at <http://www.projectliberty.org/adoption>.

This Liberty test event, facilitated by Drummond Group, will cover the SAML 2.0 specification. Note that the General Services Administration has endorsed SAML

2.0. The completion of the eGov profile 1.0, which is part of the Liberty profiles, is a prerequisite requirement for being certified by the General Services Administration and entering their eAuth federation deployment. Send email to info@drummondgroup.com for test info.