

## Appendix 2

### In Response to Mr. Sonnen's Article on the OGC

By: [David Schell](#)

(Nov 06, 2003)

To the Editor:

I am writing in regard to David Sonnen's opinion piece on the OGC.

As President of OGC, I have an obligation to respond to Mr. Sonnen's opinion piece in this issue of Directions (By the way, this is the third version that has been presented to us for response.) However, the key fact here is that OGC is an organization driven by the consensus participation of its members. It is in fact our members who determine the priorities and evolution of OGC practice as a standards organization. Therefore, while I encourage OGC members to respond to Mr. Sonnen's assertions within this public forum, I think it is in the best interest of the overall membership that members address their OGC concerns, as they always have, within the open forum of the consortium itself.



As a member-driven industry consortium, the OGC has always used open dialogue to promote collaboration and community consensus. In that spirit, OGC members and staff constantly work to ensure that our organization and processes are fair, balanced and designed to provide equitable opportunity for all members. My daily contact with members supports my belief that we do quite a good job at this. For this reason, everyone on OGC's staff, the Board of Directors, and the many members who have contacted me, are surprised and puzzled by the statements in Mr. Sonnen's column.

#### **Assertions of Conflict of Interest**

I am particularly concerned with the column's assertions that OGC is in conflict of interest with its members and may have violated antitrust laws. Such accusations, groundless as they are, create doubt and mistrust. The US federal antitrust laws and OGC's antitrust policies are clear, and OGC follows these laws and policies. The column's failure to identify the sources on which it bases its accusations leaves the reader with little ability to check the truth and no way for anyone to confirm the existence of the constituency the author claims to represent or characterize. (In addition, the author fails to acknowledge copyright on extracted text that appears in the document.)

OGC exists for the very purpose of providing a standards foundation to support fair competition, industry growth and innovation that benefits users. By promoting interoperability via an open standards foundation, OGC works to assure broad market choice and competition. We on OGC staff constantly evaluate what we are doing and work proactively to resolve issues with members and for members. I might add that antitrust issues have not been raised by members, except to set rules to prevent it.

Consider the following:

- Any technology-using or technology-providing organization can join OGC and play a role in an open process.
- The process, now involving 255 members, has grown since 1994 to be somewhat complex, but it is rigorously open.

- The process has been successful because there has always been a collective will to overcome the many technical, organizational and market issues that naturally arise.
- Our Specification Program and unique Interoperability Program have enabled rapid development, testing, validation and member adoption of OpenGIS™ Specifications. (Twelve OGC specifications are in use in the market and more than 20 others are on the way, and hundreds of products now implement OpenGIS specifications in the marketplace.)
- In a vendor neutral manner, our education and outreach projects help to educate organizations and communities about the use of OpenGIS Specifications to improve their ability to share and apply geospatial information and services to meet their mission needs.
- As user organizations and communities build or procure standards-based geospatial capabilities, OGC vendor members and the broader IT industry benefit by being able to offer geospatial solutions to a broad market requiring plug and play capabilities. Their market can expand rapidly through interoperability.

OGC's process is unique in the standards community today. It is understandable that those on the outside looking in might have questions about OGC processes. But it is noteworthy that membership continues to grow as organizations that have an interest in open geoprocessing learn about the process, visit to observe it in action, and then decide to participate. In any complex process, there will always be differences of opinion, but neither antitrust issues nor the other points of discussion raised in Mr. Sonnen's column have been identified by members as major issues.

### **On OGC Policies and Procedures**

Readers can learn about the OGC process by reviewing the organization's By-Laws and the "policies and procedures" documents for our consensus programs. These documents are publicly available on the OGC web site ([www.opengis.org](http://www.opengis.org), click on "About OGC") and clearly spell out the membership levels and the details of the organization's programs and decision-making process. There are no hidden decision processes within the OGC. OGC members, who drive our process, know that good results come from good processes.

Members support OGC's policies and procedures by working collectively to evolve our process, which leads ultimately to changes to these very policies and procedures. At the recent OGC member meetings in Segovia, Spain, for example, members discussed and initiated additions to our Interoperability Program process, aiming to promote wider member control and more efficient consensus development of the OGC Technical Baseline. Actions like this will continue as members continue to shape and evolve the OGC processes. And this is exactly what should happen.

### **Regarding the Interoperability Program and Consulting**

Mr. Sonnen's column characterizes our Interoperability Program as a consulting service that is available only to selected OGC members. This could not be further from the truth. The column should reference the testbeds' and pilot projects' long lists of sponsors and participants. It should note that OGC conducts a formal and open industry-wide competitive process for participation in these initiatives. And it is the sponsors of initiatives – OGC members, not OGC staff -- who actually select participants, based strictly on the merit of their proposals. Finally, if Mr. Sonnen took the time to look at which members participate in OGC initiatives and which members have contributed to adopted OpenGIS Specifications, he would find diverse representation at all levels and categories of OGC membership.

When completed, the results from these testbeds and pilots are rigorously documented and typically made public (see "Discussion Papers" under the "Documents" link at [www.opengis.org](http://www.opengis.org)). Often, interested members submit these documents to the formal specification processes of the Specification Program, where they are discussed and evaluated for adoption by the consortium's consensus committees. In fact, most adopted and widely used OpenGIS Specifications were conceived and matured in OGC testbeds and pilots. The Interoperability Program has effectively accelerated the development and multiplied the community take up of OpenGIS Specifications.

### **Interoperability Planning and Uptake Services**

In addition to Interoperability Initiatives, OGC undertakes a limited set of education and uptake training services, sometimes called "planning studies", which are available to any member who asks for them. Given its unique "white hat" role, in this context OGC is uniquely positioned to provide guidance and support to help technology users understand how to work with the OGC baseline architecture in their requirements planning process. OGC offers such services to ensure that requesting institutions understand the potential benefits of conceptualizing their IT process with respect to the evolving reality of interoperable geoprocessing, and to promote the value of compliance with the open standards produced by the consortium. OGC does not recommend specific vendors or technology solutions.

The goal of this activity, consistent with the vision and mission of the consortium, is to influence the conceptualization of future programs and procurements to include the requirement for open interfaces. (See our recent white paper, "The Importance of Going Open" <http://www.opengis.org/press/?page=papers>.) There is no question that systems conceived and built from the bottom up on the principles of such "open processing" significantly benefit not only OGC members, but also the broader IT industry. If we are successful, not only will OGC contribute substantially to stimulating increased choice in the market, but also technology providers will gain the ability to respond, without the burdensome costs of customization, to the increasing requirement for "plug and play" geoprocessing.

### **OGC - A Member Driven Process**

OGC's processes belong to its members. The discussion points raised in Mr. Sonnen's opinion piece primarily concern OGC members. If there is anyone in OGC to advocate for any of these points, the fruitful debate will happen among our members within our processes. OGC functions through consensus among its technical and planning committees, working groups, subcommittees, staff, Review Board, Strategic Advisory Committee and Board of Directors. Members established the Review Board specifically to address member concerns that might need special attention or that might not fall under the purview of the other groups. The OGC members realize that OGC is their consortium, and they have shown that they are quite capable of evolving it to meet their shared needs and the needs of the communities they represent.

### **In Closing**

Standards processes, in OGC and other consortia, can take some time to understand. It is likely that drawing attention to OGC will cause more people to understand and appreciate what OGC does, and how it will positively affect their lives. I am confident that the faith and trust invested in OGC will flourish as we move forward.

As I pointed out in my opening, only our members can address many of the issues identified in Mr. Sonnen's column. I encourage our members to respond to Mr. Sonnen's column as they see fit, and to bring any issues they may have into the OGC process.

Through filtering and misrepresentation of the facts, Mr. Sonnen's article raises a number of issues. I take these assertions seriously, and ask that any interested readers bring these issues into the OGC process for dialog directly with members and staff. At the bottom of the OGC home page, you will find a link to submit, review and discuss questions and issues relevant to OGC, just click on "Public Forum" link. Information will be available to the public, members and staff of the OGC, and issues will be raised at our formal committee meetings. Any issues regarding the OGC should come directly to the members for consideration and action. Issues should be delivered transparently with attribution, and should not be filtered by 3rd party interests. I assure you that both OGC staff and membership will continue to be open and informative consistent with members' expectations and the public interest.

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