

Proposal to Establish a Liaison Function
Related to Internet Developments

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UN/EDIFACT is designed to be independent of communications protocols and to focus on the electronic transfer of commercial or administrative transactions in a structured format from computer to computer. In order to achieve this independence, UN/EDIFACT has developed service segments that contain routing information and service segments to cater for security services. Related service messages have similarly been developed to support certain acknowledgement functions. This functionality has particularly suited communication over privately managed or Value Added Networks (VANs).

The Internet has evolved rapidly over the last 2-3 years to a point that it is now a viable alternative to the traditional VANs for the exchange of EDI transactions. Many analysts predict that within the next few years, the existing VAN based communications will be replaced by various levels of Internet service covering commercial, regulatory and administrative messaging. Indeed many VANs are now offering Internet services. The Internet is an open network environment and its standards are set by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). Refer the IETF organisation profile annex A. The standards include techniques for routing, security and acknowledgements.

UN/ECE/WP.4/GE.1 has established a Memorandum of Understanding with ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) and liaison points for the purposes of ensuring that the developments being undertaken in the respective areas are co-ordinated between the relevant ISO Technical and Special Committees and the GE.1 Technical and Message Development Groups. Furthermore, GE.1 has established a liaison with the ITU (International Telegraphic Union) with respect to X.400 standard. Given the importance of the ongoing developments with the Internet and the relevance to the UN/EDIFACT user community, particularly in the area of EDI, consideration now needs to be given by CEFACT to establishing a formal liaison mechanism with the organisation responsible for developing Internet standards, the IETF.

Of note, is that the IETF have established an Electronic Data Interchange-Internet Integration Working Group (ediint) and are currently working in conjunction with CommerceNet on solutions to achieve secure EDI over the Internet. In certain instances this work parallels the developments in UN/EDIFACT. In order for UN/EDIFACT to maintain a high degree of relevance in the Internet environment it is important that the areas of common interest between CEFACT and the IETF are co-ordinated.

The Australian delegation therefore proposes as a matter of urgency that CEFACT consider establishing a formal liaison with the IETF whereby the requisite levels of co-ordination are attained to ensure that the respective standards are both complimentary and compatible, where appropriate.

Internet Engineering Task Force Organisation Profile

The following overview of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) has been extracted from their home page <http://www.ietf.cnri.reston.va.us/>

IETF Definition

The IETF provides a forum for working groups to coordinate technical developments of new protocols. Its most important function is the development and selection of standards within the Internet protocol suite.

The IETF began in January 1986 as a forum for technical coordination by contractors for the then US Defense Advanced Projects Agency (DARPA), working on the ARPANET, US Defense Data Network (DDN), and the Internet core gateway system. Since that time, the IETF has grown into a large open international community of network designers, operators, vendors, and researchers concerned with the evolution of the Internet architecture and the smooth operation of the Internet.

Mission

1. Identifying and proposing solutions to pressing operational and technical problems in the Internet;
2. Specifying the development or usage of protocols and the near-term architecture, to solve technical problems for the Internet;
3. Facilitating technology transfer from the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) to the wider Internet community; and
4. Providing a forum for the exchange of relevant information within the Internet community between vendors, users, researchers, agency contractors, and network managers.

Structure

Technical activity on any specific topic in the IETF is addressed within working groups. All working groups are organized roughly by function into seven areas.

1. Applications
2. Internet
3. Operations and management
4. Routing
5. Security
6. Transport
7. User services

Each is led by one or more area directors who have primary responsibility for that one area of IETF activity. Together with the Chair of the IETF/IESG, these technical directors compose the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG).

Meetings

The working groups conduct business during plenary meetings of the IETF, during meetings outside of the IETF and via work group mailing lists. The IETF holds 4.5 day meetings three times a year. These meetings are composed of working group sessions, technical presentations, network status reports, working group reporting, and an open IESG meeting.