

ARTS: Enhancing A Retailer's Ability To Protect Their IT Investment While Benefiting From The Knowledge And Best Practices Of Retailers And Vendors Worldwide

The Association for Retail Technology Standards (ARTS) of the National Retail Federation, creates an international technology environment for retailers.

The Association for Retail Technology Standards (ARTS) of the National Retail Federation was established in 1993 to enable the rapid implementation of technology within the retail industry by developing standards to ease integration of software applications and hardware devices.

ARTS offers testing services to verify that applications accurately incorporate its standards. Vendors can be tested for conformance to the standard Data Model and/or ARTS XML standard XML schemas. View a list of the vendors that have been tested and deemed conformant.

<http://www.nrf-arts.org/conformance/conformance.htm>

Retail Solutions Online had a chance to catch up with one of these vendors, Retail Anywhere, and its Director of Marketing, Brenda Whisenhunt, to learn more about ARTS, its impact on the retail industry, and future implications of implementing standards.

Retail Solutions Online (RSO): ARTS has four standards supported by the retail industry around the world. They are: Standard Retail Data Model, Unified POS, ARTS XML (formerly IXRetail), and Standard RFPs. Can you provide a description of each of these standards for those that might not be familiar with them?

Brenda Whisenhunt: The ARTS Data Model, known as the information standard in the retail industry, provides a comprehensive design document containing all data elements and definitions required to support retail applications. The Data Model has been developed based on input of leading retailers and vendors worldwide, creating a best-of-breed model available to retailers in all market segments.

UnifiedPOS is a platform-neutral specification for connecting POS peripherals such as printers, scanners, and scales to the POS terminal, allowing retailers freedom of choice in the selection of hardware integration.

ARTS XML (formerly IXRetail) builds on the ARTS Data Model to develop standard XML schemas and message sets to ease application-to-application integration within a retail enterprise. There are currently 11 schemas available.

Standard RFPs (Requests for Proposal) were developed to help retailers choose the right applications for their specific business requirements. There are currently seven RFPs available for download.

RSO: A barrier-free retail technology environment is an ideal concept for any retailer (especially a retailer's IT staff, integrator, etc.). For those not familiar with ARTS, can you provide an explanation as to the benefits of holding to these industry standards? Why do retailers need standards?

BW: In a nutshell, an information technology architecture built on established standards provides retailers with the flexibility needed to quickly implement new applications or revise existing ones to support new retail requirements and innovations.

RSO: What are the top reasons why retailers should choose ARTS-conformant solutions?

BW: ARTS-conformant solutions provide retailers with:

- A. Increased choice and flexibility
- B. Reduced time and costs of integration
- C. Protected IT investments
- D. The combined knowledge and best practices of retailers and vendors worldwide

RSO: It's understandable that the (tier one) "big box" retailers will and have seen considerable benefits by adopting ARTS. What can midsize, tier two retailers do to begin experiencing the same benefits? Where is a good starting point for these midsize retailers to get started?

BW: A good starting point is demanding ARTS-conformant solutions from retail solution vendors. Many of the tier two and tier three retailers have the extensive requirements and flexibility needs as a tier one. Having an IT architecture built on standards provides the flexibility to implement new applications or revise existing ones quickly in order to support new business requirements going forward.

When starting a new IT project, don't start from scratch. As an NRF or ARTS member, retailers have access to the ARTS RFPs. There are currently seven RFPs to choose from. ARTS recently released a major update to its POS RFP. The update includes more than 600 new features for retailers to consider when evaluating POS. Using the ARTS RFP for POS, or any ARTS RFP, provides retailers and vendors the opportunity to lower costs and reduce preparation time while benefiting from the knowledge and best practices of retailers and vendors worldwide. Hundreds of retailers have used the POS RFP to effectively select the "best" application for their businesses.

All of the ARTS RFPs identify standards that must be incorporated within the selected application to help protect your IT investment.

RSO: Let's not forget about the vendors in the ARTS mix. What are the top five reasons for retail solution providers to adopt ARTS?

BW:

1. It reduces the time of application development, allowing vendors to focus more resources on developing feature-rich and easy-to-use retail solutions.
2. The Data Model provides vendors with a comprehensive design document and is a single source for consistent and accurate data definitions to be used throughout application development.
3. Ease of integration with other software applications and hardware peripherals
4. Ability to respond quickly to evolving priorities of retailers due to the flexibility of applications incorporating ARTS standards
5. Ensuring their customers benefit from best-of-breed selection

RSO: Retail Anywhere is a member on the list of ARTS Data Model-conformant applications. What role does Retail Anywhere play within ARTS?

BW: Retail Anywhere adopted the ARTS Data Model as the base for application development to its new Retail Anywhere Point of Sale, Kiosk, and Mobile Point of Sale applications. As a solutions provider to the SMB retail space, we realized the benefit our current and future customers would gain from a model that had been developed over 14 years by leaders in the retail industry. Providing our customers with best practices of leading retailers and an easier, quicker, cheaper path for future integration and functionality allows them to stay competitive while easily adjusting to growth and new functionality requirements.

RSO: As ARTS continues to grow, can you provide us with some insight surrounding the development of ARTS in the future? What role will Retail Anywhere play within this development?

BW: Since its inception in 1993, ARTS continues to identify new standards while expanding on existing ones. Three of the four ARTS standards have their own technical committee, which is comprised of leaders in the retail industry, both retailers and vendors. Committee members volunteer their time, realizing the value that standards bring to their respective companies and the retail industry as a whole.

Each committee has an aggressive agenda for 2007 based on direction from the ARTS Board of Directors.

Kirstin Wright, Retail Anywhere's chief systems architect, has recently been elected chair of the ARTS Data Model committee. As chair, Kirstin will volunteer her time with other Data Model committee members to insure that the Data Model continues to be refined and expanded.

When Kirstin is not volunteering her time to ARTS, she is still focusing on the Data Model. She is currently directing Retail Anywhere's engineering team as they develop a new Retail Anywhere Enterprise application using the Data Model as a base for application development.

In addition to its existing four standards, ARTS is working on special projects throughout 2007: working on an SOA blueprint for retail, working on providing standard data exchange formats for CSE's, hosting SOA and RFP education classes, as well as working on new RFP's and schemas.

RSO: This is great information. Thank you Brenda for taking the time to explain ARTS and the standards developed for rapid implementation of technology within the retail industry and easing integration of software applications and hardware devices. We look forward to additional information regarding how ARTS enhances retailers' abilities to protect their IT investments.