

# W Eye-Popping Accelerators for Office 2003

**WHAT DO THE SARBANES-OXLEY ACT, SIX Sigma, and XBRL have in common with Office 2003?**

They are part of a new eye-popping array of business accelerators designed to give users the tools to speed up development of real business solutions. They were recently announced for use with the new Microsoft Office System, so companies can now look forward to ready-to-use applications that take on pressing issues such as business reporting with XBRL, developing process controls for Six Sigma, and even creating methods to populate business scorecards.

## What Are Office Solution Accelerators?

Microsoft Office Solution Accelerators are a series of programs developed and distributed by Microsoft that extend the basic functionality of standard office applications like Microsoft Word and Excel. The real innovation in the new suite of business software tools is the integration of XML into the fabric of the applications. The XML in Office 2003 gives additional life to user-generated data. The spreadsheets, word documents, and database files created by the typical office professional can now be easily shared, stored, queried, and retrieved, creating innovative business reporting opportunities.

XML (eXtensible Markup Language) is simply a set of rules for marking up data in a way that permits computers to exchange data and execute simple commands. From a financial professional's perspective, the problem with XML is that it represents a technical challenge to de-

velop and use a working set of XML tags. Data need to be either tagged with XML internally to the programs generating the data or tagged externally with additional software tools. Applying XML tags to data generated from non-XML-enabled programs isn't easy.

Microsoft's vision is to provide businesses with an easy entry into the world of XML by giving users a simple way to use XML inside Office applications. Microsoft's accelerators promise to transform the office desktop into a business productivity system by giving the underlying data in applications the portability and access of XML-enabled data. The success of this effort will hinge on the ability of Microsoft and its technology partners to deliver the promised accelerators and to extend the concept to other common business problems. Microsoft will release several base accelerators over the next few months, and they also expect third-party software developers to develop additional accelerator applications.

The Office Solution Accelerators seek to become a basic solution for adding XML functionality to business data. With the XBRL Accelerator, for example, a user could import an XBRL set of tags (called XBRL taxonomy), map the tags to the fields on an Excel spreadsheet, and create output that can be read either straight in Excel or as an XBRL document. The XBRL document can then be stored on an internal network or be immediately shared with other users or reporting tools.

In addition to the Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for XBRL, the Office Solution Accelerator program is scheduled to include six more targeted offerings. Anders

## NEW OFFICE SOLUTION ACCELERATORS

Here is a current list of the new Office Solution Accelerators, with more to be announced soon:

- ◆ Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Proposals
- ◆ Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Recruiting
- ◆ Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for XBRL
- ◆ Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Sarbanes-Oxley
- ◆ Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Six Sigma
- ◆ Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Business Scorecards
- ◆ Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Excel Reporting

Brown, group product manager for Microsoft's Information Worker New Markets group, recently indicated that the program's targeted offerings are planned to roll out over the next year, and Microsoft will author even more.

### Six Sigma Accelerator Is Ready Today

The Six Sigma Accelerator will provide the visibility, insight, control, and flexibility that companies need to achieve and sustain breakaway business results. The Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Six Sigma can help manage Six Sigma projects and accurately reflect their financial impact. Companies can also optimally use Six Sigma resources, integrate Microsoft Office with Six Sigma methodologies, and learn from knowledge gathered across an enterprise. To download the Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Six Sigma, visit [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com) and search for "Microsoft Accelerator for Six Sigma."

### Office Solution Accelerator for Sarbanes-Oxley

One of the key components of compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley is the documentation of internal business

processes. Section 404 of the Act requires companies to implement effective internal controls, develop processes for monitoring the controls, and to issue periodic reports on the control's effectiveness. According to Microsoft, the Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Sarbanes-Oxley enables §404 compliance initiatives with document and information management, automated workflow, team collaboration, and summary reporting. The key to success for this application will be how easily the Accelerator can leverage user familiarity with Microsoft Word and Excel. Accelerators are designed to add functionality to existing programs and existing skill sets. With an installed base approaching 125 million desktops, Microsoft Office is in a great position to leverage average user experience for richer applications, such as Sarbanes-Oxley compliance.

### What's the Downside?

First of all, Microsoft hasn't released any information about pricing. The Microsoft website says, "We will announce licensing and pricing when we release the Office Solution Accelerators." In my opinion, that means not to expect the accelerators to be free. Second, you will need the top of

the line Microsoft Office 2003 Professional edition to take advantage of the full XML features of Office. For example, the XBRL Accelerator requires the professional edition to function properly. This means that users who purchase the home edition or the educational edition of Office 2003 will generally be out of luck. Third, the accelerators won't work unless a user has Office 2003 and, in some cases, other Microsoft software, such as Windows Server 2003 and Exchange Server. The Microsoft website adds, "The Office Solution Accelerators will require one or more programs, servers, or services in the Microsoft Office System. The actual requirements depend on each Office Solution Accelerator." See <http://www.microsoft.com/office/preview/solutions/accelerators/#faq> for more details. ■

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