
Strengthening the System

“We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”

Although these words were spoken by Benjamin Franklin at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, they are still applicable today—especially to the world of standardization. A year after the publication of the first edition of this book debates still rage about whether standards developing organizations (SDOs) or consortia are the better choice. Standards setting bodies continue to develop competing standards—often created by the same participants in different organizations. Consumers—and CEOs—continue to hide at the very mention of the word *standards* or at least quickly relegate a standards issue back to the world of engineers. The fragmented world of standardization is becoming increasingly confusing to navigate, and that confusion will keep its activities—and its value—a hidden secret of the select few who have made standardization their career.

This is not to say that standardization has not evolved in the last year. It has. A number of SDOs are offering alternative services to speed up the standardization process. Some consortia are submitting their completed standards for fast acceptance by SDOs, especially the international bodies of ITU, IEC, and ISO.¹ While

competing standards are damaging the intent of standardization by bringing about the very incompatibility they were designed to resolve, at least it shows that some SSOs are starting to think like a business—albeit not one with the best long term strategy.

Although this fragmentation might be a necessary stage in the effort to create a stronger, more responsive standardization system, it may also serve to undermine it all together if those who financially support the system don't recognize its value. In general, standards participation and SSO revenues have continued to decline. Although the economy can certainly take part of the blame, I believe that it comes down to two factors: perception and effectiveness.

In regards to perception, the first and foremost standards battle that must be fought is that of establishing and communicating its value. If it is not valued, then it will not survive. Since the measurement of a good standard is the number of implementations, then shouldn't the measurement of the value of standards be the same—the number of companies using it, the number of corporate strategies that include standards, the number of CEOs that can even define the word? Standardization needs to move beyond the argument over SDOs vs. consortia. The differences are becoming slightly blurred and, in

the end, users don't care where their standards come from anymore than they care where their electricity comes from. The only thing they care about is whether products work the way they are supposed to. Instead, SSOs need to band together and take a "Got Milk? ®" approach to promote the value of standardization. Consider that ten years after the inception of the "Got Milk? ®" ad campaign, studies show that 95% of Americans still recall the slogan, it has spawned a multimillion dollar licensing property, and it successfully defended milk's share of the beverage consumption market in California and elsewhere.² If they want to survive, standards setting organizations need to do the same. They must band together to communicate the value of standardization to those who matter most—CEOs and other executive management that ultimately determine how corporate funds are distributed. Extending this communication out to the consumers, who can in turn put pressure on vendors, should also be considered.

Addressing efficiency and market relevance requires a high level look at the system in general. This section starts out with an examination of standardization as an ecology that must balance economic, social, and technical interests. Read the article by Rob Gingell, Sun Microsystems Fellow and Vice President, to gain a better understanding of this system and learn about a set of principles that can be used to effectively guide the utilization of standards. Dr. Linda Garcia of Georgetown University visits this issue from a different angle, approaching standardization as an organizational field. Given the competition currently raging between and within SSOs, read this article to discover why the government is being called on to set standards for standards setters. In addition, Ken Krechmer, International Center for Standards Research at the University of Colorado, explains why the standardization system that served the Industrial Age must evolve to effectively serve the Information Age.

While some view standardization as the antithesis of innovation, it in fact stimulates it.³ Read Carl Cargill's article to discover how

standardization not only encourages innovation, but provides a safe place for it to incubate, and discover why the standardization system, unless government and academia become involved, could ultimately fail. Houlin Zhao, Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau (TSB), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), proposes a method for resolving some of the fragmentation in the standardization system in his article "Cooperation in the Age of Chance," while John Hill describes a plan to strengthen the system that is already being implemented.

Finally, NTT DoCoMo's James Kempf provides a practical article for "Getting to 'Yes' with the IETF." It is included here for two reasons: (1) To outline a system that many standards participants consider to be effective, and (2) To demonstrate how other SSOs might explain their processes to potential members.

The current standardization system can and should be strengthened. While the dynamic tension between the many entities involved in this system seems to be dangerously high right now, there are steps that can be taken to resolve the underlying issues or at least develop different, but compatible, solutions. This section provides a look into those challenges and some very possible solutions—but only if those who impact standardization work together to strengthen the system. After all, you don't want to leave yourselves hanging...

Notes

¹ ITU—International Telecommunication Union; IEC—International Electrotechnical Commission; ISO—International Organization for Standardization

² "Got Milk?®": See http://www.gotmilk.com/news/news_018.html; and "Kaiser found that for every dollar a dairy farmer spends toward the milk marketing effort, the dairy farmer was rewarded with \$3.40 in profits on average over the last 11 years," based on a study conducted by Cornell University; Kaiser, Henry. "Got milk? Apparently, you do.", Cornell University Science News; December 1997, see <http://www.news.cornell.edu/releases/Dec97/GotMilk.bpf.html>

³ IDC, 2001, "Standardization: The Secret to IT Leverage," p.2