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# Government Influence

If you think that government doesn't have much influence over standardization—even with the “hands off” approach in the US—think again. Standards impact 80% of the world's commodity trade—and that fact alone is enough to grab government attention. Considering their effect on trade barriers, nascent industries, public safety, quality, anticompetitive practices, intellectual property rights, and innovation, coupled with government's position at the top of the ICT consumer list, it is obvious that government is and must be involved at some level in standardization.

Where and how much respective governments are involved depends on the country, the industry, and the situation at the time. However, with global markets becoming the norm, governments must increasingly work together, creating a dynamic tension between domestic and international needs, local and national government agencies, public and private interests, and the countries themselves. These governments are often turning to standardization as an effective tool for managing this tension and creating solutions that ultimately benefit the global economy.

This section examines the current involvement of governments in standardization and proposes areas for further activities. The European Union (EU) has demonstrated strong support of ICT standardization, especially in its creation of a single market.

In “Standardisation and European Policy,” Erkki Liikanen, European Commissioner for Enterprise and Information Society, describes how standards are helping to make the eEurope Action Plan a success. The US government is also placing greater emphasis on standardization, and Secretary Don Evans has directed the US Department of Commerce to assist in building a fair and equitable standards playing field. See the article by Phil Bond, Under Secretary for Technology for the US Department of Commerce, to understand what Evans' Standards Initiative will entail and how it will impact your organization.

High level policies are built on detailed experiences and processes. Evangelos Vardakas discusses the evolution of the EU standardization system and the new level of SSO accountability. Once conditioned only to respond to the needs of its members, EU SSOs must now be accountable to all public authorities and society stakeholders, whether they are directly involved in the standardization process or not. Roger Marks of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and Robert Hebner of the University of Texas at Austin argue that outcome rather than process should be the ultimate gauge of standardization and describe how the US and EU governments are involved in modifying the standardization system.

Industry and consumers should have a say in how governments impact standardization and to

do so they must actually communicate to them. In every meeting that I have attended in Washington, D.C., I received the same request: Tell industry to come talk to us about where they want government involved in standardization. The need for this communication is no more evident than in the article by US Representatives Mark Udall and Zoe Lofgren, who state that many of their colleagues believe that the US Government *is* the US standards setting body and are unaware of the numerous voluntary standards bodies that currently exist. Regardless of what country you reside in, governments need to understand the value of standards, the needs of industry, and where industry desires government help. Once solutions have been implemented, industry must take the responsibility of providing feedback to these government agencies.

The areas for potential government involvement are numerous and this book covers just a few. In its article, the Center for Democracy and Technology looks at standards setting organizations as venues for public policy, arguing that standards bodies and government must work together to protect public interests. Dale Hatfield, former FCC Chief Technologist and Chief of the Office of Engineering and Technology, now Adjunct Professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder, discusses

government involvement in creating public network architectures and the increasing importance of these networks in public policy.

Of course, ICT standards become worthless if their promised ability to ensure interoperability is not kept. When this occurs, they undermine public trust and the standardization system as a whole. Dr. Susan Zevin, Acting Director of the Information Technology Laboratory at NIST, discusses the role of NIST and the need for new testing paradigms and technologies that measure the interoperability of components in integrated systems.

Throughout the world, governments are increasingly involved in standardization as an effective management tool on a global and domestic scale. And the actions of those governments—even those governments that are not your own—will directly impact your industry, your trading abilities, and your business. Industry, as the subject matter experts in both standardization and ICT products, must take a more active role in educating government on all aspects of standardization, especially in the areas where they desire government assistance. After all, if a sleeping giant suddenly awoke in your town and asked for directions, would you give them to him, directing him down the safest path for the town, or let him find his own way?