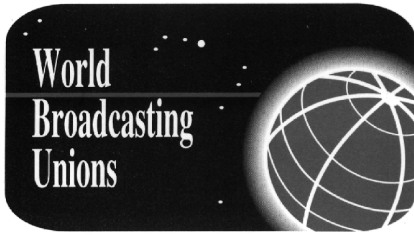

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World Broadcasting Unions - Technical Committee



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World Broadcasting Unions - Technical Committee

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OPEN COMMON TECHNICAL STANDARDS AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY¹

1. Introduction

For mass audience information services such as broadcasting, low cost and well-made equipment is vital if viewers and listeners are to benefit from the information society. This is particularly imperative for developing countries where cost efficient consumer terminals are the only way to spread information and social messaging. Costs need to be proportional to incomes, and ways need to be found to make the tools and the services of the Information Society affordable to all. Furthermore, ways need to be found to enable the developing countries to generate their own high quality media content, and to make their own equipment for production and delivery.

One of the ways that these objectives can be helped is by the use of common open worldwide technical standards for the systems and equipment of the information age, including equipment for radio and television broadcast production and media delivery.

The WBU-TC recognizes that achieving agreement on common standards is a difficult and challenging human endeavor. They also recognize that viewed from some perspectives there are disadvantages in unique common standards. Nevertheless, the overall balance of advantages on a worldwide level is in favor of unique commonly agreed standards for products, which are made available by normal market means – which are essentially a ‘public offer’.

The use of common worldwide standards is seen by some as restricting creativity by preventing companies from offering even better technical solutions and systems to the public. This is not always untrue, but it need not be true. Furthermore, it is only part of a larger picture in which there are over-riding considerations for the global community that generally support common standards.

2. The advantages of common worldwide standards

Having common open worldwide standards has major advantages, including the following, which are not necessarily in order of their importance.

- The collective process of agreeing common worldwide standards combines the intellects of the finest technical minds in the world working through international organizations such as the IEC, ISO, and ITU, and when successful, as for example in ISO/IEC JTC1 MPEG, provides unsurpassed technical solutions. Open technical standards can be and are, revised by consensus at appropriate intervals to reflect advances in technology.
- The collective process of agreeing on unique worldwide standards potentially allows participants from all parts of the world, including developing countries, to contribute to the advance of technology, and to bring home know-how that can help their national environments.
- Having common open standards enables competition among manufacturers so that the consumer can choose based on price, quality of manufacture, and features, rather than being locked in to a singularity of suppliers.
- Having open standards provides manufacturers with larger markets and thus potentially greater sales and growth prospects.
- Having common open standards makes it possible for local manufacturers to provide equipment. Common standards tend to make local equipment manufacture possible and to keep equipment prices lower for the developing countries.

3. The political dimension of company, national, and regional standards

The WBU-TC recognizes that currently there are largely three areas with the technological know-how to develop their own standards – Europe, Japan, and the United States. These areas, and companies within them, have shown a propensity, in the area of media systems, to develop their own standards by local consensus. Furthermore, they have encouraged others outside their area to adopt their standards – part of a natural competitive business process. However, in an area with such implications as media production and delivery, this can pose difficult political problems for those having to choose among several friends who each have technical strengths.

4. The example of the ISO/IEC JTC1

Groups such as the IEC/ISO JTC1 have shown that worldwide consensus of unique technical standards is possible. This group has been successful because it recognizes that the development of technical standards must begin early, before they have advanced separately to the point where there can be no discussion or compromise. Recognizing the point where standards work needs to begin, and having the capacity to encourage and steer the world's engineers to agreement and a successful conclusion, are skills that are needed in all standards bodies. Only if they are available and encouraged will common worldwide standards be possible.

5. Recommendation

The WBU-TC recommends that the WSIS:

- Take steps to arrange the infrastructures of the international standards setting bodies for information and communication technologies, such as the IEC, ISO, and ITU, to facilitate common worldwide standards, and to encourage them in their vital work.
- Take steps to recognize the value of common worldwide standards by measures that support this more demanding path worldwide.

6. Conclusion

The use of common open worldwide standards offers clear benefits at the worldwide level to humanity. One of the practical measures that the WSIS should take is to encourage common open technical standards for the production and delivery of digital media. The evidence is that though difficult to achieve, common open technical standards are possible given due diligence. Enabling common open standards serves the objective of the WSIS to encourage the free flow of information.