

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

### Changing Times / Time for Changes

The current standards infrastructure has its roots not just in the last century, but in the one before. Over the last 125 years or so, that structure has been through some changes, such as the founding of global standards bodies like ISO, IEC and the ITU. More recently, the information and communication technology (ICT) industries have seen the formation of the hundreds of consortia that now provide the majority of ICT standards.

All of these changes, however, have been accomplished largely at the behest of stakeholders in the developed nations.

Does that matter?

In this issue, I suggest that it does, and explore whether the structure that has evolved to meet the standardization requirements of the First World is adequate to meet the needs of the rest of humanity, and in particular of the rapidly emerging economies of China and India, among other nations.

I begin this discussion in my *Editorial*, where I highlight the disproportionate advantage that the corporations headquartered in long-developed countries enjoy over those based in developing nations as they seek to make their way into the global marketplace. In particular, I focus on the formidable patent portfolios owned by the traditional market leaders, and the prospect for a succession of international standards wars unless greater emphasis is placed on adoption of royalty-free standards by the ICT industry.

In this month's *Feature Article*, I expand on this inquiry by analogizing the current situation to the colonialism of the past. In prior times, developed nations extracted resources from the colonies that they seized, and also used these new territories as captive markets into which they could sell European goods. Today, a sort of patent-based neocolonialism allows the corporations in developed nations to subcontract manufacturing to factories in developing countries. There, cheap labor can produce inexpensive products which can then be sold at a healthy markup both locally and around the world under the brand of the foreign patent owner. Meanwhile, high standards-related royalties effectively bar the same factories from selling similar products under their own brands. The results are predictable, and I suggest a number of ways in which the rules might be changed to level the playing field for the ultimate benefit of all.

I provide a specific example of these predictable results in my *Standards Blog* selection, which focuses on a Chinese "home grown" (and patented) document standard called the Unified Office Format. That standard has been created in order to permit and promote the development of office productivity software by Chinese companies, in order to take marketshare from Microsoft's dominant Office suite.

I complete this issue on a lighter note with the usual **Consider This...** essay, which this month departs from the serious study of this world to look at the increasingly popular realm of virtual worlds. Or perhaps I haven't left the study of our world at all.

In any event, I invite you with this issue to see once again how the world in which we live is one increasingly interconnected community. Even in the world of standards, we are reminded that what benefits us most is what benefits us all.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Andrew Updegrave  
Editor and Publisher  
2005 ANSI President's  
Award for Journalism

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