

Standards Today

A Journal of News, Ideas and Analysis

A publication of
**CONSORTIUM
INFO.ORG**
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March-April 2010

Vol. IX, No. 2

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Giving it a Name

The year was 1960, and a dynamic young Democrat from Massachusetts was searching for points of vulnerability in his opponent's record, the vice president to the retiring, Republican incumbent. And the Cold War was in full swing.



One chink in the armor of Richard Nixon that John Kennedy thought he could exploit was the perception (inaccurate, as it later became apparent) that the Soviet Union had more nuclear weapons targeted at the U.S. than the U.S. had targeted at the U.S.S.R. In short, as the politically perfect sound byte had it, there was a "Missile Gap."

The concept of a gap in defensive or offensive military resources is not only ancient and important, but also easy to grasp. In modern times, we've begun to quantify areas in which national competitiveness can rise or fall depending on whether there is a "gap" between the resources of one nation and its trade rivals, most commonly in higher education (how many engineers are we graduating? How many biochemists?) and job skills (how many trained software developers are in the employment pool?)

But national competitiveness also depends on the efficiency with which the public and private sectors collaborate to promote national interests abroad. And if one half of that partnership isn't knowledgeable in an area of importance while other governments are, well you've got a gap that matters.

In this issue, I focus on one such gap for the U.S. in comparison to some of its largest competitors in global trade. That gap is the low level of awareness relating to standard matters in Congress and within some federal agencies. The premise of this issue is that this "Standards Sophistication Gap" needs to be recognized and closed.

In my Editorial, I focus on a small, but important first step being taken to raise the level of the government's game, and urge rapid passage of H.R. 5116, a bill that would authorize the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to play a more active role in supporting the federal agencies and Congress in addressing important standards-related issues.

This month's Feature Article, as usual, explores the same topic in greater detail. In it, I review NIST's historical role in the standards arena, and the ways in which its past experience have prepared it to play an expanded role in meeting complex, cross sectoral, standards-dependent challenges to our national competitiveness. I supplement this article with the Testimony that I delivered to the House Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation in support of this broader role.

For my Standards Blog selection, I return to a saga that I have tracked for many years in this publication: the fortunes of the OpenDocument Format (ODF). The best-known implementations of that standard are the free, open source productivity suite historically supported by Sun Microsystems known as OpenOffice, and StarOffice, the expanded and supported version of that suite that Sun sells to enterprise customers. Ever since Oracle announced its agreement to acquire Sun, proponents of ODF have wondered how well, and to what purpose, Oracle would continue to support these products. In my blog entry, I give my reading of the latest tea leaves that Oracle has made available on this topic.

Next up is Chapter 2 of my new mystery eNovel, a tale of espionage, intrigue, and technology called The Alexandria Project (the first chapter appeared in the last issue of *Standards Today*. If you are enjoy it, you can find 17 more chapters on line, and a new one every Monday at the same location.

I close, as usual, with a Consider This piece, and explore the enduring appeal of the gold standard in times (like these) of economic turmoil.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue. But either way, it's always great to hear what you think. Let me know, why don't you?

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue. But whether you do or don't, it's always good to hear from you. You can reach me at andrew.updegrove@gesmer.com.

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2005 ANSI President's
Award for Journalism

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