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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Into the Lion's Den

A glance at the Standards Today archive tells me that this is the 69th issue of *Standards Today*, and also that December will mark this eJournal's tenth anniversary. Remarkably, in all that time, I have not tackled the question of "what is an open standard?" Till now.

Despite the nod and a wink title for this Editor's note, my neglect of this topic is not the result of a lack of nerve to tackle a controversial topic (though controversial it certainly is). Rather, reporting on the many definitions that have been proposed for this chimerical phrase seemed pointless while the consensus remained strong that there can and should be no one definition that would be appropriate in all settings.

That's all well and good, but lately governments around the world have taken a renewed interest in defining exactly what should constitute, at least for their purposes, 'open standards.' As a result, the time seemed right to finally venture into this particular lion's den to report on what's going on, and opine on why it matters.

In this month's ***Editorial*** I open with a tip of the hat to the United Kingdom Cabinet Office, which has not only adopted a carefully crafted set of principles to guide its referencing of open standards in procurement, but has also devised an extremely clever mechanism for incentivizing vendors to implement those standards.

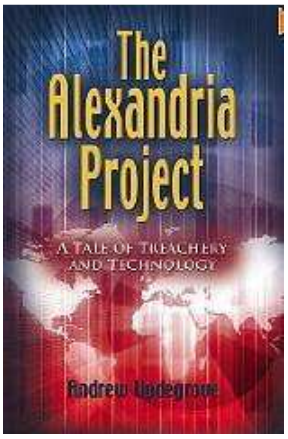
As my ***Feature Article***, I reproduce an expanded version of a paper I presented earlier this year at the First OpenForum Academy Conference, held in Brussels. In it, I survey the various traditional and modern norms of 'openness' that have evolved, as well as the results of the most recent efforts to define that term in the context of government procurement in Europe and the United States.

I follow the feature article with the ***Comments*** I submitted in response to a Federal Register notice posted by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which is considering whether to revise or issue additional guidance (or both) relating to its Circular A-119. OMB A-119 is the principal document instructing the government agencies that annually spend hundreds of billions of dollars in public funds procuring standards-compliant products. As currently written, OMB A-119 is at best vague, and at worst discriminatory, in its evaluation of consortium-developed standards in contrast to those developed by traditional standards organizations. In my comments I highlight these deficiencies, and also propose curative actions that should be taken to address them.

In my ***Standards Blog*** selection for this month, I take a look at yet another current effort to grapple with openness in standards development. In it, I focus on the recent decision of

five of the standards organizations most responsible for bringing us the Internet and the Web to propose their own definition of openness, and on what might have led them to do so.

As usual, I then switch to a different theme. As you may be aware, the rise of self-publishing is creating upheaval in the world of both physical and on-line publishing. To the good, books once doomed to rapid consignment to the hopeless netherworld of 'out of print' are once again available, and the number of new books has exploded. To the bad, there is more chaos than value to be found in this New World Order of publishing, a topic I explore in my occasional series titled ***Monday Witness***.



In a related vein, a look at the archive of Standards Today issues reminds me, painfully, that its production has suffered sorely over the last two years as I have pursued other authoring adventures – specifically, the writing of a cybersecurity thriller called ***The Alexandria Project*****.** I've included the Prologue in this issue, and you can purchase the complete book in paper and eBook formats at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iTunes and elsewhere. If you know someone that loves a good thriller, may I be so bold as to suggest that you would bring them (and certainly me) much joy this holiday season if you would give them a copy.

Finally, in grateful recognition of the close of a long and often bewildering campaign season here in the United States, I offer in my ***Consider This*** essay a theory to explain how so many otherwise intelligent people can disagree so completely and energetically on so many different topics.

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? My email address is andrew.updegrove@gesmer.com

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