



Attorneys at Law

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

### EVERYBODY'S TALKING (BUT WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?)

IT vendors these days are in love with the phrase "open source and open standards" (as in "you should buy our open source/open standards-based solutions").

If you haven't already noticed that fact, here's a little experiment to try that will make the point: Google the phrase "open source" AND "open standards." I just did, and got 4,700,000 hits, with 284 leading to recent news articles. Odds are, though, that few of those hits would take me to a knowledgeable discussion of how open source and open standards can and should work together.

In fact, while open source and open standards each work well in isolation, those who create them haven't always played very well together when they find themselves in the same sandbox. As those 4,700,000 hits suggest, however, there's a great need for both sides to learn how to optimize the relationship between open standards and open source. And that's the theme of this issue of the **CSB**, revisiting a topic I last covered in detail in the March 2005 issue. That issue was called [What Does "Open" Mean?](#) and my editorial then was titled [A Call for Communication Between Communities](#).

I think that there's been some progress since then on the communication front, with many on each side now recognizing the need to coordinate their separate activities. But the logistics of that coordination remain challenging, given the differences between these two very different methods of addressing what are nevertheless in some respects the same problems.

In this month's **Editorial**, I therefore explore some of the technical and social reasons why open source and open standards can sometimes be a difficult fit, but point out that both the open source and the open standards communities – not to mention end-users – are becoming increasingly interdependent. The result is the need for each camp to adopt a spirit of partnership with the other, to work out the type of solutions that will benefit all.

The **Feature Article** this month spotlights just such a partnership between the worlds of open source and open standards, formed to address an issue of great importance to all IT users: the potential for Linux to fragment, leading to a replay of the "Unix Wars" of the past. That partnership is manifested by the Free Standards Group (FSG), a consortium that brings together representatives of the open source community, vendors and others to set standards that enable multiple, compliant Linux distributions to interoperate with applications, and therefore allow end-users to avoid lock-in to a single Linux distribution.

That article includes a lengthy interview with Jim Zemlin, the Executive Director of FSG, and Ian Murdock, its CTO and the creator of Debian, a leading free Linux distribution. By way of disclosure, I'm proud to be a director of FSG, which is also a client of my law firm.

My **Standards Blog** selection for this month focuses on a different sandbox situation: the ongoing competition between the proponents of the OpenDocument Format (ODF) specification

(now an ISO adopted standard), and the Microsoft XML Reference Schema, now called Open XML by Ecma, a European standards group that is fast-tracking it for submission to ISO as well. As this story has grown increasingly prominent, it has received increasing attention in the press, but not all of the stories that have resulted have been well reported. In some cases, the reporting has been merely careless, while in others it has served to help spread disinformation, resulting in my admonition to ***Let the Reader Beware as ODF Coverage Increases***.

My ***Consider This...*** piece for May covers a happier topic, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a little-appreciated, commoditized product: the humble yet ubiquitous shipping container, whose usually battered image belies the fact that its standardized features have enabled the transformation of the global shipping industry.

The issue closes, as usual, with the ***Rest of the News*** – a collection of what I thought were some of the most significant and interesting stories of the past month, selected from those that I posted on a daily basis at the Consortiuminfo.org [Standards News Portal](http://www.consortiuminfo.org/StandardsNewsPortal).

Finally, please note the updated information regarding a ***June 20-21 Conference*** in New York City that will bring together representatives of all types of standard setting organizations to discuss matters of mutual concern. The list of confirmed attendees is already large and growing, but there's still room for you to participate as well, so consider registering to do so today.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Best Regards,

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

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