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#22 This One's for You, Albert

Those of us that live in the ICT standards space tend to forget that there are parallel universes of s
Regular readers of this Blog will be aware that I am prone to developing a number of recurring themes, among them:

- The concept of standards (e.g., things we agree on because we're all better off when we do) manifests itself in ways both broad and rich,
- As supposedly observed by Albert Einstein, "The universe is not only a queerer place than you imagine; the universe is a queerer place than you are capable of imagining"

In pursuit of news on the first theme, I often conclude that the great Einstein need not have looked beyond his morning paper to find weirdness beyond mortal comprehension. With 8 billion Web pages now indexed by Google and who knows how many million more being added every day, I am struck with this realization with increasing frequency.

How does such material come my way? Because this site publishes not only the Consortium Standards Bulletin www.consortiuminfo.org/bulletins, but also maintains a news portal www.consortiuminfo.org/news (with RSS feed) on standards news that is updated on a daily basis, I use a variety of methods to gather news for filtering and presentation. And that brings me in intimate contact with all those billions of Web pages.

One of those news aggregation methods involves taking advantage of the automated search function that the good folks at Google provide free of charge to anyone that cares to use it. Try it yourself: Interested in punk rock toy poodles? Just set up an appropriate search request, and news of their antics may arrive in your in-box with alarming (at least to me) regularity.

Despite the fact that my own news gathering employs much less exotic search terms (e.g., consortium OR forum +"new standard"), I still receive notice of an amazing array of organizations that are, in their own way, quite exotic, and would doubtless suffice to set our friend Albert to head scratching.

As you may have expected, its now time for me to share. Herewith, some of my favorite recent examples of what the search engine dragged in, like a cat presenting a dead mouse to its bemused master. I dedicate them to the memory and wisdom of that master of the universe, Albert Einstein:

Isle of Man Hospitality Forum: When actor Stephen Fry commented publicly that this island in the Irish Sea had "the most appalling hotels", as well as terrible food (except for the Tanroagan restaurant, which offers fresh seafood he found had "not been mucked about with"), the local hospitality industry sprang into action. And just in time, as Treasury Minister Allan Bell noted that business visitors often complain to him that the ancient Isle offers "very poor quality hotels, worse quality restaurants and very inconsistent levels of service." What to do? Band together, of course, to set new standards for service. And just to show how determined they are to improve the image of the island, all of the negative quotes in the article in question at the Isle of Man website were removed two days later.

Isle of Man On-Line also holds other delights. With cow tipping the source of much levity in the U.S. these days, my favorite Isle of Man On-Line headline can only be this: "Fly Tippers Will be Prosecuted." From the story itself, I quote Environment Minister, John Rimington, MHK: *"My Department is determined*

to work with other agencies on the Isle of Man in order to identify fly-tippers and ensure they are prosecuted for their irresponsible behaviour....I hope that the recent case will cause those who might be tempted to fly-tip to think twice before doing so!" No nonsense allowed on the Isle of Man, where fly-tipping can bring a fine of up to 2,000 quid. (The link is below, for those that would know more.)

Manure Management Consortium: Some states have a lot of hogs. Logically, they soon find that they also have a lot of hog manure, which poses certain issues which cry out for, well, management. So it was that the State Universities of Oklahoma, Michigan, Iowa, North Carolina and Missouri banded together (how to say this delicately) to take the matter in hand. From a press release from the MMC, we learn that Iowa is the nation's leading hog producer, while Michigan lags behind in hogs (and presumably in their byproducts) at number 12. On the occasion of Michigan's admission to this worthy collaboration, Vern Bernuth (who heads the formidably named "MSU Animal Manure Management Task Force"), observed: "Finding improved methods for managing livestock wastes as an economic asset will remove many barriers to what is the forefront of a potentially large expansion in the animal industry in Michigan." Even in 12th place Michigan, more than 24 million tons of livestock wastes are generated each year. It makes you stop and think, doesn't it?

European Football Finance Forum: It goes without saying that soccer is big business, at least outside the U.S. That's why we were surprised to learn from a recent press release that the 3rd Annual Meeting of the European Football Finance Forum will be confronting the fact that the football industry is apparently wallowing in "a period of sobering stagnation." No assemblage of athletes or hooligans, this, but rather representatives from global accounting firm Deloitte, leading investment bank Credit Suisse First Boston, and a host of other media, bank, and supporting industries, as well as owners of football clubs. Topics addressed at the Forum's two day meeting in London included:

- The role of trade finance in negotiating player transfers
- The financial impact of youth development, player loans and tie-up deals
- How to profit from the relationship between the fans
- A quantified approach to sponsorship and alternative revenue streams

With topics like these, no one could argue with the Forum's assertion that "If maintaining future stability and growth in football finance affects your business, this event is not to be missed." One can only assume that those who did not attend will be burdened with expensively developed youth, and will fail to make a single Euro as a result of their fans enjoying their relationships.

Still and all, each of these strange examples of collaboration once again go to show that every type of standard matters (at least to someone), whether they apply to maintaining sufficient civility in Isle of Man taxi drivers, or optimal exploitation of the relationships of sports spectators.

As Albert Einstein could hardly fail to agree, when you live in a universe that is queerer than you are capable of imagining, standards are all that lie between us and chaos.

Or at least a hell of a lot of unmanaged manure.

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Useful (?) Links and Information:

Punk rock pet poodles (and more):
<http://jazzrox.homestead.com/Photos.html>

Wikipedia page on Albert Einstein:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Einstein

Isle of Man Hospitality Forum: www.iomguide.com/news/government-community-news.php?story=633

Isle of Man Story "Fly Tippers Will be Prosecuted:"
<http://www.iomguide.com/news/government-community-news.php?story=696>

Manure Management Consortium Press Release: www.consortiuminfo.org/links/manure2.shtml

European Football Finance Forum Press Release:
<http://soccernet.espn.go.com/headlinenews?id=307376&cc=5901>

Google Barometer report (as of 11.15.04.14:45):

"Manure Management" – 111,000 hits

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