

Consortia and their Role in the U.S. Standardization System

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Setting the Stage

Before there were consortia...

- National “Standards Development organizations” (SDOs) evolved over a 100 years to meet private sector needs:
 - National in their focus, accreditation and membership
 - Generally inexpensive to join
 - Revenue derived mainly or significantly from the sale of standards
 - Abroad, usually limited in their focus to just the development of standards
 - In the U.S., standards development was sometimes an adjunct, rather than the primary activity (e.g., where the SDO was a trade association)

Before there were consortia...

- Internationally, umbrella organizations also evolved:
 - A global standards infrastructure with national representation
 - ISO - non-treaty, broad range of focus
 - IEC - non-treaty, electrotechnical focus
 - Joint Technical Committee 1 (IT focus)
 - ITU - Treaty organization, telecom focus
 - A few others with narrow foci (e.g., Codex Alimentarius)

And then there were consortia:

- Began to appear in the 1980s
- At first, formed to create single standards very quickly
- Conceived and launched by small groups of allied corporations
- Invariably in the Information Technology (IT) sector
- Sometimes handed their standard off to an SDO when complete

Consortia Today:

An extremely flexible tool to support the rapid creation, promotion and maintenance of essential standards

An extremely important global trade advantage for U.S. industry in the ICT sector

What they are:

- Almost always global, but occasionally national or regional
- Almost always formed by corporations, as compared to other types of stakeholders that may join later
- Always with a particular focus (although that focus may change or expand over time)
- Typically funded almost completely by member dues, which can vary widely
- A powerful advantage for U.S. headquartered businesses and U.S. trade

What they are:

- At any point in time, C. 600 strong
- Include a core group of very influential, institutionalized organizations (e.g., W3C, OASIS, IETF, OGC, etc.)
- Formed to develop not only standards, but also to support them in a wide variety of ways:
 - Promotion
 - Advocacy
 - Certification testing and branding
 - Education and training

What they are:

- Vary widely in:
 - Their budgets (\$50k - \$5 million)
 - How wide or narrow their focus may be (specific enabling standard to domain institution)
 - How large or small their membership (20 - 1,000)
 - Who is likely to join (corporations only, or also universities, government agencies and other governmental units), non-profits, etc.)

What they are:

- Vary widely in:
 - How “open” they are
 - The nature of their programs and deliverables (standards only, or also test suites, certification programs, white papers, trade shows, training, and much more)
 - Their rules regarding intellectual property (traditional SDO rules to royalty free and open source friendly)

What they aren't:

- Nationally representative or nationally accredited (with some exceptions)
- National in their focus (with a few exceptions)
- Generally available for participation at little or no cost
- Extant in areas outside of IT and CT (with a few small beachheads elsewhere)
- “Second class” citizens in the world of standards development
- Very Likely to offer their standards for adoption by the “Big I’s” (with some exceptions)

Why you should care:

- Consortia have taken over in some areas of standard setting (e.g., Internet, Web, etc.)
- Under the Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1995, government agencies are directed to use private sector standards instead of government created standards wherever feasible
- And also to participate in private sector standards organizations
- OMB Circular A-119 does *not* distinguish between SDOs and consortia

Why you should care:

- Consortia can, and do, things that SDOs don't
 - Open Geospatial Consortium testbeds with NASA, other agencies
 - Promote and support standards
- Consortia also increasingly do support research and development
- Areas of agency interest may already be "owned" by consortia

Why you should care:

- Key current policy areas are split between SDOs and consortia (and sometimes dominated by consortia):
 - Electronic Health Records
 - SmartGrid
 - Clean technology
 - Open government
 - Security

What you can (and should!) do:

- Be aware of which consortia are active in your areas of interest
- Participate in consortia where government:
 - Has a real interest as a stakeholder
 - Can provide an important perspective
 - Can represent the interests of uninvolved stakeholders (e.g., ordinary citizens)
 - Can catalyze action in support of policy

How to participate:

- Step one: Investigate which SDOs and consortia are active: <http://www.consortiuminfo.org/links/>
- Step two: Review specific organizations as to:
 - Reputation and influence
 - Active working groups
 - Costs
 - Mode of participation (on line, face to face, etc.)
- Step three: Read a primer on how to get the most out of participation:
<http://www.consortiuminfo.org/essentialguide/participating2.php>
- Step four: Set your strategy for participation:
<http://www.consortiuminfo.org/essentialguide/participating1.php>

Further information:

- The Essential Guide: A book-length guide to ITC standards and standard setting: <http://www.consortiuminfo.org/essentialguide/>
- Standards MetaLibrary: the largest on-line research source on standards and standard setting:
<http://www.consortiuminfo.org/metalibrary/>
- Standards Today: an eJournal of news, ideas and analysis, including many issues on government's role in standard setting:
<http://www.consortiuminfo.org/bulletins/>
- Standards News Portal: Categorized and updated daily:
<http://www.consortiuminfo.org/news/>
- Standards Blog: Real time commentary:
<http://www.consortiuminfo.org/standardsblog/>

Or just give me a call:

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