

International Standards in the Emerging Global Economy

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The international standards paradigm is changing. The traditional model, in which countries drive the adoption of standards by bodies with national representation, is well known, but we also have seen the emergence of a complementary model, where global markets drive international deployment of standards regardless of their formal status. In this paper, I will describe how standards bodies and industry are adapting to this more nuanced, dual-model international standards paradigm.

International standards have been driving innovation, contributing to the growth of markets, and protecting the health and public safety of workers and the general public for centuries. Traditionally, these activities were focused around principles of national representation, which aligned with the way that the markets were organized around the world. This key function of standards is not changing. Today, more than ever, the world needs international standards to enable the creation of products and services that will be implemented and used by customers globally.

What is changing is the increasing globalization of markets and how these markets drive the standards dynamic. This globalization trend, together with the rapid advancement of technology and intensifying time-to-market demands, is influencing consumer expectations. Industry is responding by seeking more efficient ways to define global standards, which, in turn, help expand the global markets. Thus, the global standards paradigm is evolving.

As you can see, the economics of global markets drive this nuanced, dual-model international standards paradigm. And it is one where consumers benefit from improved interoperability, greater simplicity and more competitive prices. In multiple ways, globally deployed standards are essential to bringing about the world that humankind desires.

A prime example of this dynamic is the Internet. Collectively, the W3C, IETF and IEEE represent a suite of standards, which are the foundation for the Internet. Together, these standards have been a key facilitator for the growth of a global economic and social model that has touched billions of lives, but they were not deployed via the traditional, national-representation model of standards adoption. These organizations, through their constituents, instead were and are driven by the momentum of the market to innovate and provide products for global consumers.

This example shows the power of global markets to attain the technology and products that they want and need by leveraging whatever standards are necessary to make those solutions available. The culture of innovation—driven by global markets—requires that the standards environment become borderless, and in real-world, practical application, the standards environment is responding.

So, the global truth that the standards community, today confronts is that we more and more are dealing with a different kind of international standards paradigm, in which the economics of global markets, fueled by technological advancements, drive international deployment of standards regardless of their formal status. Consequently, our main driving force must be—*will* be—the continual growth and strengthening of markets. And that means we must evolve to embrace a more economically driven model in developing standards intended for international use.