

International Standards in the Emerging Global Economy

By Steve Mills, President, IEEE-SA

Global standards today are developed, adopted and recognized in multiple ways. In this paper, I will describe how standards bodies and industry are adapting to a more nuanced international standards paradigm.

Global 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. Global standards are fundamental tools of engineering, and they are fundamental to social wellbeing. Furthermore, global standards' value and necessity are coming into keener focus in this age of globalization. Today, more than ever, the world needs global standards to enable the creation of products and services that will be implemented and used by customers globally.

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. Because industry today exists in an effectively borderless world of commerce, a borderless standards paradigm is needed, too.

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A model of standards that is aligned with the historical definition of markets by political boundaries has been refined over years and today remains broadly relevant. A complementary, market-driven standards model also has gathered maturity in certain key technology spaces, such as the Internet. This is a modern paradigm for global, open standards that is encapsulated in the newly announced OpenStand principles, and it is proven in its ability to contribute to the growth of global markets in the contemporary age of borderless commerce.

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A key characteristic of the complementary model is coordination across the global standards environment. Standards organizations coordinate so that global industry does not have to exert extraordinary effort to meet country-by-country standards requirements. The result is an efficient global standards environment that is straightforward for industry to navigate and that more quickly and cost-effectively avails consumers to innovations. In this way, the OpenStand principles foster an efficient, technical-merit-driven and open modern paradigm of global standardization for borderless commerce.

As you can see, the economics of global markets drive this nuanced, dual-model standards paradigm, which blends the values of market-driven global standards with the more traditional, international standards approach. 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.

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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.

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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.



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