BLOGS HOME   PRODUCTS & SERVICES   INDUSTRIES   SUPPORT   PARTNERS   COMMUNITIES   ABOUT

Sign In

Trond's Opening Standard

The future of high tech in Europe and beyond

Events Archives
October 3, 2008

Does an Invite-only Event Make e-business Standards Visible?

By trond-arne.undheim on October 3, 2008 8:29 AM

ISO's press release on 2 October 2008 cites Alan Bryden, ISO Secretary-General who concludes with three key actions to sum up the workshop recommendations for standardizers: ensure interoperability, develop communication and promote implementation. What follows is my impression from that same event.

So I am sitting here in an esoteric (but not warm) location. I am, in fact, writing this blog entry from the international conference on Advancing public-private partnerships for e-business standards.

Today is the first day of the 18-19 September 2008 event at the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva (Switzerland). The agenda includes lots of speakers from partnering organizations at the global level, such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Telecommunication Union - Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T), the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

The room is dark, the enormous slides projector is humming, the room is huge and would probably hold 300 people. We, however, are around 50. We are discussing how to make e-business standards more widely available through partnerships. Quite strangely, the event is invitation only. I am not sure how that furthers availability or new partnerships, but then again, I am young and don't have the necessary 25 years of experience. In fact, 90 percent are men, many have grey or white beards. By the way, I have nothing against beards as such. My own dad had one. Maybe I will get one, too? There does indeed seem to be partners in the room. I guess I will try to become one of them. How long does it take to grow a beard? And, when does it turn white?

The highlights have been the message that: business is fundamental to the world economy but we can only get benefits if we have globally accepted standards. Oh, I am forgetting the stand-up rendition of a presentation supposed to be held by Tor Arne Irgens of the Norwegian Defense Logistics organization, now masterfully presented by Howard Mason of BAE Systems. Joking aside, that one was actually well done. It's just that the person is key to his own argument. You cannot simulate presence (I wrote a PhD on that topic, What The Net Can't Do).

The insiders are also asking themselves whether they are well coordinated enough. The audience seems to agree that much has happened but more can be done. So, on 18 September 2008, at the Geneva ebusiness conference, I learn that many organizations in the room have actually signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on electronic business between IEC, ISO, ITU, and UN/ECE that commits to avoid duplication. Sounds great.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), a US federal technology agency is establishing an e-business standards registry in 2008, although it is not yet up and running. I bet journalists will be queuing up once it is. Or not. Is this topic sexy enough? I wonder.

Eduardo Gutentag, Chair of the OASIS Board and Technology Director in Sun Microsystems's Corporate Standards department asks his panel: Are standards development organizations coordinated? Are they well coordinated? Howard Mason thinks it is happening but we could do more. Mike Palmer says we still have a ways to go to meet end user requirements. I am starting to wonder what end users refers to in this context. Soon it becomes clear, we are not talking about consumers. We are talking about industry. Stuart Feder, Chairman of UN/CEFACT points out that there is also market risk in using standards if they are not actively used.
So they all seem to agree that wide implementation is the key thing. Why then sit and discuss in an invite-only seminar in WMO in Geneva – probably the most unlikely place on earth to disseminate anything other than the weather forecast? But again, I am a neophyte and I will be patient.

Integrated supply chain is the topic of the next day. Raw materials – components – production – sales – end consumers. The model is fine. I like it. Just be glad you are reading my rendition, not what was up on the slide. I have cut about sixty-five boxes for simplicity. Supply chain integration system seems to be a term in vogue.

The topic of Administrative burden reduction (for instance, see the EU's approach) and the use of standards is easier to get your hands around. Harm Jan van Burg from The Dutch Taxonomy Project informs us that using the Extensive Business Reporting Language (XBRL), the Dutch are simplifying the way rules are executed by both governments and companies by creating a data model which can be used in financial chains. Wow. Finally something tangible. An example of standards applied to a real world use case.

The conference touches upon another hot potato which is the re-use of standards. It so happens that the ebXML standard which was originally developed with a limited number of verticals in mind, now is applied to health care, among other domains. That sounds useful. So, it seems good standards travel. Let's see. According to Wikipedia's entry, ebXML, started as a joint project by Oasis and UN/CEFACT in 1999. They were trying to leverage the existing Electonic Data Interchange (EDI) and Extensible Markup Language (XML) communities to create a broader community with use of web technologies. They succeeded and today there are many derived standards. Another example is

About Events

This page contains an archive of all entries posted to Trond's Opening Standard in the **Events** category. They are listed from oldest to newest.

European Parliament is the previous category.

IPR is the next category.

Many more can be found on the main index page or by looking through the archives.

Top Tags

Alan Bryden Alexander Wurzer Amy Marasco An Baisheng ANEC Anne Catherine Lorrain apartheid Barroso BBC Bedford Hotel benchmarking blog blogosphere blogs brand Brussels business CAMSS CCC Cecilio Madero Villarejo CEN cen CENELEC CERN China Chris Messina CIO collaboration Common Criteria competition consortia copyleft Cristiano Codagnone David Hammerstein David Recordon DG COMP DG DIGIT DG Enterprise DG ENTR DG ENTR. DG INFSO Digital Britain directive e-business e-government economy efficiency EIF 1.0 EIF 2.0 EMEA encryption ePractice.eu Erika Mann ETSI EU EU Directive EU Policy EU Single Market EU27 European European Commission European Internet Foundation European Journal of ePractice European Parliament ex ante face-to-face Facebook fair FEDICT fora/consortia FT FTC Google government Harald Heiske Harvard Heinz Zourek Howard Mason IBM IDABC IE IEC IETF IHT Information Week innovation intellectual property rights Internet interoperability IPR ISO IT IT procurement IT security ITU ITU-T Japan Jochen Friedrich Kallas Karel de vriendt legislation lock-in Malcolm Harbour malpractice Member States MEP METI Microsoft milestone MPLS MySpace Neelie Kroes Nokia NORMAPME OAGI OASIS ODF OFE OOXML Open ID Open Office Open Source open standards Open Web Foundation Openforum Europe Opera Oracle OSCCA-CEC OSCON 2008 patents PDF Peter Strickx plumbing policy Portable contacts procurement public official R&D Reding Rigo Wenning semantic interoperability Semic.eu sexy Shakespeare Six Apart software Software industry software interoperability software market Sourceforge South Africa specifications SSO standardistas standardization Standards standards Standards policies Stuart Feder TBT technology Technology Reference Model The Dutch Taxonomy Project Tim Berners-Lee Tim Frain Tomoko Miyamoto trademark Trasys TRM Twitter UK UNCEFACT UNECE UPU US Supreme Court Verheugen

ebMS (secure messaging service), an OASIS standard since 2002 and endorsed by ISO since 2004. This standard has a number of large and small deployments. Is this finally starting to sound exciting? I think it is, but like an old car, it needs to be warmed up.

> Over lunch I had a great discussion on the emerging need for a revised business model for standards development organizations. I cannot reveal with whom, because the discussion was off the record. These things are sensitive at the moment. Basically, the argument goes: the existing ones are charging for standards, which is not so great for accessibility. However, to change it is not so easy, as all organizations get entrenched and understandably defensive about their own reality. But say we got this discussion going, and there are those of us who are willing to make sure it does, what are the alternatives?

Standards organizations could survive by:
- Government funding – but do we want government to decide on standards which essentially should be driven by the whole market?
- Sponsorship – from whom? In any case, it would come with strings attached. Or?
- Member subscription – well, this is possible. But large players would have to bear the large share of the burden.

By using the word survive I might be missing the point. As a former sociologist I know that even though people create institutions, it is not possible for those same people to get rid of it. They are stuck in their institution, for all the love and hatred they have towards it combined. There are mortgages at stake. The corner where you put your umbrella. The familiar colleagues. In short, what Powell & DiMaggio (1983) famously have called institutional isomorphism.

Howard Mason expressed a fundamental truth when he said there are a set of successful standards that are well kept secrets. He wanted the audience to drive acceptance in the market about the potential impact and drive awareness to people who are looking to have their requirements met. Agree. Let's do it. James Bryce Clark from Oasis was more optimistic, saying that large providers are now starting to build on open standards and that is a change. I don't know exactly who he was thinking of, but I can think of some that do and some that don't. The jury is out.

A positive surprise was the talk by CERN's IT director Wolfgang von Ruden. Beyond the marketing pitch and inside account of the Hadron collider (yes, we are all geeks, and we loved it), he talked about open standards. It turns out CERN loves them. In fact, any problem of administrative computing can be solved by a good standard, if we are to believe him. He talked about the Business Process Execution Language (BPEL) which is an e-business application xml standard, about DOCLEG which is an e-administration exchange of structured data between CERN and its host authorities in Switzerland and France. Grid middleware, and the Open Grid Forum (OGF) is, needless to say, important to CERN, as it increases computing capacity.

Open access publishing is a related issue that CERN cares about. The principle is that the author institute pays, not the user. Von Ruden gave the example of the INSPIRE tool, essentially CERN's the next-generation High Energy Physics (HEP) information system, which is available for others to use as well. In the CERN Openlab (with HP, Intel, Oracle, Siemens as partners), lots of work is done. This science – industry partnership has driven R&D, innovation and open standards since 2002 with the motto: you make it – we break it. Openlab evaluates state-of-the-art technologies in a very complex environment and improves them. In short, CERN's presentation might have been the highlight of the event.

Clearly, e-business standards are important. It is not so clear that that message gets out there. This blog entry has, alas, been bogged down with abbreviations, technical terms and bureaucratic lingo. I regret it. In future, I will do my best to simplify and explain. Clearly, nobody has thought of how to communicate e-business standards to the non-expert. Or, they do not take the time. Expect to hear more from my end.

Comments (0) | TrackBacks (0)

BOOKMARK