



# Message from the Engineering Vice President

## Gavin Schutz

### A New Old Face at HQ

I would like to take this opportunity to re-introduce a familiar face. Peter Symes has joined the Society staff as Director of Standards & Engineering. Peter brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the position and will be a worthy successor to Carl Girod, who retired earlier this year after many years of dedicated service. Peter needs no introduction. He is a Fellow and has been active in the Society for over 30 years, most recently as a Governor, as Engineering Director, Television, Engineering Vice-President, and Financial Vice-President. We are fortunate to have Peter on board and will give him all the support he needs to be successful in his new position.

### The Business of Standards

Standards development has been a cornerstone of Society activities since inception. There is no doubt that the role of standards within the industry we serve has changed over the past ten years. As the technologies we use migrate to file-based content in networked environments, the role and nature of standards have changed. Historically, the rate of change in technology allowed for standards that took substantial time to develop and were the result of industry unanimity. Also, there were finite choices and the standards development process migrated towards a combination of documenting industry practice (as in the case of tape formats) and providing standardized methods of driving interoperability. As a result, it was feasible to take several years to develop a single standard, and that standard would have an effective lifetime of 15 to 20 years. In some cases, products were deployed in the field several years before the standards defining them were completed. This was possible because there was a high level of confidence that unanimity was achievable and the standards would accurately reflect the current state of technology.

### This is No Longer the Case

Two forces are at work requiring these precepts to be modified. One is the increasing rate at which technology is evolving, and the other is the rapid migration to software-based solutions. Over the next few years, these two issues will have a fundamental effect on the way standards are developed. How the Society chooses to manage this changing environment will determine our ongoing relevance in the area of standards development.

Dealing with technological evolution in a standards organization is tricky; it requires a compromise we have not traditionally had to address. The relevance of a particular standard is diminished if the time taken to develop it exceeds the basis for industry need: a document that takes many years to develop and is technically perfect as a result is of little use if the industry has moved on to alternative implementations two years before it is ready to be published. Of

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course, the tricky bit is to avoid developing standards so fast that it results in solutions that are not well thought-out or worse, technically incorrect.

In order to survive as a relevant Standards Organization, the Society must be able to adapt quickly to this changing paradigm. To help navigate these new times, we have recently rewritten the section of our Administrative Practices that governs the standards development process. The new APs allow for an optimized development cycle while retaining the required Due Process and openness that is so important for industry consensus.

We must continue to develop and use these new tools to stay relevant. We can no longer take three to five years to develop standards in an industry that is becoming increasingly reliant on consumer-based technologies that are software based and provide an almost limitless number of alternatives. In addition, the Society will have to develop expertise in ratifying software-based standards. This work has already begun with several working documents in advanced stages of development.

But this is only the beginning. There are several other factors that must be addressed. One of the most important (and most urgent) is our ability to attract the relevant expertise in these new, evolving areas. This comes in the form of reestablishing a balance between manufacturers, users, and subject matter industry experts (often from outside our traditional areas of expertise). Because of the changing business environments, it has become increasingly difficult for employers to make high-level technical resources available from the user community. This is particularly true when the standards development process requires participation for weeks at a time over the course of several years.

The solution is not simple. We must find a way to develop these important standards in more efficient ways—without compromising the integrity of the process or the quality of the documents. We must do this quickly—before the speed of technological development renders the point moot.

One final thought focuses on the strategic issue of standards development. First, standards are only useful if they are used. Second, too many standards result in no standards. We will need to think about how we can introduce strategic thinking to the process of standards development, so that we move away from simply documenting industry practice by developing standards that involve many alternatives to accomplish the same goals.

Stay tuned.

Want to help? Get involved.

Gavin Schutz



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