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SMPTE Making Progress in New Areas

Back in March 2016, I devoted my column to explaining why there is a difference between standards and industry specifications. You see, the industry has for years conflated the two forms of work, which only serves to confuse. My goal was to highlight why an industry gets together to form standards and why specifications have a useful, but different, purpose. Fast forward to July 2017 when SMPTE and the Digital Production Partnership (DPP) announced a project to develop a pilot specifications project. Yes, SMPTE would be entering the specifications business.

Mark Harrison, DPP Managing Director, said, “One of the original DPP core objectives was to achieve a common, agreed set of technical requirements for the delivery of television programs to U.K. broadcasters, and our work on the IMF broadcast specification falls neatly in line with this goal. Working with SMPTE, the North American Broadcasters Association, the European Broadcasting Union, manufacturers, and end users across the media industry, we plan to create a specification that brings the benefits of IMF more fully into the broadcast and online realm.”

The idea is that SMPTE and DPP would launch a pilot specification development project. The end product would serve the DPP and its broad-casting partners, while SMPTE would be achieving a new document process that would

complement the existing standards process.

It is important to note that the specification process is meant to support, and not detract, from any given standard. In fact, the standards will be more valuable because the specifications will call on relevant standards. Think of it like a recipe with standards playing the role of ingredients. There are different recipes for different applications. We believe it will strengthen the role standards play in our industry.

During the HPA Tech Retreat in February 2018, Mark Harrison and Andy Wilson, DPP’s head of business development, announced the publication of the draft document, with the goal of completing a final document around NAB.

This rapid development is precisely what a specification is meant to do. The specification is designed to solve a specific problem, utilizing standards documents along the way. In this case, the project will deliver a technical specification for IMF in broadcast and online applications as a breakdown of different elements—video and audio packages, composition playlists, and output profile lists—with references to all relevant SMPTE standards.

Now that we have a pilot specification, what is next? How will SMPTE move forward?

The SMPTE Board of Governors has endorsed the pilot project with the understanding that it will lead to the development of a new stream of work that heartily complements the long-standing standards process.



SMPTE and DPP announce partnership during the HPA Tech Retreat in February: (L–R) Andy Wilson, DPP; Andy Qusted, BBC; Mark Harrison, DPP; Barbara Lange, Howard Lukk, and Bruce Devlin, SMPTE.

We are actively working on that specification process. The goal is to have an agile, highly visible, open, defined process resulting in a SMPTE Specification that is publicly available alongside the requirements that the specification should meet. A full set of requirements for the SMPTE Specification process is now under development which is expected to be completed by Summer 2018.

As the industry is fast moving to alternative forms of content creation and distribution, the need for new ways of solving the problems will naturally arise. SMPTE is proactively working with industry leaders to create the mechanisms that the industry requires. Standards have a long-standing history with SMPTE. Indeed, the Society was formed in 1916 to bring order to a chaotic technical world, and in 2018, 102 years on, SMPTE has added to that process with specifications that answer the industry’s call.

I am looking forward to seeing how this all plays out and how the specifications work will develop. It is exciting.

