

# **ICT Standardization: I Have a Dream**

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## **Author's Comment**

The title, and to some extent its content, were inspired by the speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, the famous civil rights activist, in Washington, DC, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. The intent is to extend his memorable entreaties to another vital, contemporary setting, the world of ICT standardization.

## **Introduction**

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the groundbreaking work of Eckert, Mauchley, fueled by a great world war, gave birth to an industry we now call information and communication technology. Little did they know then the vast effect their work would engender.

Today, some 3 score years later, we give homage to them as inventors of an industry, an enabling industry, that effects the lives of practically everyone on our planet. No matter what we do in our endeavors, the ubiquitous digital computing device is there. From the paychecks we willingly receive to the taxes we unwillingly pay, from the exploration of outer space to the depths of the oceans, from the telephonic voices of our families to the search for extraterrestrial life, we experience the wonders of digital computing.

None of this would have been possible, not successful, had it not been for standardization. In the formative years the companies that exerted, sometimes ruthlessly, their strengths in the market, dictated the standards. As examples EBCDIC, the venerable 8-bit coded character set came from IBM, while the plain old telephone system, POTS, came from AT&T.

But this form of standardization was not without its glaring faults. At times these faults have been remedied by the legal systems. During the early 1950s IBM consented to an anti-trust decree by the US Department of Justice to unbundle their software, hardware and services. It seems their practice of bundling was both unfairly expensive, and anti-competitive. The Bell Telephone System suffered a court-enforced break-up, severing the tight control of local and long-distance telephonic products and services.

Innovation too, suffered at the gnarly hands of company-dominated standardization. We simply cannot, we simply must not forget that the ideas of intelligent, productive, and creative minds of people outside the market dominating companies just did not gain the traction, mind share, and notoriety they deserved.

These many, many years later, we still experience the fallout from the excesses of the early dominators of the market. We still see problems being only resolved in our courts

of law, and innovations stymied by unreasonable pressures. We cannot permit this suffering to continue because market growth for everyone and technological progress for all would be sadly inhibited. The only winners seem to be the entrenched market dominators and the lawyers. We must act now, in a thoughtful, but assertive, way to clear the pathways for the benefit of end users, and the futures of our children and grandchildren.

## **The Dream**

Many times I have awakened from a deep sleep to consider that very future. Often it is painful, the problems overwhelming. But I know we must persevere. The prosperity of Mankind is at stake.

I say to you that in spite of the difficulties and the frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the basic desire of people to work together to build rather than to destroy. Together we should most vigorously work to fulfill that dream.

I have a dream. I have a dream that every country in the world uses an ICT standardization infrastructure that suits their unique requirements. No longer should the concept of 'one size fits all' in procedures dominate. No indeed. Each country, each culture, each people should have the best standardization infrastructure possible for meeting the needs of their unique situation. Simply put, standardization and industrial organizations should approach the developing countries, with a view to understanding the situation leading to a custom-fit process. They should not be extolling the virtues of their particular process in the hopes of ensnaring those developing countries in the morass. Let us together help them to develop processes that best suit them.

I have a dream. I have a dream that the leaders of those many standardization organizations have the interests of the organization at the forefront, not the interests of their employers. Together we should work on selecting leaders who lead the organization, not use the organization for their employers or their own personal gain.

I have a dream. I have a dream that everyone who works in the arena of standardization does so dominated by the spirit of collaboration. No longer should we permit the uncooperative nor the unproductive to enjoy the same rights and privileges as the collaborative and the productive. Those who contribute, those who share for the common good, should be those who benefit the most, not the detractors, not the obstacle builders, not the unfair.

I have a dream. I have a dream that all who are involved in standardization understand that standardization is more than developing specifications. Much, much more. Standardization, is a life cycle process that also has phases for determining user requirements, confirming that implementations comply, and maintenance. For far too many years, the less-well-informed have had us believe that the specification is all that matters. These same people would have us believe falsehoods. How else can we understand user requirements if not to listen to their voice, together with the voice of buyers? How else can we combat the false claims of conformity without a truly effective

means of implementation verification? How else can we control perturbations in the installed base without well-managed maintenance? The full life cycle approach is the best way forward.

I have a dream. I have a dream that interoperability, truly seamless interoperability, will become a requirement of implementations, not simply an option.

I have a dream. I have a dream that all the standards developing organizations of the world will cooperate together to the benefit of everyone. No longer will the whims of the organizations, dictated by unreasoned pressures, accept the specifications of consortia as though those consortia were of a lower class. Although each organization was created and empowered to act in the interests of their membership at that time, times have changed. The market pressures that gave rise to them no longer exist, so why should their processes and biases so long endure?

## **Summary**

I hold these dreams to be self-evident that no well-intentioned, thoughtful person can deny. But we must be cautious for there are many who are neither well-intentioned nor thoughtful. We must remain steadfast in their pursuit for the sake of Mankind.

I have those dreams today.

Let the joys of well fitting processes of standardization ring in developing countries everywhere.

Let collaboration ring in the meeting rooms, laboratories and halls of standardization.

Let the knowledge of the standardization life cycle ring the bells of long-term prosperity.

Let the benefits of interoperability ring the bells of progress and efficiency for all people.

Let the true cooperation of all standards developing organizations the world over, formal or consortia, ring in a new era of collaboration and sharing now and into the bright future.

Let these dreams ring, by the strength of all standardizers, in every village, in every hamlet, in every city, and for every person the world over.