

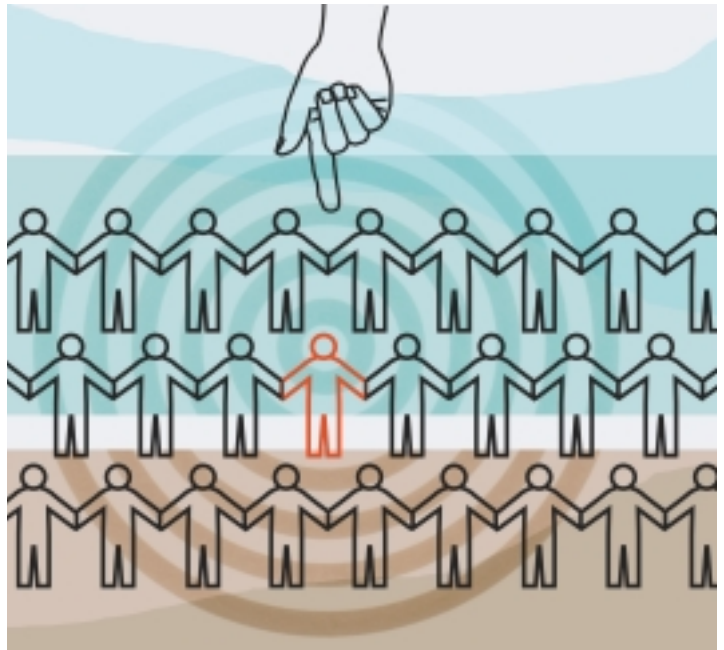
# The Standards Professional: *The Employee You Didn't Know You Needed*

## WHILE MOST COMPANIES

today have a specific individual, perhaps even an entire organization, who is responsible for corporate objectives and oversight in quality, environmental issues, and safety, there seems to be a stigma attached to the same level of oversight for standards. In fact, most companies, though they may have dozens or even hundreds of employees participating in the standards community, still perceive “standards stuff” to be simply a technical contribution rather than the fundamental business issue it really is.

In reality, standards are a complicated issue in today's global economy and should be addressed as part of the company's strategic plan. Yes, participation in technical standards committees is important. But the other side of the coin is strategic involvement in the management organizations and boards that run the technical committees.

The standards professional is an individual whose primary job function is to work on the management committees of both domestic and international standards developing organizations (SDOs). Rather than working on near-term technical issues such as size or weight or processing speed, he is involved with long-term management decisions such as “What standards are appro-



priate?,” “Who will create them?” and “What policies and procedures must be followed?” Negotiating the correct answers to these and other management and policy questions enables the work of the technical participants to flow more smoothly, thereby raising the return on investment of their own participation and their value to the company and global industry.

## **Why Does an Enterprise Need a Standards Professional?**

With or without U.S. participation, international standards are increasingly being used today as components of inter-

national trade. U.S. industry, which 25 years ago was a clear leader in the development of international standards, is continuing to discover that it is no longer the de facto standards generator it once was. As the world's economic climate changes, multinational agreements such as those incorporated into the European Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement are making proactive managed participation in both national and international standards a necessity rather than a nicety. As a result, many more U.S. companies are making the transition from simply using standards developed by others to actively

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participating in management and technical standards activities that directly affect them.

However this participation is too often conducted in a haphazard fashion. Employees may be told by their supervisors to participate in a technical or management committee that they are ill equipped to handle—either by training or personality. Often employees will take it upon themselves to try to participate out of enlightened self interest but find that their supervisors don't understand the amount of time and travel required. Their standards participation is treated as an extra-curricular activity on top of their "real jobs." Both of these and other similar situations point to a lack of understanding by management as to the strategic nature of standards participation.

The basic strategic decision a company must make is whether it wants to follow standards or lead the standards-making activity in a particular area. Either decision is acceptable, as long as it is explicitly made. The Competitor's Creed (see box) provides an allegorical model for any company's stance with respect to standards.

But in either case, the company needs to take proactive action in the form of Strategic Standards Management (SSM)<sup>1</sup> to manage its standards activities rather than let them happen in an ad hoc fashion. SSM is a complex and ongoing process, but it has six basic steps:

- IDENTIFY the standards development efforts that affect your company's businesses as early as possible.
- TRACK and monitor the progress of proposed technical standards on which your products depend.

- PLAN for strategic representation on key technical and management committees.
- DRIVE the standards development process to reflect your business interests.
- ADOPT standards that are consistent with your business directions and integrate them as appropriate into your products and processes.
- MAINTAIN a consistent and effective corporate presence in the standards arena—this will help with step one.

To effectively accomplish this, the company must address its standards involvement in two areas.

First, the company must internally manage its employees' involvement in standards activities. This is true whether the company wants to be a leader or a follower. In either case the company must be

## To be a leader, corporate management must make the long-term commitment in time and resources to participate in the management processes of the standards community as well as simply the technical committees.

aware of what is going on in the standards arena within its field of expertise.

If a company decides to simply follow standards developed by others, then "time to market" becomes a driver. Companies today cannot simply wait for a new standard to come out in order to begin building to it. They must, by virtue of some sort of limited participation, be ready to go as soon as relevant new stan-

### Competitor's Creed

**EVERY MORNING WHEN THE SUN COMES UP, A GAZELLE WAKES.**

**THE GAZELLE KNOWS THAT HE MUST OUTFRAN THE FASTEST LION—OR HE WILL BE EATEN.**

**WHEN THE SUN COMES UP, A LION ALSO WAKES.**

**THE LION KNOWS THAT HE MUST OUTFRAN THE SLOWEST GAZELLE—OR HE WILL STARVE.**

**THE LESSON IS SIMPLE:**

**IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER WHETHER YOU ARE A LION OR A GAZELLE.**

**WHEN THE SUN COMES UP, YOU'D BETTER BE RUNNING.**

dards are approved.

Because technical participation generally yields direct and measurable progress that can be tied to a company's financials in the short term, it is relatively easily justified.

The second area of SSM is more difficult to evaluate and justify, but it is crucial for those companies wishing to take on a leadership role in the standards making process. This

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sary to place desired people in key management positions. It will also take effort to build the network within the company to develop corporate positions on issues.

Equally crucial is the consideration of what impact participation will have on a company's patent portfolio. Participation in industry committees raises numerous legal issues and potential antitrust risks. By definition, an "industry committee" is any group, formal or informal, of any size in which employees meet to discuss technical, operational, legal, and regulatory matters with others in the same industry—including competitors and potential competitors. As a result, industry committees are by their nature combinations of competitors—meeting one element of a possible antitrust violation as defined in the Sherman Act and the Federal Trade Commission Act. While open standards committees are generally seen as exempt from these acts, they do pose a risk if the participants are not aware of the

potential dangers. Companies and participants must be aware of the consequences of improper activity in order to avoid legal entanglements. Participant and management



training therefore becomes an important part of SSM.

### **What Are the Characteristics and Functions of a Standards Professional?**

How companies organize their standards activities to address SSM varies widely from tightly centralized control to no control at all. This is largely dependent on the history and culture of the organization and to a lesser extent on the industry it supports. But regardless

of the organizational structure, the two basic management functions of SSM (internal standards oversight and long-term strategic commitment) are made significantly easier to implement if the company has a dedicated individual or two responsible for corporate level concerns in the area of standards: the standards professional.

The ideal standards professional understands his company's strategic goals; operates at a high enough level within the company to have the ear of upper management and to influence changes that need to be made; understands the processes, inter-relationships, and politics of the global standards industry; has a broad range of experience in both domestic and international standards activities; is honestly interested in improving the process by which standards are developed and used in a global environment. And, of course, he leaps tall buildings in a single bound.

He serves as a conduit of information from relevant standards organizations to the various business sectors within the company. He must be willing to spend a lot of time traveling and have the management backing and resources to do so; this is not a job that can be done from behind a desk.

How does one attain this

position? Unfortunately, it's not often in personnel job descriptions. The general path is an evolutionary one beginning with technical committee work directly involved with the employee's "real job," and then accepting increasingly responsible officer positions in technical committees, standards organizations, and delegations. At some point, as the level of effort in standards work increases, the employee will have to sit down with his management and alter his formal job description. A draft template for a job description can be found in the sidebar (right).

### **Moving from Technical Participant to Standards Professional**

As technical standards participants begin to evolve into standards professionals, it is incumbent upon them to make sure that the visibility attained for their efforts is positive. One immediately obvious way is to work with other employees in a similar situation to optimize interaction with external organizations for reasons of membership, corporate presence, formalizing who's working on what, paying dues, etc. This can be done by creating what might be called a Virtual Standards Office (VSO).

The VSO provides the company with a consistent address for standards-related billing, interaction, faxes, corporate

inquiries, notices of awards, etc. How the VSO is managed inside the company is irrelevant as long as the consistent external viewpoint is maintained. It could reside as part of a larger corporate office such as Legal or Licensing or Corporate Research. It could also be "owned" by a product division, although this tends to provide insufficient protection against near-term product-related constraints and budget issues. Although informal at first, the VSO may eventually evolve into a true standards office.

### **Conclusion**

There is no formal training or job description for what I've termed the standards professional. But from the company's perspective, the standards professional should have four objectives:

- To utilize the standards community and existing standards to develop and market new products in a global economy.
- To create new standards that benefit industry (including his company) and the end consumer.
- To create new market spaces and enlarge existing ones.
- To work in a proactive manner to improve the process by which standards are developed and how they are used to benefit consumers

## **Standards Professional Job Description Template**

**Job Title:** TBD, typically director of standards, etc.  
**Reports to:** Corporate office (usually offices of CTO, legal, marketing, etc.)

### **Essential Duties and Responsibilities:**

- 1.** Actively participate in the meetings and activities of standards developing organizations relevant to the company's interests in order to educate that community on the capabilities of the company, to give the company credibility and impact, and to acquire intelligence of use to the company's business activities. **Percent of time spent on this function: 35%**
- 2.** Actively participate in the relevant industry standards management and technical subcommittees in order to represent and promote the company's positions and to develop appropriate business contacts. **Percent of time spent on this function: 45%**
- 3.** Create and/or manage the process needed to effectively support the level of standards activity needed by the company and to eventually embody those processes as a formal, high-quality standards office. **Percent of time spent on this function: 10%**
- 4.** Work with legal and other offices to develop appropriate intellectual property rights policies with respect to employee standards participation. **Percent of time spent on this function: 10%**

in international trade.

The existence, enthusiasm, experience, and willing participation of standards professionals is what makes the voluntary standards community so robust. Global industry needs more of these people—so maybe it's time for you and your company to become more involved.

### **REFERENCE**

1 See "Standards Management and Texas Instruments," *ASTM Standardization News*, December 1997 or <http://www.crcamp.com/ssm.htm> for further information on Strategic Standards Management.