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US Response to JTC 1 N 9040 - Request from JTC 1/SC 25 to JTC 1 for Clarification on Consistency of Standards Versus Competing Specification

Standardization has enabled tremendous value and growth to the ICT sector. It has supported rapid innovation and widespread use while reducing costs and making products available to more people. ICT now touches nearly all aspects of life worldwide.

The nature of standardization is to attract innovative ideas from multiple sources, choose the best ones and to codify them in specifications that facilitate widespread use. Reducing the number of technical alternatives to a reasonable minimum number is an essential part of this process. This reduction process has benefits: economies of scale can be realized, networks can be built and products can achieve interoperability. It also has a cost in that some valuable and innovative ideas may be dropped along the way.

In reducing the number of alternatives, JTC 1 and other SDOs have demonstrated that it is not necessary and may not be desirable to choose only one alternative or option for standardization. There are times when one standard is all that is required to meet the needs of the marketplace and there are other instances where multiple standards make the most sense to respond to market requirements and to the needs of our society. As examples, programming languages, optical storage, interconnect/interfaces, and data networking have each seen multiple standards that have provided value to industry and to the marketplace; many of these are international standards developed within JTC 1. The cycle of innovation in the ICT sector has resulted in the continuous introduction of new technologies that improve upon existing ones - improvements in memory technologies are a good example. An attempt to choose only one standard would ignore and threaten to inhibit the cycle of innovation that continues to fuel this industry.

When SDOs produce multiple standards, markets have often successfully further reduced the number of options (in data networking, for example). Where multiple standards remain popular, products have often accommodated them to provide positive customer experiences. For example, many optical disk players support various optical media formats, most computers will run programs written in a variety of programming languages, and many digital displays support more than one interface standard.

The JTC 1 directives recognize the value of interoperability and portability. The directives seek to avoid overlap or duplication in the programs of work of JTC 1 SCs, so that two or more SCs are not chartered to do work in the same area of technology. Avoiding conflict in programs of work is an appropriate way for JTC 1 to efficiently organize its work. However, conflict is not useful as a litmus test for a technology standard because conflict cannot be uniformly defined for all standards. Each technology standard must be judged on its own merits, considering questions such as what market requirements does it address, is it globally relevant, what value does it add beyond existing standards?

In summary, JTC 1 recognizes the success that this model has brought to industry, customers and society overall. As the leading developer of international standards

in the ICT sector, JTC 1 will strive to develop standards of high quality and which represent a small number of alternatives. JTC 1 also recognizes that it is not in a position to mandate use of a single standard, and that there are times when multiple standards make the most sense in order to respond to the needs of the marketplace and of society at large. It is not practical to define criteria for making these decisions; each standard must be judged on its own merits.