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STANDARDS 2005 – THE YEAR IN REVIEW

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On this New Years Day weekend, I am forced to reflect not only on the responsibilities of bloggers to be accurate in their reporting, but also on the timeless question posed in 1969 by the Firesign Theatre, "How can you be in two places at once, when you're not anywhere at all?"

News Shorts: Available at site only – www.consortiuminfo.org/bulletins/jan06.php#news

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Rather incredibly - to me –the **Consortium Standards Bulletin** begins its fourth full year of publication with this issue.

Much has changed in the intervening time. But it's also surprising how much has not, as you can see from the editorial in the December 2002 Inaugural Issue, which was titled "IPR Policies: a Call to (Lay Down) Arms." That editorial refers to private litigation involving alleged abuses of the JEDEC standards process by memory technology company Rambus, and an investigation into the same course of conduct that was then about to be launched against the same company by the Federal Trade Commission.



While Rambus settled one suit against Infineon last year, its legal action against a number of other companies continue to grind on, as does the FTC proceeding. And the terms of IPR policies continue to be the source of as much, or more, contention than ever. Were we to run our first editorial today with only factual updating, it would still (regrettably) make as much sense now as it did then.

But times have changed while the **CSB** has been bringing you the news, and in some cases, for the better. In that same editorial I called for the following:

What's needed is for the industry to have a "constitutional convention" to set a standard policy - a policy which will have alternative terms for a limited number of situations where alternatives are truly needed, but also a well articulated rationale for each alternative,

stating where and why that alternative is appropriate. Its time for the industry to compromise once, and agree many times thereafter. Once this is accomplished, the industry can get back to the far more important business of standard setting, rather than arguing about how to do it.

Indeed, an ABA subcommittee has now been toiling for more than a year to create just such a document. In another favorable development, a number of companies are advocating for more stringent standard setting disclosure rules – and even for early discussion of licensing terms, which the U.S. Department of Justice has signaled it would find to be pro-competitive under the antitrust laws, if properly managed. The reason? Even IT companies with the largest patent portfolios have come to realize that good standards can be worth more to them than the licensing revenue of their own patents.

So as we look forward to 2006, there are reasons for encouragement as well as frustration. But in this issue, we look backward, and present what I think were the most significant events, issues organizations (and more) from the year just ended.

This issue's **Editorial** expands on this evaluation, concluding that while 2005 was a difficult year marred by a lack of cooperation in all too many venues, ultimately the successes outnumbered the failures, regardless of the amount of stomach lining consumed in the process.

Recognizing the futility of summarizing all of the important stories, or even trends, of 2005, this month's **Feature Article** focuses instead on what I believe to have been most newsworthy in the year just ended. This issue also includes my annual **News Sources Awards**, this time in several additional categories as well. I've appreciated the good work of the hundreds of standards organizations, open source projects, news services, individual journalists, community sites and bloggers that together have helped to get out

and analyze the news. Accordingly, the awards are my way of providing some small measure of recognition to those that I thought did the best job of raising the profile of standards, and explaining to their readers why standards matter.

Next, you will see ***Our Year in Review***, being a brief overview of some of the things that have been happening this year here at ConsortiumInfo.org, followed by this month's selection from the ***Standards Blog*** (relating to our Standards Story of the Year). The issue closes with a less serious entry from ***Consider This...***

All in all, it's been an extremely active year in the world of standards, and therefore an equally busy year at ConsortiumInfo.org. In light of the expanded activities at the site, I've decided to set the ***CSB*** calendar for 2006 at ten issues instead of twelve, omitting the August and December issues. This will provide time at this end to catch up on other site projects, not to mention extra time with my family, separate from my ever-present wireless-enabled laptop.

So as you read this issue looking backward, I hope that you are looking forward to the New Year, and to what lies ahead. Whatever that may be, I'll personally look forward to doing my best to investigate it, think about it, and report on it to you here at the ***CSB***.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Updegrove', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Updegrove
Editor and Publisher
2005 ANSI President's
Award for Journalism

EDITORIAL

SUBSTANCE AND STRUGGLE

Andrew Updegrove

As in time past, I began my preparations for this "Year in Review" issue by scanning the individual news items (more than 700 in 2005) that I culled from thousands more for posting at the [News Portal](#) of this site. After completing that task, I asked myself what single word might best sum up the world of standards in 2005. I was rather dismayed that the word that immediately sprang to mind, and best seemed to fit, was "struggle."

Indeed, there was a great deal of contention, as well as outright confrontation, everywhere one might care to look for it: within standard setting organizations, such as IEEE, where rival factions pushed for adoption of their favored flavor for the next standard in the 802.11 family of wireless standards; between consortia, as in the battle to the death still raging between the supporters of the HD-DVD and the Blu-ray next generation DVD formats; between individual countries and the rest of the world, as with the ongoing efforts by China to protect its domestic industries through standards within the constraints established by the World Trade Organization's Act on Technical Barriers to Trade; and last but not least, the struggle of just about everyone in the IT industry to cope with the current flawed patent regime in the United States.

Of course, there were successes, too, but while some of these so-called "successes" may have resolved an issue (at least for a time), they were really defeats of one side by another, with the public, positive statements of the losing side smacking of face-saving efforts to put the best spin on what was in fact a retreat. Certainly this was the case when the deadlock between the United States and most of the rest of the world over "Internet governance" was broken just prior to the formal convening of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis. In such one-sided victories, it may be that a different resolution has merely been delayed, rather than defeated.

As the new year begins, then, it is worth asking this question: Has the world of standard setting really grown to be more contentious, and if so, why?

I suspect that it would be untrue to state that standard setting has suddenly become more adversarial across the board. But I expect that a case could be made that within the information and communications technology (ICT) sector it has become more of a contact sport over the course of the last several years, and that the last twelve months have been particularly good examples of this willingness to mix it up.

Why would this be true? Most obviously, because ITC standards matter more now than ever, and in more ways than ever before, both positively and negatively. Standards can still create new product opportunities, but if all of the patents that they infringe are owned (for example) in the West, then manufacturers in the East (e.g., in China), may find themselves at a great disadvantage, and desirous of creating standards of their own.

Similarly, when a single manufacturer has a valuable monopoly (such as Microsoft, with its Office productivity suite), then it is more likely to work against rather than support a standard -- such as the OpenDocument OASIS format -- that could threaten that monopoly. And again, if one country has control of a key component of a valuable ITC resource, such as the root directories of the Internet (which are maintained under the supervision of the United States Department of Commerce) and a go it alone attitude to boot, then it's likely that such a country will exhibit a "my way or the highway" response to requests for joint control.

Each of these examples of contention has received ample coverage in the news this year, along with far too many other stories of a similar kind. It is likely that 2006 will bring more of the same.

Still, there is reason for optimism, for 2005 also brought news of countervailing actions in the marketplace, such as patent pledges by major IT vendors in support of open source software

development efforts, and the continuing evolution of what many have come to refer to as Web 2.0, built not only upon formal efforts such as the upgrading of the RSS and Atom syndication standards, but also upon nonprofit projects (e.g., the Wikipedia), free tools (e.g., de.lic.ious bookmarks) and entrepreneurial ventures (such as www.flickr.com) – not to mention the enthusiastic, organic and experimental currents that have swirled around the Web, based upon these and thousands of other sites, blogs and shared ideas.

And finally, there is the underlying dynamic of standard setting, which is this: compliance with standards is essentially a voluntary act. Unlike the political system, which bestows upon the majority the power of the state, and therefore the ability to oppress a minority even over long periods of time, the standards system is based upon a balance of self-interest and common benefit. No player can push that balance too far or for too long in its own direction before it begins to lose more than it gains by way of market reaction.

Of course, this dynamic does not restore equilibrium in real time, and only by coincidence is any individual cog in the standards machine in equipoise at any given moment. But overall, it is a self-correcting system, and that is a very powerful wind to have at one's back.

So it is that as 2005 closes, we may well look with trepidation towards the discrete events of the year to come. But we can also anticipate with fair confidence that at this time next year, notwithstanding all of the gnashing of teeth and sleight of hand that may lie between now and then, we will be looking back on another year during which accomplishments outnumbered failures, and where for all of the pushing and pulling, the vast majority continued to play within the system.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

2005 THE STANDARDS YEAR IN REVIEW

Andrew Updegrove

Introduction: 2005 was a busy standards year – far busier than can be summarized in one article, or even one issue of this journal. The year had both high and low points, victories as well as losses, and stories that simply went sideways or sputtered out entirely.

In many ways, the year was characterized by struggle, as noted in this issue's [Editorial](#), in part because it was also beset by increasing complexity on many fronts: patent thickets grew thicker while the United States patent system became increasingly recognized for contributing to the problem; nations and regions became more skilled at incorporating standards into their commercial strategies; major corporations did as well; and with the increasing success of open source software came friction between the simple concept of Free and Open Software and the more complex licensing practices of traditional standard setting participants.

But the flip side of the coin is that these same complexities often arose from the fact that the importance of standards is becoming better recognized. With this realization of value and importance, for better or worse, comes greater incentive for commercial and governmental interests to play the standards game for maximum benefit.

In this third Annual Review of the year in standards, I will therefore not attempt to summarize every major event or story of the year just ended. Instead, I will memorialize what I believe to have been the most newsworthy highs and lows of the last twelve months, so that readers now and in the future can remember the best – and the worst – that 2005 had to offer.

1? Standards Story of the Year: [Massachusetts and OpenDocument](#)

There was little doubt in my mind what to recognize as the 2005 IT standards story of the year. It involves a visionary (and now toppled) leader in the person of State CIO Peter Quinn, who announced his resignation to his employees on Christmas eve; a battle between the largest IT companies in the world, as companies like IBM and Sun saw an opening to break Microsoft's ownership of the office productivity software market; infighting among politicians in a scrabble for control of state IT procurement; the future of not only open standards but of open source software as well; the need for software vendors – and standards developers – to serve the accessibility needs of those with disabilities; the preservation of the historical record; and whether you or I will be able to access our individual past in the future.

My coverage of this saga began at the [News Portal](#) on September 1st, and at the [Standards Blog](#) on September 17th. I dedicated the [September issue](#) to the story, and have continued to follow it in all three of these venues ever since – as I will in 2006, since the story is far from over.

The twists and turns of this story are too Byzantine to be summarized in this article, but you can access the full database of news stories and blog entries, both already existing and as new material is added in the future, [here](#).

2? Open Source Story of the Year: [The Embrace of Open Source by Big IT](#)

While 2005 was not the first year in which big information technology companies invested heavily in Linux (IBM most prominently passed through that knothole years ago), 2005 was the year in which the floodgates opened, with many companies making public pronouncements as well as private strategic decisions intended to boost customer confidence and interest not just in Linux, but in open source alternatives to proprietary software products in general.

The most dramatic evidence of this trend was a series of public announcements by major patent owners that they would not assert their patents against Linux, and in some cases, against any open source software product. Those announcements were intended to allay customer concerns relating to the consequence of porous patent laws, and to underline the marketing message that the open source train was gathering steam, having already left the station.

The first announcement was made by IBM, which on January 10 [pledged](#):

...to open access to key innovations covered by 500 IBM software patents to people and groups working on open source software. The pledge applies to any individual, community, or company working on or using software that meets the Open Source Initiative (OSI) definition of open source software. This is believed to be the largest pledge ever of patents of any kind and represents a major shift in the way IBM manages and deploys its intellectual property portfolio.

IBM's pledge was followed rapidly by (often curiously reminiscent) announcements by other multinational IT vendors. Sun Microsystems, for example, [announced](#) a scant 15 days later:

... the largest single release of patent innovations into the open source community by any organization to date, marking a significant shift in the way Sun positions its intellectual property portfolio.... [S]aid Scott McNealy, Chairman and CEO, Sun Microsystems, Inc. "The release of more than 1,600 patents associated with the Solaris OS far eclipses any other vendor's contribution. Today represents a huge milestone for Sun, for the community, for developers and for customers." A more modest pledge was later made by Computer Associates, which was reported on March 3 to be planning a pledge of its own (it made its formal commitment in support of IBM's pledge on September 7, involving [14 patents](#) of its own). Nokia made its own pledge in support of Linux [in May](#).

Other actions of many types followed. In August, Novell announced that it would open source its flagship [Suse Linux](#) software, and even less directly involved vendors shifted position towards a world in which open source software might become even more powerful. Intel, for example, announced in May that it had formed an internal [open source group](#). In April, it was even announced that Microsoft had [extended an olive branch](#) to the open source community (although no watershed change in its public strategy followed its call for a "for a sit-down to discuss how the software giant can better work with the open-source world.")

By the end of the year, it seemed certain that the open source genie would never be tricked back into the proprietary bottle, if only because too many proprietary vendors were themselves too committed to any longer back away from their public commitments.

3? Standard of the Year: [XML](#)

If there was a standard of the year, surely it was XML. But not just XML (which achieved W3C Recommendation status on February 10, 1998), but all of its schematic and other children – whether supported by independent organizations (such as XBRL international, which has adapted XML for public accounting reporting purposes), organizations within organizations (such as LegalXML, a Member Section within OASIS, which in turn supports a myriad of XML-related activities), less formal multi-member forums, and even individual companies, university labs and government agencies.

In fact, there are few information domains in which XML cannot be useful – and in most cases, has already been put to use - from human resources HR-XML Consortium, to sports data ([SportsML](#)). This trend continued in 2005, with the formation of new groups, both formal and informal, including the [International Molecular Exchange](#) (Imex), which was formed to "jointly curate and exchange data" in the five publicly available databases that are based upon the Molecular Interaction XML Interchange standard developed for proteomics use.

Look for more activities of all types involving XML in 2006 (and after).

4? Standards Developer of the Year (Organization): [OASIS](#)

By almost any measure, OASIS was the standards development organization that found itself (by design or otherwise) in the middle of the most action in the IT sector. All in the same year, it:

- Continued to play a central role in the development of Web services and other ebusiness standards
- Completed a nearly three year struggle to achieve consensus on one of the first formal intellectual property policies to offer an elective rules track to create standards that would be friendly to open source software implementations (OASIS was then [condemned](#) for its trouble in a letter signed by 29 open source advocates, who wanted OASIS to mandate use of the open source-friendly terms for all of its Technical Committees)
- Adopted and released eight new standards, including version 1.0 of the OpenDocument format in May, providing the first open office productivity application format (and the basis for the commercial and political struggle in [Massachusetts](#) that I named above as the 2005 Standards Story of the Year).
- Launched six new Technical Committees to address a wide array of new needs..

While some other consortia and accredited standards developers may have had more projects in motion in 2005, it was OASIS that, through a perfect storm of commercial and political forces, found itself to be at the center of more of what was newsworthy in 2005 than any other organization.

5? Standards Developer of the Year (Country): [China](#)

In April, we dedicated an issue of the [CSB](#) to the [rising power](#) of China, which has deployed its formidable resources to the creation of what may be the best funded and staffed standards infrastructure that the world has ever seen. While that infrastructure appears to still be finding its voice in the established

bureaucracy of global standard setting, the influence that China can be expected to assert will be substantial, given the size of the market subject to its control.

China has even more reasons to flex its standards muscles than most countries, given the preponderance of patents in the West that currently forces it to function as the cut-rate job shop for the high-priced occidental brands that reap the margins generated by the sweat of Chinese brows. If China can create and enforce its own standards without violating the World Trade Organization's Technical Barriers to Trade Act, it will do so, adding another weapon to an already formidable commercial armamentarium.

Already, there have been major international repercussions over China's efforts to require compliance with a home-grown wireless standard. That issue has only been partially resolved, and additional tests are in the offing involving Chinese standards for 3G cell phones, DVD players and video/video compression.

Stay tuned. You'll be hearing more on this story in 2006 as well.

6? Intellectual Property Issue of the Year: [The ITC Patent Mess](#)

To paraphrase an old saying, "Nobody doesn't love to hate the U.S. patent system." And well they might, as a variety of events in 2005 demonstrated.

On the litigation front, multiple high-profile lawsuits ground on that many considered to involve patents that should never have been issued, while new threats emerged involving patents that are also popularly thought to be invalid.

An example of continuing litigation was the ongoing effort by a one-employee company called Eolas Technologies to collect on a multi-hundred million dollar judgment against Microsoft involving the Internet Explorer browser – a threat that had earlier inspired a plea to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) by the W3C, signed personally by Tim Berners-Lee, to void the patent in question. An example of a new threat is the contention of another small company, this time based in North Carolina and called Scientigo, which claims that use of [XML](#) (first released in 1998) would infringe its patent.

At the same time, endemic cries against the formation and funding of new patent "trolls" (i.e., companies formed for the sole purpose of purchasing, and asserting, patents against operating companies) reached the pages of even the [Wall Street Journal](#). One such company is Acacia Technologies, which has acquired 120 patents in a variety of technical areas and has brought suit already against companies large and small, including Intel. Another, named Thinkfire, is venture backed and was founded by former Microsoft chief technology officer Nathan Myhrvold. Thinkfire licenses patents it has purchased, and manages those owned by others as well.

At the heart of the matter is the long-held belief that patents in the U.S., and particularly software patents, are [too easy to get and too hard to challenge](#), thereby enabling the owners of patents that should never have been issued to put innocent software developers and end-users to the choice of paying up or facing an uphill – and extremely expensive – battle in court to challenge those patents. A bill is currently in Congress to address the situation, but the opinions on the specific changes that should be made to existing law are as fiercely held as they are diverse.

Meanwhile, 2005 saw a pitched battle in Europe over whether to permit the award of software patents at all. By year's end, the question had been overwhelmingly answered in the [negative](#), at least for now. And in this country, various initiatives were launched in support of open source software, while awaiting whatever relief, if any, Congress might provide. One such initiative was an information resource launched by Open Source Development Labs (OSDL) to create an [on-line patent commons reference library](#). More ambitiously, an [open invention network](#) was formed by IBM, Philips, Sony, Red Hat, and Novell to actually buy patents that might be infringed by Linux users, in order *not* to assert them.

As the year ended, it appeared that the best that could be hoped for would be the eventual passage of a patent reform bill that would be likely to leave everyone equally unhappy.

All in all, no one was happy with the U.S. patent system in 2005 – except the trolls.

7? International (Non?) Event of the Year: [WSIS](#)

Perhaps the only thing that was less popular in 2005 than U.S. patent laws was the U.S. position on a question that came to be phrased, "Who Should Govern the Internet?"

As I reported for months at the ConsortiumInfo.org [News Portal](#) and explored in depth in the [November](#) issue of the **CSB**, the controversy focused on whether the U.S. would (as earlier promised) or would not (as it announced in June) relinquish control of the Internet Council on Assigned Numbers and Names (ICANN). Internationally, pressure and angst mounted following the U.S. backtracking, while domestic determination not to give in rose in equal measure.

By the time the second plenary meeting of the World Summit on the Internet Society (WSIS), a multi-year endeavor commissioned by the United Nations and administered by the International Telecommunication Union, convened in Tunis, virtually all other topics had been eclipsed by the Internet governance controversy.

At the last minute, a compromise (of sorts) was reached that largely gave the U.S. what it wanted – continuation of the status quo – while granting those that wanted a global resource to be administered collectively only a new "Internet Governance Forum" that might – or might not – grow into something meaningful.

Summary: All in all, the Year in Standards was contentious and clamorous, and by turns both regressive and progressive, infuriating and encouraging -- much like the year in domestic and international relations. It's a safe bet that we can look forward to more of the same in 2006, as few of the stories highlighted above have run their course, nor have the underlying conditions, attitudes and strategic interests that fueled their heat abated.

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AWARDS

STANDARDS NEWS SOURCES OF THE YEAR

Andrew Updegrove

For the second year in a row, I would like to recognize those news sources that I believe did the best job of bringing standards-relevant information and analysis to the on-line world. As I stated in last year's awards article:

To state the obvious, standards news reportage does not receive the type of attention and awards that movies and Broadway shows (or even advertisements) attract. While the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) annually bestows its President's Award for Journalism to an individual reporter, we are aware of no official recognition given to those standards organizations that release the most noteworthy news, or the media that provide the most thorough and discriminating specific coverage of the standards world.

This year, I am expanding the categories of news providers I would like to recognize to include not only news services and standards organizations, but also individual journalists, bloggers and community site editors as well.

Methodology: The awards that appear below are of two types.

Statistical Awards: As was the case last year, this set of awards was determined solely by reviewing and tabulating those articles and press releases that I selected to present and link to at the ConsortiumInfo.org [News Portal](#) during 2005 – more than 700 items in all, out of the thousands of articles and press releases I reviewed in the course of the year.

The larger sample set from which these 700 plus items were chosen was harvested through three methods:

1. Use of a series of standards and open source focused Google Alerts, most of which were in place throughout the year, but some of which were added in response to new stories as they developed as the year progressed
2. Press releases sent directly to ConsortiumInfo.org by many of the 455 standards organizations and open source projects listed at the ConsortiumInfo.org [Consortium and Standards List](#) (if your organization does not currently send press releases to ConsortiumInfo.org, please find out how to do so [here](#)).
3. My own use of the Web and all it has to offer.

Special Awards: Because the database used above does not include some of the other sources of information upon which many of us rely (e.g., blogs are under-represented at the News Portal – something I plan to correct this year), the second set of awards is more subjective, in that it is limited to those sources of which I have become aware by various means, and which I personally found to be most useful in finding, understanding, and presenting the news this year.

Sample Set: During the measuring period, I included news received from hundreds of sources based in many countries around the world that in most instances fell into one of the following three groupings:

1. Standard setting organizations, open source projects and other non-profit sources.
2. News portals, on-line journals, on-line versions of magazines and newspapers, and other for-profit media outlets.
3. Blogs and community sites.

Selection Criteria: In order to be chosen for posting at the News Portal, a news item must fall into one or more of the 22 categories of news I cover at the News Portal shown at left.

Standards News

[Intellectual Property Issues](#)

[New Initiatives](#)

[New Standards etc.](#)

[Open Source](#)

Topics We're Following

[China](#)

[Europe](#)

[Not Here but There: A](#)

[Wilderness Journal](#)

[Open Source/Open Standards](#)

[OpenDocument](#)

[Security](#)

[Semantic & NextGen Web](#)

[Web Services](#)

[Wireless](#)

[WSIS/Internet Governance](#)

Standards Business News

[Miscellaneous](#)

[Standards and Your Business](#)

[Story Updates](#)

[Who's Doing What to Whom](#)

Policy and Impact News

[Legislation & Advocacy](#)

[Standards and Society](#)

[Standards in Action](#)

Consortium News

[Mergers, Dissolutions, etc.](#)

[New Consortia](#)

Quotes of the Day

In one single category (New Consortia) inclusion is automatic, but in all others, a story must also have additional qualities that I believe make it not only newsworthy, but relevant and interesting to the ConsortiumInfo.org audience as well.

What makes a standards story relevant and interesting (at least to me)? The following are some of the criteria I look for in a story and/or in its presentation:

- Does it recognize the role of a standards or open source organization, or of a standard or of open source software, in the story?
- Does it relate to information or communications technology; if not, does it relate to some other standards area that has more than purely commercial relevance?
- Does it relate to how we live, work or transact business?
- Does it illustrate the importance of standards or open source to society?
- Does it help a reader understand what standards or open source are all about?
- Will the standard, open source software, or event in question have a major impact beyond its purely technical ramifications?

Additional criteria for certain categories appear below.

My particular thanks go to the individuals that have chosen to write such stories, and to the media that have agreed that these stories deserve to be made available to the world (please keep up the good work).

Without further ado, here are the 2005 ConsortiumInfo.org News Sources of the Year Awards.

I. Statistical Awards

1? Award: **Most Newsworthy Standard Setting Organization**

(Consortium, Accredited Standards Developer or Open Source Project)

The following awards do not indicate which standards organizations were most prolific in generating new (or amended) standards, but rather which ones received the most attention in the media as a result of the work that they performed during the year. The items counted included both press releases issued by the organization as well as inclusions in the title or lead sentences of on-line articles.

- **First Place:** **Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Systems (OASIS)** - 47 Items [Last year: Third Place]
- **Second Place:** **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)** - 31 Items [Last year: Second Place]
- **Third Place:** **European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI)** - 9 items [Last year: Did not Place]

Each of these organizations not only performed much good work in 2005, but was also the focus of stories that highlighted the impact that standards have on society, or which reflected other forces acting in the marketplace, such as the difficulty of reconciling the rights of patent holders with the standard setting process.

While the W3C was not the focus of much controversy in 2005, OASIS was more than usually in the news in 2005 as a result of two events. The first was its adoption of a new intellectual property rights policy early in the year, which was intended to be more "open source friendly," but which was not as warmly welcomed in that community as hoped (see our March 2005 issue, [What Does "Open" Mean?](#)). The

second event was a story that is continuing into 2006, and involves a struggle over the proposed adoption by the Massachusetts Executive Agencies of the OpenDocument OASIS Format standard for archival purposes (see our September issue, [Massachusetts and OpenDocument: the Commonwealth Leads the Way](#) and the many Standards Blog posts that are collected [here](#)).

[Disclosure: OASIS is a client of the author and his law firm]

2? Award: Best On-Line Coverage of ICT Standards by an On-Line News Service

- **First Place:** [eWeek.com](#) 55 stories Items *[Last year: Third Place]*
- **Second Place:** [ZDNet.com](#) - 50 stories (includes ZDNet U.S., U.K and Australia) Items *[Last year: Did not Place]*
- **Third Place:** [CNET.com](#) 36 Items *[Last year: Second Place]*

Immediate runners-up include InfoWorld (25), BusinessWire (20) and TechWorld (17). The rankings also appear to reflect in part the number of journalists published by each news service (eWeek: 21; ZDNet: 19; and CNET: 20) that appreciate the role of standards.

The relative level of awareness of standards by some news agencies in comparison to others is made more obvious by the names and numbers of some of those services that did not rate highly, as follows: Computerworld (13), InformationWeek (12), and IDG News Service (10).

To an extent, when more than one news service reported on the same story (as was often the case), the rankings also reflect which article appeared most quickly. However, where two reports on the same story appeared on the same day, the item i chose to list was selected on a random basis (with the result that the effect should roughly cancel out over time – at least among those news services that got to the Web with their stories first).

3? Award: Best Coverage of ICT Standards by an On-Line Journalist

This year I would also like to recognize the individual journalists that were most aware of the role of standards, open source software and the organizations that create them, and that took the time to present that role to their readers. As was the case with news services, while the same story was often reported by more than one journalist, only one report was usually included at the News portal.

- **First Place:** [Martin LaMonica](#)- [CNET.News.com](#) - 15 Stories
- **Second Place:** [Matthew Broersma](#)- [ZDNet UK](#) - 14 Stories
- **Third Place (tie):** [Ingrid Marson](#) [ZDNet UK](#) and [Steven Vaughn-Nichols](#) [eWeek.com](#) - 10 Stories each

II. Special Awards

1? Award: Best Columnist/Blogger (Commercial)

Online journalism has become increasing brief and stylized, with attendant loss of value. Not only are most on-line stories limited to one to two screens of text (using whatever space is left between the advertising), but prevailing rules of journalism dictate that a good deal of what space is available will be spent in a very predictable way: headline, subtitle, opening sentences, expansion of theme, quote from source consistent with story line, statement of counter position, closing quote from source counter to story line or "good closing quote".

The result is that while print journals abound with longer, more analytical pieces, in-depth on-line analysis is increasingly becoming the province of bloggers and those specialty sites that place fewer constraints on their authors.

It will be no surprise to many that as the recipient of this first award I have selected:

David Berlind (ZDNet.com)

David has previously been honored by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), which presented him with its Presidents Award for Journalism in 2003. Unlike most journalists, he was an IT professional before becoming a professional writer. His [Between the Lines](#) blog (a venue shared with co-author Dan Farber) has consistently covered not only open standards and open source, but more recently the interplay, and sometimes clash, between those two disciplines. I haven't agreed with David on every position that he has taken (the opposite is also true), but his commitment and passion for covering open standards and open source is unquestioned, as has been his contribution towards bringing important issues to light and into public dialogue.

2? Award: Best Community Site or Blog (Non-Profit)

Blogs and community sites that focus on particular domains or issues have become an increasingly important route by which news can reach the public that would otherwise be neglected by, or unknown to, the formal media. In addition, many provide skilled analysis, as well as an opportunity for additional facts and opinion to be aggregated and consolidated.

It will (again) be no surprise to many that I would like to honor, as the recipient of the first award in this category:

Pamela Jones - Groklaw.net

Almost immediately following her first posting on May 16, 2003, Pamela has had an enormous and loyal following. Her ongoing dedication to investigative journalism in defense of Free and Open Source Software is well-known to friend and foe (most notably, SCO) alike. More recently she has supported a variety of open standards-related causes as well, including by championing the efforts of Peter Quinn and the Information Technology Division of Massachusetts to mandate use of the OpenDocument format by the Executive Agencies of the Commonwealth for archival purposes. Pamela's indefatigable work at Groklaw – and her less visible but equally tireless and substantial efforts behind the scenes to marshal data, develop sources and influence outcomes – have earned her the well-deserved respect and trust of the entire open source community.

Conclusion: This year saw what I believe to be a noticeable increase in standards awareness in ICT news coverage, as well as in the number of news outlets (both general as well as technical) reporting on open source topics. I hope that this trend will continue, and take pleasure in bringing some small measure of recognition to those services and individuals that have taken it upon themselves to acquaint their readers with the role that these important tools play in the modern world.

Comments? updegrove@consortiuminfo.org

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OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

Andrew Updegrove

2005 was a busy year at ConsortiumInfo.org as well as in the standards world at large. Here are a few highlights:

February 16: I was pleased to announce the launch of the [Standards MetaLibrary](#) in our [February issue](#), which was appropriately dedicated to the Study of Standards. What is the Standards MetaLibrary? Most succinctly, it is an expanding database of categorized abstracts of serious articles (currently 1,038 in number) about standards, in each case with links to the full text, which in most cases is available free of charge. The Standards MetaLibrary was created with the assistance of a generous grant from Sun Microsystems. I described the content of the Standards MetaLibrary in the formal [announcement](#) as follows:

The Standards MetaLibrary is not limited to material about standards in a narrow sense. Rather, it focuses on the importance of standards to the modern world and their impact on society, and how they are created, and by whom. The materials included therefore address topics such as how the standard setting process operates, how governments support this process and utilize standards, the economic benefits of standards uptake, legal aspects of the use (and abuse) of standards, and many other subjects that illustrate the role of standards in the world today.

By year's end, use of the MetaLibrary was exceeding 18,000 visitors a month. For more about what the Standards MetaLibrary is and how to make use of it, see the [FAQ page](#).

March 29: At the end of March, the host of this site, [Gesmer Updegrove LLP](#), hosted what the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) called a "[landmark event](#)". As described in greater detail in the ANSI press release that followed the meeting:

A landmark event occurred in Boston, Massachusetts, today as representatives from 21 consortia convened with members of the voluntary consensus standards community for the largest known meeting of the two constituencies.

Hosted by Gesmer Updegrove LLP and organized by the [U.S. Standards Strategy](#) (USSS) Committee, the session was held specifically for the purpose of information sharing and soliciting input from consortia on the draft revision of the Strategy that is currently underway. The USSS (formerly known as the [National Standards Strategy](#)) serves as a strategic framework to help guide standards-related activities impacting trade, market-access, emerging national priorities and more.

ConsortiumInfo.org publicized the event, and I, (a member of the United States Standards Strategy Committee), gathered most of the representatives of the consortium community.

June 28: The [Standards Blog](#) was launched. By January 3, 2006 the 103rd blog entry had been posted, and monthly visits to the Standards Blog were approaching 90,000. Rather than a compendium of links to the news of the day, the Standards Blog attempts to provide in-depth analysis of important events, and to follow important stories relevant to the world of standards as they develop. The Standards Blog has most thoroughly covered the evolving story in Massachusetts relating to the adoption of [open document formats](#), and in particular the OASIS OpenDocument format. Many of the most important developments in the story were first reported in the Standards Blog, which has now been cited as a source in more than a hundred main-stream news articles.

August 15: I, was presented with the **ANSI 2005 President's Award for Journalism**. As stated in the ANSI [press release](#):

Andrew Updegrove has been awarded the President's Award for Journalism, which recognizes outstanding journalistic work that helps to illuminate the role that standardization and conformity assessment activities play in improving the health and safety of Americans, while strengthening the competitiveness of U.S. business in a global marketplace. Mr. Updegrove acts as editor and publisher of the *Consortium Standards Bulletin*, which offers a wealth of information on standards and standards-setting, both online and in print. *The Bulletin* and website, ConsortiumInfo.org, have helped to raise the profile of standards and highlight their importance to commerce and daily life, as well as encourage greater support for their use and development.

December: I was elected to the **Boards of Directors** of both **ANSI** and the **Free Standards Group**, offering the opportunity to gain greater insight into issues of interest to the ConsortiumInfo.org audience. ANSI is the administrator and coordinator of the U.S. voluntary standards system, includes more than 200 standards bodies as its members, and represents the interests of the U.S. internationally, including as the U.S. representative in global standards bodies ISO and the IEC. The Free Standards Group, a nonprofit organization formed by the open source development community and leading IT industry vendors to create the standards needed to prevent Linux and other key open source software from fragmenting in the way that destroyed UNIX interoperability. Its current standards include the Linux Standards Base, which was recently adopted as a global ISO standard.

By the Numbers: At year's end, all ConsortiumInfo.org resources were still free and available to the public, and more extensive -- and utilized -- than ever. Here are a few examples:

- Number of archived news items at the [Standards News Portal](#): **1761**
- Number of news items entered in 2005: **751**
- Number of articles in the [Standards MetaLibrary](#): **1,038**
- Number of standard setting organizations and open source projects in the [Consortium and Standards List](#): **455**
- Increase in monthly visitors (January to December 2005): **19,905 to 183,745 (923%)**
- Monthly page views (January to December 2005): **83,091 to 743,885 (895%)**

I look forward to increasing the resources and services available at ConsortiumInfo.org in 2006, including a re-launch of the Standards Blog on a new open source technology platform that will permit it to become a fully-featured community site, and, I hope, an expansion of the MetaLibrary, among other plans currently on the drawing board.

As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome, as are inquiries relating to how I can work with other organizations towards achieving goals of mutual interest.

Comments? updegrove@consortiuminfo.org

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WHAT PRICE PUBLIC SERVICE?

[Andrew Updegrove](#)

For the last three and a half months, I have been reporting at the [Standards Blog](#) on the unfolding story of Massachusetts CIO Peter Quinn's effort to adopt and implement a policy that would ensure that important state documents will remain available to the public indefinitely. That policy mandates the use of "open document format" standards by the Executive Agencies of the Commonwealth, and additionally approves two tools for that purpose: the Adobe PDF format, and the OpenDocument OASIS format.

What began as a simple effort by a responsible public servant to perform his job to the best of his ability, unfortunately, degenerated this fall into the launching of political attacks in the Massachusetts Senate on his authority, and to unsubstantiated (and soon disproved) accusations regarding his personal integrity being raised on the front page of the Boston *Globe*.

During this same time period, I have written a total of 52 (to date) lengthy blog entries, some investigative, some analytical, and some informational on this story. The entries that begin and end this article, and the details included in between, document, sadly, what can happen when a dedicated public servant runs afoul of political and commercial interests that might suffer as a result of the implementation of a useful public policy.

The first blog entry below reports on the results of an investigation instigated by inquiries made by the Boston *Globe*, as earlier reported [here](#) in an entry entitled, "City on a Hill or Tammany Hall?"

* * * * *

December 10, 2005

Quinn Cleared in Travel Investigation (But Will the *Globe* be Cleared?)

The Boston *Globe* reports today that Peter Quinn has been [cleared](#) in an investigation into whether his travel to trade conferences had received proper approval. The article reads in part as follows:

The Romney administration's chief technology officer did not violate conflict-of-interest standards or other rules when he took 12 out-of-state trips to attend conferences during the past year without obtaining the written approval of his boss, according to a review by the governor's budget chief....

Also, Fehrstrom said that while sponsors of many of the conferences included computer software companies, Quinn had assured Trimarco that none of the firms are currently state vendors or are bidding on state business.

The article also confirms Quinn's statements that his superior, Eric A. Kriss, who was then secretary of administration and finance, had not only verbally approved each of the trips in advance, but had told him that completing any paperwork in connection with the travel was unnecessary, "because he felt that the reason that the regulation had been put in place originally -- the fiscal crisis of the mid-1990s had cut out all state-funded travel -- had expired." It was the completion of this paperwork (only) that had been called into question, and not the travel itself.

As noted in an [earlier entry](#) entitled "City on a Hill or Tammany Hall?" Massachusetts has an opportunity to showcase its innovation in technology through Quinn's policy proposal, or to attack the messenger as part of an internal squabble. The same point is implied in a quote in today's *Globe*, and has been made in letters to the Commonwealth by both IBM and Sun Microsystems:

"I knew of every trip that Peter was taking, and I approved them all," Kriss said. "He was in demand at most of these [conferences] because of the path towards [open format] that we were taking. People in other states were anxious to hear about the Massachusetts experience."

So ends one sordid little story in the long unseemly saga of Massachusetts politics. But the story does not answer all of the questions that this incident raises, some of which may be much more significant than Peter Quinn's travel documentation: what caused this fruitless inquiry to be launched in the first place, and was the reporting of the *Globe* responsibly conducted?

In fact, the investigation was instigated in response to inquiries to the State Government made by the *Globe* itself, as it reported on [November 26](#). Both articles were written by *Globe* staff writer Steven Kurkjian. As noted in my earlier *City on a Hill* entry, the inquiries were made by *Globe* staff writer Steve Kurkjian concurrent with moves by Senator Pacheco and others in State Government to curtail Quinn's ability to set rules for proper management of the IT needs of the Executive Agencies for which he is responsible.

The questions that remain are, why did the *Globe* make these inquiries, and did it conduct the degree of investigation prior to reporting the story that is consistent with responsible journalism?

The reason these questions are relevant is because a paper can either be the source of invaluable information that might not otherwise come to light, or it can be used by enemies of a person – or of a policy – that are currently under attack. When a controversy is in process, I believe that it is incumbent upon a journalist to be especially cautious regarding sources that can be expected to have an axe to grind, and to subject those allegations to particular scrutiny before proceeding to make them public.

In this case, what did the *Globe* do before going to press with the story? According to today's story, "phone calls to Kriss's home [in connection with the earlier story] seeking comment at the time were not returned." The story does not say for how long the reporter tried to contact him, or whether it was known whether Kriss was even in town on Thanksgiving weekend, or why the *Globe* felt that it needed to rush the story to print before making further efforts to learn whether it indeed had a story to report at all.

Andy Oram, an O'Reilly Media editor did manage to reach Kriss on the day that the first *Globe* story came out. Here's what the *Globe* reporter [would have learned](#) if he had held his story until he was able to do the same:

I managed to reach Quinn's former boss, Eric Kriss, which the *Globe* did not. (Choosing to break a story over Thanksgiving weekend, when protagonists are on vacation and government offices that could answer questions are closed, definitely does not contribute to clarity.) Kriss, whom I know because he's contacted me with a book idea earlier, pointed out that:

- Most of Quinn's trips occurred after Massachusetts made the decision to adopt OpenDocument. There is no possibility that the trips would influence the decision that had already been made.
- While some two-way communication occurs at any conference--and is beneficial to the public--the primary purpose of the trips were to let Massachusetts government tell the rest of the world what it was doing.
- Far from being junkets, these trips were normally squeezed in on weekends around his normal duties and represented a contribution of his free time to the community.

In other words, the reporter would have learned exactly what the investigation would learn: that there had been no impropriety, and that there was no story to report.

The more troubling question is, why did Kurkjian wake up one morning and decide to look into Quinn's travel documentation at all, among all of the other stories and areas of inquiry available to him at that time?

That's something I'd very much like to know. As it happens, the *Globe*, like a number of other papers, has an ombudsman, and his name is [Richard Chacón](#). His email address is ombud@globe.com, and his number is (617)929-3020; he also has a separate voicemail number: (617)939-3022.

Today I sent him the following questions by email:

Dear Mr. Chacón:

I refer you to two stories by Steve Kurkjian, one appearing on November 26 and one on December 9, relating to the travel documentation of Peter Quinn, the CIO of the Commonwealth. Currently, as reported by the *Globe* in several stories, Mr. Quinn, and a policy that his department, the Information Technology Division, are being criticized by Senator Pacheco, Secretary Galvin and Microsoft, among others. They are also being applauded by a large number of people, companies and governments around the world.

In the first of the two stories I refer to above, titled [Romney administration reviewing trips made by technology chief](#), Mr. Kurkjian reports that he made inquiries into the travel of Peter Quinn which resulted in an investigation being launched by the State into the same topic.

In the second story, titled [Review backs trips by technology chief No conflict found for aide](#), also by Mr. Kurkjian, Mr. Quinn is reported to have been cleared. The article also reports that he was cleared through the testimony of a person, Eric Kriss, who Mr. Quinn had told Mr. Kurkjian prior to November 26 could substantiate his story.

Mr. Kurkjian, however, went to press over the Thanksgiving weekend with a story that was damaging to Mr. Quinn's reputation before meeting with success in reaching Mr. Kriss. Had he done so, as indicated by today's story, he would have found that there was no need for an investigation, and indeed, no story to report at all.

Given the controversy surrounding the possible displacement of Microsoft products by the policy that Mr. Quinn proposed, I believe that it is important for you to address the following questions, in order to determine whether the *Globe* was used by opponents of Mr. Quinn or his policy to pursue the ends of any such opponents, and if so, whether the *Globe* followed appropriate journalistic practices in order to avoid this outcome:

1. Did Mr. Kurkjian decide to look into Mr. Quinn's travel on his own, or was this suggested to him by someone?
2. If there was a source, who was that source?
3. If there was a source, was that source inside the Massachusetts government or outside?
4. If the source was inside the government, were the disclosures made to Mr. Kurkjian made in violation of any State policy?
5. If the source was outside the government, did the source have any affiliations that would lead him or her to have an interest in the disparagement of Mr. Quinn?
6. Why did Mr. Kurkjian not wait to run the story until he was able to reach Mr. Kriss, who Mr. Kurkjian knew could confirm or disprove the basis for the story?
7. Was this story, and the investigation behind it, in compliance with the *Globe's* policies?

Given the importance of the information technology policy that underlies this story, which is literally being watched from around the world and has generated hundreds of articles in the world press, I hope that you will undertake to answer these questions.

By way of disclosure, I have been reporting on this story for several months at my blog, and have reproduced this letter there in an entry that will be read by thousands of visitors over the next several days. The address of that entry is: <http://www.consortiuminfo.org/newsblog/blog.php?ID=1805>

I am also an attorney, and one of my clients is the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Systems (OASIS), which developed the OpenDocument standard that lies at the heart of the discussions that are going on within the State House. However, I am neither authorized nor acting for, nor am I being compensated by, that organization in connection with this email or any of the entries at my blog.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Andrew Updegrove, Editor
ConsortiumInfo.org

On December 12, Robert Chacon responded to me as follows:

Mr. Updegrove,

Greetings and many thanks for your detailed note. I think you raise some reasonable questions about the Globe's stories concerning Peter Quinn (I had many of the same ones when I read Saturday's story that he was cleared in the investigation).

I don't have immediate answers for you (or your blog readers, many of whom have sent their own similar notes after having read your page). I can tell you at the outset that Stephen Kurkjian is one of the most experienced, professional and ethical journalists that I have ever known. Nevertheless, I do believe that some of these questions deserve answers - from Steve and his editors.

I have already sent a note to Steve asking for a chance to talk about the stories. I will offer a more detailed reply when I have some answers.

Regards,
Richard Chacon

* * * * *

On Christmas Eve, Peter Quinn sent an email to all of his employees, telling them that he would resign as the CIO of Massachusetts, effective January 9, 2006. His email read in part as follows:

Over the last several months, we have been through some very difficult and tumultuous times. Many of these events have been very disruptive and harmful to my personal well being, my family and many of my closest friends. This is a burden I will no longer carry.

It is also readily apparent that I have become a lightning rod with regard to any IT initiative. Even the smallest initiatives are being mitigated or stopped by some of the most unlikely and often uninformed parties. I view these circumstances quite troubling because the good work laid out by the IT Commission is slowly being strangled and brought to a halt. And the last thing I can let happen is my presence be the major contributing factor in marginalizing the good work of ITD and the entire IT Community.

News of Peter's resignation was first reported on December 27 by me at the [Standards Blog](#) and by Pamela Jones at [Groklaw](#). In my entry, I reported:

According to Kriss, who met with Quinn on December 21st, the personal attacks, and especially the unfounded (and quickly disproven) charges publicized by the Boston *Globe*, played a major part in reaching his decision.

The articles in the press that followed largely focused on the impact that Peter Quinn's resignation would have on the fortunes of the OpenDocument format and its proponents, and whether or not Governor Romney, widely assumed to be grooming himself for a run for the presidency, would withdraw his support for ODF in favor of the XML Reference Schema that Microsoft had offered to ECMA, a European standards body, in response to the success of ODF.

In response, I posted the following entry at my blog.

* * * * *

December 29, 2005

THANKS, PETER; HAIL AND FAREWELL

The best way to predict the future is to invent it.
- Computer scientist and visionary Alan Kay

For the last three and a half months I've been covering the ongoing debate and, for want of a better phrase, "related events" surrounding the decision by the Information Technology Division of Massachusetts (ITD) to mandate use of the OpenDocument format (ODF) for archiving Executive Agency documents. The architect and public spokesperson for that policy has been Peter Quinn, the head of the ITD, and the CIO of the Commonwealth.

Like everyone else who has been covering this story, whether on one side or the other, I've felt free to use Peter's name and report on his actions as if they were public property. Which, in a way, is what one's name and actions become – even legally, as regards the threshold for proving libel -- when one accepts a public position. And while I have invariably been complimentary, and even protective (in the case of the *Globe* article questioning his travel records), I've never asked Peter's permission to keep putting his name out there, day after day and week after week, thereby doing my small bit to help keep him pinned down at the center of a controversy.

Now, as you know, Peter has decided to resign his position, in part to permit the work of the ITD to move on unhindered, and in part to allow his and his family's life to do the same thing. I can't begrudge him the decision, but I'm very sorry to see him go, especially as a result of the reasons that led to that decision.

I can't say that I know Peter. I've interviewed him once, heard him speak or testify three times, and exchanged a few brief emails with him over the past several months. But I have admired him, and I'd like to take a few minutes to say why.

First of all, I've been working with standards organizations for 18 years, and those organizations have created hundreds of ITC standards during that period. But most of those standards, while important, were not significant in any larger sense. Most were simply the cleverly created tools that were needed to take the next incremental step in the march of technical progress.

ODF, though, is a standard that *matters*, even though very few people yet appreciate it. Unless ODF (or another mechanism capable of achieving the same end) becomes universally adopted, much of the information of today's world will not only fade from view as time passes – it may literally disappear for all practical purposes, leaving little or no trace. Peter not only realized this, but he committed to do something about it.

Second, I've always admired the leaders and visionaries that see things before the rest of us, and have the courage to show the way. It's both risky and lonely to be out in front. The enemies, doubters and flaks always outnumber the friends and those that "get it," and too often it's those that follow that get the credit rather than those that took the heat.

And finally, I've always admired people who did the right thing simply because it was the right thing to do, regardless of whether it would be easy or hard, popular or controversial, personally beneficial or costly to one's career. There are all too few of us that ever rise to that challenge, especially (it seems) in public life.

Unfortunately, I and others in the blogosphere and the traditional media will need to mention Peter a bit longer, as the consequences of his resignation play out. I hope that he will understand and not begrudge our actions too much, in hopes that his goals will be more likely to be achieved as a result.

But we should keep it short. It's the least we can do for someone who expected no personal benefit from doing something that needed to be done for the benefit of all, and who took the fall for doing so – not because what he wanted to do was wrong, but because what was good for all was threatening to a few, and because those few were powerful.

So as Peter steps back from the spotlight, I'd like to express my gratitude to him, and wish him well.

To everyone else, I'd like to suggest that the best thing we can do for Peter is to give him some peace and privacy. And we should do everything we can to achieve what he set in motion - for our benefit as well as in recognition of his efforts. It's the least we can do for someone who tried to make a difference – and did.

So thanks, Peter. Hail and farewell.

* * * * *

Epilogue: As of this writing, the Globe's ombudsman, Robert Chacon, has not yet publicized the results of his investigation. Hopefully, that will happen soon. But happily, on January 3, I was able to report in an [exclusive story](#) that the Massachusetts administration, at least for now, remains committed to perpetuating Peter's hard-won effort to protect the history of a government that could have supported him far better than it did.

[To browse all prior and later blog entries on this story, click [here](#)]

Bookmark the Standards Blog at <http://www.consortiuminfo.org/newsblog/> or set up an RSS feed at: <http://www.consortiuminfo.org/rss/>

Comments? updegrove@consortiuminfo.org

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CONSIDER THIS

[[[December 31, 2005

#35 *Objectivity and my Secret Life as Simon Hoggarts*

What has come to be known as the "blogosphere" has now been in existence long enough to spawn untold millions upon millions of personal Websites, each of which presents the thoughts and observations of its individual author. As one might expect, those thoughts and observations are (to say the least) varied. To enter into the blogosphere is therefore to enter into the very collective consciousness of humanity.

Which can be a rather disorienting experience, especially if as one looks in, one sees one's own self looking back. Or, worse yet, someone looking back that doesn't look like them at all, but who someone else suggests *is* them.

As happened to me a few days ago, as recorded in my blog. Consider this...

* * * * *

New Years Day weekend is not a time favored by those publicists that would toss their news into the pond of public awareness (unless they wish their news to disappear quickly, leaving as few public ripples as possible). There being little worthwhile news to report, this post will therefore not deal with the news of the day.

For the same ripple reason, I will instead use this opportunity to reveal a startling personal fact.

I have learned, through a seemingly reliable source, that I am actually [Simon Hoggart](#), London *Guardian* political columnist and BBC Radio 4 personality.

Could this indeed be so, you ask? Yes, although it came as a complete shock to me as well. Although I have lived in England in the past and read the *Guardian* on many occasions, I was heretofore unaware that I had not only read, but written, some of what I had previously enjoyed.

This state of pleasant ignorance ended when an alert reader brought a certain blog post to my attention. That entry was posted by one Jon Levell in his thought provoking blog, [Irregular Verbiage](#), aptly subtitled (the most recent entry is dated November 24th), "Sporadic Musings."

It seems that in that most recent Musing, Jon was disposed to muse over the Massachusetts Open Document saga. But his musing did not stop there. Instead, he culminated with this final, coy muse:

In other news, if you are obsessively reading info on the debate about open standards (and specifically whether public organisations like the government of Massachusetts or the European Commission should mandate that their employees use then) then a key source of info is the Standards Blog. What I find most intriguing is that you never see the Standards Blog's Andy Updegrave and the Guardian's/Radio 4's Simon Hoggart in a room together.



Hmm. He had a point. To the best of my knowledge, I *had* never been seen in the same room as Guardian/Radio 4's Simon Hoggart; at least, to be objective, unless I *was* Simon Hoggart.

While some (Microsoft Office spokesman Alan Yates Microsoft springs to mind) might question my objectivity, in fact I have tried to be scrupulously objective in my reporting of facts and in any analysis of legal language that I offer on line, while preserving the right to express the opinions that I form as a result of what I observe. I strive to maintain a reputation for objectivity not only for its own sake, but in order that my opinions will be given credibility and weight, as well as the facts I report.

I therefore take it as obligatory that I investigate Mr. Levell's disturbing suggestion that I am "Guardian/Radio 4's Simon Hoggart", rather than mild-mannered Massachusetts attorney and standards wonk Andy Updegrave. After all, perhaps the greatest test of objectivity begins when one looks into the mirror. Moreover, I shall do so with as much diligence as I would a contention that Mr. Yates (for example) is in fact Presidential Press Secretary Scott McClellan (perhaps I'll return to that intriguing possibility in a future blog entry).

With this as prelude, here are the significant facts that I have uncovered, as well as my ultimate conclusion on the question, after balancing all ambiguities against my own sense of identity:

1. Mr. Hoggart was born on May 26, 1946. I was born on November 9, 1953. Close enough for government work.
2. Mr. Hoggart has an [entry](#) in the Wikipedia, and I do not. Pure coincidence, or careful research on the part of the Wikipedia staff, notwithstanding the recent challenges to the accuracy of the on-line encyclopedia?
3. According to that same entry, Mr. Hoggart is alleged to have had a brief affair with [Kimberly Quinn](#). I do not recall ever...ahem, being in the same room as Ms. Quinn, but, on the other hand, I have no recollection of ever being in the same room as Mr. Hoggart, so these two pieces of data appear to cancel each other out.
4. Mr. Hoggart chairs BBC 4's weekly show, [The News Quiz](#), a delightfully erudite, humorous and occasionally pedantic show which I have often enjoyed. I have some small pretensions to being both erudite and humorous, while my partners regularly assure me that I am pedantic in the extreme.
5. Mr. Hoggart is the author of, among other works, a compendium of absurd Christmas Letters, titled [The Hamster that Loved Puccini](#). I am forced to admit that I am fully capable of giving (and perhaps have given) such a name to a book, should I ever write/have already written one.
6. I have not been able to contact Mr. Hoggart by telephone to put the question to him/me, but each time I placed the call, *his phone was invariably busy!*

But enough of this.

Clearly, I have been unable to disprove the suggestion of Mr. Levell that I am one and the same with the Guardian's/Radio 4's Simon Hoggart. Therefore, resolving all doubts against my own bias that I am, at least in this regard, unique, and assuming that Mr. Levell is a responsible practitioner of the blogging trade and has some evidence to support his implied allegation, I must, with regret, surrender my identity. So be it.

Finally, a note to Mr. Levell.

I see from the CV that you have posted at your site that you have earned a Ph.D in Theoretical Particle Physics. Having myself (or, as the case may be, Mr. Hoggart's self) at best only a muddled and imperfect knowledge of quantum theory, perhaps you can explain, for Simon's and my benefit and in the manner of the late lamented Douglas Adams, the seeming duality of existence that I/he/we/whoever are currently experiencing. Or, as the question was more succinctly put by the [Firesign Theatre](#), in their 1969

appreciation album, [All Hail Marx \[and\] Lennon](#), "How can you be in two places at once, when you're not anywhere at all?"

Mr. Levell, Simon's and/or my identity are at your mercy. We await your response.

Please muse on that.

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