Common ground

Alix Paultre, Editorial Director

I recently came across an interesting news item in Wired [1] about how the EU was adopting [2]the Universal Charging Solution [3] (UCS) cell-phone power interface. USB has been a kind of power lingua franca for smart phones, but that ubiquitous interface is burdened by a plethora of connector styles. By standardizing on the Micro-USB interface we create a more seamless and productive environment for the consumer to use their cell phones, and more opportunity for the creation of innovative products from the industry.

Consider what the market presence of the iPod did for portable music devices and home entertainment systems. Many third-party companies released very innovative products that were only viable in a market with a common device interface. The need to manufacture products that have to have the interface flexibility to address multiple connector and communication protocols often is a hurdle too high for many. A common interface allows the designer to focus on the desired application functionality instead.

Another example exists in the area of solid-state lighting. We need to stop focusing on the Edison socket. We can and should create products that address it, but it should not be where we steer the industry. There has been some development in the area, but we should be placing more emphasis on creating new luminaires that exploit the advantages of solid-state lighting instead of crippling LED and EL technology on the procrustean bed of existing infrastructure.

The power industry should help the lighting industry achieve this by working with luminaire designers and developing power supplies and interfaces that suit the creation of new designs. Common or compatible power footprints, communication protocols (for dimming, color management, and the like), and connectors will provide a fertile ground for next-generation product development. Why aren’t there more table lamps on store shelves with integrated LED or EL illumination that never need to have a bulb replaced?

There are many areas where we could be cooperating more on developing standards, from e-vehicle infrastructure to server architectures. Power is the single common denominator in all electronics, and the infrastructures you create to power the next generation of technology will guide the development of the products created.

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