The ECN Roundtable - Standards Issues

Moderated by Alix Paultre, our roundtable this month deals with regulatory issues, and the question is: “How can the many standards organizations better cooperate with one another to improve the way things are done?”

Cees Links, President of GreenPeak and Marketing Chair of ZigBee RF4CE Standards Group

Competing companies offering different technology solutions for the same problem create market confusion for OEMs as well as for customers. For example, the 3D TV market has stalled because of different 3D rendering technologies (using active glasses, passive glasses, or – not glasses at all).

The various associated standardization bodies competing for the market have created an additional level of confusion. Some of the leading TV manufacturing companies have very actively participated in building a standard to synchronize 3D glasses by using ZigBee RF4CE technology (Z3S: ZigBee 3D Synchronization), while other TV manufacturers have decided to restart the whole effort based on Bluetooth technology.

Dumb, dumb, dumb…

Apparently the internal political positions and the complete overestimation of the value of technology (“better” versus “good enough”) are completely blindsiding

companies. Consumers are not interested in technology - they are interested in safe choices that arise from uniform standards. As long as there are no standards, consumers will just sit back and tell the manufacturers: come back later, when you have sorted it out.

Main-stream consumers do not want to run the risk of betting on a losing horse. Remember the Betamax against VHS war or more recently BlueRay against HD DVD?

Examples of successful standards like TCP/IP, Wi-Fi and GSM that created a “rising tide” for suppliers, came from uniform standards which in turn, helped adoption rates to increase rapidly. Standards wars always generate agony in companies, wasting shareholders money, but consultants and journalists get a boonn out of them as there is controversy to write about…

Tom Williams, Director Datacomm Division, BTR Netcom (www.btr-netcom.com ***[1])***

Cooperation between the many different standards making organizations is essential for the continued growth of the individual industries they represent. Whether those industries are commercial, industrial, residential, government or private industries. This cooperation can determine the continued success or possible stagnation of an industry.

One of the best ways to help with this cooperation is the appointment of liaison members attending meetings for complimentary standards bodies. A simple liaison letter from one standards committee or subcommittee to another, letting them know the progress that is being accomplished will help to inform members and committees. Sharing of proposed draft standards before publication between bodies will also help to harmonize complimentary standards.

Allowing members of one standards body to attend the meeting and participate in the sharing of information and ideas will only improve the standards making process. Competing and complimentary standards bodies should do the same to insure there are no significant differences between the standards that would

prevent a particular product or service from performing as intended between all user environments.

Standards bodies creating the next evolution in technological products do so with a understanding that complimentary standards help create confidence in the products for user safety, performance and reliability. This cooperation will sustain the overall growth and prosperity of many industries. To not cooperate will only delay and prevent that growth.

Mario Gomez, Product Compliance Engineering Manager, TE Circuit Protection (www.te.com ***[2])***

I believe there is a huge opportunity for improvement in the area of factory audits for certified products. Efficiency could certainly be improved through a system of mutual recognition by product safety agencies. Many of these agencies are also the standards organizations for their respective regions, so by creating a mutual recognition program, they could dramatically reduce redundant testing.

The reduction in repetitive testing resulting from mutual recognition of certification test reports, such as the IEC's CB Scheme for product approvals, would clearly improve efficiency. The CB Scheme was developed with member safety agencies agreeing to accept each other's certification test reports. This method lets a manufacturer submit samples for testing at one agency to obtain certification, and then use that report to obtain additional certifications from other member agencies.

An equivalent process for factory audits, which consume considerable amounts of time and money, needs to be developed. If we assume that a manufacturer has two factories and four agency approvals on a product, and each agency conducts four annual audits at each factory that amounts to 32 audits each year for each product. It is not uncommon for some manufacturers to endure more than 100 follow up service audits every year.

Industry really needs an alternative to the existing repetitive factory audit system in place at this time.

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