New Standards, New Markets

Adrian Scrase is Vice President for International Partnership Projects within the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI). He talks to InterComms about the organisation's work with standards bodies in emerging markets

Q: Back to basics, why should standards be global?
A: ETSI is a European Standards Organization recognised by the European Commission and, consequently, has a formal role in producing European Standards for the ICT sector. These Standards are designed to meet European regulations and requirements, thus satisfying the Commission's interest in having Pan European interoperable systems. However, certainly over the past decade or so, it has become very clear that industry has a greater need for Standards which support worldwide deployments. This is no real surprise. It is just a part of the globalization effect. Consequently, ETSI has always tried to write standards which have a worldwide application.

Q: Such as?
A: Probably the best example of that is in the mobile sector. The GSM standard was written in response to a mandate from the European Commission to ensure that a pan-European mobile phone system was put in place. In the absence of that direct mandate from the Commission, that may never have happened. Instead, we may well have had separate national mobile systems with no roaming possibility between them and fewer services that large scale markets encourage.

Initially then, the GSM standard was written primarily with European interests in mind. It was clear however that, once the work had started, there was considerable interest from other regions of the world and that the requirements from those regions would need to be accommodated. The same is true of quite a lot of other pieces of work that ETSI has done over the years. If you look at DECT and TETRA, they are both good examples of standards where the letter "E" initially stood for 'European' but after a short while the meaning of that letter was changed to 'Enhanced' in order to reflect the strong interest shown in those standards from other regions of the world.

Q: In terms of international outreach what else has ETSI done?
A: ETSI has been successful in working with all of the world's regions. The new and developing markets in the BRIC countries are certainly worth mentioning. Brazil has hosted several important ETSI meetings and they are very involved in both mobile and fixed evolved networks.

We have also had long ties with Russia. Although Russia is not so prominent in the telecoms manufacturing business they do follow standardization at the highest governmental levels and we have regular exchanges there.

Of course, China and India are good examples of countries with which you would expect ETSI to engage. With China, we have a long standing relationship which has been in place for more than ten years, right from the time that they created the China Communications Standards Association. More recently, India has expressed interest in establishing an ICT standards body and ETSI is engaged in assisting with that process too.

Q: You have signed an agreement with Global ICT Standardization Forum for India (GISFI) in August, what are you working on now?
A: The next step will be to identify specific pieces

of work where GISFI and ETSI can work together. We believe that ETSI can work with India to do that successfully. We could envisage that resulting standards could then be published both as Indian and ETSI standards but with identical text. It is too early to see which technologies are likely to be addressed in that way and it may take some time before we see the fruits of this cooperation, but we are working hard to help create the right conditions for this to succeed.

Q: What about working with established markets?

A: That is business as usual. We have very long standing cooperation agreements with organizations such as ATIS and TIA in the U.S.A. We have good examples of co-operation such as the Global Mobile Radio (GMR) standard, a satellite radio system that was first standardised in Europe and then introduced into the US market by adoption in TIA of the common text. Whilst we now have a US and European standard, the technical content is word for word identical.

We also have strong ties with Asia, Canada and Australia and we hold regular coordination meetings under the umbrella of the Global Standards Collaboration (GSC). GSC is an occasion where the highest level executives from the most prominent ICT Standards Development Organizations (SDOs) meet to exchange views on standardization programmes.

Q: So there isn't much change in terms of standards, nothing radical on the horizon?

A: I believe that there is in fact something very radical on the horizon. If we go back to the mobile sector again and look historically at the emergence of GSM from Europe and CDMA from the US, this resulted in a divided market. If you look at what is happening right now, both of these technology streams are converging into a single standard known as LTE.

I think that is a good example of a more global approach to writing standards. 3GPP was created in 1998 with the involvement of Europe, Japan, Korea, China and North America. We are now seeing just how successful this model has been and how it has fostered convergence of mobile systems onto a common platform. 3GPP has a comprehensive Support Team which is based at the ETSI Headquarters and so ETSI is a major contributor to this global success.

We will try and achieve the same success with our regional partners in new areas of ICT. We may not always succeed - but we will always engage with enthusiasm and we do have a very good track record to inspire us.

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