

NEWS RELEASE

IT STANDARDS HIJACK THREATENS EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

A chorus of concern is growing among the European business community over the fast tracking of the approval process of a new IT standard, which will limit office software competition and saddle the European economy with increased future IT costs.

Two organisations, OpenForum Europe (OFE), a leading organisation set up to advance the use of open standards, and ODF Alliance, a campaigning group promoting open document format, representing over 210 organisations in 30 countries, highlight that the new standard, Microsoft licensed Office Open XML, is being fast tracked to become a new European ISO/IEC standard. This new standard has been submitted by ECMA, the European Computer Manufacturers Association with a completely unrealistic deadline for stakeholders to engage

“There are major difficulties with ECMA’s standard, which if accepted will affect future formats of all documents on which all office and word processing software depends, and ultimately convenience and cost. It will reinforce the current supplier monopoly position, limit customer choice and increase costs for European business and consumers,” commented Graham Taylor, director OpenForum Europe.

However, despite these difficulties, interested parties have only up to February 5 2007 to express their view points. The clock is ticking. To stop Europe being rail-roaded into an inadequate standard, the ODF Alliance urges national supporters who have issues to raise contradictions of ECMA’s standard with existing standards to encourage their national ISO representatives to raise formal contradictions as quickly as possible, certainly before 5th February 2007.

One of the OFE’s and ODF Alliance’s main criticisms targeted at ECMA’s standard is its complexity. It is over 6,000 pages long, excluding supporting material, making it time consuming and ultimately more expensive for the future development of software. It also duplicates an existing comprehensive and recently ratified) standard Open Document Format (ODF) which causes a major issue of system complexity, development, maintenance, archiving and licensing. Furthermore, elements of ECMA’s standard contradict the recently ratified ODF standard, which if implemented, would lead to confusion for software developers, increase cost and leading to problems sharing and archiving documents. There are also serious doubts that the standard could be implemented outside the Microsoft environment, due to license requirements that are not made explicit.

The issue of customer choice in the office software market has recently been highlighted by BECTA (the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency), which has produced two interim educational market reports, expressing concerns on value for money, interoperability, and lock-in from Microsoft Vista and Office 2007. The review includes eight recommendations for Microsoft to deal with issues for the academic community including potential lock-in, confusing pricing, and restrictive licensing terms.

ACTION: Write to your local standards organisation setting out your concerns, recommending that an issue of this importance should be reasonable given time for proper consideration and due diligence. A 30 day Fast Track Procedure is not appropriate for a 6000 page document. Contact list on the ODF Alliance European Website.

For further information contact:

Marino Marcich
Managing Director
ODF Alliance
E-mail: mmarcich@odfalliance.org
Tel: +1.202.789.4450

Basil Cousins
Convenor
ODF Alliance-Europe
basil@Openforumeurope.org
+44 (0)208 661 1874

Or Visit www.odfalliance.org

Contradictions

<http://www.groklaw.net/article.php?story=2007011720521698>

Wiki pages:

http://www.grokdod.net/index.php/EOOXML_at_JTC-1

http://www.grokdod.net/index.php/EOOXML_objections

Andy Updegrove on contradictions :

<http://www.consortiuminfo.org/standardsblog/article.php?story=20070117145745854>

Ends

For press information contact:

Roy Turner, Chelgate PR
Tel: 020 7939 7939 or 07970 522232 or
rt@chelgate.com

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- **Open Forum Europe (OFE) was launched in March 2002 at the Financial Times London to accelerate, broaden and strengthen the use of OSS in business and government. OFE pursues the vision of an open, competitive European IT market by 2010 in line with the European Commission i2010 Strategy with the mission of facilitating open competitive choice in the IT Market Place. OFE is supported by major IT suppliers and works closely with the European Commission and national governments via its national associates. www.openforumeurope.org**
- **The ODF Alliance seeks to promote and advance the use of OpenDocument Format (ODF). The alliance works globally to educate policymakers, IT administrators and the public on the benefits and opportunities of the OpenDocument Format, to help ensure that government information, records and documents are accessible across platforms and applications, even as technologies change today and in the future. www.odfalliance.org**

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