

Building on standards

14/10/99 The Island

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This year, the World Standards Day theme highlights the importance of International Standards in the construction industry, which has been one of the basic human activities throughout the thousands of years of human progress.

There will never be a standard for beautiful design, but to lay the foundations for an

intelligent museum or a sophisticated city infrastructure, standards need to be shared and applied on a practical daily basis by the many professionals. These range from designers, architects, civil engineers to manufacturers, regulators and contractors all the way to the companies who spend billions on construction goods and related services each year. The relevant standards range from the more obvious building standards to those covering telecommunications, electrical installations, electronics, networking and the associated safety standards.

When a Japanese construction company

following Canadian plans builds a factory in Chile, everybody understands the need for totally transparent, universally comprehensible technical standards. Each professional organization involved in the supply of material and components from mechanical equipment to electrical systems relies on these "tools" that International Standards represent.

If, today, 100 building professionals were to come together from all over the world to build a tunnel, they would virtually take for granted the effectiveness of standardization that provides the building blocks for the

work, without hampering individual design or imposing unwanted features on the finished product.

As in electronic commerce or any other technology sphere, standardization is at its best when it is international. The technical agreements developed by the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) supply the foundations needed for different products and services, no matter where they are produced.

IEC, ISO and ITU - as the three apex organizations in international standardization - are in the position to provide the necessary overall, all-encompassing view that takes in all spheres of intellectual, scientific, technological and economic activity. The very nature of the international, open and consensus-based standards process ensures that the final standards, be they for products or services, represent the collected knowledge and experience of all sides involved - industries, governments, research institutes, testing laboratories and consumer organizations.

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Small and big companies all over the world acknowledge the benefits of International Standards. Many customers and suppliers promote actively the need to join the international standardization network of IEC, ISO and ITU.

The return on investment by participating in the international standards development process can be seen at various levels within each sector. The first level is usually that of the creation of a common language. This enables a manufacturer to communicate clearly, without fear of ambiguities or misunderstandings, with a customer's product engineers, designers, and purchasing agents anywhere in the world. And it allows the same clarity with suppliers. Everyone gains. At another level, today a commercial, as well as a social - and more and more a legal - requirement is to address concerns of public health and safety as well as the impact a product or service may have on the environment.

Quoting one user and developer of standards: "If your exports have to be modified to conform to the national standards of a customer then you clearly have had no part in the development of those standards. Any redesign of your product or service to meet the technical specifications of that country represents a bit out of your profit margin. You're winning - some, but you're also spending some. And if you have customers in several countries each with its own unique national standard, then you're spending even more. If on the other hand, the client country is using International Standards, that makes things clearer and more cost-effective for everyone."

Today, quantitative and qualitative requirements arising from the population explosion and natural aspirations for higher living standards makes building one of the key areas for the satisfaction of human needs ever more important. A recent study of the construction process in

the 21st century made by Sweden's Lund University, says that from many parts of the world there are demands for increased productivity in the construction process, higher quality of construction products, increased con-

sideration of property management and a more holistic view of the entire process. To ensure these improve, International Standards are key tools for staying abreast of technology-driven business development.

As many of those who are part of the construction and associated industries already know, to build well, for the long term, to build internationally, rationally, and cost-effectively, International Standards hold a key to the solution.

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