

Standards and the Future of the Internet

Geneva 2008

Declaration 25th February 2008

As members of the European Open Community participating in or supporting the OpenForum Europe Conference we pledge to maintain the openness and integrity of the Internet as enjoyed today. Furthermore we agree to continue to work to ensure that the role, definition, and application of Open Standards is not mitigated or limited by proprietary pressure. We believe it essential that these steps are matched by Government, through active support for such standards through appropriate frameworks, procurement policies and organisational remit.

Open Standards already underpin the success of the Internet, and acts as an exemplar to the market on what is important, and what is possible when full competition and innovation is unleashed.

“It was the standardisation around HTML that allowed the web to take off. It was not only the fact that it is standard but the fact that it is open and royalty-free. If HTML had not been free, if it had been proprietary technology, then there would have been the business of actually selling HTML and the competing JTML, LTML, MTML products. Because we would not have had the open platform, we would have had competition for these various different browser platforms but we would not have had the web. We would not have had everything growing on top of it. So I think it very important that as we move on to new spaces [...] we must keep the same openness we had before. We must keep an open internet platform, keep the standards for the presentation languages common and royalty-free. So that means, yes, we need standards, because the money, the excitement is not competing over the technology at that level. The excitement is in the businesses and the applications that you built on top of the web platform”

Tim Berners-Lee

Openness is all about Freedom (but not necessarily gratis) - the Freedom to Innovate, Integrate, Participate, - and Leave. For consumers it is the freedom to choose his operating system, to choose any software and to exchange with everyone. Open Source/Free Software and Open Standards are tools which form the basis and guardians for that Freedom and Openness.

In the ICT market, and in particular in the IT domain, the broad majority of Standards are developed outside of the formal standards organisations. This includes open standards developed in industry organisations like OASIS or W3C. There are also formats by dominant suppliers that are at times referred to as “de facto” standards. This has created a discontinuity with the world of formal standards bodies.

Standards can only be declared Open if they are

1. subject to full public assessment and use without constraints in a manner equally available to all parties;
2. without any components or extensions that have dependencies on formats or protocols that do not meet the definition of an Open Standard themselves;
3. free from legal or technical clauses that limit its utilisation by any party or in any business model;
4. managed and further developed independently of any single vendor in a process open to the equal participation of competitors and third parties;
5. available in multiple complete implementations by competing vendors, or as a complete implementation equally available to all parties.

Subsequent innovation then takes place on top of the stable basis provided by such standards. Dual, competing standards rarely provide anything other than confusion, increased cost and complexity, and loss of innovation. Unless clear differing functionality can be proven they are more likely to inhibit competition and be the result of the desire to protect proprietary market share.

Recognising the dangers that loss of Openness of the Internet could mean, the signatories of this Declaration call upon the European Commission, National Governments, Standards Bodies, Industry, the Community

and the Market:

- To collaborate such that the Internet remains fully open, without proprietary pressure, and based on Open Standards.
- For clarity within the role of standards bodies to ensure the avoidance of competing standards which will inhibit competition and loss of innovation.
- To mandate the use of Open Standards for interoperability.
- To drive up the quality, transparency and perceived independence of the Standards development and approval process, both at International and National level.
- To establish a clear link between the public interest and work of standardisation bodies.

Signatories:

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**ECIS – European
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Interoperable Systems**



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**ESOMA - The European
Software Market
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**FFII – Foundation for a
Free Information
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Standards WG**



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**FSFE – Free Software
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