

The age of mass standards

Vittorio Bertola
Institutional hacker

Open Standards International
Symposium

Yale Law School, 3 Feb 2007

Key innovations of the Internet

- ◆ Intelligence and complexity at the edges
- ◆ Freedom to innovate
 - No centralized authorizations or validations
 - Freedom to deploy new products and services
- ◆ Users instantly become providers
 - Of new content
 - Of new technologies

The age of mass standards

- ◆ 40-60% of users publish some kind of content
- ◆ Technical standards become a mass affair
 - Not just for engineers and regulators any more
 - Often, directly exposed to final users
 - Need for open, mass access to most standards
- ◆ Code is law (standards are policies)
 - Technical standards have political implications
 - Standards need to be not only effective, but also democratic
- ◆ Standards need to follow the global public interest

Users for the global public interest

- ◆ Governments follow national interests
- ◆ Companies follow the money
- ◆ Empowered users are the global constituency
 - Cross-national in nature
 - Not tied to business interests
 - Intrinsically distributed (less controllable)
 - It is very hard to impose anything against users!
 - Fast to react, fast to innovate
 - Key element of the Internet model

Key features of user participation

- ◆ Strong stake in the aggregate, weak stake individually
 - Participation is discontinuous by nature
 - Usually limited to a few passionate individuals
 - Needs a lot of proactive nurturing (funding, outreach)
 - Open doors are not enough
- ◆ About advocacy, not about representation
 - In general, forget about elections and voting
 - Focus on injecting good ideas
 - Early feedback on upcoming innovations
 - Ensuring that the global interest is heard

Heading for disaster

- ◆ An example: Digital Rights Management
 - The industry closes itself in an ivory tower and creates new standards
 - The new standards suit the industry, not the users
 - Users resist and find ways to work around them
 - The industry lobbies governments to make the standards compulsory
 - Governments and industry go after 7-year-old girls
 - The users get outraged and find more ways to work around the new standards
 - Et cetera ad libitum
- ◆ How much does this cost, and what for?

The good path for the future

- ◆ Need for open standards, made including the final users and all stakeholders
 - To make them democratic
 - To make them effective and workable
 - To preserve the power and growth of the Internet
- ◆ We need to revisit the existing standardization processes and open them up
 - No more intergovernmental bureaucracies
 - No more industry ivory towers

Thank you

E-mail

vb@bertola.eu

Website

<http://bertola.eu/>

The Internet Bill of Rights campaign

<http://internet-bill-of-rights.org/> (*coming soon*)