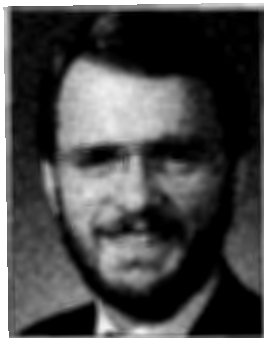


The Making of a Standard: Step Four

by Thomas C. Salander



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While the first three steps of the standards-making process have not been dealt with in this column previously, this particular discussion is timely in view of the imminent canvassing of the M community, which will take place this spring.—Editor

My dictionary defines "canvass" as follows: Canvass kan·vass (kan'vəs) *v.t.* 1. to solicit votes, subscriptions, opinions, or the like from. 2. to examine carefully; investigate by inquiry; discuss; debate. *v.i.* 3. to solicit votes, opinions, or the like. *n.* 4. a soliciting of votes, orders, or the like. 5. a campaign for election to government office. 6. close inspection; scrutiny.

Well, matching five out of six is not bad. There is no campaign for government office, but the rest is an accurate description of what you, the M Technology community, will do in the months to come: "Canvass."

The canvass process is enough to make most standards-making groups run screaming from the room. Few standards organizations relish tough scrutiny by the community that soon

will have to subject itself to the standards-developers' picture of the world as *they* think it should be.

Step by Step

The procedures for doing a canvass are laid out in the ANSI document "Procedures for the Development and Coordination of American National Standards." The specifics of the canvass are in appendix B (page 20) of the document.

The following is a general outline of the procedure based on the ANSI document and my experience.

1. Develop a Canvass List

The MDC must develop a canvass list of people and organizations that are "... known to be, or who have indicated that they are, directly and materially affected by the standard. . . ." Who? You. (No apologies if this is too personal. Standards-making is not always a polite and gentle afternoon tea. Occasionally we have to be blunt, or "brutally honest," as they say up North.) Yes, you. If you are reading this article, you have an interest in M. (While *M Computing* has broadened its appeal, it is still a long way from being a general-interest publication. So, if you are reading this, it is because you really do have an interest in M; it is not because of my caustic humor and rapier wit.)

The operative words from the ANSI document are "or who have indicated that they are." It is not for the MDC, or even ANSI, to decide: if you say you have an interest, you have an interest. ANSI also talks about interest catego-

ries. For our canvass we have five interest categories: producer, user, government, professional society or standards agency, and general interest. No single category is permitted to dominate. In most standards-making organizations, producers dominate, meaning any person or organization who implements M, writes software in M (for resale or not), or markets services based on M software. A user is anyone (or organization) who buys M systems or software for internal use or subscribes to M services. Dominance means that no single interest group constitutes a majority of the canvass list. For the next round of canvassing conducted by the MDC, all members of the M Technology Association and anyone else who participated in the 1988-89 canvass were asked to participate. This was a potential pool of about 540. As of this writing, about 100 individuals have accepted the invitation for the canvass of X11.1 (Language Standard). There was lower acceptance for the other proposed standards.

2. ANSI Review of List

Once the sponsor (MDC) makes a list of potential people and organizations for the canvass, it submits the list to ANSI for approval. At that time ANSI will announce the pending canvass in its Standards Action with a call for additional participation. There is a thirty-day waiting period to collect these names. Meanwhile, the proposed list is also submitted to ANSI's Executive Standards Council. The council reviews the list and notifies the MDC if additional canvassees are needed for the canvass list. Nowhere in here is there the option

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to remove someone from the canvass list. The system is biased towards getting the broadest participation.

3. Conducting the Canvass

This is the easy part for the MDC and the fun part for the canvass participants. The MDC distributes copies of the proposed standard to those on the canvass list and anyone else who participates through the public-review process as announced in Standards Action. After reviewing the document, all canvasees have the opportunity to respond within three months in one of four ways: approval; objection, which must include the rationale; abstention with comments; or "nonparticipation" (that is, no comment). Experience has shown that people and organizations who would approve the standard are less likely to respond. If they do respond, they generally will do so earlier than those who object. This follows human nature: people who support some activity are far less likely to express that support (through voting, writing letters, lobbying friends and acquaintances, or other forms appropriate, or inappropriate, to the situation) than those who do not. Think about that the next time the city wants to plant trees on your street and is stopped by one person who does not like to rake leaves.

4. Disposition of Views and Objections

"Prompt consideration shall be given to the expressed views and objections of all participants . . ." MDC responds to objections through a task group, who meets with each objector to review the comments and attempts to obtain a mutually satisfactory resolution. The task group will meet again with each objector to explain the task group's disposition of the objection.

After these meetings, if there are still objections, these objections and the

MDC's responses to them are distributed to the canvass list for another four-week consideration. This allows an opportunity for all the participants to weigh the comments and decide if any lead them to change their position. In the past, there has been some confusion about this part of the process. Perhaps the confusion stems from the procedures of other standards-making bodies, including the International Standards Organization (ISO). Other groups frequently make substantive changes to their documents during the final balloting. ISO goes even further—it can approve a standard before the specification is completed (this is the current situation with ISO 10646, the "standard" for internationalization of character sets). During the appeals that followed the 1988-89 canvass, one objector complained that the MDC was not willing to make changes to the standard during the canvass process. Yet, on the other hand, the same objector complained that the MDC had not followed some of its own rules during the development of the standard. It cannot go both ways. The MDC's development process is open and democratic. Anyone in the community can participate. *Robert's Rules of Order* are followed. How democratic, or even open, can a procedure be if someone else can bypass the whole process? The MDC cannot make substantive changes to the proposed standard during the canvass process without taking the changes back through the normal process used for all changes to the standard. If a change does become necessary, the document will be withdrawn from canvass. Once a revision has been completed, the canvass process will start over again.

5. Submittal of the Standard

After the second comment period, the MDC submits everything to ANSI. Actually, more than everything. Twelve documents, or document

sets, are sent including two copies of the draft standard, all the original canvass comments, all the MDC responses, and all of the second review comments. This marks the official end of the canvass. It does not mean the end of the process or acceptance of the standard. In another *Stone Disks*, we will cover ANSI approval, including (egad) appeals.

Did you notice? Only one hundred participants have been listed as of today? Are we willing to accept any standard? Are we willing to allow a few pen-wielding "fanatics" with an ax to grind to prevent the technology from advancing for so many? It doesn't matter if either point of view is close to yours. If you do not participate, you will have no choice or voice. Not everyone wishes to participate in the MDC. But, everyone in our community should be on the canvass list, just in case the MDC has been infiltrated by closet COBOLers, in which case the proposed 1993 standard will go wa-a-a-ay retro. Or maybe there's a columnist out there looking to sharpen a poisoned pen on the crypt of our technology.

Or maybe you might even like what you see, and want to keep it. ❖

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