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VIEWPOINT

Ah Standards, Sigh . . .

by Pamela G. McIntyre

As an adjunct professor teaching microcomputer courses to beginners, I make a point of discussing the importance of standards. I also make the point that despite the existence of standards and dozens of standards organizations, there are still incompatibilities between types of hardware and software. As future PC technicians, I want my students to be forewarned.

The inevitable question is "why are there still incompatibilities?" That's what I would like to know. Why bother to develop and adopt industry standards if they are not going to ensure universal compatibility? I can think of one reason, competition. One of the largest hardware vendors in the world is notorious for making sure that their hardware is incompatible with almost every other type of hardware in the galaxy. Why? To make sure that you buy only their hardware which they can guarantee will work flawlessly and which they will support. Heaven help you if you buy a tape drive from someone else and it doesn't work or stops working.

Who would you call? The answer is that it really doesn't matter. No matter how many vendors you call, each will point a finger at the others. Wouldn't you think that if all vendors were creating their products according to the same standards that everything would work with everything else? Forgive me, I'm thinking too logically again (bad habit).

To me, the word standard means just that, standard. Everyone is on the same page, using the same specifications, requirements, guidelines, criteria, and principles. There is no doubt in my mind that if hardware and software vendors really wanted to ensure compatibility, they would all sit down at a table and work it out. Somehow, I don't think that is going to happen.

But I keep hoping. To me the ultimate standard means, for example, that there would be a need for only one CD-ROM driver and that driver would work with any CD-ROM drive in any microcomputer anywhere. Now that's a standard. The same would apply to tape drives, sound cards, hard drives, network cards, etc. And let's not forget to apply the same rules to software. No more conflicting TSRs. But then, that would require standards, sigh . . .

Welcome to Viewpoint. The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of MTA. Guest writers and responses to columns are welcome and will be printed at the discretion of MTA. Email: MTA@mtechnology.org

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