ISQ

INFORMATION STANDARDS QUARTERLY

SPECIAL EDITION: YEAR IN REVIEW AND STATE OF THE STANDARDS

SUSHI IMPLEMENTATION: THE CLIENT AND SERVER EXPERIENCES

DEDICATED TO STANDARDS

EXTENDING AND PROMOTING THE USE OF OPENURL

ESTABLISHING SUGGESTED PRACTICES REGARDING SINGLE SIGN-ON

NISO
How the information world CONNECTS

OP [OPINION]

A judgement formed about something;
a personal view, attitude, or appraisal
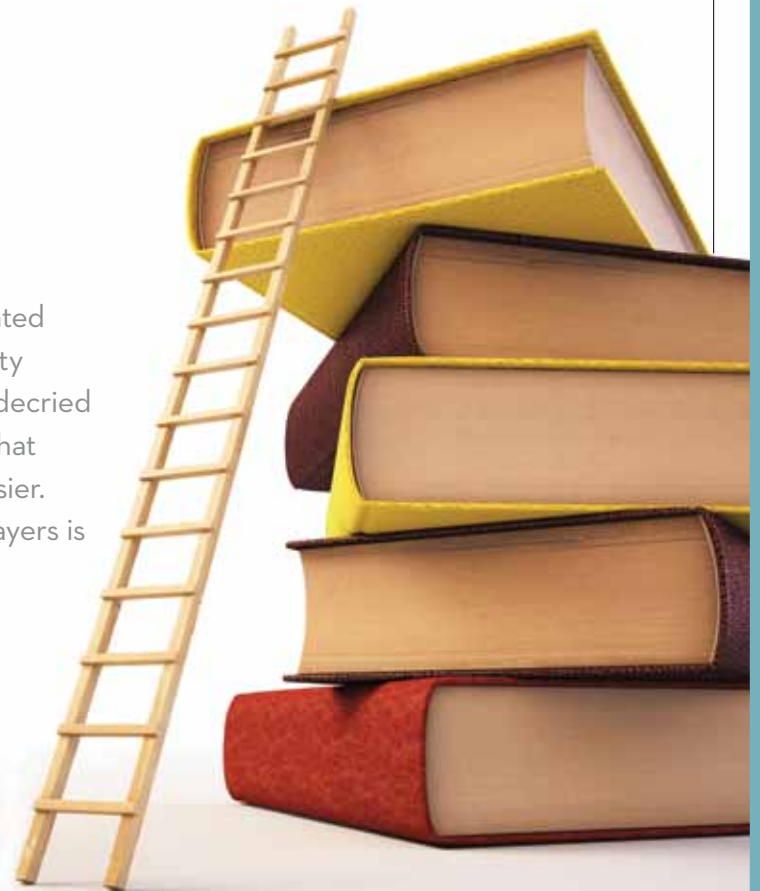
Andrew K. Pace

ANDREW K. PACE

Dedicated to Standards

I have no qualms about expressing my love-hate relationship with standards. For the decade that I have been involved with NISO, I have both articulated the collective sigh heard throughout the community whenever a standards initiative is announced and decried lack of adherence to the most basic of standards that make libraries more efficient and all of our jobs easier. But truth be told, my patience for standards nay-sayers is waning more quickly than it once did.

"Libraries will set standards, and vendors will set reality," a leader in the field once told me. I laughed because it was funny, but also because it is part of the sad reality with which libraries are faced. A lack of standards is required to support any cottage industry and there are a lot of service providers who see standards as a threat to proprietary software. The days for this sort of thinking should be numbered.

Standards require dedication and discipline. Standards require care and attention. Standards require governance and administration. Standards are a way to create cooperation and unification in an industry that demands diversification. In the early part of my career, I remember wishing that there were only one web browser. How much easier it would have been for all of us at the dawn of the web if Netscape or Internet Explorer had been the only game in town. But in our hearts we knew that such a dream would result in less innovation, not more. For the Web, standards reigned.

> Standards require dedication and discipline. Standards require care and attention. Standards require governance and administration. Standards are a way to create cooperation and unification in an industry that demands diversification.

Somewhere in ISO standards, a group of experts decided how big around a shower curtain ring should be. Can you imagine if you had to buy custom shower rings to fit your shower curtain rod? Some of us are making curtain rings, some of us make the rods, some of us make the curtains. What we have in common is the dedication to creating efficiencies for libraries and their suppliers, while supporting diversification of systems.

CONTINUED »

I try as much as I can to hold my head high in the realm of standards. Vigilance is also required. My own product group at OCLC was recently faced with a decision regarding the latest version of NCIP. Should we create web services based on version 1.1 or version 2.0 of the standard? No one was really implementing version 2.0 yet. Being a lonely standard implementer can be risky. We boldly chose version 2.0. (Okay, it wasn't that bold, but it was a small gamble.) Several months later, other groups were struggling with the same decision. Rather than simply urge the group working on item availability for discovery systems to join us, we contributed our software code to the group.

So don't tell me that standards are too hard. If you think so, then you think sharing is too hard or cooperation is too hard. One of my first mentors in the standards world was Pat Stevens (most of you NISO groupies will remember her). I always loved the analogy she used to support standards development. Somewhere in ISO standards, she would explain, a group of experts decided how big around a shower curtain ring should

be. Can you imagine if you had to buy custom shower rings to fit your shower curtain rod? Some of us are making curtain rings, some of us make the rods, some of us make the curtains. What we have in common is the dedication to creating efficiencies for libraries and their suppliers, while supporting diversification of systems. Why do we do it? Because the ethos of cooperation and sharing that is the cornerstone of our profession demands it. I OP I doi: 10.3789/isqv23n1.2011.06

ANDREW K. PACE <pacea@oclc.org> is Executive Director, Networked Library Services with OCLC, Inc. and a member of the ISQ Editorial Board.