

INTEROPERABILITY

Are Secrets Standards? Even ANSI Secrets?

Open systems are based on carefully crafted international standards. If you want to implement (or even understand) open systems, you need to read these primary reference documents. Textbooks, tutorials and the like are fine, but at some point you have to go to the real thing.

Standards are more than just how you code a particular project: They are the basis for training a new generation of computer professionals. If I have a staff of eager young programmers or a bunch of students in a class, I certainly hope they will go home at

night and read. Not what I assign them, but just plain general reading.

THE MOVERS

General reading is what makes well-read computer professionals. Well-read computer professionals are the ones that

will be able to move our industry forward.

The problem is getting the standards. If you have money—lots of it—you can buy paper versions of International Standards Organization and American National Standards Institute standards. ISO and

ANSI don't hesitate to charge \$10 per page, don't have student rates and prohibit copying.

Not all organizations think this way. The International Telecommunication Union has given permission to me and a group of volunteers to post their entire standards set on the Internet network for distribution at no charge. The head of the CCITT calls this "the B-52 philosophy of stan-

dards distribution:

Load them up in a plane and carpet bomb the world."

Thousands, and possibly tens of thousands, of talented engineers

spend lots of time formulating standards on a volunteer basis. It's an insult to their dedication to hide the results of their work behind a mountain of purchase orders and stacks of paper.

ACCESS TO STANDARDS

Standards about networks should be accessible on networks. This isn't really such a radical idea—the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol standards have been available for years on many servers around the world. Access to the standards is one of the primary reasons that TCP/IP is so well accepted. People know about TCP/IP and people use what they know.

I'd like to propose a meta-standard. If you have something that you want to call a standard, it has to be available to everybody cheaply and easily. If I can't get it for free (or darn close to free), it's not a standard. I don't care if ANSI makes it, it's still not a standard.

Once something is a standard, then we can start comparing "American National standards" or "ad-hoc standards." Until I can read about it, though, it's not a standard, it's a secret. And open systems aren't based on secrets. ■

CARL MALAMUD, A WRITER AND CONSULTANT, HAS JUST HAD PUBLISHED 'STACKS: INTEROPERABILITY IN TODAY'S COMPUTER NETWORKS' (PRENTICE HALL, 1991). FEATURED THIS WEEK AS THE INTEROP BOOK AT THE INTEROP CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION. THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED ARE HIS OWN.

Carl Malamud



User's

OPEN SYSTEMS

COS Presents The Open Systems Conference

Now you can participate in a comprehensive Open Systems conference — with a user point of view.

On November 18-22, 1991, the Corporation for Open Systems International will sponsor a five day conference and exhibit on Open Systems, just outside of Washington, D.C., at the Hyatt Regency in Reston, Virginia.

Tutorials, courses, seminars, new technology and panel discussions—covering the full array of open systems—will all be featured.

The Conference will showcase:

Fall User's Group meetings and programs of major Open Systems organizations including North American MAP/TOP, The User Alliance for Open Systems and OSINET.

A five day multi-vendor Educational Exhibit of Open Systems products and services you can purchase today.

The National ISDN 1 Planning Conference—A day and a half devoted to the inside track on the Bellcore, North American ISDN User's Forum (NIUF) and COS plan to deploy ISDN nationwide by November, 1992.

A formal dinner featuring Communications Week's O.N.E. Award for Open Network Excellence, with keynote speaker, Dr. Henry Kissinger.

An informal evening of networking and live, professional entertainment.

Find out more about The User's Open Systems Conference. Call Bill Horst at 703.883.2730. Or, fill in the coupon and fax it to 703.734.2975.



The Corporation for Open Systems International
1750 Old Meadow Road McLean, Virginia 22102
1.800.759.COSI

Please send me more information about The User's Open Systems Conference.

Name _____

Title _____

Company _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Telephone _____

Fax _____