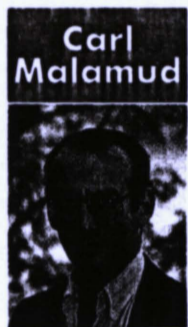## INTEROPERABILITY

How Putting ISO Documents On-Line Can Pay

I was recently in Geneva, battling the bureaucratic abyss of the International Telecommunication Union to keep alive the experiment to post standards on the Internet. While there, I went across the street to meet with Larry Eicher, secretary-general of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

My visit to Dr. Eicher had two purposes. First, I wanted to brief him on how technically easy it had been to post the ITU standards on the network and what a grassroots success the experiment had proved.

My real purpose, though, was to ask if ISO was willing to post the standards for Open Systems Interconnection on the network. Eicher agreed that there were many benefits to posting standards on the network, but he raised an important issue.

ISO makes 25 percent of its gross revenue by selling documents. How did I plan to replenish the missing revenue? After all, he needed to fund the process. We thought about this problem and there seems to be a possible solution that will address both needs.

One of the problems with OSI is that the standards are not as well-accepted as one would like. It has taken years for OSI to start becoming a reality. One key reason is that the vital standards documents describing OSI are not widely available.

In other words, the market for OSI documents is small. Students don't know about OSI, and therefore don't start to use the standards when they go to work at corporations. Public-domain implementations of standards, developed at research institutions, are vital to demonstrating the standards' feasibility to users and vendors.

The compromise I proposed to Eicher would allow free electronic distribution of low-resolution versions of standards on the global network. Low resolution might be 200 dots per inch, the same as used for a G3

fax image. Text would be in simple ASCII format. High-resolution paper copies would continue to be sold at a tariff structure set by member organizations in consultation with ISO.

When the ITU's Blue Book was put on the network, there was a question of whether anybody would care. In a little over a

month, people from more than 600 computers in 30 countries accessed more than 100,000 files from the main server. Another 21 servers on four continents made copies of the data and also started distributing the documents.

Electronic distribution of standards has increased the number of people reading the

Blue Book by an order of magnitude in just a month. If more people read the standards, more will want to implement them. If more people want to implement them, more will want to purchase the nice, high-resolution paper copy.

I have offered the services of a non-profit group called the

Digital Resource Institute to assist ISO in this project at no cost to them in the same way we assisted the ITU in converting and posting their standards. With a solution on the table that may actually increase revenues, there is no reason for ISO not to move forward and take this important step. ∎

CARL MALAMUD IS WRITING 'EXPLORING THE INTERNET: A TECHNICAL TRAVELOGUE,' TO BE PUBLISHED BY PRENTICE HALL AND FEATURED AS THE INTEROP BOOK AT INTEROP '92 FALL. THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED HERE ARE HIS OWN.