

## INTEROPERABILITY

# Government Study Blasts ANSI's Practices

The American National Standards Institute is under severe attack from the groups it was meant to serve. Many large corporations and trade associations are withdrawing from ANSI, whose officials are repeatedly accused of being arrogant and out of touch.

The Office of Technology Assessment, the research arm of the U.S. Congress, recently concluded that ANSI must change. In a scholarly, impeccably researched study, OTA investigators demonstrated that ANSI has not kept up with the times and has resisted repeated attempts to bring ANSI interests in line with the public interest.

Carl Malamud



The OTA investigators were particularly blunt when it came to the use of information technology as a way to disseminate standards. One of the strongest policy options presented in the study was to separate the dissemination of standards from the production of

those standards, wresting document production out of the Gucci-style boutique that ANSI runs.

The OTA showed that standards groups such as ANSI have a natural bias toward under-producing standards. These keep prices high and distribution low. This is a natural monopoly-pricing situation, no different from that in electricity or other public utilities, and the ANSI monopoly has not served the public interest.

The study was critical not only of ANSI but of all the standards organizations in the United States. OTA investigators were surprised by the amount of maneuvering among the various groups, and were highly critical about turf wars that did little to serve the public interest.

Standards are a key competitive tool in our increasingly global marketplace. The OTA study scrutinized the European and Japanese standards efforts and showed that both regions have used standards as a competitive tool to the detriment of the United States.

The United States' participation in the standards process has been under ANSI's leadership, which has failed miserably to mobilize this vital competitive tool. Unless we start participating aggressively and substantively in the standards arena, we shall continue to fall behind.

The policy options proposed by the OTA range from simple, concrete steps

**CARL MALAMUD** is writing *Exploring the Internet: A Technical Travelogue*, a book that will be featured as *The Interop Book at Interop '92 Fall*. The opinions expressed are his own.

that can be immediately taken, to a whole-scale restructuring of the standards system.

So what is the ANSI reaction to these suggestions? It is clear that the standards process is in a state of crisis, but ANSI officials arrogantly resist any changes.

They dismiss proposals to help make ANSI more efficient or to increase the effectiveness of standards-making.

One of the policy options in the study was to have the National Institute of Standards and Technology run a standards data-

base, making vital documents available to the public. This is an obvious, simple policy option and should be implemented. Next step: a total overhaul of ANSI to bring our standards process in line with the public interest. ■



**The hidden costs of some bridge/routers can haunt you forever.**

They can be hard to install. And even harder to use. Maybe they're just plain unreliable. You're locked in. There's nowhere to turn for help...What some companies don't tell you about their bridge/routers can hurt, costing you time, money and lost service.

So choose ACC. New and independent test results prove that ACC bridge/routers are the simplest in the industry to install and operate. And you have the best of both worlds by being able to switch easily from bridging to routing to bridge/routing with

one simple software command. You don't have to invest in new hardware. Also, our commitment to standards supports interoperability over a wide range of protocols. All this plus ACC's reliability and team of value added resellers keeps your network going with no surprises.

So, before it's too late and you find out about those hidden costs the hard way, talk to ACC.

**Call 1-800-444-7854 today for more information on ACC's entire line of bridge/router products.**



**ACC** Advanced Computer Communications

*The Smartest Investment In Internetworking*

See us at Interop East Booth #510

315 Bolloy Drive, Santa Barbara, CA 93117. ACC is a registered trademark and The Smartest Investment In Internetworking is a trademark of Advanced Computer Communications. © 1991 ACC