

Introduction to the Minitrack on Standards and Standardization

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Standards and standardization play an essential role in the use and effectiveness of information systems. Standards enable interoperability, the creation of complementary products and communication and collaboration between firms and individuals. However, the way in which standards are created frequently influences the adoption of standards and their eventual business impact.

Therefore, in issuing the call for papers for the Standards and Standardization minitrack, we asked authors to focus on three main areas: the development of standards, their use as well as the business implications.

Many I.S. researchers are familiar with standards, such as through the theories (and practice) of *de facto* standards competition epitomized by the VHS vs. Beta “standards war.” While this has been an important area of research in the past 20 years, in creating the minitrack we sought a broader range of perspectives for standards-related issues, including not only economics, but more sociologically focused research, as well as research that bridges standards issues more directly to the established I.S. literature. We feel the six papers presented in this minitrack provide that broad range of perspectives.

From a methodological standpoint, four of our six papers are case studies, concerning different areas of IT and different branches of business. Two of the six papers are more conceptual — one synthesizing practical experience, the other applying an influential theoretical lens from economics to model the standardization process.

Interestingly, all of our papers touch on the standards creation process in some way. We believe this reflects the increasing number of new standards being created, to further the Internet-enabled transformation of commerce in the 21 century. We feel this trend validates our decision to launch the minitrack at HICSS as part of the track on the Internet and the Digital Economy.

We are encouraged that half the papers also consider the relationship between the use and impacts of standards. We believe this is an understudied yet important area, if the investment in standards creation and evaluation (by both producers and users) is to yield a concomitant economic return.

However, a vibrant minitrack is more than just a collection of individual papers. It is a chance for researchers of similar interests and divergent perspectives to have a broader discussion of both the phenomena and the theories we use to make sense of these phenomena. We look forward to have an discussing the relevance of standards for the I.S. field, and how to improve both standards research and practice. Therefore, we have reserved time in our mini-track for a discussion on future research needs in the developing area of IT standards and standardization research.

The best of the papers from the minitrack will be published in Fall 2005 in the *International Journal of IT Standards & Standardisation Research*. Through this year’s minitrack and the special issue, we hope to create a permanent forum for IT standards researchers to develop and disseminate their ideas.