

BOOK REVIEW:

Scaffolding the New Web - Standards and Standards Policy for the Digital Economy

**By Martin Libicki, James Schneider, David R.
Frelinger, Anna Slomovic.**

RAND Science and Technology Policy Institute, 2000

**Reviewed by Ken Krechmer
Technical Editor, Communications Standards Review**

Scaffolding the New Web is RAND's response to a 1999 request by the US Office of Science and Technology to investigate current standards development processes and recommend public policies. It is based on the results of a meeting of distinguished standards developers who met July 20, 1999 as a focus group to discuss issues related to information technology standardization. In large measure this book focuses on compatibility standards (standards which define a specific relationship between two or more entities).

This book provides, in three appendices, an excellent overview of Java related standards activity, a discussion of the possible impact of XML (extensible markup language) and an excellent view of library standards development. Several other appendices provide useful information on electronic payment systems, commercial encryption and privacy issues.

The report itself is only one third of the book (the appendices form the other two thirds) and provides few new insights into the world of standards and standardization. Chapter Four offers five paths for the development of semantic standards (specifically application specific XML sets). But does not address the use of adaptability standards (which do not pass data or control but only negotiate which data and control to pass) to negotiate among different XML sets. Standards are considered a policy tool in Chapter six. "Standards may be able to take over much of the work otherwise required from politically controversial regulation." The concept that standards are a substitute for regulation is outdated, as is noted in other chapters. "...standards, regardless of how earnestly people try to manipulate them, are a force for openness." Several other chapters also argue for greater openness and market freedom. The

obvious conflict between regulation of standards and openness of standards is not addressed.

Patents are noted as a growing and serious concern to standardization. The perceived conflict between patents and standardization is noted, but the only direction offered, is to resolve it outside the standardization process. In closing, the report notes, "So far, standards difficulties have proven no worse than a speed bump before technology's relentless march." While a comforting idea, it is the view of an outsider.

Ken Krechmer
Communications Standards Review
757 Greer Road
Palo Alto, California 94303-3024 USA

VOICE: +1 650 856-8836
e-mail: krechmer@csrstds.com