



Standards: a blessing or a curse?

First the curse: it usually takes an endless amount of time for a standard to come together, and once it is completed, often it feels like compromise that does not fully serve everyone's interests.

But clearly there are blessings as well. The main blessing of standards is the enormous "peace-of-mind" that makes large companies big supporters. Without standards it would be difficult to have machines or equipment efficiently co-operate. It would be expensive to develop workarounds to make gear talk to each other.

Wi-Fi and Bluetooth are clear examples of this.

Systems can be very complex. Every element of a large system that can be standardized essentially removes a significant uncertainty factor out of the complexity of the total system – or at least, isolates it and makes it manageable.

Furthermore a standard usually is based on a collective experience and cooperation which increases reliability and the long term availability. A good standard also creates an ecosystem of multiple vendors avoiding the single source trap (and at the same time, helps to drive down the cost) – all helping to further bolster this peace of mind.

This does not mean that there are no "botched standards" – standards that fail to be really adopted (eg. HiperLAN, IrDA) or pseudo-standards that essentially are proprietary solutions disguised by the user community as an open platform, where essentially there is just a single provider behind the technology (eg. EnOcean, Z-Wave).

Bottom line: standards are both a blessing and a curse – but looking at the bigger picture: the blessings dominate!

Do you have comments or suggestions? I appreciate your feedback!

► cees.links@greenpeak.com

