

Standardized Standards

A new document framework being developed at NISO will improve publication methods and the use of standards.

By Lesley West

In August, the National Information Standards Organization issued a news release. They were calling for participants in a new activity to identify common aspects and structures in standards and create content models and a document framework (a DTD, or document type definition) that will support standards. The result will harmonize the structure of common elements of standards, such as Scope and Terminology.

ASTM staff is participating in the group, offering oversight and technical expertise. In doing so, we join other standards developers, national standards bodies, publishing bureaus, aggregators and other interested participants and industry observers.

Standards development organizations and national standards bodies already have individual guides such as ASTM's form and style guide. While they are not consistent from one organization to another, they are not entirely dissimilar. When completed, the NISO standard will allow a wide range of standards organizations to drive their current and future production toward greater document interoperability through:

- Fostering interchange: Co-published standards will become easier to manage between two different publishing systems in two different houses;
- Encouraging adoptions with industry members who also publish standards: Organizations will have the potential to share richer data;
- Aiding when multiple standards are used across an enterprise or for a single project;

- Improving tools while reducing development costs: Standards publishers can expect more innovative, less expensive tools to be available because of increased market size and lower customization costs for publishing vendors;

- Helping discovery service vendors and librarians find useful consistency between standards to better locate and serve results.

How might this directly benefit ASTM members and customers? One example is the ability to help industry assemble internal specifications that include snipped content linked directly from the authoritative standards while staying in-license in the resulting document. By easily identifying the standard structure, such a tool can also display when a copied section has been updated in the original standard, offering efficient change management.

ASTM is extremely supportive of the NISO activity along with other organizations. Last spring, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers worked with the International Organization for Standardization and ASTM to propose the activity. Together, ASME and ASTM have committed to funding the standard's development from inception through ballot. By participating, ASTM assures its members that the standards they develop will embrace these technical benefits.

NISO will maintain a public site where you can monitor the group's developments (www.niso.org/workrooms/sts). ASTM members can be assured that the standards community is committing to standardization of its own.

THE BACK STORY

The proposed NISO standard is based on an extended version of the Journal Article Tag Suite, which is the primary document type widely used by scholarly journal publishers.

Several standards developers built internal structures based on JATS for their standards, and ISO made theirs openly available online. That DTD, the ISOSTS, is now the basis of the NISO activity. It will be modified with a more SDO-usable document structure. Companies in industry have also voiced interest in the structure for their internal standards and documents.

Both structures — ISOSTS (now NISO STS) and JATS — are now in NISO, and will be coupled to inherit good technical developments. The NISO activity aims to be as backward-compatible as possible, to minimize change/effort for current ISOSTS users while also working well for SDOs of many kinds.



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