In 1961, when computer standardization lacked true notions of collaboration between bodies and even common goals, three European computer manufacturers came together and created Ecma to prevent further confusion.

Over 40 years later, its members are still making Ecma thrive by developing a variety of standards in new work areas, for subsequent submission to ISO/IEC Joint Technical Committee JTC 1, Information Technology. Among these new work areas are: the Universal 3D file format for the manipulation of data from the engineering world for training, marketing, maintenance and simulation; the 6 cm DVD-like optical disk, for the distribution of games for (portable) game machines/play stations; and, last but not least, the holographic versatile disks and cards (HVD & HVC). HVD’s initial capacity of 200 gigabytes (due to grow to 1 terabyte), together with the high transfer speed – growing from 100 megabits per second to 1 gigabits per second – represent a quantum leap in storage possibilities.

Ecma’s single purpose remains to develop and to publish international standards.

**Time to market**

The Information and Communication Technology & Consumer Electronics (ICT & CE) industry decides on the type of publication, the organization and the process to use for their standards. As a rule, a mix of technical, commercial/economic and political justifications exists in addition to time, money and quality constraints. Specifications from consortia and *de jure* International Standards represent two extremes.

ICT & CE standardization has special needs. Take, for instance, the short life cycles of products for magnetic and optical storage like DVD, which dictate the development times of standards. Less than a year is perfectly common in Ecma. In addition, software standardization requires an iterative process, much akin to that of the release of software products; it is impossible to develop a complete and long-standing standard “in a single run”.

Truly global ISO and IEC standards – when timely – are not only important for industry and manufacturing, but also for users, such as in public purchasing, and for conformance testing.
Mutually beneficial

Although ISO, IEC, JTC 1 (and its predecessor, ISO/TC 97) and Ecma have always enjoyed a natural symbiosis to mutual benefit, their field of action, structure and working methods are very different:

Ecma focuses on ICT & CE, while ISO and IEC have far broader scopes, with many very different work areas. Although ISO/IEC JTC 1’s work area is information technology, its scope is broader than Ecma’s.

ISO technical committees work through national bodies, whilst Ecma works directly with industrial companies and not-for-profit organizations such as universities and governmental institutes. The ISO five-stage process first uses national and then international consensus building, whereas Ecma’s members enjoy direct participation in a three-stage process.

In the mid-1980s, ISO and IEC created the fast-track procedure based on a proposal by Ecma. After being vetted in Ecma, the standards go through a meticulous international process within JTC 1 ("more eyes always see more") to ensure quality. Ecma submitted over 80% of the 250 fast-track proposals to ISO and IEC, only one of which failed. To facilitate publication, the structure given to the ISO and Ecma standards is very similar.

"Better a good standard today than a perfect one tomorrow!"

Thus, Ecma acts as a “subcontractor” to ISO and IEC, in particular to ISO/IEC JTC 1. Ecma’s A-liason with JTC 1 is based upon the long-standing trust relationship and mutual recognition between them so that, despite differences in methods and structures, industry values both JTC 1 and Ecma to attain the goal of timely International Standards.

Value added

The creation of more than 400 consortia proves that high-tech industry needs control. Ecma and consortia, often sharing several members, are complementary.

Ecma allies the agility of consortia with the quality of the de jure standardization organizations. By combining its efficient infrastructure and proven flexible working methods with well established interfaces to ISO, IEC and ITU-T as well as to CEN (European Committee for Standardization), CENELEC (European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization) and ETSI (the European Telecommunications Standards Institute), Ecma ensures its strong position in the area of ICT & CE standardization.

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