

FROM CONCEPT TO STANDARDIZATION

NAVIGATING PATHS TO INDUSTRY-WIDE ADOPTION



The journey from concept to standardization is never straightforward. It requires an awareness of process and the ability to align diverse interests while maintaining a clear vision. This case study explores how a nascent idea in digital identity moved along the path with the goal of becoming a widely adopted standard, impacting millions of users and organizations globally.

I've always enjoyed working in the world of internet standards development, particularly with open standards communities like the IETF, W3C, and OpenID Foundation. I also deeply respect the work of government and treaty-based SDOs such as NIST, ISO, IEC, and ITU-T. This case study explores how a nascent idea in digital identity moved along the path with the goal of becoming a widely adopted standard, impacting millions of users and organizations globally.

The Challenge

Turning a technical concept into an industry standard requires overcoming significant hurdles. There were three critical challenges to address: complex stakeholder dynamics, technical ambiguities, and lengthy timelines.

- **Complex Stakeholder Dynamics:** Multiple organizations, each with their own priorities and technical approaches, often had conflicting opinions and objectives.
- **Technical Ambiguities:** Early drafts of the specification were incomplete and required substantial refinement to align with industry needs.
- **Lengthy Timelines:** The standards process typically spans several years, creating risks of lost momentum and disengaged stakeholders.

The Approach

Let me first explain: there is no one-size-fits-all approach to facilitating these kinds of activities. These are some common approaches and fairly high-level strategies. The specific challenges outlined above—complex stakeholder dynamics, technical ambiguities, and lengthy timelines—require tailored solutions. You have to adapt to the needs of the people involved while keeping the work aligned with the process of the standards organization and the goal of the work.

Resolving Complex Stakeholder Dynamics

- Facilitated early discussions to establish a clear, shared understanding of the problem the standard aimed to solve.
- Organized collaborative workshops to align stakeholders and address conflicting priorities.
- Used neutral facilitation techniques to foster constructive discussions and build trust among participants.

Clarifying Technical Ambiguities

- Conducted regular reviews of the draft specification to incorporate feedback from diverse contributors.
- Ran early pilots to validate technical feasibility and gather insights for improvement.

Managing Lengthy Timelines

- Developed a roadmap with specific milestones to guide the project from concept to finalization.
- Ensured consistent communication to maintain stakeholder engagement throughout the multi-year process.
- Delivered monthly reports to keep participants informed and aligned with the project's progress.

Strategic Engagement with Standards Bodies

- Made sure the draft was presented to other related working groups, wherever they are housed (e.g., IETF, W3C, ISO)
- Actively participated in discussions to advocate for the specification and resolve technical disagreements.

The Outcome

The work remains ongoing and in draft form, but this is a normal and healthy stage in the standards development process. Gaining industry and government attention during the draft phase is a key indicator of success. I have been invited to present at conferences as both a keynote speaker and a session leader, reflecting the broad interest in this effort. Additionally, I've been asked to create monthly reports for individuals and organizations who cannot participate directly, ensuring they stay informed and engaged.

This ongoing process exemplifies how standards work thrives on iteration and collaboration. It's about building critical relationships within the community and demonstrating how effective facilitation can drive meaningful progress. By maintaining this momentum, the draft is positioned to evolve into a widely adopted standard that impacts millions globally.



Key Takeaways

So, what's to learn from rolling these particular boulders uphill?

Vision and Clarity Drive Success

- Clearly articulate the problem and the desired outcome to align stakeholders from the outset. Remember, you don't need to have all the answers yourself; your role is to help the smart people in the room clarify the vision and make it something everyone can work towards.

Consensus is a Continuous Process

- Ongoing collaboration and compromise throughout the project are essential to making progress and avoiding surprises when it's time to formally move the draft to full standard.
- It's not only about what happens during the meetings. Side meetings, one on one chats, meeting up for coffee – relationships make the process run more smoothly.

Success Require Advocacy

- Engage actively with as many relevant standards bodies and stakeholders as you can to ensure your specification gains the support it needs to succeed.

And think about it: These strategies are not just for standards development but are applicable to any collaborative, high-stakes technical project.

Let's Collaborate on Digital Identity Standards Development

Staying on top of the latest developments in the fast-paced world of digital identity and Internet standards requires more than just passive observation. With nearly 15 years of experience, I offer consulting services to help your organization navigate the digital identity standards development process.

Whether you need guidance on when to engage during the design of critical identity-related standards, building consensus among stakeholders, or ensuring your voice is heard in the standards community, I can provide it. Let's discuss how I can help you stay ahead and make an impact.

Reach out today to explore how my [Digital Identity Standards Development Services](#) can support your organization.

