



Bruce Devlin

A New Generation of Standards

A big thank you to Alan Lambshead, who after four years as Standards Vice President, is handing over the post to me. I think it is entirely fitting that midway through Alan's final set of face-to-face meetings we see the publication of SMPTE ST 2110. Alan's steady hand at the helm has guided the standards community through many choppy waters to a point in time where we can look forward, with optimism, to a new generation of workflows and efficiencies powered by SMPTE standards.

For those of you who have been living on a different planet these past couple of years, the SMPTE ST 2110 standards herald a new future for the connectivity, flexibility, and functionality of professional media facilities around the world. I still remember the impact of serial digital interface (SDI) when it was first introduced. The prospect of lossless record and replay was a ground-breaking shift in functionality. SMPTE ST 2110 gives us a similar step change in functionality, where truly dynamic reconfigurability of networks carrying professional grade signals is now a reality.

I have heard criticisms that the standards process is slow, but in reality, that's not really true. The standards process, by design, is thorough. This means scrutiny at the most minute detail of what is written, so that the standard itself can act as a bedrock upon which systems with long-term stability can be built. A standard that is rushed and incomplete does not give good interoperability and ultimately will detract from SMPTE's reputation for quality and reliability.

During the early SDI era in the 1980s, the professional media industry was predominantly a hardware engineering profession. We were fighting against physics and SMPTE standards were mostly about interfaces and protocols to allow different hardware devices to communicate. As semiconductor physics improved and we could do more calculations in realtime, those interfaces and protocols became more sophisticated. The world, however, was still dominated by national TV stations, tape interchange, and the mobile phone was still something that would break your foot if you dropped it.

Today, we have no such limitations. We live in a global world with instant, global distribution of high-definition and ultrahigh-definition simply a matter of economics rather than physics. The biggest spend in most product development is now software rather than hardware. That software now runs on virtual hardware rather than physical hardware and it can often be easier to move that virtual hardware to the media than to move the media to the virtual hardware.

The standards world needs to continue to step up to this challenge. I believe that we will see the use of more modular standards with a larger number of smaller documents used for defining functionality and services that deliver the technology needed in the industry. My challenge as the incoming Standards Vice President is improving the quality of our software standards while simultaneously refining the speed at which we can deliver them. Although a daunting task, I am confident that the cohort of standards participants are up to the job and the

many kind words of encouragement and the significant number of hands in the small of my back that are pushing me forward is both encouraging and mildly terrifying.

As we begin 2018, you will see some activity on a new initiative that we are trialing with the U.K.'s Digital Production Partnership. In addition to SMPTE's Standards, Recommended Practices, Engineering Guidelines, and Registered Disclosure Documents, we will be trialing a new Specifications process. The goal is to create a nimble process in which SMPTE's resources can be used to create business-driven specifications that constrain the heavy-weight standards for which we are renowned. The specifications process is there to reflect that a standard like ST 2110 will be used very differently in different scenarios. The U.S. with its fractional frame rates will have different constraints than the U.K. with its integer frame rates. Countries with right-to-left non-Latin scripts will have different captioning and subtitling requirements than North America. Constraining standards for local cultures and working practices has been one of the keys to the success of Film and TV over the years. We hope that this specifications trial will encourage organizations to approach SMPTE for the publishing and long-term memory of their increasingly diverse range of specifications.

By the time that you read this text, I will have started my new role of Standards Vice President. I am honored and flattered to have been elected to this post and I hope that I can bring to the standards community some of the enthusiasm and passion that I have for this industry of ours.