A Focal Access Point to Follow the Standardization of Learning Technologies

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Abstract

The Workshop for Learning Technologies, within the European Committee for Standardization (CEN/ISSS WS-LT), produced the Learning Technology Standards Observatory, a web portal where those interested in the LT standardization process can get familiar with it, learn the main differences between related specifications, follow what is going on, what is planned for the near future and furthermore participate in the process itself. This paper presents the main functionalities and content areas within this site and how users can benefit from its use.

1. Introduction

Uptake of learning technology standards is increasing, with numerous commercial products under development, and many R&D projects exploring the issues in this area. However, there is widespread confusion and misunderstanding about the relationships between the relevant standards and specifications, as well as between the organizations that develop, define, profile or implement them.

Especially in Europe, it is crucial that communication on these aspects increases both in quality as well as in accessibility, as there is a danger that only an U.S. centric point of view will be widely disseminated otherwise.

This is the rationale that led the European Committee of Standardization’s Workshop on Learning Technologies (CEN/ISSS WS-LT) [1] to establish an accessible and sustainable web based repository that acts as a focal access point to projects, results, activities and organizations that are relevant to the development and adoption of e-learning technology standards: the Learning Technology Standards Observatory (LTSO) [2], see Figure 1:

Information available at the LTSO includes but is not be restricted to:

- Summary of each standard or proposal including key data in order to allow the user to grasp the gist of the specification.
- Tracking data on the evolution of the standard through the different drafts.
- Relationship and main difference among proposed specifications and standards for the same category (e.g. AICC CMI and ADL SCORM, LTSC LOM and IMS metadata, IMS LIP and LTSC PAPI, etc.).
- Clarification of the relationships between formal standardization bodies (ISO, CEN, IEEE), specification development consortia (such as ARIADNE and IMS) and profiling bodies (such as CANCORE, ALIC, and others).
- Links to the complete set of specifications (if available on-line) or to information on where to obtain them.
- Information on the actual uptake of specifications and standards.
- Information about relevant events, activities and organizations.
The LTSO is multilingual-capable. Contents can be published in any of the 11 official languages in the European Union. They are published using a proprietary web-based authoring tool. This means that both contents and structure are completely dynamic and can be updated automatically using a web-based interface.

2. LTSO Contents

LTSO contents offer up-to-date information on the main institutions and bodies involved in e-learning standardization and their outcomes. Currently, there is information about the following institutions (references to each institution can be obtained from the LTSO itself): ISO/IEC JTC1 SC36, IEEE LTSC, CEN/ISSS WS-LT, ADL, AICC, IMS, European Schoolnet, ARIADNE, PROMETEUS, GEM, EdNA, ALIC, and DCMI.

For each institution the following five subsections are maintained: (1) Working groups: Data of each working group within the institution. (2) Liaisons: Liaison policies, active agreements and their results. (3) Meetings: It gathers information on the next meetings scheduled. (4) News: Last or most relevant piece of news. (5) Future activities: Summary of future activities.

The gist of the LTSO is structured around the different areas within the learning technology standardization process. For each group of specifications/standards the LTSO provides a classification for it and information on its scope. Within each group, the LTSO provides key information on every standard/specification like the institution that produced it, version tracking, its present-day status, references to related sources, etc. In addition to this basic information, eight sub-categories are also included: (1) Summary: An overall description containing the minimum information needed to understand the gist of the standard. (2) Current version: Name and reference to the currently available version as well as its main updates. (3) Previous versions: Tracking data on the evolution of the standard. (4) Relations: Similarities and main differences with related specifications. (5) Future work: Main working lines and tasks being developed. It may include the schedule. (6) Conformance: Requirements to be compliant with this standard. (7) News: News related to this standard. (8) Meetings: Next meetings scheduled that may affect this specification.

Current contents cover the following standardization areas:

- Metadata.
- Content Aggregation.
- Educational Modeling Languages.
- Learner Information.
- Assessment.
- Runtime.
- Digital Repositories.
- Architectures and Interfaces.
- Accessibility.
- Collaboration.
- Glossary and Vocabulary.
- Intellectual Property and Digital Rights.
- Localization and Internationalization.
- Competency Definitions.
- User Interfaces.
- Platform and Media.
- Quality.

The LTSO can be used by those unfamiliar with the learning technology standardization process: it includes summarized information describing the main characteristics of outstanding specifications, the most important differences among related specifications, and an access points to the main standardization bodies. Also, it can be used by experts who want to share their knowledge or learn more about a specific subject: detailed information, like versioning tracking data or relationships with other specifications, is also available at the LTSO.

Current contents cover 17 standardization areas – with more than 50 standards, specifications and proposals described – 13 institutions and bodies and more than 80 news and events have been published since June 2003. Also, some of the most relevant experts, in some cases editors of well-known specifications/standards and chairmen of the most important working groups, have subscribed to the LTSO experts’ info system.

6. Acknowledgements

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7. References

