

International Press Telecommunications Council

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International Organization for Standardization (ISO)

President Dr Oliver Smoot

1, rue de Varembe, Case postale 56

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Schweiz

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Dear Dr Smoot,

Concern about policy change regarding ISO Codes

The International Press Telecommunications Council (IPTC) is deeply concerned by the recent positions taken by the ISO with respect to royalties for the use of ISO Standards in software. The IPTC was established in 1965 to safeguard the technical interests in the free exchange of news among of the world's news industry. The IPTC represents the major news agencies, newspaper publishers, news distributors and system vendors for the news industry from around the globe. From this position IPTC expresses its concern over recent considerations at ISO to charge a fee on the implementation and use of ISO Codes, particularly ISO 639, 3166 and 4217, in commercial products. This step would not only be a breach of the recent ISO policy, and by that raising questions on the trustworthiness and reliability of ISO's policies, but as well raising basic questions on the understanding and use of standards.

For many years the IPTC has created and maintained standards for international news exchange. It is the expressed policy of the IPTC to use wherever possible ISO and other publicly available standards within its own guidelines. Therefore, many of them reference ISO Codes, like our Information Interchange Model (IIM, released 1991). The IIM requires the use of ISO Codes for languages in specific fields of its data structure. Later the IPTC built its standards on XML technology and implemented the use of the common "xml:lang" attribute referring RFC 3066 which makes the use of ISO Codes for languages mandatory. Apart from this common element the IPTC defined proprietary elements for defining languages and advised the implementers of its standards to use the ISO language code for this purpose.

The IPTC publishes their standards free of charge as downloadable files. The IPTC also does not request a royalty fee for the USE of its standards, which represent considerable value and intellectual property. These IPTC decisions to use ISO Codes for applying metadata to news were made on the assumption that the USE of these codes is also free of royalty fees. The new commercial policy of ISO would have a severe negative impact on the credibility of industry standards organisations like IPTC since we would provide a standard which implementation implies royalty fees to a third party and would not be "free" in its use anymore, as we advertised our standards for more than two decades.

Apart from being affected by ISO's change of policy as pointed out, the IPTC wants to draw your attention to the damage done to the trust into standardisation as a whole that would result from this step.

This proposed asking implementers to pay fees for the mere use of a standard would obviously split standards into two groups: One for standards on "tangible" products like e.g. screws where one only has to pay for buying this standard's document, and another group for "intellectual" products where one has not only to pay for the standard's document but also for implementing this standard. From your latest move one could derive as next step that e.g. any ISO 900x supporting quality assurance software vendor would be the next group that would be asked to pay fees for implementation. And as ISO starts considering this it could kick-off an avalanche: other standardisation body would say "why not me" and this could end up in a big uncertainty in the industry about the commercial reliability and perspective on standards.

We hope you reconsider your recent step on changing ISO's commercial policy as a step to reassure the trust of not only the news business we represent into international standardisation.

The Management Committee of IPTC
(as Board of Directors)

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Michael Steidl, Managing Director