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Agenda item:	Open standards		
Attachments:	PDF v1.7 Expert Group Report		
To:	Standardisation Board		
From:	Standardisation Forum		
Date:	October 2009	Version	1.0
Subject:	Addition of PDF version 1.7 to 'Comply or Explain' list of open standards.		

Why should we choose PDF 1.7?

PDF is an international ISO standard that enables users to view and exchange documents, independent of the environment the documents were created in and independent of the environment in which the documents are viewed or printed. A clear choice for a document format contributes to successful transfer of information to citizens and businesses as well as between government organisations.

Can we say 'yes' without reservations?

The recommendation submitted is the result of an extensive expert investigation, a public consultation and discussion in the Standardisation Forum. Within the organisations considerable experience has been acquired with the use of versions this standard was built on.

Are there any risks involved in the choice?

The impact of the standard is mainly in the area in document creation. Organisations will have to define specific guidelines and agreements to ensure correct use and implementation of the standard, and correct creation of documents. In this context it is important to define in what situations PDF/A-1, ODF should be used and in when PDF 1.7 should be used.

These risks are thought to be minor compared to the alternative of not opting for the PDF v1.7 standard and leaving a choice of document standards that do not offer interoperability. The risks are limited since changeover is only required the event of new build or system replacement. This will enable gradual migration. This migration is well supported by, for instance, a wide range of software products.

Objective

The Standardisation Board is asked to approve:

1. Inclusion of the PDF v1.7 standard in the 'Comply or Explain' list of open standards.
2. The area of application and the organisational scope defined by the expert group.



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Explanatory notes

Re 1

Since v1.7, PDF has been an international ISO standard (ISO 32000-1:2008) that enables users to view and exchange documents, independent of the environment the documents were created in, and independent of the environment in which the documents are viewed or printed.

Inclusion of PDF v1.7 in the 'Comply or Explain' list of open standards means that all organisations in the (semi-)public sector are expected to implement a 'Comply or Explain' policy for this standard.

An expert group has evaluated the standard based on the defined criteria of openness, potential, workability and impact. For all four criteria the recommendation was positive. A subsequent public consultation has not resulted in any responses that warrant reconsideration of the expert recommendation.

Re 2

The area of application is exchange and publication of documents to which no or only limited revisions can be made,¹ which contain information on origin or feature richness² and for which PDF/A-1 cannot be used as a standard. This demarcation of the area of application closely matches the area of application of PDF/A-1 already included in the list of open standards.

However, a relationship exists with the area of application of ODF, which is also in the list of open standards. In order to clarify the relationship between the three standards, the expert group recommends using the PDF v1.7 standard according to the following decision table:

1. If the document is intended for a reader/co-author who should be able to fully revise the document, use: ODF
2. If the document is intended for a reader who will read the document and only add annotations:
 - the document does not contain feature-rich content ('bells and whistles'): PDF/A-1
 - the document contains feature-rich content: PDF v1.7

The organisational scope is government organisations and institutions in the (semi-)public sector.

¹ Limited revisions refers to changes by means of annotations. These revisions are added to the document as an additional layer instead of changes to the original content.

² 'Feature-rich' components are components, such as videos and music, that cannot be saved in PDF/A.



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Which problem does it address?

The use of PDF provides a uniform format for the transfer of feature-rich documents to which no or only limited revisions can be made. Collaborations between government and citizens/companies in particular will benefit from use of the standard, because citizens and businesses will be using only one document format for all communication from government organisation, which the government is required to be able to open.

The expert group has found that the standard contributes to interoperability between government organisations and to supplier independence.

What are we dealing with?

PDF v1.7 specifies a file format for rendering electronic documents. The point of departure for the standard is that users should have the option to exchange and view documents independently of the environment in which they were created, and the environment in which they are printed or viewed. Each PDF v1.7 document contains a full description of the document and may contain pictures, audio, video, and 2D/3D in addition to text.

Are there any alternatives?

The expert group has found that there are rival standards within the selected area of application, but these alternatives:

- have a far more limited function range and therefore only cover part of the area of application.
- have only marginal market acceptance.
- closely match the area of application of PDF 1.7, but as a result of the chosen area of application of PDF v1.7, have no overlap (ODF and PDF/A-1).

The expert group believes there are no real rival standards for the proposed area of application.

Outline of the expert group and the consultation

The expert group consisted of stakeholder representatives from both the private and public sectors, such as Adobe, Elsevier, the National Library of the Netherlands and a number of archive institutions. Some were also members of the expert group for PDF/A-1. After the report was drawn up, a public consultation was held. In the consultation phase a response was received from a number of parties regarding accessibility and sustainability of documents based on PDF v1.7 and the relationship with ODF and PDF/A-1. These responses have been included in the attachment and do not call for reconsideration of the expert recommendation.

Possible consequences of inclusion in the list of standards

Selecting a single standard makes it easier for citizens and businesses to communicate with government organisations and increases interoperability between government organisations.



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But inclusion of the standard in the list in no way guarantees correct use of the standard. Organisations will have to define specific guidelines and agreements to ensure correct use and implementation of the standard, and correct creation of documents. The Forum will draw up such guidelines in cooperation with the relevant parties.

Since 'Comply or Explain' is valid for new builds and system replacement, a gradual migration path will be used for each organisation involved. Migration to PDF v1.7 can be implemented without difficulty because of the wide variety of software available for performing the migration, also from other file formats.

Communications

The Standardisation Forum and the *Nederland Open in Verbinding* programme agency (The Netherlands Open in Connection) will devote attention to inclusion of the PDF v1.7 in the list of standards.



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Attachment: Responses from public consultation

Basically, there were two types of responses to the public consultation. These are explained below, together with the Forum's answer to the responses.

- **Accessibility/sustainability of PDF v1.7:** One response received stated that inclusion of PDF version 1.7 without guidelines and regulations could be considered a risk in terms of accessibility and sustainability.

Forum: The expert group agrees with this point of view, but the Forum and the expert group believe that, although drawing up strict guidelines and rules for accessibility and durability is an important consideration, it is not a requirement for inclusion of PDF v1.7 in the list of open standards. The Forum will draw up such guidelines in cooperation with the relevant parties.

- **Compatibility with PDF-A/1:** One response stated that PDF 1.7 is not sufficiently compatible with PDF-A/1.

Forum: The expert recommendation subscribes to this point of view by stating that migration from PDF v1.7 to PDF/A-1 is not always possible. In the area of application the expert recommendation therefore proposes "using PDF/A-1, unless...". If a document is feature-rich³, PDF/A-1 offers insufficient support and the choice of PDF v1.7 as an archive format will be required.

³ For instance, PDF documents:
that include video and sound
that contain CAD information in layers and dimension data.
that must allow (limited) revision by means of annotations
that require the option of a digital signature.