

# CONSENSUS

Canada's Newsmagazine of Standardization

## A clearer picture

### U.S. ruling resolves debate over HDTV standards – sort of

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has decided on a standard for digital high-definition television (HDTV) broadcasting. The FCC ruling provides broadcasters, equipment manufacturers and TV viewers with a clearer picture of television's future – and a reminder that standardization can involve political and commercial concerns as well as technical ones.

HDTV offers significantly better color, picture detail and sound than conventional television. Using the FCC-approved system, broadcasters can transmit one HDTV program or several lower-definition

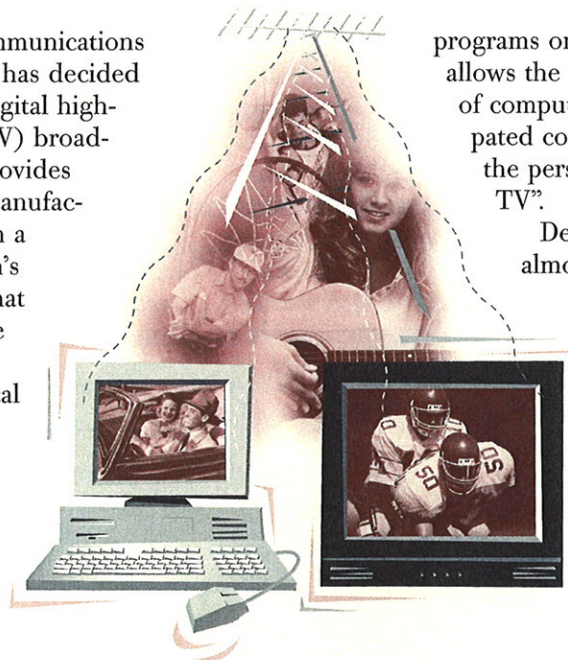
programs on one channel. The standard also allows the transmission of massive amounts of computer data, accelerating the anticipated convergence of the television and the personal computer into the "PC-TV".

Development of the standard took almost ten years. The process started in the 1980s with a Japanese proposal for an analog HDTV system. To prevent Japan from taking the lead in developing and marketing HDTV, the FCC encouraged manufacturers and researchers to develop North American technology that could be adopted as a national and possibly world-wide HDTV standard.

In 1993, several major firms that had been working on separate proposals established the Digital HDTV Grand Alliance. After two years of testing and development, the Advanced Television Systems Committee (ASTC), an industry standards body, presented the Grand Alliance system to the FCC.

The ASTC standard was tentatively approved by the FCC in May 1996. That touched off protests by

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# Standards – are they going to the dogs?

If those dogs are service animals, the answer may be yes.



Joanne Moss (left) and her dog Star visit seniors' home. Service animals are becoming full fledged members of the health care team.

**S**eiko isn't just Susan Hoffman's best friend. The black standard poodle has saved Ms Hoffman's life six times by helping her through her epileptic seizures.

With Seiko around, Ms Hoffman no longer needs to worry so much about being robbed during her seizures (something that has happened twice) or being hit by a car. Likewise, burns, broken bones and dangerous falls are not the constant threat they once were. Seiko watches over his master when she is incapacitated, fetches medical attention when it is needed and can even sense when a seizure is imminent.

Sox isn't the family pet. She is John Hatton's ears. As a hearing ear dog, she listens for sounds like sirens, alarms, ringing phones and doorbells, keeping her master out of harm's way and helping him to function in a sound-dependent world.

Since the first dog-guides came on the scene in Canada in the 1930s, service animals have proven themselves in a diversity of roles – from dogs that teach autistic youngsters to become more open and

communicative, to horses that assist in the physical development of people with cerebral palsy, spina-bifida, multiple sclerosis and muscular dystrophy. There are even monkeys that have been trained to help paraplegics live more independent lifestyles.

## Flesh and bone

If these animals were made of plastic and silicon instead of flesh and bone, they would be carefully regulated and standardized. But unlike their technological cousins – known under the law as electronic assistive devices – service animals receive little attention from the government or voluntary standardization bodies. Some groups concerned with particular types of service animals have developed guidelines for their work, but there are no provisions for independently determining whether a given organization is conforming to these guidelines.

Joanne Moss, an advocate for service animal recipients, believes this must change. She would like to see the loose-knit service animal community become a full fledged member of the health care sector, complete with a national infrastructure of voluntary consensus standards, certification programs for professionals and accreditation programs for training facilities.

For help in this project, she has approached the National Standards System of Canada, which includes more than 250 organizations accredited by the Standards Council of Canada to develop consensus standards and operate programs for determining conformity to those standards.

"Consensus standards make a lot of sense," says Ms Moss. "I've looked at the National Standards System and what it's accomplished to date, and the proof is there. They've brought so many groups together to make progress that otherwise might have taken 30 years. Just the exchange of information that can take place in the standards process could revolutionize this field."

## Rallying the troops

The first step is to rally the troops – service animal practitioners who value their independence and their own tried and tested methods. Ms Moss hopes that these stakeholders will recognize the benefits of voluntary consensus standards. These benefits include public education, heightened recognition of the field among health care profes-

sionals and governments, widespread credibility and acceptance and, perhaps most importantly, a forum for the community to collaborate and move forward. She emphasizes that a standards infrastructure will not replace existing practices and guidelines, but will build on them.

The focal point for the development of the standards infrastructure will be the Canadian Alliance for Animal Assisted Remedial Technologies. Though it has yet to be incorporated, the association will, for the first time anywhere in the world, give the entire service animal community a national address, identity and voice.

In addition to attracting service animal recipients, trainers and therapy associations to the Alliance, Ms Moss would like to invite participation from a broad range of related groups, including health care professionals, veterinarians and the consumer services industries. Such a broad-based effort is necessary to address the diverse issues in the field, she says.

For example, many people still have trouble gaining admittance to restaurants and buses when accompanied by a dog-guide. Part of the problem lies in the fact that there is no commonly agreed-upon format for identification cards, and in some cases, no cards at all, says Ms Moss. A national standards infrastructure could bring some much-needed consistency to the situation. But ultimately, success depends on educating transit authorities and the hospitality industry, and addressing any concerns those groups might have.

Voluntary consensus standards would not only help established dog-guide teams, but would also provide peace of mind to individuals considering taking the plunge and committing to a service animal. While most of the trainers and breeders working in the field are reputable, says Ms Moss, she knows of people who have spent thousands of dollars only to end up with very expensive pets. Voluntary standardization will not only reduce the likelihood of this happening, but will provide recourse for the customer when a disagreement occurs. The animals, too, will benefit through the inclusion of humane training, care and handling provisions.

## Opening doors

Perhaps most importantly, the consensus process will make service animal recipients active participants in the evolution of the field. "People don't

like to be told what's best for them. They prefer to be part of the decision-making process. This program will give them the opportunity to mould the program to fit their needs and enable them to share their ideas in a non-threatening way," says Ms Moss.

Emerging information technology tools promise to make the standards process more accessible to service animal recipients than ever before. These tools include the Standards Information Service of Canada, which will enable individuals to take part in standards development over the Internet, and software to assist people who have trouble using keyboards.

Ms Moss has already discussed her plans with the Standards Council of Canada and two accredited standards development organizations – the Canadian Standards Association and the Canadian General Standards Board. All three organizations have expressed interest in her initiative.

And Canadian standards may be only part of the solution. There are service animals around the world, and people increasingly travel with them. Ms Moss believes the ultimate answer will be international standards developed by the International Organization for Standardization.

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Photo: KIN Magazine

standards developed by the International Organization for Standardization.

**Susan Hoffman and Seiko: robberies, burns and broken bones are a thing of the past.**