Author

Mike Gilmore

Senior Partner of The Cabling Partnership (www.it-cabling.com)
Managing Director of e-Ready Building Limited
P.O. Box MT65, Leeds, United Kingdom. LS17 8YD.
e-mail: mike.gilmore@e-readybuilding.com
Telephone: +44 (0) 113 232 3721

See last page for biographical details

A MEXICAN STAND-OFF … IN MEXICO

by
Mike Gilmore, FIA Technical Director
for Networking+ (April 2009)

International standardisation is admittedly a very distant land for most people - who are, instead, busy trying to keep their heads above water in the current economic climate. However, the last week of March heralded a meeting of the international body responsible for the standardisation of both copper and optical fibre cabling within premises - currently working on Category 6_A and 7_A specifications for balanced cabling components. One might think that in a recession, the speedy development of standards for new products would be high on everyone's agenda - enabling marketing strategies to be developed to remove from customers wallets whatever money is available for the latest technology.

Strangely, little progress was made - virtually all draft standards being stalled and being re-circulated for one more voting round. Although there were good reasons for rejecting certain proposals, there is an overwhelming feeling that the primary objective was for the supporters of Category 6_A to find fault with Category 7_A proposals and vice-versa. A stand-off resulted - very appropriate, as the meeting took place in Mexico. So the travelling circus of international standardisation moves to Beijing in September - lets hope that there will be less stonewalling next to the greatest wall of all.

On the bright side, we already published "end-to-end" channel specifications for Class E_A and Class F_A cabling (ISO/IEC 11801 Ed.2 Amendment 1). So what was all the argument about in Mexico? The answer is, as usual, the components used to create those channels. Some might argue that the longer it takes the agree the component specifications, the greater the commercial advantage that accrues for those cabling system suppliers offering a "channel approach" - restricting the opportunities for those who sell cables or connectors. Other more Machiavellian observers suggest that further delay allows those cabling system suppliers to fix hidden problems in their components - while blaming any delays on the competing solution.

Whatever the reason, little progress was made and the technical justification for the delay is thin to say the least. In the meantime, the Augmented Category 6 specifications are published by the TIA in North America, and while being less technically demanding that those of Class E_A/Category 6_A, they do have channel, link and component specifications.

So did any good news come out of Mexico?

There was progress on a number of peripheral issues. An agreement was reached on the meaning of the designations OM and OS for optical fibre cabling. Most people had always understood that the OM1, OM2, OM3, OS1 and OS2 designations, first initiated in 2002, did apply to the cabled optical fibre. However, some influential organisations had begun to believe them to be related to the optical fibres themselves. This is exemplified in the US TIA where their outside plant cable uses "OS2 optical fibre" cabled to a slightly different specification than the OS2 cabled optical fibre specification. This sort of confusion is undesirable. It was agreed, firstly, that the term Category would be applied to the designation and, secondly, that the Category applied to "cabled optical fibre".

This decision brings optical fibre cabling into line with the Category designation applied to copper cables. Equally importantly, it was agreed to ensure that everyone would be made aware of these decisions. Although equivalent European standards (EN 50173) series had already adopted the term Category, even their standards will be subject to minor editorial changes over the next few months.

The FIA had been at the forefront in resolving this confusion and will be issuing a series of White Papers and amendments to their Technical Support Documents over the coming months. If you would like to join the FIA in order to do so, e-mail jane@fiasec.demon.co.uk or, alternatively, you can contact the FIA Secretariat in 01763 273039.

Biography

As the Technical and Standards Director of the UK Fibreoptic Industry Association, Mike is heavily involved in the development of training and competence standards for the fibre installation industry and sets down policy in this area. In addition he chairs the audit and arbitration committees for the FIA. His book "Fibre optic cabling; theory design and installation practice" published in 1991 remains a reference for both experts and entrants into this field.

Mike also initiated the establishment of the Telecommunications Infrastructure Advisory Board (TIA-B) along with the relevant directors of its other host organisations CMA and ECA-ITEC.

In the UK, Mike is Chairman of TCT/7, the BSI Technical Committee responsible for the three panels on telecommunication cabling. He also chairs two of these panels (TCT7/-/1 and TCT7/-/3) and is Secretary of TCT7/-/2. TCT7/-/1 and TCT7/-/2 act to assist development of European and international standards for the design and installation of telecommunications cabling respectively. TCT7/-/2 also manages the implementation of these standards in the UK, where necessary producing supporting national standards.

Mike is involved in CENELEC TC215 - as Convenor of Working Group 1 and Secretary of Working Group 2. These committees are responsible for the development of an integrated series of standards for the design and installation of telecommunications cabling in a range of premises. In 2008 he led the ETSI STF362 on energy efficiency in broadband deployment resulting in the ETSI TS 105174 series documents, allowing Mike to assist in a new TC215 activity covering data centre facilities and infrastructures (monitored in the UK by BSI TCT7/-/3).

At international level, Mike is Convenor of the Cabling Implementation Task Group (CITG) within ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3. This group is responsible for the strategic management of the international standards covering the specification, QA, installation, administration, operation, maintenance and repair of generic cabling. This work supports all the cabling design standards produced by ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 including ISO/IEC 11801, ISO/IEC 15018, ISO/IEC 24764 and ISO/IEC 24702 for industrial premises produced by ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 IPTG (also convened by Mike Gilmore).

Mike is a regular speaker at seminars and conferences in all five continents. He has provided the keynote address and opening presentation in many conferences in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. His seminars, providing regular updates on the progression of cabling standards are particularly well attended and are operating in the UK and continental Europe.