

Missing the Mark on Standards Could Mean Missing the Market

For some time now we have been writing about the progress being made in writing international standards related to optics and optical instruments. The standards that have been written to date deal with definitions, methods of describing optical elements in drawings, and procedures for doing tests. These initial standards serve as the foundation for standards yet to come, but do not have an immediate impact on the way business is done in the optics community.

This will soon change. Now that the foundation has been laid, the subcommittees within ISO/TC172 are beginning to write performance standards, standards that deal with how well optical instruments and components must fulfill their function. The subcommittee that is farthest along writing performance standards is SC9 - Lasers and Electro-optical Systems. In this group, they have prepared drafts concerning the quality of components used in laser systems. The drafts

include such performance items as figure quality, beauty specs, and laser damage threshold.

The delegates in SC23/WG2 - Coatings are also working on performance specifications for optical thin film coatings in the area of durability as a function of the type of use the coated surface may see. Coatings on elements buried inside an instrument intended for laboratory use need not be as durable as coatings on the objective of a tank sight, for example.

Performance specifications for optics will have great benefits for the consumers of optics. Think how comforting it will be to go into a store and see binoculars or telescopes with a tag that says "Meets quality level A per ISO XYZ". This will mean that the product has been certified to meet the quality criteria laid out in ISO XYZ and that the price asked includes assurances of this level of quality.

But these performance standards can also have a downside for manufacturers of such products. Manufacturers that are not aware of the standardization efforts going on in their product areas and who are not contributing to the writing of the standards may be excluded from appropriate quality levels for minor reasons or may be required to redesign products to meet the performance requirements in relevant standards. While this may not have an immediate effect on their business, these voluntarily written international standards will more than likely be adopted as regulatory standards by various nations around the world.

Once the ISO standards get written into national law, they will have a tremendous effect on foreign trade. Markets will be extremely limited for those manufacturers whose products do not meet the ISO performance standards.

—Robert E. Parks

Capital Eye

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already lengthy patent process. "There is no end to the checks and security measures we could implement," he acknowledges. "But we don't want to check any more than we have to."

But at least one senior examiner doubts that the new procedures to combat future forging will be enforced: "There are so many people authorized to issue patents, it will be an extra hassle."

The lesson for future dealings with the PTO according to Weidenfeld: Take patents with a grain of salt because they can become invalid for a variety of reasons. His advice to would-be filers is to always proceed with caution and retain an attorney to guide you through the process. "Remember there are no guarantees with patents. It's risky business," he says.

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TENTH TOPICAL MEETING ON
**GRADIENT-INDEX
OPTICAL SYSTEMS**

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S C O P E

The conference is devoted, in particular, to the dissemination of new scientific and technical information on the design and applications of gradient-index optical materials, active and passive GRIN and micro-optic devices, nonlinear GRIN optics, components, and systems using these components. The reported work will encompass fundamental research, advances for both current and future applications, and novel materials for linear and nonlinear GRIN optics.

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