

QA

[QUESTION & ANSWER]



Sue Boettcher
Senior Technical Projects
Specialist and the primary voting
representative to NISO

CYNTHIA HODGSON

Member Spotlight on 3M: Ensuring Customer Confidence

3M is a long-time NISO voting member and active participant in standards development. For this issue's member spotlight, ISQ Managing Editor, Cynthia Hodgson, spoke with Sue Boettcher, Senior Technical Projects Specialist and the primary voting representative to NISO, Paul Sevcik, Senior Product Development Specialist and a member of NISO's RFID Working Group, and Joan Olseen, Marketing Communications Manager.



Paul Sevcik
Senior Product Development
Specialist and a member of
NISO's RFID Working Group

Q 3M is well-known for its consumer products such as Post-it® notes and for the materials technology in use in many manufacturing and industry applications. What kinds of products do you have in the library market?

Sue: 3M has been making library products for almost 40 years. World-wide we offer such products as the SelfCheck™ System for self-service circulation, Tattle-Tape™ Security Strips, Detection systems, the handheld Digital Library Assistant, and item returns and sorters for physical materials handling. In addition to our RFID tags, the RFID technology is built into our self-service and security solutions.

Q How have you incorporated standards into your library products?

Paul: At 3M, standards are pervasive in everything we do. The factory where our products are made is ISO 9000 certified. [ISO 9000 is part of a family of international Quality Management standards.] We use test standards extensively to ensure safety and product quality. For example, we test our RFID products as a system for electromagnetic compatibility to prevent interference and to meet FCC regulations. We even have a special department at 3M to guide developers through their testing of products. We know both durability and longevity are important for RFID tags in a library environment and we do accelerated aging tests in our specialized laboratory so our customers can have confidence that our tags will be reliable and will last as long as the items to which they are attached.

Sue: We also use standards in our software development, from ANSI standards for coding, to ISO standards on currencies and date formatting, to IEEE standards for the software development process.

Joan: There are a lot of standards which customers take for granted. They assume products won't give them electric shocks, start fires, or interfere with other electronic devices. 3M spends a lot of money and effort to ensure the customer can take these things for granted. Our customers' health and safety are a number one concern.



Joan Olseen
Marketing Communications
Manager

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Q What benefits have you found from incorporating standards into your products?

Paul: At the product development stage, standardized processes allow greater efficiency in designing the products, and they enable new people to get up to speed quickly. In product testing, the processes ensure the product is complete and works as expected, which results in happy customers. We like happy customers.

Sue: Standards do not equate to commoditization, as many people think. They actually provide us with flexibility, interoperability, and the ability to differentiate ourselves and to be competitive.

Paul: That’s right. Standards help grow the market and provide competitive opportunities because they give the customer greater vendor independence in the selection of compliant products. The customer is the real beneficiary of standards. They can be confident their investments will have lasting value and work with other products—not only those products they have now but also those they might buy in the future.

Joan: The company has high standards for the 3M brand. We are responsible to make products that live up to the brand reputation and have longevity. Standards help ensure that. 3M plans to be around for the long haul. We participate in a lot of standards development and we do a lot of R&D to continue to make products that the library community needs.

Sue: And where no standards exist, we will sometimes develop our own and share them with the industry, like we did with SIP.

Q SIP is the Standard Interface Protocol that is supported by many vendors for library circulation. How did that come about?

Sue: It was developed originally to support the 3M SelfCheck System, which allows library users to check their materials in and out themselves. We were using screen scraping for the interface between library systems and the SelfCheck System. Every time we implemented the SelfCheck System with a different library system, we had to create a new customized interface. So we developed SIP to be a common protocol, published it as a public, open standard, and encouraged library automation vendors to use it, to promote interoperability.

Customers of our self-service products would often require their ILS vendor to support SIP and it quickly became a defacto standard. It’s still in use today, even though the NISO NCIP standard has been released. Not many have migrated to NCIP yet for the self-service functions.

Q Let’s talk about NCIP, the NISO Circulation Interchange Protocol (Z39.83). 3M was a major participant in the NCIP standard development. Why do that when you already had the SIP standard?

Sue: We were involved in the NCIP development right from the beginning. We saw the opportunity to take our defacto standard, SIP, and build on it with the NISO community to create a consensus standard that was broader in scope than SIP. 3M currently supports both SIP and NCIP in its products; we’ve had NCIP 1.0 implemented for over two years.



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Version 2 of NCIP, which was published in 2008, incorporates more capability for the self-service areas where vendors are still using SIP. We plan to support the new version of NCIP and we continue to participate on the NCIP Implementers Group. The Group is actively promoting the adoption of NCIP 2.0 by library equipment and ILS vendors.

Q What other standards development has 3M been involved in?

Sue: Outside the library industry, 3M is heavily involved in standards development in every area we have products, from consumer to aerospace. We also work with various industries to promote standards. We like to work through organizations like NISO so we can collaborate with others.

Paul: In addition to the NCIP standard, we also participated in NISO's RFID Working Group and on the ISO working group developing the International Standard for RFID in libraries. RFID tags have been a problem area for a while. Even though the tag itself was standardized, those standards didn't cover the data that was stored on the tag. Several national standards or data models had been developed, as well as the NISO RFID Recommended Practice for U.S. libraries. The new ISO level standard will, hopefully, supersede those and become the umbrella standard that closes the gap. Once vendors, such as ourselves, implement this standard, libraries will have assurance that their systems will be able to read tags from partner libraries when they inter-borrow, and also that their investments will be secure over time despite equipment and vendor changes.

Q Is there anything else you would like ISQ readers to know about 3M?

Joan: Although some standards have to be followed to meet legal requirements, much of our use of standards is voluntary. Using them is just built into our corporate culture. 3M is also committed to actively contributing to sustainable development.

Paul: Our commitment to the environment isn't new; we've been working to reduce the environmental impact of our products and processes since the late 1960s. We go beyond making our own manufacturing processes "green." We use a lifecycle management process to consider what happens when a product is disposed of so we can make sure our products are friendly to the environment even when they are no longer in use. There are directives in Europe like WEEE, which make manufacturers responsible for aspects of disposal, and RoHS that led to the reduction or elimination of hazardous substances in products, such as the lead in solder on circuit boards. Although some countries have requirements like those, most of our environmental and sustainability compliance is voluntary.

Sue: As Joan said earlier, 3M is in it for the long haul and with our sustainability strategies everyone can be confident that we're looking after future generations too. |QA|

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CYNTHIA HODGSON <chodgson@niso.org> is the Managing Editor of ISQ and a technical editor and consultant to NISO.

3M

www.3M.com

3M Library Systems

www.3M.com/library

SIP

www.3M.com/sip

NCIP Implementers Group

www.ncip.info

NISO RFID Recommended Practice

www.niso.org/publications/rp/RP-6-2008.pdf



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