

Reversing Loss, Microsoft Wins Open-Format Designation

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Microsoft has won an international standards designation for its open-document format, according to voting results obtained Tuesday, apparently ending a divisive yearlong battle with software rivals before a global standards-setting organization.

Microsoft's Office Open XML, a format for interchangeable Web documents, was approved by 24 of 32 countries in a core group in a ballot by the International Organization for Standardization. Approval by the standards-setting body, a nongovernmental network of 157 countries based in Geneva, is considered almost certain to influence software spending by governments and large companies.

The tally reversed a loss by Microsoft in first-round voting before an 87-nation panel in September, a process that involved blunt lobbying by both sides toward members of national standards committees — typically made up of technicians, engineers and bureaucrats.

In the final round of voting, which ended Saturday, three-quarters of the core group members — including Britain, Japan, Germany and Switzerland — supported Microsoft's standard, according to the results document. Of the 87 votes, 10 opposed the standard: Brazil, Canada, China, Cuba, Ecuador, India, Iran, New Zealand, South Africa and Venezuela.

Under organization rules, at least 66 percent of core group members must accept a standard for it to be approved, and no more than 25 percent of all voting nations can be opposed.

Roger Frost, a spokesman in Geneva for the standardization group, would not confirm that Microsoft's format had been designated, saying the organization would disclose the vote Wednesday after informing its members. The International Herald Tribune obtained the results from one of the delegations contacted by the standardization group.

Microsoft's request for rapid approval of its standard in early 2007 produced an intense lobbying campaign by I.B.M. and Sun Microsystems, which had helped develop a rival interchangeable document format called Open Document Format.

This rival was the first interchangeable document format to receive approval by the standardization group in 2006, and its backers used that in selling the technology to governments and large companies. The format is now being considered for use by 70 nations.

Microsoft's push for speedy approval led to objections from many members of the standards group. They felt pressure from the company, whose Office application suite is the standard on more than 90 percent of computers and archives worldwide, according to International Data in Framingham, Mass.

There were tart remarks even from countries that abstained from the vote, like the Netherlands. "This is like someone with six shopping carts of food trying to go through the express lane at a supermarket," said Michiel Leenaars, a member of the Dutch delegation. "The end result of this will be confusion. The standard is simply too big. There are still a lot of questions out there."

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