



TIA Interview: "Smart Standards"

Interview of **CHERYL BLUM**,
Vice President, Technology and Standards,
Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA)

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ANNOUNCEMENT: You're listening to wsRadio.com, the worldwide leader in Internet talk. Welcome back to the Peggy Smedley Show, the voice of M2M and connected devices.

SMEDLEY: Regardless of where a company falls in the value chain, there are certain standards that have -- always have to adhere to M2M. You know, it's development of these standards that enables us to achieve interoperability between the devices and where they are in and all about the M2M space.

And, you know, there are certain associations in the space and the telecommunications industry overall, and, you know, we've been talking about it in the space for a very long time that the M2M industry has not really been great at developing standards.

And it's been interesting because one of the things is we've been driving and trying to drive that forward, and it's interesting now because the Telecommunications Industry Association is really trying to step forward to do that. And one of the persons with me on the show today is Cheryl Blum, who is the Vice President for the Technology and Standards, Telecommunications Industry Association.

Hey, Cheryl, welcome to the show.

BLUM: Peggy, thank you so much, and thank you for inviting me to speak today on your show.

SMEDLEY: Well, you know, Cheryl, we've spent some time together, and, you know, TIA is trying to step up right now, and it's interesting to hear what you guys are trying to do because you guys are involved now with what's known as the TR-50, and we're going to get into that in a minute or two.

But, even before we get into that, for some of our listeners who might not know what the TIA is, could you kind of help us understand what is the TIA?

BLUM: I sure can, and thank you so much, Peggy. TIA, as Peggy said, one of our areas of work and experience is with standards. TIA is accredited by the American National Standards Institute, and we develop standards, and they are voluntary standards.

We have been around, TIA, since our inception in about 1924, and we cover many areas of standards development. We work on private radio standards, antenna towers, satellite, user premise equipment, cabling and wiring. Certainly, mobile communications is a huge area, mobile TV, telematics, health care, and, as you mentioned, Peggy, most recently smart device communications.

We have members, too, from many, many areas, from our equipment manufacturers, service providers, end users. They all serve on our formulating groups which develop the standard.

SMEDLEY: Well, let's talk about that, the smart device communication, because that's where you guys have come out and developed what you call the "TR-50," and that's really most interesting to us because, of course, that's what we do in the M2M space and the connected devices. Let's really talk about what that smart device communication and what that's going to matter to really driving forward what we're really trying to do and what we're all about here talking about M2M. Let's talk a little bit about that.

BLUM: Great. Thanks, Peggy.

TR-50, as Peggy mentioned, was started and conceived and created in December of this year, and we saw the need for smart device communications and the need in terms of looking at it in a broader, more general sense across the board.

Certainly, we know there's many industries on verticals, as we call them, smart grids, smart homes, health care, intelligent transportation, industrial automation, retail, banking. It goes on and on, and each of them certainly has their way of communication information from their smart devices to a network, to the cloud, to applications that will use those.

We wanted to look at it in a more general manner and say how can we provide a service to the industry and look horizontally across all these verticals and provide standards that would allow us to have communications across all these various devices to different applications and networks without specializing each of the interfaces from a device to whatever its end point

might be. So we were looking at it again in a general manner, providing a standard and interface that would allow some bidirectional communication across these devices and various types of networks.

And we're looking at all different areas when we're doing that. We're looking at different architectures. We're looking at the security. Of course, we know that's a huge overriding issue in all of this. We're looking at how do we manage the network operations, how do we ensure very good performance when we think about the amount of information coming from these smart devices. As we've talked, any home could have anywhere from 10 to 20 to whatever, 30, of these different devices if one can conceive of a number of homes, say just in that space, and the communications, how do we manage the performance, how do we scale our equipment and networks. So we're looking at it from a multitude of areas.

SMEDLEY: And one of the things, Cheryl, that's interesting about being able to look at that is the diversity of your membership. It was interesting because I was actually in when you guys actually had a voting membership of who was going to be your president and your vice president. It was interesting because -- I was there, I was at your meeting that day, and you guys had closed doors, and you were having your voting. And it wasn't like, hey, somebody wants to volunteer, be a member, and, you know, here's your president and here's your vice president; everyone says, hey, okay, you know, you take the job, I don't want the job. It wasn't like that. You guys had a re-count, and, you know, it really truly was, you know, kind of a vote, and everyone's counting. It was an interesting day that day.

So tell us, you know, who's actually a part of that committee and how it works because you really had an interesting -- it wasn't just "Hey, Joe, you take the job." You know, there were people who were dedicating their time and commitment to make this smart device communication committee really work.

BLUM: And you're right, Peggy, too, there. It is a big commitment. As we know today in these times and resources, for companies to, in a sense, volunteer their best and their brightest to the work of the committees is very much appreciated, but we do. We have quite a diverse membership. We have a membership from small companies, large companies. Again, as I mentioned, they come from the manufacturer community, from the consumer community, from infrastructure providers, device providers. They come from all over the world, not just from North America, but we have participants from Europe and India and Japan.

And, as you noticed, as you mentioned, when you attended one of our meetings, that, again, they were from all over the world participating.

And, also, as you mentioned, we did have an election process. Our standards formulating groups are open groups. They run on a consensus basis, and we hold an election for our leadership of the group. We were extremely fortunate to have a Dr. Jeffrey Smith of Numerex Corporation elected as our chair, as you said, through quite an election process, and, also, Mr. Jim Wert of ILS Technology was elected as our vice chair. And both of those companies, as you

mentioned, are very much in the smart and connected device space.

SMEDLEY: So, when you look at a committee, you know, how many members are normally in attendance to a TR-50 Committee meeting? You know, do you have 10 people show up? Because, when I was at that meeting, you not only had a good group of people at the meeting, you had people calling in. They call in, drop off. You know, they're doing some things. So how many people are actually sitting and actively participating in a given meeting?

BLUM: And that's a good point. Just as you said, people can call in or as well as physically be there in person. So it can vary with number of attendees in a room, anywhere, say, from 25 or so with another 10, 15 calling in. And, as you mentioned, some of our meetings have had over 50 participants. Others, we have about 25, 30, 35. So the number varies for any one of the meetings, but we do have quite a bit of attendance at our meetings and a good representation from many companies.

SMEDLEY: So what do you say is the biggest challenge now that TIA really faces moving forward as a standards body? What's your biggest challenge that you're going to face?

BLUM: Thinking about that, I actually see a couple of areas. One, as we mentioned, one of the areas of focus that we are taking up is in the area of security. I think it's overarching across a lot of this work with smart device communications, as we know, to keep the information secure and also to ensure that the information is delivered to the appropriate user of that information, the recipient of that information.

And, along the lines of security, we had our April meeting. We were fortunate to have it in Atlanta, and we had several researchers from Georgia Institute of Technology who were working quite a bit in the area of security.

In addition to industry, we also wanted to reach out to academia and, again, particularly in this area look at some of the research and how might we be able to factor some of that into the practical use for smart device communications. So I think that is definitely one of the areas of focus that we will be having going forward here is in security, and, again, providing security, I believe is a challenge.

Another area, I think, of challenge is the fact that, as we know, there are so many participants, as you mentioned, Peggy, so many organizations, associations, and people involved in the development of standards or addressing various aspects and issues of smart device communications. Well, how do we coordinate all of that? We certainly want to avoid overlap. We don't want to end up -- reinvent the wheel. What we'd like to do is have TIA lead a lot of engineering areas where we can show our global leadership and expertise, but we don't want to overlap. So we want to fill a gap in the existing landscape here in standards.

So I think cooperating, collaboration, harmonizing is going to be a key aspect, too, because we don't want multiple standards or divergent standards or add any confusion to the

industry as to which standard to move forward with. So I think that's going to be a challenge for us going forward.

SMEDLEY: Well, Cheryl, you know, as always, you know, it's amazing time runs very quickly here, and we're out of time for this segment, but, like anything, as an association, you still have to drive membership, and you have to get more members to join the association. With that in mind, I'd love for you to tell our listeners, if there's anyone out there that wants to learn more about TIA, what is TIA's URL, so they can go and find out more information?

Certainly, you are going to be at our conference in June. They can certainly come by the TIA booth and learn more about TIA, but could you give us your URL where they can get more information on TIA?

BLUM: I sure can. They can -- the URL is www.tiaonline.org.

And, as you said as well, Peggy, that we're just so excited at TIA to be having a booth, being part of the connected world, and being part of your sessions. I know I mentioned our chair, Dr. Jeffrey Smith. He'll be one of your keynote speakers in your standards event, and we really appreciate that as well.

So, again, we can either -- you know, you can find more information about membership and a lot of information about TIA in general and some of the other areas we're involved at www.TIAonline.org.

SMEDLEY: Thanks, Cheryl. It was good having you on the show.

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