

## Leadership Interview

### Fred Harrison, Chairman of the Board of the Open Mobile Alliance



*“The basic premise of standardisation is that if we all work together we can create a bigger market and everyone can have a larger share. If we fail to agree in areas like interoperability then perhaps the whole market may be smaller than we hope, or may not evolve at all.”*

**Fred Harrison is the new Chairman of the Board of the Open Mobile Alliance. He is also Head of Standards and Technical Policy at Telefónica Europe where he directs and coordinates Telefónica’s activities in standardisation bodies. He succeeds Jari Alvinen of Nokia, who chaired the OMA since its formation.**

**Interview by Abraham Joseph of Device Management Forum**

#### **What is the mission of the OMA?**

The mission of the Open Mobile Alliance is the global adoption of mobile data services. In order to achieve this we create common specifications that the entire industry can use. We also facilitate testing to ensure the interoperability of devices, networks and services. Interoperability means that if you are a customer you can access services regardless of the device you have or the network you are using. In order to get this interoperability, we need technical standards and specifications so that different components of the service can work together. These specifications are what the Open Mobile Alliance is delivering.

#### **What changes if any are you likely to make to the direction of the OMA?**

Perhaps before I answer this it is appropriate to give some background about the Open Mobile Alliance. The OMA was started six years ago, and is now a very large and successful organisation. We have around 380 members consisting of a broad range of companies including network operators, device manufacturers, IT companies, and content companies. We have already delivered a large number of specifications and are currently running at a very high work rate. At present we have about 100 or so different projects and work items within the work programme. We’ve produced around 40 different specification releases since we started six years ago. Based on this record I would say that the OMA has been very successful so far in achieving its vision. However we do need to evolve with the changes in the industry. One of the big issues is that the lines between the Internet, mobile networks, fixed networks and broadcast networks are blurring. From a user's point of view the service needs to be seamless across the different domains. So the OMA is aiming to broaden its membership and adapt its scope of work in order to ensure that it continues to deliver relevant specifications as the market evolves.

**In that case, this must either put you in conflict (or possibly create the need to collaborate) with other organisations that are looking at some of these areas.**

Yes, there are a variety of different organisations looking at different aspects of standardisation. In some respects the ecosystem for this type of work is very fragmented. When the OMA was started, one objective was to reduce fragmentation and in fact we have been able to affiliate with a number of organisations and bring them together. We have also spent a lot of time building relationships with some of the relevant bodies. We have about 40 cooperation agreements with different bodies such as the W3C, the IETF and the Third Generation Partnership Project (3GPP). This is how we've tried to adapt to the convergence, and to work collectively rather than in conflict. We offer a place where organisations can come and affiliate if they wish, work together on new programmes and build strong relationships with other key industry bodies.

*OMA has to live in the real world and recognise that the deployment of technology is not under its control but driven by individual market*

**Does it matter whether the OMA is led by a vendor or an operator?**

Clearly, an operator and a vendor have different business perspectives and different requirements to be met. However, at the end of the day, the overall standardisation goals are the same – to support the development of markets and the adoption of services. Of course the leadership of the organisation is important, but the OMA process is an open one and the procedures and organisation we have in place allow for all parties to have a say and to have influence.

**You mention keeping up with the market. Can the standards process really keep up with the market?**

This is a continuing challenge. One of the strategic topics we are working on within OMA is our time to market. We recognise that some of the work we have undertaken has taken longer than we would have liked and perhaps we may have missed some opportunities. However we have made significant changes in the way the process is being managed, and the work schedule is now being monitored more carefully. We have taken some steps to reduce time to market. But I would agree that this is still a challenge as the market seems to be changing ever more quickly.

**So how does the OMA do this? Does it operate a market radar which enables it to forecast the market in order to ensure that it delivers the right standards?**

It's difficult to develop an overview of everything that is going on, so the way we do this is by encouraging our members to bring in requirements based on market needs. We have an open process which allows for new ideas to be offered by one or several members. This supports future developments that might be needed. These will be discussed informally before we start the detailed specification development work. So we do have some early-stage activities that help us to identify standards that might be needed as early as possible. Also, our members have their own internal activities looking across the market. We have access to their market insight through the requirements they bring into the OMA.

*We need to ensure that for the new developments that are important to the market, OMA is able to deliver the right specifications at the right time.*

**This all sounds very altruistic and well-behaved. Do vendors not play games with the standards process?**

Beneath the standardisation process there is always a degree of commercial tension. Different players have different business models and want different outcomes. Also, we have direct competitors working in the same groups and perhaps having different views about how they would take advantage of technology. So there is always an undercurrent of commercial conflict.

Of course the purpose of standardisation is to find a common ground where working together will provide a larger benefit than working independently. But I have to say, yes, as with all standardisation bodies there is quite a bit of debating and challenging among the various participants before the right solution is developed. The basic premise of standardisation is that if we all work together we can create a bigger market and everyone can have a larger share. If we fight in areas like interoperability then perhaps the whole market may be smaller than we hope, or may not evolve at all.

**What sorts of activities are having the greatest impact on where standardisation needs to go?**

There is a broad range of hot topics in OMA at the moment. Thinking of them in different groups for example, in person-to-person communication, there is still quite a lot of interest in messaging. Customers have a variety of messaging technologies and services at the moment, like email, SMS, MMS, and instant messaging. There is quite a lot of activity to create a way in which we can bring all of this together into a more coherent package. One idea that seems to be particularly interesting is that of the common address book: a single address book to be used across a set of messaging applications.

In the area of content the OMA has completed an important specification recently for broadcast applications which has created a very strong interest. It has features such as an electronic program guide and we're hoping that this technology can be used not just for mobile TV but also for IPTV and other types of broadcast across a number of delivery mechanisms. There is also significant effort now on mobile advertising, to define some basic standards that might support deployment of advertising on mobile phones.

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The third main area, which we can call common specifications, includes areas such as device management. There is a strong level of interest in device management currently. Now we have the possibility that a large number of device capabilities can be managed through the operator, through a service provider, or by the device manufacturer in order to assist users and to provide support and customer care.

Of course this is only a selection of highlights. As I mentioned, there are over 100 work items are currently in progress.

**Everyone seems to be excited about mobile advertising, but what about the potential for the technology to create tension between the content owners and those in the service loop?**

I should start by saying that OMA is only working on the technical specifications. What you are referring to has more to do with commercial relationships. Clearly advertisers and content owners already have mechanisms such as those used on the internet, for broadcast and with other types of media. They would like to extend this to mobile. Then there is the operator community that has information about its customers. This is very valuable to the advertising community. What OMA is trying to do here is to define standards and metrics to help the operators and the advertising industry work together. This illustrates how standards can help to create a new market.

**Will the OMA's role remain technical or will the organisation need to get more involved in some of these commercial matters, for example to help protect end users?**

The OMA is a technical group so we don't address commercial matters or regulatory issues. But I will say that there are some technical capabilities that can help with such aspects. For example OMA has work related to dealing with spam, viruses or controlling access to content for minors. Of course the issue of privacy is very important, particularly when it comes to dealing with customer data, and the OMA is working on security and related technical aspects.

**How do these requirements get fed into OMA? Are they coming from service providers or vendors?**

I'd say both. Generally speaking, service providers are very well aware of the issues around privacy and content control. Indeed, the GSM Association has worked with operators to develop codes of practice in this area and the OMA maintains a cooperative relationship with this group. Also device

vendors and IT companies have a view on what the requirements should be, for example how the user interface might work when presenting users with choices and options.

**What are the priorities for the OMA over the next 2 to 3 years?**

The priority is making sure that we are aligned with market needs and the expectations of our members and the industry. We need to ensure that the deliverables the OMA is creating, both the specifications and the interoperability programs, are really relevant to the market, which is moving very fast. One of the key tasks I have as Chairman of the Board is to ensure that our processes and organisation is able to respond to the market. Also we are looking to widen our membership. Increasingly, there is a need to reach out to new members who may be working in specific fields that might be important to the OMA. One example of this is that a little while ago we made some changes to our mission to make it clear that the OMA will be providing specifications for the fixed world as well as mobile. We need to continue to embrace broader engagement to ensure that we remain relevant to the developing markets whether they involve different types of access, devices, services or content.

**Are we likely to see more work on requirements capture within the OMA going forward?**

Yes. Let me just explain the process. We have four main phases for the work within the OMA. The first is requirements capture and starts with very early activities that try to understand whether there is a need for new work. This leads into a more formal requirements phase which involves detailed discussions about use cases and defines what the precise requirements are. Then comes the architecture phase, which is intended to design how the specific technology will work and in particular, how it interacts with other technologies. Following that, we have the writing of the detailed protocols. These three phases conclude with the publication of a set of specifications which we call a Candidate Enabler Release (CER). The fourth and final phase is the interoperability phase where we facilitate testing of implementations. From those tests we may make improvements or corrections to the specifications. Vendors can use the testing to improve their implementations and ensure that the services are interoperable.

The requirements phase is a very strong focus within the OMA, and it is very important that we are working on requirements that are going to deliver specifications that the markets really needs. I think we have a good process and it is well managed, but we are dependent on contributions from our members.

**What do you think about the proliferation of standards organisations and standardisation initiatives?**

I don't think we need any more standards bodies. There are so many already. What is needed is to bring some of the work together and the OMA can help facilitate this. I mentioned earlier that we have affiliated some groups. There may be an opportunity for us to do some more of that to reduce the fragmentation.

As an example, device management is already fragmented, and maybe that is not so surprising, since historically we've had different approaches on fixed and mobile. This is an area where the OMA is trying to make a difference and we are working very closely with the Broadband Forum (previously DSL Forum). We have a work activity now on converged device management, which is aiming to bring together OMA device management and technologies that the Broadband Forum has created. Where we have seen fragmentation, we have tried to reach out and see whether we can reduce it.

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We are starting a new piece of work with the OMA, focusing on Device Management 2.0, a new generation of converged device management. Our current published specification is Device Management 1.2 which has been adopted by most handset manufacturers and operators. As part of the requirements capture for Device Management 2.0 we will reach out to as many organisations as we can to ensure that we bring common requirements together. This work is just starting in our existing device management working group, and we hope there will be some new people contributing.

**Does converged just mean fixed and mobile?**

It depends on what we mean by fixed and mobile these days. There is a lot of interest in devices in the home and how they will be managed, so it is broader than just fixed and mobile networks now.

In terms of interoperability, there are already some things we are doing that help interoperability between mobile, fixed and home network devices. Additionally, there is some new work being discussed at the moment, which will be addressing this area.

A brand new topic we are starting is called Converged Personal Network Service which will help to link personal networks with wide-area cellular networks.

**Are there different requirements coming from different geographies or different market sectors?**

Yes, we are seeing some differences and one of the issues we need to address is to make sure that the solutions we provide meet the needs of different regions – even different countries in some circumstances. Sometimes there are differences because of infrastructure issues. For example different parts of the world have different historical infrastructures. Also, there may be different regulation or different market priorities. In terms of achieving the interoperability promise, we are trying to provide solutions which will be globally applicable, but we also need to ensure we are meeting the needs of individual regions and markets. This is one of our challenges: to ensure we can do things which are applicable in particular regions which may have unique requirements but at the same time achieve overall global interoperability.

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**What is the biggest challenge the telecoms industry faces going forward?**

One of the biggest challenges is to work together. The value chain for the delivery of a service to an end-user is becoming increasingly fragmented. There are more and more players in the chain and when you have many players in the value chain there is a need for many interfaces to create the end-to-end service. Sometimes there is tension between companies that want to try and get to market first versus those that want to collaborate on standardisation in order to really get the best possible value out of the market. These are the sorts of challenges that the industry as a whole is seeing. As members of OMA we need to work together on the things that really deliver maximum growth opportunities for the new market areas, but also we need to be able to compete in order to deliver better value to end users. Part of that equation is solved by having standards – timely standards that help us work together yet allow individual companies to pursue their own commercial objectives.

**If you had one message for the market what would it be?**

I would encourage people to participate in the collaborative effort of the OMA. The OMA is very open, although it may seem very large, and possibly quite daunting. We need the broadest participation in order to be successful and we have a structured membership arrangement so that even the smallest companies can get involved in the work.

For more information on the open Mobile Alliance, please visit <http://www.openmobilealliance.org>.