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Introducing Mountain View Alliance

The Mountain View Alliance (MVA) formation signals a new phase in the evolution of Open Specifications.

MVA is a recently formed alliance of PICMG, Network Processing Forum (NPF), and the Service Availability Forum (SA Forum) that is aiming to harmonize specifications and coordinate marketing activities. Other groups are expected to join in the latter part of 2005. This article will provide an overview and set the context for the MVA. As a consortia of consortia it is a new concept in the embedded systems environment.

Most of the specifications activity today have originated from an unmet need for an open way of applying new technology to emerging and existing markets. My personal view is that the most successful efforts are those that have delivered the right spec at the right time, for example, when the wider marketplace has just begun to perceive the need. From this perspective the specifications and the bodies that create them can be seen as a product of their environments, and the secret of a successful organization is responding correctly to the market situation and getting the timing right.

Where does the MVA fit in this picture? The MVA is a *consortia of consortia* that has been formed in recognition of an emerging need for a more coordinated approach to platform design. This *overview* perspective is new in this marketplace, where each organization has previously focused on its own piece of the puzzle. However the MVA is not a specification body, or a consortia governing body, rather it is a loose association of (currently) three organizations that recognize the need for better coordination of specifications and activities. The two main goals of the MVA are to:

1. Develop a mechanism to "harmonize" member specifications.
2. Work out ways to coordinate different marketing activities among groups.

I will go into more detail on the activities but first I want to come back to the issue of timing – why now for the MVA?

I think it is measure of spec organizations' success in meeting market needs for more open platform design, particularly in the telecom industry, that customers are now looking for an easier way of making the pieces work together. To use the MVA members as an example: a Telecom Equipment Manufacturer (TEM) who is building a network element may include a Network Processor Blade that uses NPF specs for the data plane transport, in an AdvancedTCA (a PICMG spec) chassis that needs to provide SA Forum compliant APIs for high availability requirements. TEMs do not want to have to sort out where the different specifications overlap, or even contradict each other; they want a level of reassurance that the specs are compatible. In other words the user is now looking to the vendor community to provide a more coordinated approach to system design for all the same reasons that have driven that community to open specifications in the first place:

- Time to market
- Reduced capital and operational expense
- Greater choice
- Ease of upgrades

So what is the MVA about? It is about aligning and harmonizing (you will see this word often) specifications and coordinating marketing. Harmonizing specifications means that they should be generally compatible with each other, but they are not inextricably bound to the others. The MVA is addressing the telecom market as a starting point, but it recognizes that many of its members' specifications are used in other industries. It is *not* a governing body, a compliance body, or a trade association. It does not have member companies, just member organizations.

How far specification bodies need to coordinate with each other is open to debate, and all the possibilities cannot be covered in detail here. Such possibilities

can range from a collection of app notes to a full-blown compliance and certification program. The MVA initiative is at the very light end, aimed at resolving conflicts in specifications, not at developing design guides or compliance programs. In fact the MVA as it is constituted can only provide recommendations to member organizations as to where they should be working together bilaterally to resolve gaps, conflicts, and overlaps. Additionally the MVA can help coordinate marketing activities among groups to get better value for the groups' members.

The MVA has been meeting since November 2004, but was formally announced at SUPERCOMM in June. There are weekly meetings for both marketing and technical committees; results should become apparent over the coming months. The measure of MVA's success will be how well the member organizations begin aligning their activities. An outline of the Alliance's activities is available at www.mountainviewalliance.org. As the group moves forward we are expecting other specification development organizations to join, which will broaden the reach of the alliance.

A future possibility is to use the MVA as a clearinghouse for users to express their needs and desires for future specifications that will result in specific feedback to MVA members.

What can individual companies expect from the Mountain View Alliance? In the short term they should get regular reports from their organizations on MVA activities. In the longer term they should get more robust coordinated specifications and specification organizations that begin to have a broader platform view of the industry.

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