Stevens Institute of Technology Professor Releases Book on Open Standards and the Digital Age

First Book to Focus on the History and Politics of Internet Standardization

Hoboken, NJ (PRWEB) May 12, 2014 -- Andrew Russell, a Stevens Institute of Technology professor of History and Director of the Program in Science and Technology Studies in the College of Arts and Letters, recently published a book explaining how “openness” was a deliberate result that predates the origins of the Internet.

His book, Open Standards and the Digital Age, highlights the historical and political history of how the internet evolved into an open platform. From open source software to open access publishing, it’s clear that “openness” is a defining principle of the twenty-first century. In fact, to a considerable degree, anyone of power obstructing openness is perceived as questionable, and whistleblowers as largely heroes—as seen in the recent example of Edward Snowden and the National Security Agency. Yet the standard of openness is not simply the inevitable outcome of the globalization of technology; it was a strategy that engineers used to promote the Internet’s global adoption.

Open Standards and the Digital Age is the first history of American communication and information technology to focus on the politics of standardization. Russell traces how openness became the defining principle of the Digital Age, despite the fact that the first information networks in the twentieth century were closed systems subject to centralized control (most notably the Bell System and the American military’s Arpanet). A critical shift occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, when engineers not only created new digital networks, but embraced discourses of openness to describe their ideological commitments to entrepreneurship, technological innovation, and participatory democracy—a legacy that continues today. However, as Russell also points out, such rhetoric also obscures the ways the Internet and other “open” systems still heavily depend on hierarchical forms of control.

Much has been debated about the future of the Internet, but this account examines its crucial origins: not only where standards originated, but also how they became a central element of American political economy and global business. Russell’s historical analysis ultimately brings a fresh perspective to policy debates over the globalization of Internet governance.

“The creation of the digital infrastructure of the open world reflects the faith in market capitalism, reverence for technological expertise, and skepticism toward concentrated power that were defining characteristics of the late twentieth century,” says Russell. “This history ends in the early twenty-first century, not with an open utopia but rather with digitized and reinvigorated critiques of centralized control. These critiques indicate the persistence of a bundle of contradictions and unresolved questions over power and control in a digitized open world.”

Open Standards and the Digital Age is available through Amazon.com.

About Stevens Institute of Technology

Stevens Institute of Technology, The Innovation University®, is a premier, private research university situated in Hoboken, N.J. overlooking the Manhattan skyline. Founded in 1870, technological innovation has been the
hallmark and legacy of Stevens’ education and research programs for more than 140 years. Within the university’s three schools and one college, more than 6,100 undergraduate and graduate students collaborate with more than 350 faculty members in an interdisciplinary, student-centric, entrepreneurial environment to advance the frontiers of science and leverage technology to confront global challenges. Stevens is home to three national research centers of excellence, as well as joint research programs focused on critical industries such as healthcare, energy, finance, defense and STEM education and coastal sustainability. The university is consistently ranked among the nation’s elite for return on investment for students, career services programs, and mid-career salaries of alumni. Stevens is in the midst of implementing a 10-year strategic plan, The Future. Ours to Create., designed to further extend the Stevens legacy to create a forward-looking and far-reaching institution with global impact.
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