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An Open Letter on Inclusive Terminology in Standards, Specifications and Software

As a worldwide organization with members and users from many backgrounds, nationalities, races and ethnicities, Avnu Alliance strongly believes that the standards we promote and base our interoperability ecosystem on must use terminology and language that is inclusive. It is critically important that insensitive, archaic and non-inclusive terms shall be avoided regardless of previous usage.

One example of non-inclusive terminology is “master/slave” to describe a model where one device or process controls another as subordinate. Alternatives such as “main/secondary”, “primary/secondary”, “primary/replica”, “host/target”, “leader/follower”, “orchestrator/worker”, “initiator/responder” or similar descriptive terminology should be used as applicable and where possible.

Another example is the term “blacklist” to describe something (i.e., users, websites, emails, or applications) blocked or not permitted and “whitelist” to describe counterparts that are allowed or accepted. Alternatives such as “blocklist/passlist”, “denylist/allowlist”, “permitted/refused” or similar descriptive terminology should be used as applicable and where possible.

Avnu Alliance will be adopting an Inclusive Terminology Policy for our documents and specifications, transitioning existing documents as rapidly as possible to inclusive language and terms. We ask that the standards bodies that we collaborate with and use as the foundation for our interoperability to also join us in this journey. We put forth that this is a market requirement for the technology no less important than other requirements to achieve the market and ecosystem goals that we are all are striving for.

It is acknowledged that some of these terms have been used in the technical community for some time and also that moving away from the terms takes effort and time. Avnu views this effort well spent given that language is essential to productive collaboration and bringing people together. Collaboration is of course foundational to standards development and developing open ecosystems and communities. By simply using inclusive language, we avoid unintentionally perpetuating stereotypes, alienating colleagues or creating a less efficient development and collaboration environment. As we consider the importance of this effort, some may ask “why now?” On this point we are reminded of the old proverb:

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.”

Let us work together to create an inclusive technology ecosystem that will benefit all.

Avnu Alliance Board of Directors

3855 SW 153rd Drive
Beaverton, OR 97003
503-619-0571
www.avnu.org