Introduction

This Handbook offers guidance to all stakeholders in container shipping on how to demonstrate or validate a company’s adoption of DCSA standards.

About DCSA
The Digital Container Shipping Association (DCSA) has a vision of a digitally interconnected container shipping industry in which customers have a choice of seamless, easy-to-use services that provide the flexibility to meet their business and sustainability goals.

DCSA is a non-profit, independent organisation established in 2019 by nine of the 10 largest container shipping companies. Our mission is to drive technology standards and frameworks that will enable all parts of the industry to achieve greater operational efficiency, regulatory compliance and business agility. As part of this work, DCSA continues to define and publish a wide range of open-source, digital standards and API definitions that are free for everyone to use.

DCSA Standards Adopters
Any organisation, company or vendor is free to adopt and use the DCSA open-source standards at any time. There is no requirement for them to self-certify adoption of any standard. However, as adoption grows, many parties in the container shipping industry are seeking to demonstrate their adoption of standards for their own marketing purposes.

Organisations ranging from technology vendors, freight forwarders and carriers, to port and terminal operators want to affirm their commitment to digitalisation and cross-industry collaboration. Those same organisations - and the shippers that rely on them - also need a simple way to verify that any potential business partners, technology vendors and service providers are also using the latest standards to ensure interoperability.

DCSA does not perform verification of any external solutions or services and does not authorise any third parties to perform independent assessments of compliance with our standards at this time. But we do recognise the benefits of being able to demonstrate or verify adoption, and this has led us to develop the adopter programme described in this Handbook.

We encourage every party involved in the maritime supply chain to read the Handbook as it provides useful information not only for those who wish to self-certify, but also for those who work with them. It is intended to help organisations such as shippers, freight forwarders, trade associations and banks to understand the implications and benefits of working with adopter companies.
Introduction (continued)

We hope and expect that the adopter programme will help to reduce the time and effort involved in both preparing and responding to procurement paperwork such as RFIs, RFPs and tender/bid documents for many parts of the maritime industry.

Naturally, any adopter programme without external verification relies on a level of honesty and trust between the parties involved. As open source communities are founded on the principles of collaboration for the greater good, we believe companies interested in adopting DCSA standards are likely to already embrace the spirit of mutual trust and transparency.

For the current phase of our industry’s journey towards digital standards, our goal is also to minimise costs and complexity associated with certification, which would inevitably increase with any requirement for external verification.

We are fully committed to open standards and hope that adopting a transparent adopter programme, with criteria that are freely available to all interested parties, will encourage clarity and openness and make it as easy as possible for every organisation to adopt and benefit from the DCSA standards.

How to use this Handbook
This Handbook is the starting point for any organisation that is considering self-certifying their adoption of any of the DCSA standards. Please read it thoroughly before you begin assessing your standards adoption. It contains an outline of the types of organisation that are eligible to join the adopter programme, the processes to be followed, and some important limitations on promotional activities around the adopter programme.

But it’s not just for those who wish to demonstrate their own adoption of standards. Organisations such as cargo owners that are looking for standards-based solutions will find information on how they can identify and short-list providers who have adopted DCSA standards. This is a great first step towards validating interoperability for yourself.

Once you have read this Handbook, if you still have questions about the adopter programme, please visit the FAQs section of our website here: knowledge.dcsa.org.

DCSA is fully committed to open standards and hopes that adopting a transparent adopter programme will encourage clarity and openness.
The adopter programme allows any party in the container shipping industry to confirm and demonstrate their adoption of one or more of the DCSA’s published standards. DCSA aims to create a set of adoption questions for each of its published standards. Answering these questions will enable an organisation to determine whether they are fully adopted, or to identify areas in which they need to carry out more work.

Which DCSA standards are covered by the programme?
The adopter programme is being introduced gradually as DCSA standards are released and refined. Visit our website at dcsa.org/initiatives/ to find a list of our standards. There is a dedicated page for each of our standards. As a standard becomes part of the adopter programme, the necessary resources will be added to that page.

Who can become an adopter?
Given our commitment to open standards and transparency, DCSA does not want to restrict the adopter programme to certain sections of the industry. Anyone who has adopted a DCSA standard into their workflows, solutions, services or facilities is free to take part in the adopter programme.

However, it’s likely that the programme will be most relevant to the following groups:

- **Carriers**
- **Solution providers** (e.g. software/hardware vendors, service providers)
- **Ports and terminals**
- **Non-vessel operators (NVOs) and freight forwarders**

Some DCSA standards will be more relevant than others to individual organisations. There is no requirement for an organisation to self-certify against all standards, simply select those that are most relevant to your area of operations.

There will also be organisations that do not wish to demonstrate their own adoptions of standards, but wish to include DCSA standards adoption as part of their procurement or operational processes. These are likely to include beneficial cargo owners (BCOs), shippers, legislators and (inter)governmental authorities, as well as other companies with a role in logistics such as banks, insurers, rail, trucking and air transport providers.
About the adopter programme (continued)

What are the benefits of the adopter programme?

The DCSA adopter programme will have different benefits for organisations in different parts of the industry, but we envisage advantages will include those summarised in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Carriers</th>
<th>Solution providers</th>
<th>Ports &amp; terminals</th>
<th>NVO &amp; freight forwarders</th>
<th>BCOs / shippers</th>
<th>Legislators &amp; (inter) governmental authorities</th>
<th>Other (e.g. banks, rails, trucking)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiate your services as being future-proof and interoperable</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve efficiency by adopting a standardised approach instead of bespoke implementations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Streamline vendor selection process with pre-filled documents for standards adoption</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Streamline international trade, reduce delays at borders and customs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure data consistency and quality</td>
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✓ Likely to offer this benefit to this type of organisation
✗ Unlikely to offer this benefit to this type of organisation
≈ May offer this benefit to this type of organisation in certain circumstances
What about API testing?

It is perfectly possible to adopt DCSA standards without the use of APIs – organisations are free to exchange standardised data by whatever means they choose. But DCSA believes APIs can play an essential role in delivering much-needed improvements to visibility in the shipping supply chain. That’s why we publish API definitions for many of our standards to help organisations expedite standards implementation using a modern technology.

In these cases, API reference implementations and validation toolkits are published in addition to the questions for each standard. Details of these tools can be found on the same page of the DCSA website as the Self-Certification Checklists and can be used by any organisation to verify their standards-based API implementations.

Use of these tools is not a requirements of the adopter programme, but they are an excellent way for any organisation to demonstrate the readiness of their solutions for deployment. If you are an organisation that procures solutions or services, you may wish to ask your business partners to share the outputs of their testing with the DCSA tools.
The adopter programme process

This chapter describes in detail how a company can join the adopter programme. Key stages are summarised in the infographic on page 12.

Self-Certification Checklists

For every version of each DCSA standard covered by the adopter programme, DCSA issues a Self-Certification Checklist (SCC) which takes the form of a questionnaire. Supporting notes are included in each SCC to help with completion of the questions. SCCs are freely available for download from the DCSA website by any interested party without registration. Visit our website at dcsa.org/adopt, select the relevant standard and then download the SCC as shown here:
It is up to each organisation to decide which standards are relevant to the solutions, services or facilities they provide. If you offer multiple solutions, services or facilities, you may wish to self-certify each of them separately. You may also wish to certify the same product, service or facility against more than one standard. Simply download and complete the relevant SCCs.

Please pay close attention to the supporting notes for each SCC as in some cases the criteria for adoption of a given standard may be different depending on your role in the container shipping supply chain.

For example, to adopt the DCSA standard for electronic bill of lading, a shipper will have to evaluate a set of processes and use cases that is different from what is relevant to a solution provider. When this is the case, you will find a dedicated section in the SCC that is specific to your organisation type.

DCSA standards are not intended to act as a limitation on any company’s systems and it is expected that many adopters’ products, solutions or services may offer their own data points in addition to those required by the standard. However, if any of the data definitions from a DCSA standard are not supported by a solution, then adoption cannot be claimed. There is no concept of “partial adoption of with a DCSA standard in this event.

If the process of assessing your standards adoption identifies some areas in which your solution, service or facility has not yet fully adopted a standard, please continue your work towards adoption of the standard and return to validate adoption later. DCSA hopes that the adopter programme will be helpful to many companies as an opportunity to identify these areas where more work is needed to achieve adoption.

DCSA welcomes your feedback on our SCCs. Please provide any comments via our website dcsa.org/general-contact/.

It is up to each organisation to decide which standards are relevant to the solutions, services or facilities they provide.

Simply download and complete the relevant checklists.
The adopter programme process (continued)

DCSA wants to know about companies that have joined the adopter programme so that we can track adoption of our standards in the industry and keep in touch about standards updates.

Registering for Updates

Any organisation that has used a Self-Certification Checklist to confirm adoption of a DCSA standard is asked to register online with the DCSA at dcsa.org/adopt. This lightweight registration process asks the organisation to specify the standard they have adopted and to provide at least one contact email address. There is also an opportunity to share basic information with DCSA on how you expect standards adoption to benefit your business – planned use cases, target customer type etc. There is no charge to register your organisation with the adopter programme.

As DCSA standards are updated, the relevant SCCs and supporting notes will also be updated. A numbering system is used to ensure version control between the updated standards and their associated SCCs.

On publication of an updated SCC, DCSA will send an email notification to any organisation that has previously registered as an adopter of the relevant standard. The organisation is then free to decide whether they wish to recertify for the updated version of the standard.

DCSA will send a semi-annual email to all registered users inviting them to provide an optional update on how they are using DCSA standards in their operations.

Registered users may unsubscribe from updates at any time by following the link in the notification emails. However, we ask that adopters provide DCSA with at least one email address at all times for notification purposes.

When standards are updated, DCSA will notify all organisations that have registered as adopters so they can decide whether to recertify.
The adopter programme process (continued)

Promoting your adopter status

We hope you will be proud to advertise your adoption of DCSA standards. Once you have successfully registered with the adopter programme, you are free to publicise your adopter status via your usual promotional channels. We ask only that you follow these three simple promotional guidelines to ensure full transparency:

Logo

When promoting your adopter status, you may not use the DCSA logo on any platform including brochures, websites or social media posts.

Form of words

We wish to ensure that everyone understands exactly what solution, service or facility has adopted which standard (including version numbers). For this reason, we ask that when you are promoting your adopter status you include the following form of words at least once in each promotional material (including documents, website pages, press releases and brochures):

"[Your Company name] has self-certified [Your solution/service/facility name] as an adopter of the DCSA Standard on [DCSA standard name] version [DCSA standard version number – found in the SCC filename]. DCSA does not currently verify compliance or authorise any third party to verify compliance."

Completed SCCs

You are welcome to generate copies of your completed SCC(s) and API test reports for display on your website or for inclusion in sales proposals, RFI/RFP responses, bids and tender documentation.

Example of promotional wording:

"ACME Company has self-certified ACME Visibility Solution as an adopter of the DCSA Standard on Track & Trace version 2.2. DCSA does not currently verify compliance or authorise any third party to verify compliance."

Posts on social media do not need to carry this statement in full, but we invite you to use the hashtag #DCSAadopter.
The adopter programme process (continued)

1. Read the Handbook
   Once you understand the full process, visit DCSA.org to see which standards are currently covered by the adopter programme. Determine which standards are relevant for your organisation.

2. Download & complete Checklist(s)
   Answer all the questions in the Self-Certification Checklist(s) with reference to the supporting notes. If you’re using our API definitions, you can also test your implementation with our API tools.

3. Register at DCSA.org
   Visit our website to register as an adopter for each relevant standard and tell us a bit about how you’ll use the standards.

4. Celebrate your Adoption of standards
   Advertise your adoption of DCSA standards using your normal promotional channels, following the guidelines laid out in the Adopter Programme Handbook. Get ready to tell us about your success stories.

5. Stay in touch
   We’ll email you semi-annually to ask for an update on how your business is using the DCSA standards. Participation is voluntary, but we’d love to get your feedback.

6. Be ready for the future updates
   You’ll be notified by email when DCSA updates any standard for which you have registered as an adopter. To recertify for the updated standard, return to step 2 and download the new checklist.
The role of the adopter programme in procurement

The adopter programme is designed to improve the selection process for all sides when companies are procuring solutions and services from DCSA adopters.

If you are involved in procuring solutions or services, you may wish to know whether a potential business partner has adopted one or more DCSA standards. If the partner advertises standards adoption, we recommend you ask to see their completed SCC(s) and, where relevant, their API test reports.

Check carefully which service, solution or facility has adopted which standard. Double-check version numbers against the DCSA website dcsa.org/initiatives to ensure that the standard adopted is the most recently published version of the DCSA standard. While it’s expected this will simplify the short-listing process, remember that the adopter programme is an honour-based system. Before procuring any solution or service you should fully validate interoperability yourself.

As a proactive approach to ensure interoperability, we recommend you consider making adoption of with DCSA standards (or standards in general, really!) a requirement for those taking part in your RFI, RFP or tender process. The SCC(s) can be downloaded from our website for this purpose.

It is expected this will expedite responses to RFIs or RFPs from vendors and service providers and make it easy for procurement teams to assess the submissions. Those who have already completed SCCs will be able to submit these pre-filled checklists. Others can be directed to this Handbook for information on how to respond in a consistent manner that simplifies your selection process.

We recommend you consider making adoption of DCSA standards a requirement for those taking part in your RFI, RFP or procurement process. It is expected this will expedite responses to RFIs/RFPs from vendors and service providers and make it easier to assess their readiness for interoperability.
The role of DCSA in the adopter programme

How will the adopter programme help DCSA to maintain its role as an independent standards body promoting digitalisation for the benefit of all in the container shipping industry?

DCSA does not review, approve or certify any organisation’s implementation of our standards and we don’t authorise any third parties to conduct independent audits or assessments at this time.

The adopter programme will be kept under continuous review and may be supplemented in the future with a process for independent verification of standards compliance.

DCSA does not publish a list of organisations, products, services or facilities that have registered as adopters of given standards. We maintain a private list of those companies.

This information is primarily used for notification and internal reporting purposes, but DCSA may choose to share the names of adopter organisations privately with our members on request.

Contact information will never be shared with third parties, including our members. The full DCSA privacy statement is available on our website at dcsa.org/privacy-statement/.

To maintain full independence, DCSA will not engage in joint promotion or marketing activities with organisations to announce they have adopted any of our standards. This means we won’t be able to review, approve or supply quotes for your adoption-related press release or brochures.

However, we do want to hear success stories from any organisation that is finding benefits as a result of implementing the DCSA standards. If you have prepared a case study which describes how adoption of DCSA standards has helped your organisation and a named customer to achieve their joint business goals – from improving efficiency to winning new business or creating new services – DCSA will evaluate how we could help you spread the news.

Please contact us via our website: dcsa.org/general-contact/.
What’s next?

DCSA needs your support and involvement to help make the adopter programme a powerful force for change in the container shipping industry.

It only takes 25% adoption to drive real change in a whole population*

Prior to the launch of the adopter programme, DCSA talked to individual organisations and performed a high-level evaluation of their solution before commenting publicly on their compliance. This approach is not scalable given the level of industry-wide interest in adopting DCSA standards.

To make it fair for everyone, we are replacing it with the adopter programme. This means we are not validating anyone’s adopter status as part of this programme. We are always eager to hear about success stories of standards implementations! Please let us know when your standards-based solution or service has helped your customer so we can consider potential joint promotion.

FAQ: “I’ve seen DCSA congratulate other service providers on their compliance prior to the introduction of the adopter programme. Why won’t you do the same for me now?”

If you still have questions after reading this Handbook, please visit our FAQs page at: knowledge.dcsa.org

*Source: Scientific American, 2018