From: Todd Carpenter  
ISO/TC46/SC9 Secretary

Title: Report from the International ISBN Agency for the TC46/SC9 plenary meeting on May 4, 2011 and the TC46 plenary on May 6, 2011 in Sydney, Australia

Source: Stella Griffiths, Executive Director, International ISBN Agency

Project(s): ISO 2108

Status:

Additional information:

REQUESTED ACTION
Circulated to P- and O-members, and to technical committees and organizations in liaison for:

☑ information

☐ discussion at [venue/date of meeting]

☐ comments by [date]

☐ voting (P-members only by: [date]

P-members of the technical committee or subcommittee concerned have an obligation to vote.

With more than 200 countries and 160 national or regional registration agencies in the International ISBN System, it is something of a rarity for new agencies to be appointed. However, in the last year we have appointed Oman and it looks likely that Myanmar and Somalia will also join.

Again, issues surrounding the correct identification of e-books continue to be the main and very active source of discussion. ISO 2108 states that “Each different format of an electronic publication that is published and made separately available shall be given a separate ISBN” and since 2008 the International ISBN Agency (IIA) has continued to encourage publishers to provide ISBNs for each e-book format while also allowing third party intermediaries to assign their own ISBNs to e-books where publishers do not provide them. The IIA undertook a survey of publishers, retailers, libraries, bibliographic data aggregators and wholesalers to establish the views of each stakeholder on these issues and the current implementation problems they faced. The findings of the 2010 survey clearly revealed that many publishers adopted a variety of ways of identifying digital publications and there was a great deal of inconsistency in how the ISBN was used.

Following the results of the survey, the IIA released a set of guidelines in the form of FAQs about the identification of e-books by ISBNs. This document has been released to all agencies, many of whom have produced translated versions for their publishers. Response to this document from the publishers and trade organisations has also been encouraging.

In the light of this, a revision of the standard to incorporate some new definitions and to update examples is now potentially more likely.

We have started work on a shorter and updated version of the User Manual that will be available on our website.

We have had some problems with illegitimate ISBNs. Several thousands of 978-999-prefixed identifiers are wrongly assigned as ISBNs in the Amazon catalogue. These have mostly been assigned by US wholesalers, second-hand booksellers and other third parties, and Amazon have no way of knowing which are legitimate and which are not. Individual cases of illegitimate ISBNs can be dealt with by Amazon if notified to them. We are still seeking ways to resolve this in a more efficient way.

We have been alerted to a publisher in China listing many hundreds of different books with the same ISBN (978-7-5333-0535-2). We have requested, via the ISBN Agency in China, that this be corrected.

It is not possible to “trade mark” ISBN as it is a term that has now passed into common usage. There have been a small number of cases of websites using ISBN as part of the domain name implying that they are legitimate agencies assigning ISBNs. We will take action against infringements such as these or of “passing off” and although the IIA will seek to resolve matters with minimum effort and expense, we would hope to have ISO’s support on any issues that appear to violate IP rights.

Stella Griffiths
Executive Director, International ISBN Agency
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