Identification of eBooks: One Year On

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About EDItEUR

- London-based global trade standards organization for books and serials supply chains
  - Established 1993
  - Not-for-profit membership organization
- ONIX family of communications standards
  - ONIX for Books
  - ONIX for Serials
  - ONIX for Online Product Information
- ONIX for Licensing Terms
- EDI
- RFID
- Manage the International ISBN Agency

THE CHALLENGE TO THE ISBN ... AS I DESCRIBED IT LAST YEAR

Why did ISBN set this rule?

- Ease of trading
- Most book trade e-commerce systems require ISBNs
- Certainty of identification is critical for effective e-commerce
- Ease of discovery of the different formats available
  - Bibliographic databases require ISBNs and users do not want to be tied to one channel
  - Collecting detailed sales/usage data
  - If separate formats are not identified in a standard way, sales and usage data by format cannot be easily collected

But many publishers have chosen not to follow the rules

- “We only “publish” one generic format (e.g. .epub) and assign an ISBN to that”
- “We are not responsible for formats provided by third party intermediaries”
- “We don’t care whether or not different product formats are listed in bibliographic databases”
- “Hardware-led channels do not require standard identifiers; customers will find our books through their preferred platform outlet”
- “Our system requires us to manually create and manage separate ONIX records for each ISBN we assign – we can’t manage the metadata blast involved”
- “Our sales channels do not require standard identifiers for ebooks – they can use proprietary identifiers”
- “ISBNs are too expensive for us to assign to each format”
- “It is too difficult to assign ISBNs for formats provided by third party intermediaries”
If not a publishers’ ISBN at product level, then what?
1. Use proprietary product identifiers in the channel
2. Have someone else apply ISBNs in the channel
3. ...and introduce yet another new identifier...like the music industry has?

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE LAST YEAR?

US ebook sales to end of Q1 2010 (before the launch of the iPad)

The implication of growth on that scale?

“Within five years there will be more digital content sold than physical content. Three years ago, I said within ten years but I realised that was wrong – it’s within five.”

Steve Haber,
President, Digital Reading Business, Sony Electronics

...and while you might think “He would say that, wouldn’t he” this estimate is not seen as out of court by some publishing CEOs –both Carole Reid of Simon & Schuster and Brian Murray of HarperCollins recently went on record as believing that “40 to 50%” of their sales would be digital in 5 years

And what has changed with ISBN and ebooks?
Still moving in the direction of a single “eISBN” for every title?

- The ISBN agencies say “no” and are not alone
- Publishers still find little agreement
- Marked differences in practice between publishers
- Marked differences between practices in different countries
- Google is adopting the ISBN for Google Editions
- …and is requesting a unique ISBN from publishers …
- …and will assign its own ISBNs if the publisher does not …
- …but has no way of knowing whether the ISBN they have been given by a publisher is unique to the Google Edition
- Report on cataloging model for a “Provider-Neutral E-Monograph Record” in MARC refers to an eISBN (while making it clear that the catalog record is not manifestation-specific) [July 2009]
**Single ISBN for all versions**

From ISBN research, libraries want it both ways....

- Essential to have a single 'matching point' to compare collections, pull-in usage data, exclude already-purchased titles from lists, etc.
- Useful to have a second ISBN for each platform as different platforms have different DRM etc. Combined with a single ISBN for all formats, would help to identify where we have purchased the same title from more than one platform.

- The use of a single ISBN would enable provider-neutral records and act similarly to eISBNs. Open link resolution, federated search, and unified discovery platforms would also benefit from the use of a single eISBN.
- It is also useful to have some sort of identifier by platform, particularly for back-end vendor operations.

**Why not stick with existing rules?**

- Significant and real problems with publishers' metadata management
  - Instead of one or two metadata records, there may be dozens
  - There are system solutions, but very few publishers have them
  - Many publishers systems are ISBN-dependent
- Significant and real problems with workflow
  - Publishers do not know what products will be published and therefore have to be able to create ISBNs "on the fly"...
  - ...often for third parties where there are significant challenges in connecting systems to ensure integrity and accuracy of metadata
  - These challenges are even greater where the vendor attaches their own ISBN
- Perhaps soon there will only be one ebook format anyway?
  - Are we creating a structure to meet a temporary requirement

**WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

**Possible system assistance for publishers**

So, why not change existing rules?

- One eISBN simply does not meet everyone's requirements:
  - serious risk of development of multiple non-standard solutions – a well ordered supply chain could disintegrate as no one knows what an ISBN represents
  - Products need unique identification
- Are we going to return to:
  - Classic problem of "lumping and splitting" – if we call two things the same thing when we subsequently need to distinguish between them, it will become impossible
- A particular challenge for sales, usage reporting
- We have found little support (outside the library community) for the introduction of a "release identifier" to collocate all ebook manifestations

- One metadata record – multiple ISBNS
Seeking a way forward

- International ISBN Agency (through EDItEUR) commissioning research on possible mechanisms for supporting the status quo – for example, making it easier for a third party to obtain an ISBN and metadata record from the publisher
- BISG commissioning research aimed that “describes, defines and makes recommendations for the identification of e-books in the U.S. supply chain...to support a BISG-endorsed policy statement that responds to the International ISBN Agency’s recommendation regarding the assignment of ISBNs to separate e-book formats”

A simple envoi

The ISBN is probably the most effective globally implemented product identifier that has ever been devised. Are we sure we want to throw that away?

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