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Electronic Ordering and ISBN-13 —
“How Will I Order Books in a 13-Digit World?”

by Eric Throon (Chair, Internet Commerce Committee, Book Industry Study Group and Manager, Third Party Systems Integration, Baker & Taylor) <throon@btol.com>

The night before our PVL Open Forum I took some time to rehearse my presentation. Like most Americans, I seem to have the T.V. on regardless of what I’m doing. Therefore it should come as no surprise that I had the T.V. in my hotel room on — albeit muted — while I practiced my spiel. About halfway through the run-through I glanced at the screen and was greeted with the tag line for a product I would rather not see advertised, “When the moment is right, will you be ready?”

Despite my aversion to such programming, I got a chuckle out of how apropos those words were to my presentation. January 1, 2007 is the moment by which we must all be ready.

EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) has been a boon to libraries in the last several years by automating formerly manual processes. Electronically ordering saves time and prevents errors. The addition of electronic order confirmations and invoicing further eases the load.

The term “EDI” is actually an umbrella term that refers to a number of standards for formatting the data that is transmitted between systems. The book industry in North America relies on X.12, EDIFACT, and the BISAC Fixed Field Format. While much data is transmitted in an EDI document, it can be argued that the single most important item is the ISBN and of course all three formats carry it. Since the ISBN is changing, the EDI standards for these formats must likewise be adjusted.

The Internet Commerce Committee (ICC) of BISG (Book Industry Study Group, www.bisg.org) is tasked with creating guidelines and roadmaps for EDI usage in all segments of the book industry. To be more accurate, the ICC is part of BISAC (Book Industry Standards And Communications) which is the standards-setting arm of BISG.

The ICC has been grappling with ISBN-13’s impact on EDI for almost two years. It was clear that before specific guidelines could be issued we had to settle on the conceptual approach to be taken. Ideas were floated, discussed and sometimes torpedoed. It came down to a choice of “flipping a switch” on the January 1st of the year in question, or of offering a more gradual process. Doubting that we could get every organization’s EDI subsystem to simultaneously start using a 13-digit — and only the 13-digit — ISBN at the stroke of midnight, it became apparent that we had to add ISBN-13 support to the existing ISBN-10 support. Carrying both iterations of the ISBN for each item in an EDI document would allow organizations to migrate from ISBN-10 to ISBN-13 at their own pace (but before 1/1/2007). So, the general philosophy for ISBN-13 and EDI is to continue to support ISBN-10 while adding ISBN-13 support and then transitioning to ISBN-13 use exclusively. For those interested in the nitty-gritty details, there is a paper on the BISG Website with the pertinent information (http://www.bisg.org/docs/BISG_EDI_Roadmap.pdf).

I want to reiterate that we need to think of the BISAC EDI format as obsolete. It has served us well over the years, but it is time to let go. The BISAC format was created in the 1970’s and has limitations that reflect the punch cards in use at the time. BISAC (the committee) ended support for BISAC (the EDI format) in 1995. It is a rigid format and cannot accommodate the need to add ISBN-13 support while maintaining ISBN-10 functionality. Rather than rigging some improbable workaround, it is time to retire it.

The good news is that the X.12 and EDIFACT formats can easily handle the transition to a 13-digit ISBN. Guidelines and supporting documentation have been issued and posted on the BISG Website for X.12 and www.editeur.org for EDIFACT.

In practical terms, libraries currently using BISAC to transmit orders to suppliers need to talk to their ILS vendors to determine their options for migrating from that format to X.12 or EDIFACT. This conversation needs to happen soon as there may be a charge to add this functionality and money will have to be budgeted. The upgrade needs to be scheduled and time allowed for testing and implementation.

Those using X.12 or EDIFACT should not think that they escape unscathed. They too need to talk to their ILS vendor about their plans to support ISBN-13. When will they be ready? When will your library be upgraded? Have they been coordinating and testing with your book vendors? Speaking of which, do you know what your book vendors are doing to prepare for ISBN-13?

I would counsel that you ask detailed questions of your ILS and book vendors. For instance, many ILS systems use the ISBN from the 20 tag when you wish to order additional copies of an existing title. However, OCLC is releasing records with the ISBN-13 in the 024 field. You may also have records with the 13-digit ISBN in an additional 020 field. How will your ILS handle this admixture of digits and tags? Will it populate the correct numbers into the correct fields in your EDI order? How will the dedupe process work?

The questions don’t end there. Will your order confirmations and invoices have the 10- or 13-digit number, or both? How will you ILS system process these inbound EDI documents? How will these incoming items match to existing bib and order records?

Obviously the change to a 13-digit ISBN is a little more complex than just adding three digits. The ISBN flows from system to system and vendor to vendor. Systems need to be upgraded and tested. Sample EDI documents need to be exchanged to ensure compatibility between the upgraded systems. Time needs to be budgeted for working out the inevitable kinks. At first blush, January 1, 2007 may seem like a long way off, but when you consider all that needs to be done it starts to seem like it is very near indeed.

So, when the moment is right, will you be ready? ☹️

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check their email. “This service is paramount for students, particularly as many are working alongside their studies,” says Sue Roberts, Head of Learning Services. “With this in mind we were keen to become associated with Innovative, which has built a strong reputation on their reliable and flexible software.”

www.iii.com

This comes courtesy of the clever Ramune Kubilis <rkubilis@northwestern.edu> (NOTE address change!) — The National Library of Medicine (NLM), a component of the National Institutes of Health, has announced the release of a PDA software tool designed to help first responders when they arrive at a hazardous material (Hazmat) incident, such as a chemical spill. WISER (Wireless Information System for Emergency Responders) provides the emergency responder with critical information on hazardous substances. The operational versions of WISER for Palm OS and for Pocket PC are now available without charge for downloading to users’ PDAs at http://wiser.nlm.nih.gov. More than 1700 copies of the WISER software have been requested and downloaded. A desktop version will be available later this year.