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Chaos/SANs

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The Standard Address Number — Is It Appropriate for Libraries?

By Sandra K. Paul

The ANSI/NISO Standard Address Number was invented in 1980 by a NISO Standards Committee at the urging of the National Association of College Stores (NACS) and the American Booksellers Association (ABA). Bookseller members of both organizations were sick and tired of publishers and wholesalers telling them that they must identify themselves — in writing or over the phone — with a number ranging from 5 to 15 digits, and one that was unique for each publisher/vendor with which they did business.

The NISO Standards Committee first considered the wide range of existing numbers, hoping that one of them might meet the needs of the industry. One that was considered and rejected has just been recommended by the United Nations for all international EDI — Dun & Bradstreet Information Services Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number. This 9 digit number, established in 1962, identifies U.S. *businesses* in D & B's database of more than 16 million entries. The problem the Standards Committee had was that D & B doesn't consider schools and school systems (major textbook buyers) nor *libraries* as businesses, precluding their general numbering by D & B.

So, in all of its wisdom, the NISO Standards Committee developed a 7 digit number with single check digit created and verified on the same logic as the ISBN check digit. (This may create a check digit with the value 10, which is expressed as the roman X, as it is in the ISBN.) The ISBN Agency at Bowker agreed to take on the responsibility for assigning SANs to "each address of each organization in or served by the book industry that is engaged in repetitive transactions

with other members of this group" including "book publishers, booksellers, book wholesalers, jobbers and distributors, college and university bookstores, libraries and library systems, library binders, serial vendors, and elementary and secondary schools and school systems." This standard became ANSI/NISO Z39.43 (1980).

A Bookstore Past

Emery Koltay of the ISBN Agency used the Bowker reference tools to assign numbers. Booksellers listed in the *American Book Trade Directory* were assigned numbers starting with 1; book publishers and wholesalers listed in *Publishers, Distributors & Wholesalers in the United States* were assigned numbers starting with 2; schools and school systems which were customers of CBS/Holt (which had an active member on the Standards Committee and no Bowker directory existed) were assigned numbers starting with 4; and libraries listed in the *American Library Directory* were assigned numbers starting with 3. Walden and Dalton were given blocks of numbers to assign to their stores, so that a relationship with the pre-existing store number could be maintained. The NACS and ABA mounted major campaigns to let their members know what their numbers were. CBS/Holt offered 48 hour delivery if customers supplied their SAN when ordering. "SANity" buttons were distributed at the NACS and ABA conventions! The SAN became an integral part of the bookselling community.

In designing computer-to-computer communications formats for book trade business transactions, the Book Industry Systems Advisory Committee (BISAC) REQUIRED

that the SAN be used to identify the senders of the communications, as well as the addresses to which books were to be delivered. When the American Booksellers Association's Booksellers Order Service (BOS) and Association of American Publishers' PUBNET online ordering systems were invented, both REQUIRED the use of the SAN to identify the buyer and seller from which the electronic orders and order acknowledgements were flowing.

But, what about journal publishers, subscription agents, library systems — and libraries?

Well, the only organization in the library community that was ever interested in SANs was OCLC. At one point in time, OCLC verified the list of SANs assigned to libraries against their name and address file and asked Bowker to assign SANs to those which were unnumbered. They even mentioned the SAN in some of their communications to OCLC users. However, after that one-shot attempt, they became as inactive as Bowker in trying to stimulate the use of SANs in the library community.

A Brighter Future

When the Serials Industry Systems Advisory Committee (SISAC) Subcommittees developing EDI formats reviewed the concept of identifying senders of these formats — libraries, subscription agents, library utilities and journal publishers — they questioned whether the SAN was really a workable standard for this purpose. Little did they know that, at that very same time, organizations in England, Canada and Australia were being asked to pinpoint the assignment agency in their countries for an expanded, international version of the SAN (or ISAN). Con

ceived with the idea of making the SAN country-specific WITHOUT changing the check digit in the 278,000 SANs already assigned in the United States, it was agreed that the two-alpha country code in the International Country Code Standard (ISO 3166) would be affixed to the front of the SAN. If the values of 0 through 26 are assigned the letters A through Z, it turns out that U and S, when calculated as part of the check digit, are divisible by 11 without any remainder and, trust me, that means that the old check digit without the US in front is the same as the one with it!

Emery Koltay has been generous with SANs, assigning them to Canadian booksellers, publishers, and libraries himself, and providing blocks of numbers to the U.K. and Australia. It took several months to obtain the identity of the SAN agency in these countries *and* their agreement to change the value of the check digits of SANs already assigned in

their countries. But they did agree. The ISBN Agencies of the U.K. and Australia are the SAN Agencies as well; the Canadian Telebook Agency is the SAN Agency in Canada.

At a meeting of European Community representatives during the Frankfurt Book Fair, the concept of European-wide EDI standards for the book trade was approved. One of the first questions to be answered was how to identify organizations throughout Europe. They realized that the ISAN is ideal!

So, despite the concept of DUNS numbers for global EDI, it appears that journal purchasers who will be using electronic formats for orders, claims, cancellations, etc., will join their book purchasing counterparts and use the SAN or ISAN to identify themselves. What is needed is the same type of publicity push for library/subscription agent/journal publisher SANs that the booksellers mounted in the 1980s.

Are you willing to participate? Do you know your SAN? Call me at 212/929-1393 or send a fax to 212/989-7542 if the answer to the first is "yes" and/or the second is "no." ☛

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