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Sandra K. Paul
SKP Associates

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Chaos

By **Sandra K. Paul**, President (SKP Associates)

It does seem, based on questions raised at the Charleston Conference this year, at a meeting of the journal publishing members of the Association of American Publishers, and at the Serials Industry Systems Advisory Committee (SISAC) itself, that the SICI has created more than its share of CHAOS. This column will be an attempt to defuse some of the confusion.

First some definitions. The term "SICI" (pronounced "sick-ey") refers to the ANSI/NISO standard Z39.56 - 1991 — the Standard Item and Contribution Identifier. I assume that all of the readers of *Against the Grain* know that the International Standard Serial Number (another ANSI/NISO standard, as well as an international one) merely identifies the title of a serial publication. Issue-level identification is required if you are going to order, claim or cancel a serial; article-level identification is needed for document delivery, among other applications. The ANSI/NISO SICI standard allows you to identify issues (calling them "items," to accommodate electronic publications) and articles, as well as other contributions in a serial.

The major benefit of the SICI is that it is created from information that appears on and in the serial itself AND it can be created from a citation to that serial. THERE IS NO NEED FOR PUBLISHERS TO PRINT THE SICI ON THEIR PUBLICATIONS, BUT THEY ARE URGED TO DO SO. Your computer can create it if the following information is known: ISSN; publication date; and enumeration assigned by the publisher. The only addition is a check digit, which your computer can create with the appropriate formula. So far so good?

As many of you know, SISAC provided the stimulus for the creation of the SICI standard because they were preparing computer-to-computer electronic data interchange standards for serials which required at least the

item-level identification standard. In addition, they developed a method for publishers to print a bar coded representation of the item-level section of the SICI on the covers of their serials, to ease check-in at libraries. Here's where I think the problems really began.

First of all, SISAC called that bar code the "SISAC Symbol;" a poorly defined term, at best. (They have since realized that and the new name is the SISAC Bar Code Symbol.) Then, in order to keep the length of the SISAC Bar Code Symbol as short as possible (so that more publishers would find it less troubling on the covers of their beautiful publications), they incorporated codes in the Symbol. I will not bore you with the detail, but must point out the CHAOS when what is encoded in the bars is NOT — that's right — NOT identical to the information printed below it. Below the bars you'll find the item-level identification section of the SICI; in the bars you'll find some of that information, but some codes, too. Unlike all other standard bar codes found on library materials, you cannot go from the SICI to the SISAC Bar Code Symbol - or vice versa - without benefit of some formulas. Those formulas are found in the publication, SERIAL ITEM IDENTIFICATION: BAR CODE SYMBOL IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES, February, 1992, published by SISAC's parent company, the Book Industry Study Group. There are three Appendixes in that document that provide the formulas used in the SISAC Bar Code Symbol. One of those — the Enumeration Descriptor Table of Values — is 24 pages long and is available from the Study Group in machine-readable form.

So, those in the serials community who are saying that they are waiting for publishers to print the SISAC Bar Code Symbol on their publications before they implement systems in which the SICI is used can stop waiting. You don't need the Symbol on the outside of the publication to use it; you don't even

need the printed out, eye-readable SICI. You can create it yourself. However, we are finding that the same may not be true of the contribution-level identifier.

This identifier was designed, as the rest of the ANSI/NISO standard, to provide minimal information for unique identification. If only one contribution starts on a page, the standard requires only the page number for article-level identification. Now that's fine if you have a copy of that page in front of you (on paper or on a screen). The chaos comes into play if you have only a citation; you have no way of knowing if that is the only contribution starting on that page. Therefore, it may become necessary to provide the identification of the contribution title specified in the standard — the first letter of the first few words in the title of more than three letters each — in more cases than expected. AND, if you have a SICI prepared with serial in hand vs. one prepared from a citation and they are different, how can they BOTH uniquely identify the same thing?

So, as is true of much standards work, it isn't as easy as it seems; we must walk before we run; there's always a chicken and egg situation when you introduce something new; and people don't like change. Add the right amount of chaos to that equation, and you have a major educational challenge in front of you. The SISAC Document Delivery Task Force, Chaired by **Julia Blixrud** of the Council for Library Resources, is attempting to take on this challenge. Wish them luck and help them, if you can, inside your own organization.

For more information on any of this, don't hesitate contacting SISAC at 160 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10010, Internet 5552838@MCIMAIL.COM. Phone 212/929-1393, fax 212/989-7542.