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Open EDI, Interactive EDI and More EDI on the Internet by Sandra K. Paul (President, SKP Associates)



I have just returned from what was probably the most exciting meeting of ANSI-Accredited Standards Committee X12 I've ever attended. In addition to their normal practice of holding "hearings" on minute data elements values that organizations such as the Book and Serial Systems Advisory Committees (BISAC and SISAC) would like to add to their standards for Electronic Data Interchange (EDI for those new to this part of the world), I found them looking at the entirety of the potential for Electronic Commerce. Part of the incentive for their doing so was the coming to fruition of their own long term planning effort; the other was President Clinton's edict that ALL government procurement will take place through Electronic Commerce (EC — and we used to think that stood for European Commission!) by 1997. Isn't it interesting that that is the same year X12 selected to move to the internationally accepted EDI format, EDIFACT. Here are some of the concepts they are developing.

Interactive EDI

As the urging of those involved in the healthcare industry, which began developing and adopting X12 standards a few years ago, X12 is working on several scenarios and transaction sets for interactive EDI. Think, if you will, of the person appearing in an emergency room and saying that she/he has Blue Cross/Blue Shield coverage. In today's healthcare scenario, this must be verified instantly, not in a "batch of transactions" processed the next day, if that person is to receive treatment. Although less critical, certainly, booksellers on PUBNET are now starting to receive BISAC Purchase Order Acknowledgments in the same phone call to Paramount Publishing in which they place their BISAC Purchase orders. If book publishers and wholesalers are to be able to move forward from proprietary systems and the "old" BISAC formats intended for magnetic tape into X12 transactions, they must be able to provide this type of one-call answer to a library's acquisition request.

Open EDI

The concept of "open edi" has been under development by the folks in the international computer systems arena — the same systems planners who developed the Open Systems Interconnect (OSI) model — for some time. X12's Future Planning Committee has adopted many aspects of their model in its FUTURE VISION FOR X12. The basic concept is to stop thinking about data elements, segments and transaction sets as the end goal of EDI, but to think in terms of business requirements. For instance, the idea of reserving raw material for the manufacture of a specific item I need may not be so very different than my reserving a seat on a plane. This concept will force the planners to think about BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS and then develop the appropriate transactions for use in a business environment. Hand-in-hand with this concept is the development of a Basic Semantic Repository of terminology for use in EDI, that will identify the same BUSINESS CONCEPT in X12 and EDIFACT EDI messages, so that communication across transaction sets and between countries will be possible. The example I just love in this area is the use of the term "Delivery Date." Until the healthcare folks became involved, we might all have thought that we knew the meaning of this term in an EDI transaction. Now, more than 9 months later, we can't be too sure.

Library Systems Requirements

In a forum of systems vendors which met the Thursday before ALA Midwinter, representatives of BISAC and SISAC finally asked the vendors point blank — "What will it take for you to move from proprietary and/or first generation BISAC to BISAC and SISAC X12 subsets?" The answer was twofold. They said that they will make the conversion when —

- 1) X12 EDI transactions can be sent over the Internet; and
- 2) they can be certain that ALL of the data elements sent in the transaction are, in fact, "read" by the

receiving system — i.e., a mandatory library subset of required data elements.

Well, there's good news and good news in reaction to these needs.

EDI on the Internet

A group of interested parties has formed an Internet Engineering Task Force subgroup to develop the appropriate protocols to handle EDI on the Internet. As is its tradition, they are working exclusively on the net and the listserv over which they communicate is open to any interested party. If you are ready to receive 50 messages/day, don't hesitate subscribing to IETF-edi@byu.edu. They are working hard and I suspect they will come out with a suggested protocol for trial use very soon.

BISAC/SISAC Minimal Library Records

In an effort to answer this need, BISAC and SISAC will be calling together librarians, systems vendors, book wholesalers and subscription agents for a meeting on the Thursday or Friday preceding ALA Annual in Miami to review the data elements in the combined Book and Serial X12 Purchase Order transaction set, in order to determine those elements which all agree should be required in a Minimal Library Order. **If you are interested in participating in this session, please send you name, address, phone, fax, and e-mail information — and whether you prefer Thursday or Friday — to Sandy Paul: BISAC/SISAC, 160 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10010, Internet 4164812@mci mail.com, phone 212/929-1393, fax 212-989-7542.**

AND, on an only slightly-related (same place, different time), I look forward to seeing many of you on **Sunday, June 26, 1994**, from 9 A.M. to 12:30 P.M. in Miami, when Katina and I co-chair "Selecting Products in Electronic Formats: A Dialogue on the Critical Information Librarians Require." (See *Against the Grain*, November, 1993). ☞