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Adventures in ISBN Land

by Heather S. Miller (SUNY Albany) <hm766@vmsalbany.edu>

Thirty years ago it did not exist, yet today librarians, publishers and booksellers find the ISBN as familiar as an old sofa, and sometimes just as uncomfortable and annoying. Where did it come from and why do we use it? What good is it? What is its future? And just what is it anyway?

History

Various systems (all different) for numbering books had been used by publishers, booksellers and libraries for some time, all aimed at maintaining control over sometimes elusive bibliographic entities. As computers began to invade the book business, the hope of creating a universal numbering system which would be compatible with any computer system seemed more feasible.

The basic concept of establishing standard book numbers which would unequivocally identify publisher, title and edition for any book had been discussed and studied for some years. It had been determined that no existing system, including the **Library of Congress** card number, could be utilized. A new universal numbering system was devised in Britain by Professor **F. G. Foster** of the **London School of Economics** at the behest of the **British Publishers Association**, **W. H. Smith and Son Ltd**, and **The Book Center, Ltd**. Bibliographic rules for use of the numbers were written by **David Whitaker**, then Chairman of the publishing house **J. Whitaker & Sons**. The focus was on meeting the needs of book distribution and sales, but librarians were involved and were particularly interested in establishing unique numbers that would never be reused for other titles and for creating a system flexible enough to allow for future adaptations.

The SBN (Standard Book Number) system was designed so that booksellers and publishers could easily incorporate it into their existing systems. This quickly became the ISBN (International Standard Book Number) when the **International Organization for Standardization** adopted the British concept for worldwide use, expanding it from nine to ten digits. The number is divided into four segments, each a machine readable code, separated by a hyphen or a space. The first segment is the group identifier, basically a language affiliation or a geographical region. The second segment identifies the publisher and the third part identifies the title and edition, if more than one. These segments vary in length individually, but together account for nine digits. The tenth number (and fourth segment) is the check digit which computers use in algorithmic calculations to determine the validity of the entire number. For example, ISBN 0-7006-0740-4 can be decoded to read, English language — University of Kansas Press — Revolt against modernity — check digit 4.

The ISBN must appear in the publication itself in order to be useful.

Since 1969 when the SBN went international and became the ISBN, roughly 130 countries have become part of the process. The number of publishers participating has gone from a few who had to be cajoled into using the numbers to thousands today.

The Publishers' International Directory describes the ISBN as:

... a short, machine readable code that identifies unambiguously any book published internationally. The ISBN accompanies the publisher's product from production through distribution to sale. ... The introduction of the ISBN led to the simplification of ordering, stock control, accounting, and export procedures in many branches of the book industry.

The ISBN also facilitates ordering, acquisition, cataloging, and circulation procedures in libraries ... In addition, the ISBN contributes to more efficient marketing of books. It identifies not only a product, but also its publisher ...¹

The ISBN is applied only to specific materials:

- Printed materials
- Microforms
- Educational videos or movies
- Mixed media publications
- Microcomputer software
- Atlases and maps
- Publications in Braille
- Electronic publications²

Other publications, such as posters, coloring books and catalogs are specifically excluded. Others have their own numbering schemes, the **International Standard Serial Number (ISSN)** for serials and the **International Standard Music Number (ISMN)** for music.

Administration

The ISBN system is coordinated by the **International ISBN Agency**, headquartered in Berlin, Germany. It manages the system on a global scale, approves the establishment of and assists group agencies, supervises the development of the system and promotes its uses. Group agencies, corresponding to group numbers (the first segment of each ISBN) or subsets of them, do much the same thing on a regional scale, dealing with the nitty gritty of assigning publisher prefixes, advising publishers on the use of the ISBN and publicizing the system. There may be more than one agency per group. For instance, zero or one as the first digit in an ISBN indicates "English speaking." The group is far flung indeed, in-

cluding the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa, Zimbabwe and other countries, each with its own agency. The **R. R. Bowker Company** is the U.S. agency.

A number of publications assist in the administration and publicity of the ISBN program. The International agency publishes the **ISBN Newsletter** and the **ISBN Review**, **The ISBN Users' Manual** as well as the **Publishers' International ISBN Directory**. The manual is a booklet that explains the ISBN system's structure and use, while the directory is currently a hefty three-volume compendium of publishers indexed alphabetically, geographically and by ISBN.

The ultimate goal of the ISBN agencies is to have an ISBN assigned to and published in every book. Most commercial publishers have long since seen the wisdom of this and participate automatically, but small publishers and non-commercial publishers sometimes do not. Some think they cannot, but that is certainly not the case. All that is required is filling out a form and paying a fee, currently \$175 for five years, after which an ISBN will be assigned. **The Bowker Annual** regularly includes instructions on obtaining an ISBN as well as an explanation of the ISBN system.

The wonders of the scannable barcode have recently been added to the ISBN. Some expansion and adjustment of the **Universal Product Code (UPC)** in use on other types of products was necessary in order to incorporate the ISBN. The resulting scannable barcode and eye-readable number which incorporates the book's ISBN is called the **Bookland EAN** (European Article Number). Having reached this stage, the ISBN is adapted to all that technology requires today.

Uses and Abuses

The ISBN Agency issues specific, clear instructions to publishers regarding the use of the numbers. Every book must have its own ISBN. This includes new titles, new editions, different formats (e.g. cloth and paper), each edition, replacement sheets, etc. for looseleaf titles, and each volume of a set as well as the set as a whole. Likewise, each book has only **one** ISBN, so joint publications or books published by one and distributed by another publisher will not have multiple ISBNs. Publishers with more than one location are to use only one ISBN for a given title. They must keep track of their numbers and the books they have been assigned to. And ISBNs must not ever be reused.³

Likewise, publishers are told exactly how to print the numbers in books — that they must appear in the books, where, what type size, etc. When printed, the number must be

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preceded by the letters "ISBN" and the segments separated by a space or hyphen.⁴ There is little cause for confusion. Similar guidelines exist for other formats covered by the system. Clearly, the aim of the entire ISBN operation is to create an orderly, systematic method for identifying without a doubt any published book.

If all this sounds rather mundane, it might be useful to explore the expectations of the developers of the ISBN system and to look at how well it has succeeded. In 1969, **Emery Koltay**, then Director of the U.S. Agency, predicted that, "Direct links between the computers of publishers, wholesalers, library systems and other[s] concerned with books doubtless will become commonplace ..."⁵ Some 27 years later, this expectation has yet to be fully realized due to the extreme difficulty of imposing commonality on what is essentially an individualistic, even chaotic, world. Even though there are significant gaps in the computer-to-computer communication chain, the ISBN system is widespread, expanding geographically and in terms of formats using it and works very well when properly used. There is an ISBN in most books and ISBNs reside in various computers where they serve as the simplest access point to bibliographic information, pricing, publisher information, ordering information, and the like. The flexibility of the system is illustrated by its application to CD-ROM and other electronic publications. Unfortunately, the battle of getting publishers to see the usefulness of the ISBN has to be fought all over again with each format.⁶

Book ordering systems routinely use the ISBN as the "hook." Library materials suppliers and libraries themselves make daily use of it. Keying an ISBN into a supplier's system and calling the supplier and quoting the ISBN to a clerk are common methods of getting an order into the pipeline fast. Direct electronic ordering is used by some libraries, but it is still more common between vendors and publishers. One library materials supplier recently pointed out that ordering based on the BISAC fixed field format results in truncation of information and that, therefore, "... it is most important for the ISBN to be included, so that we can still correctly identify the item ..."⁷

Libraries make internal use of the number as well. Not only do most libraries attempt to include the ISBN on orders, the numbers are a useful access point in automated acquisitions systems as well. In a system that permits searching by ISBN, it is possible to search by the group and publisher segments of the ISBN to find order records for books from a particular publisher and to determine how they were obtained, which vendors were used, how well they filled the orders, what orders are still open, etc. This information can be useful in determining where to send an order for another book from the same publisher, particularly for publishers that are out of the mainstream.

A recent survey of libraries worldwide uncovered many ways in which libraries make use of ISBNs as well as a great variety of opinions of their actual value. Libraries use ISBNs as ID numbers in automated systems, as matching points when downloading records for cataloging and for retrospective conversion, in various kinds of lists and union catalogs, for bibliographic verification, when searching OPACs and other databases, in interlibrary loan transactions (32% of the respondents require an ISBN on ILL requests), and for ordering. The primary use is for verification (84%), while locating books is the second most common use (53%). In general, it is not seen as an absolutely essential access point.⁸

In Britain, royalties are paid to authors when their books are borrowed through libraries. Keeping track of these transactions is a complex task greatly aided by computers. In this system, the ISBN is an important matching point and the "... objective is not to find the correct ISBN for any particular title, but it is to discover any and all ISBNs in use relative to that title."⁹

Nevertheless, problems are not hard to find. **Audrey Eaglen** calls the ISBN "a good tool, sorely misused."¹⁰ She does not hesitate to state that the "ISBN has not lived up to the claims made for it ..."¹¹ Problems are "caused by the way those who ought to know better have chosen to use, not use, or misuse the ISBN ..."¹² She goes on to describe publishers' use of new ISBNs for new printings of the same work, reducing it to an inventory control mechanism, using only part of the ISBN or omitting it altogether in publishers' catalogs, ads and reviews and the use of inaccurate numbers.¹³

Writing a decade ago, a sub-group of the British MARC Users' Group had no trouble assembling a list of ten categories of commonly encountered situations directly contrary to ISBN Agency guidelines: reuse of existing ISBNs, distributors assign ISBNs to books that have legitimate numbers assigned by their publishers, failure to assign a new number to a new edition or a change of title, ISBN on the book differs from that previously announced for the title, failure to print the ISBN on the book, use of invalid numbers, failure to assign a new ISBN to a title taken over and reissued by another publisher, failure to use an ISBN at all, publishers who change their names and do not inform the agency. Two groups were singled out for special criticism: "overseas books" and "societies and institutions." "Overseas" means the U.S., Canada and Australia who were chided for lacking discipline in using the system. Most can sympathize with their characterization of societies as "lacking stability" as publishers and keeping "appalling" records.¹⁴ That is precisely why most libraries prefer to get society publications from suppliers.

The current situation

This group, in common with other commentators on the subject, admits that the pre-

cise error rate is unknown. Has the situation improved since these writers took publishers to task? In examining this device on which so many depend, more recent information was obtained from the Acquisitions Department of the University Libraries, State University of New York at Albany, and from library materials suppliers who responded to a questionnaire. Data from the library is in no way exhaustive. It shows a tip of an iceberg in one library, but it seems to indicate that problems have not all been solved. A few examples:

A publisher's flyer lists the book *Trajan's Parthian War* with ISBN 0-89005-530-0. A library supplier database and OCLC attaches this ISBN to another title: *Greek Historical Inscriptions From The Sixth Century B.B. to the Death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.* Authors and publication dates differ. There appear to be two different books from the same publisher, both carrying the same ISBN. If an order with this ISBN is sent to the supplier, the library might very well receive a book other than the one it needs. In such a situation, this library sends its order without ISBN, forcing the supplier to rely on the bibliographic information to identify the book.

In another case, one ISBN, 2-7384-2128-8, appears to be shared by *Le Roman Negro-Africain des Annees 50 a 60*, by Nelly Lecomte published by L'Harmattan and Albert Bensoussan's *L'Echelle sefarde* put out by the same publisher.

AAAI Press/The MIT Press assigned the ISBN 0-262-61102-3 to *Proceedings of the Twelfth National Conference on Artificial Intelligence*, a two-volume set, and to *Massively Parallel Artificial Intelligence*, by Hiroaki Kitano and James A. Hendler.

The ISBN manual states that different books must have different ISBNs and that multi-volume works must be assigned an ISBN for the set as well as for each volume.¹⁵ Nevertheless, *Nederlandse tekeningen uit de negentiende / Nineteenth-century Dutch Drawings*, a two-volume set, lacks an ISBN for the set even though each volume has a number.

Sometimes it is library suppliers who cause confusion. One supplier produced slips for what appeared to be two books, both with different ISBNs, *Stochastic Limit Theory: An Introduction for Econometricians* and *Stochastic Limit Theory: Advanced Texts in Econometrics*. In fact, there is one book. "Advanced texts in econometrics" is a series, not the book's subtitle. And the two ISBNs are legitimate numbers for the cloth and paperback editions. It would not have been too difficult for both slips to have resulted in orders and, ultimately, duplication.

ISBNs apparently gone berserk can wreak havoc on any attempt to maintain order. Finding different ISBNs on different parts of one book is not rare. *When Lean Enterprises Collide*, published by the Harvard Business School Press has this combination: ISBN in CIP on verso of title page: 0-87584-571-1; on back cover: 0-87584-540-1; on vendor's slips: 0-07-103632-6. The latter may look bizarre

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enough to cause some wonderment, but if that is the number in the vendor's database that is the one that will connect with the bibliographic information for this book.

Having seen Acquisitions Department staff members put time and energy into ISBN riddles and having read about problems with the numbers, I sought input from some library materials suppliers via a questionnaire focused on their uses of and problems with ISBNs. Responses were received from eight North American book suppliers and are summarized below.

Question: How much does your company focus on the ISBN on an order? In other words, is the ISBN the sole focus, making the bibliographic information superfluous?

Response: Six of the respondents indicated very heavy reliance on the ISBN, two much less. All agreed that bibliographic information is important. Some comments: The ISBN is the "first and preferable entrance point." "ISBN is primary search criteria [sic]. If additional bibliographic information is included and the ISBN search fails, we attempt to retrieve a record with that secondary information." Others added: "We do not like to receive orders consisting of just ISBNs." "Bibliographic information is never superfluous. While our first search is an ISBN search, if the ISBN has been provided, the title pulled up on our system ... must match the title on your order ... If the titles do not match, we will then search by title ..." At the other extreme, one stated that "ISBN is not our primary focus at all. We focus our attention on author, title, publisher and customer's price. The customer's price generally relates more to format required than does the ISBN." In the same vein, one noted: "Historically we have not put much emphasis on the ISBN, based on our customers' requests. However, in the past two years due to electronic orders received from customers and electronic orders being sent to publishers more focus has been put on ISBNs."

Question: If an order for a book contains an ISBN that is not found in your database or is for a book that is out of stock, do you search by other means (author/title and/or title) and report on other editions and/or formats that are available?

Response: Five answered "yes," while one said "no," however, most indicated that the library must state its wishes either by a general policy on file with the vendor or by annotating individual orders. None will ship a different book without some kind of indication that this is the library's preference. One vendor stated that without specific instructions from the library, they try to report on other editions and formats. One stated frankly: "If you order by ISBN and that specific item is out of stock they report only on that title." The

vendor expects the library to provide specific ISBNs to search and report on. Likewise, if the library wants something specific done, such as "supply paperback if cloth edition is out of stock," it must be said "big and bold." Given the volume of orders handled by inputting clerks, something needs to grab their attention. Use red marker or highlighter.

Question: Could a library arrange to have the paperback edition sent automatically in lieu of cloth (or vice versa) if the first choice format is out of stock?

Response: All indicated that this option is possible and is embedded in the library's profile.

Question: On an approval plan, this library recently received the same book in cloth and paperback editions, several weeks apart. How could this occur? Could ISBNs be involved?

Response: All indicated that this should not happen and that they have methods for checking to prevent such duplication. The most detailed response explained that "when an approval vendor handles more than one binding format of a title, it has to somehow 'link' all the bindings and ISBNs ...". With that link, the system will know which binding has been sent to any given customer. If the link is not made, the "system looks at that paperback as a completely different book and we end up profiling [both editions] for all customers ..." Others suggested profiling problems or human error.

Question: Are electronic orders treated differently from printed orders relative to the focus on ISBN explored in the first two questions?

Response: Seven respondents insisted that electronic orders receive the same review as paper orders, although they did not explain how this is done. One pointed out that electronic orders with ISBNs go directly into the mainframe and, therefore, "ISBN orders are handled faster." This seems to leave open the possibility that the wrong ISBN will result in shipment of the wrong book, albeit faster.

Question: Under what conditions would you supply a book whose ISBN differed from the ISBN on the library's order?

Response: The following comments give some insight into the approaches of different vendors:

"Under no conditions. If that situation occurs, it's an error on the shipper's part."

"If all other information matched (i.e. title, author, edition, price, publisher) what the library ordered and the ISBN is not the dominant factor in their profile, we would send the different ISBN."

"Agreed automatic supply of alternate binding if first choice is unavailable."

"When you order a book and provide an ISBN you really aren't asking us for an ISBN match, but for a title match. The ISBN just provides a quick way to do that search."

"Assignment of new ISBN by publisher who has purchased the title from the original publisher."

"Only after receiving customer's approval."

"If the library specifies paperback or cloth on the order, the ISBN is ignored and the stated binding is sent."

Question: How do you [the vendor] deal with publishers' use of incorrect and duplicated ISBNs?

Response: All indicated that they contact publishers for verification and make corrections in their systems. One indicated that differing ISBNs has become increasingly common "... with all the buying and selling of imprints that has occurred..." When ISBNs are duplicated, it is often due to the ISBN having been assigned to a title that was never published and then reassigned to another title. Vendors must purge from the systems all the information for the non-existent book and enter information for the new book. One was quite philosophical about such problems, stating that "publishers' inconsistencies are an everyday occurrence that we just deal with." Nevertheless, errors are costly to all concerned. One noted the increasing dependence on ISBN in electronic ordering from publishers and that it is in everyone's interest to make it work as accurately as possible, so there is a disincentive to carelessness.

Question: What is the effect of libraries sending orders with no ISBN on them at all?

Response: Answers to the question ran from one end of the spectrum to the other, from "no effect at all" to "not a recommended practice" and "ISBN is very important." Several commented on the increasing need for the ISBN in electronic orders to publishers from vendors and the lack of ISBN slowing the entire process of shipping the library's order. Some rely on price as a clue to what the library really wants; one will always supply a cloth binding in the absence of ISBN and price; all will contact the library if the item cannot be identified.

Question: How often do you find libraries using incorrect ISBNs on orders? Is the frequency increasing, decreasing or staying the same? What problems does this cause for the vendor?

Response: There was also a wide range of response to this query. Three of the vendors feel the problem is small and decreasing, one feels it is staying the same, and one believes it is increasing. Nevertheless, six of them added comments, most listing the ways in which library error causes them problems

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New Products and Services

Tagax®: A standard solution for automatic application of Security Tags in the Book Industry

by Adrian Cudmore

A revolutionary new system is now available for automatically applying security tags into the spines of books in order to prevent theft from libraries and retailers. Hence, publishers edition books can be delivered to libraries, as part of the acquisition process with tags already inserted, just as are some journals and commercial bindings which are re-bound at present. The system, branded Tagax® offers libraries, retailers and publishers significant advantages over current systems as for the first time widespread, automated introduction of tags across a broad range of titles has become both economically and technically feasible. This will save libraries the time-consuming and expensive task of inserting tags by hand for many of their acquisitions.

Tagax®, was developed in the United Kingdom by PP Payne Ltd and is now being marketed in the United States by its American subsidiary, Supastrip Inc. Tagax® addresses the needs of libraries, manufacturers, retailers and publishers alike, by covertly applying tags into the spines of books during the manufacturing process and consists of three main components: switchable electro-magnetic tape, a dispensing unit and an applying head.

In order to take advantage of this low cost approach by applying tags at the manufacturer and as publisher edition books are not distinguished between their end use, standards need to be agreed within the library and book retailing community. For the first time, Tagax® offers a solution to this scenario as it is fully compatible with all existing electro-magnetic systems which are currently installed in libraries and book retailers. This includes compatibility with detection and de-activation equipment as well as the latest in automated self check-out systems for libraries. Further, the nature of the electro-magnetic tag and its placement mean that it is completely hidden from view, with no alteration to the product appearance, hence it is virtually impossible for the thief to find, short of tearing the book apart. Thus, once applied at source, a tag will operate effectively in all systems for the duration of the book's working life.

This tag compatibility has recently been independently certified by FLOG, a European research facility associated with the University of Dortmund in Germany, and which is the leading organization in Europe for defining source tagging compatibility standards. Tagax® is the only material to date which meets these rigorous standards.

In the UK, PP Payne has been at the forefront of defining standards for source tagging within the book community. This arises from our work with BIC (Book Industry Communication) which is the UK book trade standards body, sponsored by the Booksellers Association (UK), The Publishers Association (UK), The Library Association (UK) and the British Library. Source tagging standards have been accepted in principle and final terms are in the process of being negotiated. The Library Association have been party to these discussions with no objections raised. As part of this process PP Payne is already talking to a leading international educational publisher in order to identify the specific details of the implementation process. Elsewhere within Europe, similar activities are taking place and most recently the Danish Book Industry approved source tagging using Tagax®. It is likely that this will be the first country to fully implement the system.

In the North American market place Supastrip Inc. has started the awareness and consultation process and is currently working with The Book Industry Study Group's BISAC (Book Industry Systems Advisory Committee), CBISAC (Canadian Book Industry Systems Advisory Committee), the American Library Association, the American Booksellers Association, the National Association of College Stores and the Association of American Publishers.

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and, ultimately, costs.

One pointed out that, when libraries use the vendor's automated system for ordering, ISBN error is virtually nil. Many libraries still send orders to vendors by other means and vendors have to connect the library's wishes to its database and/or to the publisher's database. One stated: "The amount of research we have to do on library orders in increasing." Problems include: phone calls to customers and/or publishers, delays, return of incorrect books, mixup of cloth and paperback ISBNs and bibliographic information. Others said: "It is a rare occurrence when a library provides the correct ISBN when ordering a set or volume of a set" and "There are many libraries whose pre-order searching [is] outstanding. For those libraries whose information is incomplete, occasionally inaccurate, or difficult to understand, a more laborious task is employed ..." Even the vendor who felt that libraries' usage of ISBNs is improving said that "we need to go further yet."

Vendors were also given the opportunity to make additional comments. Here is what they said:

"It would speed fulfillment of orders if the librarians would supply correct authors, titles, publishers, ISBNs, and prices."

"We are very much opposed to ISBN ordering alone without the other bibliographic data. There is too much room for error and delayed order fulfillment with only an ISBN as identifier."

"ISBNs are increasingly important in book ordering, especially in the electronic environment in which we operate. Barcoding and OCR [optical character recognition] technologies depend upon ISBN, and that is the direction in which publishers and vendors are developing their technology."

"Computers prefer numbers (actually, they require only numbers). The further we remove subjectivity from deciding which book fits your order, the more accurate your shipment. Now, if we could only remove human error!"

Conclusion

The ISBN is far more than a number. Its history is linked inextricably with the rise of automation, yet it carries with it the stigma of dependence on error-prone human beings. Its early promise has not been entirely fulfilled, partly because development of automation capabilities has lagged behind hopes and partly due to misuse of the scheme. Different segments of the information community use the ISBN in different ways and have somewhat different attitudes toward it, largely a result of their degree of dependence on automation. The ISBN is best used with care. If libraries verify ISBNs and accompanying bibliographic data, they can enhance the vendor's ability to

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defend materials that you don't agree with. The FCPL selection policy says the collection should include both. I agree, but not all libraries will. It is imperative that all of us think carefully about these issues. Each library system should think carefully about these issues, and should have policies in place to deal with people who do not agree with what they carry.

•• Non-biased and responsive selection.

One of the perennial questions in collection development is when selection becomes self-censorship, and I think it's important to talk about because self-censorship can be tempting when selection policies and selections are questioned. Selection can also become censorship if what we like plays a part in what we select.

The process of non-biased selection is a difficult one, and is open to abuse by library selectors if we aren't constantly aware that what we like has nothing to do with what is appropriate to select. As much as possible we need to use agreed-upon objective criteria to select materials for our libraries. That's another way of saying that we select materials based on our institution's goals, its selection policy, and responsiveness to our users.

A local Fairfax County newspaper, responding to excerpts from some FCPL materials that had been taken out of context, encouraged library staff to use "plain-vanilla common sense" when selecting, or deciding not to select, materials for the public library. When does plain-vanilla common sense become self-censorship? Selection is always a difficult balancing act, especially when you don't have enough money, and constantly have to make choices between what to buy and what not to buy. To me, being a selector is like being a high-wire performer. You can't become careless or complacent. You need to constantly balance pressures from one direction with pressures from all the other directions. Or you'll fall, and won't reach your goal — inclusiveness and objectivity. But I also think that you need pressures

from all directions — because if you lean too far in one direction or another, you'll also fall. And fail.

How can you avoid what happened in Fairfax County? I don't think you can. But you can be prepared for it, and plan for how to handle it. Libraries are uniquely vulnerable because a person who's looking for something offensive can generally find it. If we're doing our jobs, the collections contain, and I quote again from the FCPL selection policy, "... materials which offend, shock, or bore one reader but are considered pleasing, meaningful, or significant by another." It's pretty easy to take one book and take pictures and text out of context and make a case for protecting children from ideas and information they're not ready for, for controlling what children have access to, and therefore controlling what goes into a collection. But this is a democracy. Everyone has a right to an opinion, and public institutions should represent multiple viewpoints. We will continue to be a democracy as long as all of us participate in the process. In Fairfax County, people who disagree with Ms. Gounoud — like Valerie Eastwood and John Clark of Northern Virginia Citizens Against Censorship and their supporters — are active and have invested enormous energy in this debate. As have Karen Jo Gounoud and supporters of Family Friendly Libraries. That's what democracies are all about. And why public libraries are part of this debate.

The past four years have not been easy — all involved parties have spent a great deal of time and energy on the issue of collections and policies relating to collection access. But these issues have inevitably led to questioning why public libraries exist, and who we serve. These issues are real, and our assumptions about them should not be taken for granted. Time spent dealing with them, and reviewing policies related to fundamental principles, and how we interact with and respond to our constituents, is never wasted. If public libraries are to be responsive, which I believe we have to be to survive, we need to listen to all of our constituents, and the collection needs to respond to a wide variety of interests and perspectives. By the same token — a few constituents should not dictate what is available to all.

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supply the correct item. Libraries can benefit from expressing their requirements to vendors unambiguously and completely. It is false economy for libraries to shortchange pre-order searching and verification in the hope that the vendor will do it. The quality of orders libraries send to vendors ultimately affects costs.

Across the industry, cost savings and benefits of speed and accuracy can be achieved from increasing accuracy in the use of ISBNs. The ISBN system seems to be here to stay. During the first 25 years of use, ISBNs were assigned to an estimated seven to eight million titles worldwide and uses were found for the number beyond those envisioned by the system's creators.¹⁵ There is every reason to believe that use will continue to expand. Libraries, vendors and publishers all have a contribution to make towards its increased success.

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nals" which often consist simply of sites on the World Wide Web to which new information or articles are added. Are these serials, books, or something else entirely? And, how many ISSN does a publisher need — or want

— for a given title in various formats? What constitutes a "reproduction" in the online environment?

These are just some of the challenges that NSDP staff face every day, but fortunately, for the most part, we find such challenges exciting rather than daunting. When publishers call us to ask about ISSN for a kind of

FOOTNOTES

¹International ISBN Agency, *Publishers' International ISBN Directory*, 22nd ed. 1995/96 (Munchen; New Providence: K. G. Saur; Berlin: International ISBN Agency; New Providence: R. R. Bowker, 1995), ix.

²Ibid.

³*The ISBN System Users' Manual* (Berlin: International ISBN Agency, 1986), 11-12.

⁴Ibid, 14.

⁵Koltay, Emery, "Standard Book Numbering." In *The Bowker Annual* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1969), 72.

⁶Bowers, Richard A., "ISBN: A Marketing Infrastructure for Publishers." *CD-ROM Professional* (May 1993): 100.

⁷"BISAC E-Mail Orders." *Harrassowitz Newsletter* (Feb. 1996): 5.

⁸Barwick, Margaret, "Survey on the Use of ISBNs in Libraries." *ISBN Review* (1994): 35-46.

⁹Scumson, John, "Numerical Analysis: Paying the Authors." In *ISBNs in Book Ordering and Control: It's All Done by Numbers* together with *The Use and Misuse of ISBNs*. (London: MARC Users' Group, 1986), 6.

¹⁰Eaglen, Audrey B., "The ISBN: A Good Tool Sorely Misused." *Collection Building* (1989): 74.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.: 75-76.

¹⁴"The Use and Misuse of ISBNs: The Report of the MARC Users' Group." In *ISBNs in Book Ordering and Control: It's All Done by Numbers together with The Use and Misuse of ISBNs*. (London: MARC Users' Group, 1986), 47.

¹⁵"Twenty-five Years Playing the ISBN Numbers Game." *Library Association Record* (Dec. 1991): 821.