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## Chaos

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## **EDIFACT: Developing International Standards for Electronic Trading in Books and Serials**

by **David Martin** (consultant to **EDiTEUR** on EDI message development, and the compiler of the first issue of the **EDiTEUR Manual**, published 1995)

In the USA and Canada, ANSI X12 is today's standard for electronic trading in books and serials. In the UK, the national EDI standard, **TRADACOMS**, has been implemented by **Book Industry Communication (BIC)**, and there is now a critical mass of large publishers, wholesalers, booksellers and libraries trading electronically in this format. In a number of countries proprietary systems and message formats have been adopted for national trade ordering networks.

But the information industry — of which books and journals are self-evidently part — is now so international that its trading communications require an international messaging standard; and **EDIFACT** is the international standard for EDI. In 1992 a group of interested parties from a number of European countries, representing all levels of the book supply chain from publishers to libraries, met in Amsterdam, and agreed to set up **EDiTEUR** as a forum to develop **EDIFACT** standards for the international book trade.

Today **EDiTEUR** is established as a membership-based organisation sponsored or endorsed by the European federations of publishers, booksellers and library associations and by the **International Publishers Association**, and with a permanent secretariat provided by **BIC** in London. It has members from a number of countries outside Europe, including the USA and Japan. In 1995 **EDiTEUR** published a first set of **EDIFACT** specifications and implementation guidelines for book publishers, booksellers and libraries. Currently, this work is being extended by the addition of further messages, and by the revisions which inevitably arise as pioneer users confront the practical issues of EDI application.

In May 1996, **EDiTEUR**, working with a group of individual "sponsors" -- journal publishers, subscription agents, libraries, and system suppliers -- and in collaboration with **ICEDIS** and **SISAC**, is part way through the process of mapping into **EDIFACT** the functionality covered in existing ANSI X12 EDI messages for serials trading. Just a few years ago it would have been reasonable to question the stability and usability of **EDIFACT**. The syntax and data structures were changing too much and too often. Now the standard has reached a level of maturity. We can invest in the **EDIFACT**-based sys-

tems without the risk that they will be made obsolete by next year's version.

But **EDIFACT** is a very wide-ranging and complex framework of message standards, from which it is necessary to select and document a subset which is appropriate to the business cycle in a particular industry. **EDiTEUR** has chosen to work within the **EANCOM** subset, which is documented and maintained by **EAN International** in Brussels. **EANCOM** is supported and used worldwide, particularly by those industries in which distribution is a key element. **EAN** is at the heart of a network of national agencies which administer product numbering, location numbering and barcoding systems, all fundamental to EDI.

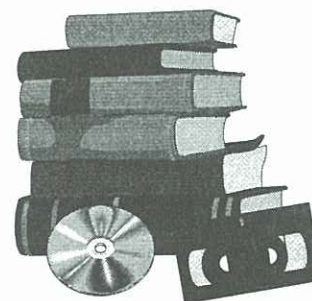
**EDiTEUR's** task is to take the cross-industry message specifications maintained by **EAN** and to develop implementation guidelines for particular book- and serials-related applications. This may also entail developing industry-specific code lists, or adding existing industry lists to the EDI message specification. For this purpose, **EDiTEUR** is formally recognised as an agency responsible for the allocation of industry codes. The initial set of messages included in the 1995 **EDiTEUR Manual** for book-related transactions consists of **QUOTES**, **ORDERS**, **ORDRSP** (Purchase Order Response), **ORDCHG** (Purchase Order Change) and **INVOIC** (Invoice/Credit Note). The manual was compiled in association with the **EDILIBE** project, a Europe-wide development linking a group of academic libraries, international booksellers and library networks. Consequently some aspects of the first issue are more fully worked out in relation to library supply than to more general trade practice. Work during 1996 will redress this imbalance and provide detailed implementation notes for the publisher/bookseller trading cycle, and will add several further messages, including (at the very least) **DESADV** (Despatch Advice), **RECADV** (Receiving Advice), **OSTENQ** (Order Status Enquiry), **OSTRPT** (Order Status Report) and **REQOTE** (Request for Quotation).

For serials, the initial set of messages will parallel the X12 set on which **SISAC** and **ICEDIS** have collaborated, so that in **EDIFACT** terms it will include Purchase Order, Purchase Order Response, Invoice/Credit Note, Despatch Advice, Order Status Enquiry and Order Status Report. The remaining priority in **EDiTEUR's** current work programme relates to bibliographic and product information for both books and serials. It is expected that there will be **EDiTEUR** implementations of the **EDIFACT** Price Sales Catalogue and Product Data messages;

and, through **Book Industry Communication (BIC)** in the UK, some very interesting work is being done on using **SGML** to carry much more extensive descriptions of book and serial contents lists.

**BIC** has already resolved that all new message development for the UK book trade will use **EDIFACT**. **Centraal Boekhuis**, the Netherlands book trade network, recently went live with an international EDI trading application using **EDiTEUR** guidelines. The German national book trade network and the major German wholesalers are implementing **EDIFACT**. The Scandinavian countries are committed to **EDIFACT** for book trade communication. And the list could go on and on ... An increasing number of countries now have national groups which are coordinating book trade EDI developments. The future of **EDiTEUR** is most probably as a federation of such groups, with individual membership coming mainly from countries where no national group exists. In this context, **EDiTEUR** has maintained very close liaison with **BISAC** and **SISAC** since its beginnings, and looks forward to an increasingly strong and positive input as **EDIFACT** is brought into use for trading with, and within, the USA. 🐾

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