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We Used to Call It Publishing-New Intellectual Property Pathways

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We Used to Call It Publishing — New Intellectual Property Pathways

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NB: Welcome to this new column to be edited by the intrepid SKP and Albert Simmonds. Read on.—KS

At a heavy-duty meeting not long ago, where librarians, people in publishing, booksellers and writers' representatives sat together around a huge table, one of the speakers used a phrase that got a nervous laugh. Our mission, she explained, was to facilitate rights activity in "the industry formerly known as the book business."

Now that distinctions among books, periodicals and assorted other formats are blurring toward the vanishing point in digital environments, we all know it is time to do things differently but, from one point of view, the prospect is daunting. Every sector of the intellectual-property universe is involved; each has its own goals and territory to protect, and each will find change impeded by inertia.

From another angle, though, what is about to occur is exciting, even invigorating. Because the Internet provides opportunities that have never existed before, we have a chance to set up a brand-new big-picture rights system that will tie us all together for the common good.

With its eye on this possibility, the **Book Industry Study Group** recently formed **BASIC**, AKA **Book And Serial Industry Communications**. Today a new Rights Committee within BASIC is working with groups around the world—including (but by no means limited to) **EDiEUR**, the **International ISBN Agencies**, the **International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers**, and the **International DOI Foundation**—to systematize the movement of intellectual property in all media and all locations to and from all interested parties.

Although it sounds like a tall order, the first steps are simple to grasp. Creating a system to handle this scope of content that will function well for writers, libraries, publishing companies, colleges, schools, wholesalers, retailers, book clubs and everyone else who deals with intellectual property obviously entails connecting people who hold rights in intellectual prop-

erty with people who want some of those rights for some purposes and some time.

This, in turn, requires that both rights holders and potential rights users (and the same person, company or institution can be sometimes one and sometimes the other) be unmistakably identifiable by computers. This means two major initiatives are in order:

- Setting up and assigning "identifiers" — like the ISBN or the Social Security Number — for authors, publishers, works, composers, versions of works, parts of works, and so on.

- Setting up a standard set of "descriptors" about rights requests and responses — in other words, creating "metadata" (data about data) elements for these transactions.

Several papers posted at www.bic.org.uk/bic explain what is happening with identifiers and metadata in exemplary plain English. These include "The Fire and the Rose" by **Godfrey Rust** and "Unique Identifiers: a brief introduction" by **Brian Green** and **Mark Bide**. "Identifiers," as Bide and Green point out, "are critical to the successful implementation of all forms of electronic commerce. It would be impossible to imagine how any form of electronic ordering of books could have been successfully implemented without the universal acceptance of the ISBN. In the digital environment, as the realistic potential arises to trade in fragments of works smaller than the book or the journal issue, a similar universal system will become essential."

More specifically, we will need **ISWC (International Standard Work Code)** numbers, **IP (Interested Party)** numbers and **PII (Publisher Item Identifier)** numbers along with ISBNs, numbers that denote **SICIs (Serial Item and Contribution Identifiers)**, **BICIs (Book Item and Component Identifiers)**, **DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers)** and more.

On the metadata front, the **Working Group** chaired by **Sally Morris**, **Secretary General of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers** in the U.K. and **Albert Simmonds** of **Albert Simmonds Development** in the U.S., has focused on the need to provide essential in-

formation not only about any given piece of intellectual property but also about its various manifestations.

Viewing "all possible transactions" as intersections among "USER, OBJECT, and USE," the metadata group has posted "schema" and a "Rights Decision Tree" at the BIC site. It has come up with dialog for "base-level" commercial or non-commercial transactions—such as Retrieve, View or Print Single Copy—that can be processed fast via computer. Its members are working on a "data dictionary" of standard terms for those and more complicated transactions. And it has fielded a pilot project involving **Xerox**, **Yankee Rights Management** and **VISTA Computer Services** which will demonstrate that metadata make it possible to capture publishers' terms, conditions and other rights-related information, to express that information in a common language and to use it for processing commercial and non-commercial rights transactions.

When rights metadata reach relatively final form, when necessary new identifiers have been assigned and when everything that should be integrated into the Common Information System has been integrated, all of us in the brave new world of intellectual property will find it easier—maybe even easy—to access whatever material we want, pinpoint its source and its derivatives, and arrange to use it to further whatever our goals may be.

Certainly, that's the mission of the **BASIC Rights Committee**, which is eager for more members from the library community. If you are interested, please contact **Judith Appelbaum** or **Sandy Paul** at **BASIC**, 160 Fifth Ave., N.Y., NY 10010, phone: 212/929-1393; fax: 212/989-7542; email <sandy@bookinfo.org>; Web site: <http://www.bisg.org> 

