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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Acquisitions In an ISBN-13 World: Was Y2K Just a Dry Run?

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I, User — Just Say No: Eliminating Low-Value Tasks

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On many days it seems not possible for libraries to absorb more: more new technology; more new products; more new services; more new tasks; budget cuts; staff reductions. Automation, outsourcing, and workflow redesign aimed at increasing efficiency and lowering costs may have already tightened your processes to the breaking point. You may not have capacity to absorb another thing. It might be time to say no.

But as librarians, we don't want to say no. We can't really afford to say no. And it's foolish to say no to the new stuff. It's the new stuff that administrators expect and patrons demand. It's the new stuff that will allow the library to reinvent itself for a vigorous future. In very many libraries, the time has come to say no to some of the old stuff, which is often the hardest thing to do.

In fact, we cling to the old; the familiar. We are drawn to tasks we know how to do well. We justify activity and expense with classic images of pristine catalogs and collections, even as they lose relevance. We value old-fashioned library aesthetics to which patrons are oblivious. We tend toward print materials over digital content because we can see when it backlogs, and we understand how it works.

In order to move far and well into the future, it is important to re-evaluate library services and workflow priorities often. We must think clearly about the value or the service provided, and be bold about removing steps and tasks in favor of newer, more important ones. Those that will be eliminated are not inherently bad. They may once have been critical and even now, may offer some diminished value. But service pressures require that we eliminate low-value and non-critical tasks regardless of their original intent because there are so many newer and more vital tasks to be accomplished.

The following is intended to stimulate thinking about "low-value" tasks that may still be performed in your library. Each one that remains may provide a real opportunity to do something better. Some are big. Some are small.

- Stop using overly complex fund structures (and small itemized endowments)
- Stop multiple, item specific, mid-stream searches
- Stop making system print outs (especially for single items)
- Stop inserting routing slips and colored flags
- Stop using free text fields
- Stop signing purchase orders
- Stop applying book plates

- Stop manual transcription of information from the system
- Stop manual tallies
- Stop writing narrative monthly reports
- Stop item by item book selection
- Stop putting new books out for review
- Stop "checking all" as a standard workflow routine
- Stop keeping paper files that replicate information stored in the system
- Stop storing publisher catalogs
- Stop photocopying
- Stop periodical check-in, at least for some categories of material
- Stop binding journals
- Stop upgrading third-party catalog records
- Stop trying to eliminate duplicate call numbers
- Stop accepting gifts
- Stop maintaining physical shelf-lists
- Stop building files of items not held
- Stop cataloging unsolicited serials

Many of these tasks are obviously inefficient and may only exist as a result of inattention. Some exist because of organizational momentum; some are legacy tasks from a previous era; some are closely associated with the library culture; and some still exist because certain staff members are ill-equipped for change. Others on the list may seem inconsequential, not worthy of reconsideration, requiring just a couple of seconds per item. Still others may seem absolutely primary to your organization, and/or outside the bounds of immediate control. In the end, none of these reasons fully justifies continuance of low-value tasks. We must challenge all these assumptions to move forward.

More generally, we should seek to recognize and question outdated remnants of pre-automation routines, manual transcription, item by item decisions or tasks, redundant systems, repetition, procedures that introduce error, and seeking the perfect in favor of the good. In all these ways we will better serve the patron when we just say no.

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Acquisitions In an ISBN-13 World: Was Y2K Just a Dry Run?

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Let's face it. You always suspected that all the hoopla over Y2K was a little over the top. And when the lights stayed on and your bank account remained in the black (or the red, as the case may be) you were even more sure of it.

The truth can finally be told: Y2K was really just a dry run for Y2007K.

The entire book industry—from publisher to patron—needs to get ready for ISBN-13. On

January 1, 2007, the ISBN will grow to 13 digits. This may appear to be a rather simple thing at first blush, but its ramifications are very real and far-reaching.

As a quick refresher, the ISBN is comprised of a group identifier, a publisher's prefix, an item number—and most importantly for this article—a check digit. The check digit is calculated through an arithmetic formula and is used

by computer systems to validate the preceding 9-digit "core." With ISBN-13, all current 10-digit ISBNs will be getting a prefix of '978.' This will cause the check digit to be recalculated so the last digit of the ISBN will change also. Some good news is that the check digit will be calculated using a different arithmetic formula, and the 'X' found in the last position

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of some ISBN's will be a relic of history.

Example: ISBN-10 - 0140179178
ISBN-13 - 9780140179170

Lastly, when all available blocks of '978' ISBNs have been assigned, prefixes of '979' will be assigned. Expect to start seeing some ISBN's with 979 prefixes in 2007.

Why is this happening?

Two reasons really. The oft-cited opinion is that we are running out of ISBN's and that this will add to the pool of available numbers. Although we are not in imminent danger of consuming all of the 10-digit numbers, it is true that adding the 978 and 979 prefixes doubles the available supply of numbers.

The sometimes overlooked reason for migrating to a 13-digit ISBN has to do with the plethora of product identifier numbers now in use. It is not unusual for a product to have an ISBN, a UPC and an EAN. Not surprisingly, confusion abounds. Publishers, distributors and retailers waste time re-stickering books with different barcodes. Different segments of the industry pick different identifiers to be their system's standard number. Barcode readers get confused by the myriad zebra stripes adorning every item. Acquisitions librarians struggle to find the appropriate product identifier when placing orders.

Clearly a system that had but a single product identifier for each item would save an inordinate amount of time, money and ibuprofen. Well, whoever "they" are, "they" must be listening. The UPC and ISBN are being integrated into the 13-digit EAN (International Article Numbering - was originally European Article Numbering) system. The end result will be just one worldwide product identifier number. The correct name for the number is EAN.UCC-13, although the book industry has adopted "ISBN-13" as the colloquial term. To be sure, the International ISBN Agency and all of the other structure around the ISBN will remain; but now the ISBN number will become a valid EAN.UCC-13. No longer will a book need an ISBN for the library and trade businesses and a separate UPC code for mass-market. It will have one 13-digit number. Likewise, videos and music will no longer get a UPC for North American retail, an ISBN for library channels and an EAN for European distribution. One number will suffice.

The ISBN is the product identifier most prevalent in libraries, however the UPC is often used on videos and music CD's. Understanding how both codes can be transmogrified into a EAN.UCC-13 should prove useful.

Although there are variations, the UPC code we are most concerned about is the UPC-12. Much like the ISBN, it has a manufacturer's code, item number and a check digit.

To understand how a UPC-12 can become a valid EAN.UCC-13, it is first helpful to know that the first digits of the EAN.UCC-13 specify the country of origin. The product in your hands

originated in Moldova if the first three digits are "484". A first digit of "0" specifies North America, so any existing 12-digit UPC can be converted into the new number by simply appending a "0" to the front of the existing number. Adding the preceding 0 does not change the check digit, so turning a UPC code into a valid EAN.UCC is really very easy.¹

ISBN's are a little trickier. When the international book community wanted to integrate the ISBN system with an existing barcoding system, it approached EAN, which agreed to the new quasi-country of Bookland. Bookland was assigned prefixes of 978 and 979 in the EAN system.² So just as EAN.UCC-13's that start with a 484 indicate that the product is from Moldova, codes that start with a 978 or 979 indicate that the product is from Bookland—which of course means that it is a book.

When the 10-digit ISBN is changed by adding the 97x prefix and recalculating the check digit, the result is a 13-digit number that is also a valid EAN.UCC. At this point the goal of rolling the EAN, UPC and ISBN into a single numbering system is realized. Every product will get a single 13-digit product identifier in the EAN.UCC system.

What you can expect is that between now and 1/1/07, you will see book products identified by both their 10-digit and 13-digit manifestations. Books published after that date will begin to have just the 13-digit number assigned. If you have been paying close attention, you have noticed that the EAN.UCC-13 has already been in use on books for quite some time. While the text above the barcode on the back cover will say something like, "ISBN 0-7357-1117-8," under the barcode you will see, "9780735711174." Notice the addition of the 978 prefix and the recalculated check digit. This is the number that is actually encoded in the barcode.

Arguably, the ISBN is the core piece of data in our industry. Obviously changing something this significant will have an impact on many aspects of a library's operations. A short and incomplete list would include, searching, cataloging, bibliographic record matching, interlibrary loan, etc. Trying to address all of these areas is beyond the scope of this article and the author's expertise. Henceforth this article will be limited to the issues that pertain to electronic ordering.

The bad news is that the ISBN lies at the heart of electronic ordering in the library industry. *Without modification, the current methods of electronic ordering are incapable of transacting business in an ISBN-13 universe.* If you want to order electronically after 1/1/07, you must take action. At a minimum, the programming behind every **EDI (Electronic Data Interchange)** document that you exchange will need to be altered and tested with every one of your trading partners. Ancillary processes will also need to be examined. For instance, many ILS systems allow you to create a PO line item from an existing bib record. After 1/1/07, that ISBN should be transmitted in its ISBN-13 it-

eration. If the ISBN in the bib record is still a 10-digit number, the ILS system will need to be savvy enough to change it as it is creating the PO line item.

The good news is that the Internet Commerce Committee of the **Book Industry Study Group** (www.bisg.org) has been studying this issue and has published the policies and standards to ensure a smooth transition to a 13-digit world.

Briefly, the standards outline a method for **EDI** documents such as Purchase Orders, Order Confirmations and Invoices to begin carrying both the 10- and 13-digit numbers simultaneously. The standard is designed in such a way that different organizations can migrate to an ISBN-13 world on their own timetable. Using the standard ensures that **EDI** documents can still be exchanged, even if one trading partner is ISBN-13 compliant while the other trading partner is still living in the ISBN-10 world.

For argument's sake, let's say that your ILS system is not yet ISBN-13 compliant while your book vendor has completed the migration. When you transmit your Purchase Order, it will contain only the 10-digit ISBN number for each line item. Your book vendor will still be able to process the order, and will return an Order Confirmation and an Invoice with both the 10- and 13-digit numbers listed for each line item. Since your ILS system only recognizes the 10-digit ISBN, it will ignore the other number and process these documents as usual. When your ILS system is upgraded, it will begin transmitting both numbers in Purchase Orders and will prefer the 13-digit ISBN in responses, but will still be able to process the 10-digit number in case you are working with a non-compliant book vendor. Once all parties have become compliant, transmission of the 10-digit number can be dropped.

The various documents on the **BISG Website**³ explain the details of how the **ASC X12** format of **EDI** should be used to accomplish this migration seamlessly. **BISG** works closely with **EDITEUR**, the international umbrella body for book trade standards. Their Website (www.editeur.org) explains how to accomplish this same goal using **EDIFACT**. **BISG** and **EDITEUR** have been collaborating on the standards for the next generation of **EDI** using XML. The XML documents being created already contain the needed functionality to support ISBN-13 and are already being adopted in the retail world.

There are predominantly three formats of **EDI** in use in the library world today. They are **X12**, **EDIFACT**, and the **BISAC** fixed field formats. Both **X12** and **EDIFACT** are easily adjusted to support the migration to 13-digit ISBN's. The **BISAC** format is different.

A brief digression: I'm a dog person. I don't mean to imply that I am half man, half dog. I mean that I spend considerable time doing dog temperament tests, assisting in dog rescue and the like. If you spend enough time around dogs, eventually you will encounter a dog that has

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long-ago seen his best days. He will be very old and his body will be racked with arthritis and cancer. His kidneys and liver may be failing and he will look up at you through cloudy eyes and you will know that it is time to let him go.

The **BISAC** fixed format is like that dog. The **BISAC** fixed field format was created in the 1970's. The various records have an 80-column limitation because it was created for use with punch cards. **BISG** stopped supporting this format in 1995, yet it has lived on. The **BISAC** format is the primary method of electronic ordering in the retail book industry and is still used by many integrated library systems. The complexity of migrating to a 13-digit world is clearly beyond the capabilities of the **BISAC** format. **BISG** will not release any updates to the **BISAC** fixed field format standard to accommodate ISBN-13. He has been a faithful companion and served us well for many years, but it is time to let Old Shep go to his reward.

This point cannot be overemphasized: If you currently transmit **EDI** orders in the **BISAC** fixed field format, you will need to migrate to **X12**, **EDIFACT** or **XML**.

There are a number of steps that libraries need to undertake in order to ensure a smooth pain-free migration to ISBN-13 ordering.

1. Inventory all applications used in the selection and acquisition process. Don't forget about seldom-used but still active tools. For instance, one library I recently worked with used an old DOS ordering program for one specific purpose that occurred just once a year.

2. Talk to the vendors that supply those products (or internal IT staff for home-grown applications). Find out their plans and timetable for migrating those programs and processes to ISBN-13 compliance. Expect that older products will not be upgraded. Understand your ILS and book vendor's plans for ISBN-13 compliance. Don't be surprised if software needs to be upgraded or ILS add-ons need to be purchased. Discovering this now will facilitate an orderly budget and planning process.
3. Find substitutes for soon-to-be obsolete products. Plan your migration to **X12** or **EDIFACT** if you currently use the **BISAC** format for transmitting orders. Budget and plan accordingly.
4. Document the steps needed to get your entire acquisitions process ISBN-13 compliant. Monitor your vendors' progress. Install and test new software.

Just as Y2K was inevitable, so is the change from ISBN-10 to ISBN-13. The ISBN's evolution will impact every library's selection and acquisitions processes. Those still using older technologies will be forced to find newer solutions and adopt new processes while other libraries will escape with a minimum of change and disruption. Regardless of your situation, beginning the process now will ensure that it can be managed and accomplished with time to spare. Or, you can ignore it and pray the metaphorical lights stay on anyway. I just wouldn't bet the bank account on it.

In addition to his duties at **Baker & Taylor**, **Eric Thronson** is Chair of the Internet Commerce Committee of the **Book Industry Study Group**. As noted, this committee is setting the standards for **EDI** use in the book industry.

The **PVLR (Publisher/Vendor Library Relations)** group of **ALA/ALCTS** will be hosting an **Open Forum on ISBN-13** at Midwinter in Boston. It is scheduled for Monday, January 17, 9:30-11:00 A.M. **Eric** is among the panelists scheduled to speak.

Endnotes

1. Note that there is no mandate that 12-digit UPC codes be replaced by 13-digit codes and some manufacturers may opt to continue using 12-digit UPC's ad infinitum. However, the Sunrise 2005 initiative from the Uniform Code Council urged general retailers to become able to scan 13-digit numbers. It appears that there will be a very high level of compliance. With this hurdle removed, the author expects manufacturers to begin to adopt the EAN.UCC-13 as their standard product identifier.
2. You may have noticed that our Bookland athletes did not fare well in the Athens Olympics. This was no doubt because they were sitting in the shade of an olive tree, engrossed in a good book and missed the starting times of their events.
3. It should be noted that there is also a 14-digit number that is an extension of the 13-digit number already discussed. The 14th digit denotes packaging level such as carton, pallet or truckload. For the sake of clarity, it is not being discussed here. More information can be found on the **BISG** website (www.bisg.org).

Bet You Missed It

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Column Editor's Note: Hey, are you reading this? Your esteemed column editor would like to know what you think! Zip off a quick email to <pmrose@buffalo.edu>. Does **BYMI** fill your needs? Do you have any suggestions for changes? I'm listening! — **PR**

SHOCK VALUE

by **Sandra Beehler** (Lewis & Clark College)

In July, 2004, 50,000 Quebecois turned out to protest what they saw as a strike at free speech — a notice from the **Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)** that it would not renew the license of a popular "shock" radio station in Quebec City when it expired at the end of July. The station carries programming offensive to women, foreigners and the mentally ill, and many others. The problem is that the **CRTC** only has power to admonish or withdraw licenses from stations. Many believe that the **Commission's** powers should be extended to enable it to impose fines appropriate to the levels of offense. Further discussion awaits the return of the federal Parliament in October.

See — "The Purge of the Shock Jocks," *Economist*, Aug 7, 2004, p. 30-32.

ENGLISH FOR EU

by **Sandra Beehler** (Lewis & Clark College)

As Latin, German and Russian before it, English is now poised to become the language of choice for business and government within the European Union. English is now the most-studied language in secondary schools throughout Europe. Another factor in the choice of English is the demands of foreign investors, whose international working language tends to be English. The dominance of English is likely to have most impact on institutions of the EU and on European integration. Among the three main working languages of the EU, English is winning the battle over French, with German a distant third. As use of English spreads, it will serve to lower language barriers that have slowed the process of integration.

See — "After Babel, a New Common Tongue," *Economist*, Aug. 7, 2004, p. 41-42.