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ISBN-13 at the University of Chicago Library

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ISBN-13 at the University of Chicago Library

by Frances McNamara (Director Integrated Library Systems and Administrative and Desktop Systems, University of Chicago Library) <f-mcnamara@uchicago.edu>

The ISBN is an extremely useful identifier that we have come to depend upon in a number of different library systems, although primarily as a means of communicating with publishers, jobbers and vendors when we order monographic items. In library systems, it is not usually the unique identifier. Each system has such a control number and bibliographic utilities like OCLC and RLIN also assign unique numbers within their systems. It is, however, an important and useful number that is found in MARC records and in many records used to communicate with vendors and sometimes with other libraries. The MARC record itself is of variable length and the 020 field is also of variable length, so an increase in the length would not require a change to the format.

When I did a scan of the ISBN index in our library system I found examples of records where a record reflected LC practice:

020  _ _ $a 9780374104436
020  _ _ $a 0374104433 (hardcover : alk. paper)
and others reflecting OCLC's current interim practice:
020  _ _ $a 2271062217
024  3 _ $a 9782271062215

Note that the 13-digit ISBN starts with “978” and the final digit is different because it is a check digit. Keep in mind that after 1/1/2007 there will be other valid ISBNs that start with “979.” So you might have valid ISBNs for totally different titles that look like this:

ISBN-10  2271062217
ISBN-13  978 + 227106221 + 5

and

ISBN-13  979 + 227106221 + check digit

The first two represent the same book, but the third is for a different book and would never have a 10-digit form. So you should never try to normalize a 13-digit ISBN that starts with 979 to a 10-digit ISBN.

Why would you want to? When we get to 1/1/2007 the goal is for all of the publisher and vendor databases to use only the 13-digit ISBN so that we can all order and track orders using that number. For them, it seems likely that they may want to do some kind of data conversion to use all 13-digit numbers even if they retain the old 10-digit numbers in another field. However, our library patrons may consult bibliographies and other sources listing 10-digit ISBNs far into the future. For library databases, we purposely retain out of print titles and we will probably want to reflect the 10-digit ISBN actually printed on the book that we own. So our databases will contain:

- 10-digit ISBNs for pre-2004 imprints
- 13-digit ISBNs for post 2006 imprints

While the vendor databases will probably contain:

- 13-digit ISBNs for all titles

POTENTIAL ISSUES

The fact that the length of the number and check digit calculations are different for ISBN-10s appearing on books and in various records is already causing problems with existing systems. It may be that a system that displays a MARC-formatted record, like the cataloging module of our Dynix Horizon system is accommodating variable length fields and not validating check digits, so it may not care about the new numbers.

Other systems might start rejecting fields already. Acquisitions modules may use an ISBN field that may be of fixed length and might or might not check the check digit. So length of field, check digit calculation, a process that supplies the hyphenation for display or searching, special ISBN processors or parsers, or special ISBN indexes all might be features that need adjustment to be able to accommodate the ISBN-13. And this may be true right now since these are beginning to appear on books and in records already.

After 1/1/2007 when we have library systems retaining 10-digit ISBNs for older titles communicating with vendor systems that require 13-digit ISBNs we will need a way to transform the ISBN-10 to ISBN-13 when communicating with a vendor. Likewise, when we are adding records with ISBN-13 from vendors, we may need to find a way to try to match those against older ISBN-10 records in our database if we use the ISBN to check for duplication when ordering or adding new books.

There will be a set of orders that are still open on 1/1/2007 that may have been ordered using ISBN-10 but may need to use the newer form of the number for ongoing tracking of the order.

TEST CASES

The ISBN is used in records that we exchange with many different vendors and systems. In the area of Acquisitions alone, libraries deal with numerous vendors. Each system designer will have to decide how to make modifications to deal with this change. It would probably be less useful for libraries to try to specify exactly how each system should be changed than to develop a set of test cases that will allow us to test whether changes work for our systems and workflows. If you choose examples of each situation, the older ISBN-10 title for which you might need to order an additional copy, the interim title with both ISBN-10 and ISBN-13, and a hypothetical post-2006 title with ISBN-13 only, you will have test cases to use to verify that changes will work in your ordering workflow. I think for any affected system you would want to:

- Enter ISBN in order
- Enter in bib record; import records
- Produce EDI (EDIFACT or X12, not BISAC); Print PO
- Search ISBN including check for duplication
- Display ISBN
- Receive and pay for title
- Check documentation/user manuals

Notice that the first thing you should check for is whether your EDI format is BISAC. That format can no longer be used, as it will not accommodate ISBN-13.

The Acquisitions module is undoubtedly the most important software for which we will need to do an audit of where and when the changes will occur. We will need to insist the ILS vendor have a plan to deal with the change and be ready to test the changes provided to verify they work. In addition we will need to find out the plans for changes from the suppliers we use and with whom we communicate.

OTHER MODULES AND SYSTEMS

Other modules and systems used in the library will need to be examined to see if any changes are needed.

Cataloging: If the ISBN is used to automatically match and overlay records upon import, systems will have to recognize equivalent ISBN-10s and -13s in case an existing record bears the ISBN-10 and an incoming duplicate record bears the ISBN-13. Likewise, if records are extracted and sent out for automatic matching and enhancement for full cataloging or Table of Contents records, if ISBN is used as continued on page 38
the match there could be issues depending on how the matching is done. Input and edit as well as searching of ISBNs in this module should be checked.

Public Catalog. The ability to search by either form of ISBN must be retained. Many older bibliographies will use the ISBN-10 in the citation. A user should be able to input the search in any form and let the system normalize it as needed for the best results. Display of the ISBN should also be checked. If the system was automatically supplying hyphens, this feature could require changes.

InterLibrary Loan. A number of ILL systems allow search of a union catalog and then behind the scenes the system may automatically check your catalog to verify you don’t already own the title, or it may automatically go around to a list of library catalogs to find a copy for the user. If the ISBN is being used for this search it will need to be tested to see that the multiple ISBNs currently in records and the ISBN-13 post-2006 do not prevent the system from working as efficiently as possible.

External Linking. A new feature of many catalogs is the ability to do an Open URL or other link to external sources to display book jackets and reviews or to use an institutional link resolver. Often for monographic titles the ISBN has been the best identifier to use for this type of search. Now, however, the MARC records used to provide the ISBN may contain multiple fields and in the future an older record may contain the 10-digit ISBN while the file of reviews may have the newer number. Keeping these links working will be another challenge.

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Adventures in Librarianship — Recent Developments

by Ned Kraft (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

In a recent issue of Science, Jeb Cartledge and Surri Ray finally confirm through carbon dating and other techniques what many of us have long suspected: that the Nippur Codex is the oldest library catalog known to man. Discovered in 1998 by German tourists looking for a shortcut to the Simmuh Valley, the Codex has been under scientific, linguistic, and bibliographic scrutiny ever since. The Science article, “Nippur: Yes or No, Library or Laundry List?” (v.68, #4, pp 97-115) puts all doubts to rest.

Now called the “Nippur Catalog,” the document lists 64 manuscripts. If there is an order to the list, it has yet to be deciphered. Manny Several, who consulted with Cartledge and Ray on semantic issues, suggested in a recent interview that the catalog may be in “spontographical” order. But when asked to explain, Several began coughing and would not respond to the question.

The style of script and the quality of the papyrus lead earlier scholars to believe that the Nippur Catalog is actually the result of a well known rivalry between the Mo family on one side of the Nippur River and the Ma family on the other. Ray and Cartledge don’t dispute that possibility. In fact, their article states that “Cosimo Ma and Maximus Mo were known to publicly draw daggers over the issue of the size of their respective libraries.” And the document’s introductory matter contains the phrase “contus quentin im pardo Mo,” which translates roughly as “in your face, Mo.”

Ray and Cartledge will present their paper and entertain questions at the British Library’s Heretofore Auditorium, part of the Bombasticum Lecture Series, on August 2nd. Although Ms. Ray, who will lead the discussion, expects to be “heralded by enthusiastic bibliophiles and a few hangers on,” Mr. Cartledge is not as optimistic. “They don’t allow spoiled fruit in the Heretofore, do they? I’ll be all dressed up, you see. And with my fellowship running low, the last thing I need is a pelting.”