



Book Industry Study Group's Identification of E-Books Research Project

Summary of Report Findings

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Prepared by Information Media Partners for Book Industry Study Group, Inc.

- Executive Summary
- Detailed Review of Findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations



BISG
BOOK INDUSTRY STUDY GROUP

Project Introduction

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BISG's Identification of E-Books Working Group
Director of Publishing Standards & Practices, Hachette Book Group

Project Introduction

Welcome. I'd like to take a moment of introduction, especially for those who are new to this project, to review the process that led us to the publication of this report.



The Book Industry Study Group's ([BISG](#)'s) Identification of E-Books Working Group was started in May 2010 to address a specific issue: the assignment of ISBNs to digital content. The Working Group was aware that the current revision of the ISBN standard (published in 2005) mandated that each different format of an electronic publication be assigned a separate ISBN. The Working Group was also aware, however, that adoption of this practice over the intervening years had been anything but uniform, particularly in the US. In the spring of 2010, the International ISBN Agency responded to this inconsistent adoption by publishing a position paper entitled [E-Books and ISBNs: a position paper and action points from the International ISBN Agency](#). This paper supported the current standard and suggested a number of problematic issues that non-compliance might be causing in the book supply chain. BISG's Identification of E-Books Working was created to review and respond to this position paper.

2005:

ISBN Standard revision calls for unique ISBN assigned to each separate format of an electronic pub

Mixed acceptance;
an array of practices

2007:

IDPF publishes ePub Standard

Publishers start assigning an ISBN to ePub file of a title and supplying only that file to partners

2008:

ISBN Agency issues guidelines “allowing ISBNs to be assigned by e-book resellers...”

“...in limited circumstances where publishers will not provide their own ISBNs and the reseller judges that a unique identifier is essential.”

February 2010:

ISBN Agency issues position paper reaffirming one ISBN per electronic pub

May 2010:

Formation of BISG’s Identification of E-Books Working Group

Set up to review International ISBN Agency recommendations and BIC Code of Practice

Project Introduction

Everyone working in today's book industry has the same goal when it comes to identification: we all want the ability to clearly identify and describe products so the end-consumer can find what they want in the format they require—print or digital. But, how do we accomplish this? What guidance can associations like BISG give? How do we account for the fundamental differences between physical and digital product in a solution? How do we impose order on a system undergoing a period of such rapid reinvention and expansion? Anyone having first-hand experience with this, in addition to the other challenges our industry faces today, can tell you that keeping up with this constant rate of change can be like trying to build a house in the middle of a hurricane.

There's little doubt that the emergence of the digital marketplace and online social communities has created great opportunities and great challenges. The book industry is undergoing a turbulent period of redefinition and repositioning as our customers depend more and more on the online world for the information that determines their digital and print purchases. Along the way, the traditional roles in the publishing supply chain



Project Introduction

have been blurred or combined. Booksellers have become publishers, publishers have become booksellers, authors have become both publishers and booksellers, and the end consumer has taken on a much more powerful role in this new ecosystem.



Possibly the best gauge of the scope and depth of the changes facing our industry is the fact that perhaps the most reliable and successful standard ever produced by the book industry, the ISBN, which has stood as the product identifier for more than 40 years, has now become, in just the past five or six years, the subject of so many long and impassioned debates over its use and even its relevance in the digital marketplace.

So, how do we start to take control of the present and prepare for the future? BISG's Identification of E-Books Working Group felt that the issues being raised by the International ISBN Agency were anecdotal and saw the need to gather real data about what is going on in all sectors of the industry. The Working Group felt that real data would lead to real recommendations and best practices.

Project Introduction

To this end, BISG's Identification of E-Books Working Group commissioned Michael Cairns of Information Media Partners to conduct a study that would gather this data. At the same time, the International ISBN Agency also decided to do a similar study. While there has been some shared discovery of the findings between the two groups, the studies were conducted separately.



What follows is a summary of findings from BISG's *Identification of E-Books Research Project*. A fuller version of this report, including several interview transcripts, is available from the BISG office. Contact Angela Bole, BISG Deputy Executive Director at angela@bisg.org or 646-336-7141 x13 for more information.

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Project Findings

Prepared by
Michael Cairns, Managing Partner at Information Media Partners,
for the Book Industry Study Group, Inc.

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- Executive summary
 - Findings
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 - Recommendations
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 - Project summary
 - Key Findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations



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Executive Summary

Prepared by
Michael Cairns, Managing Partner at Information Media Partners,
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Findings

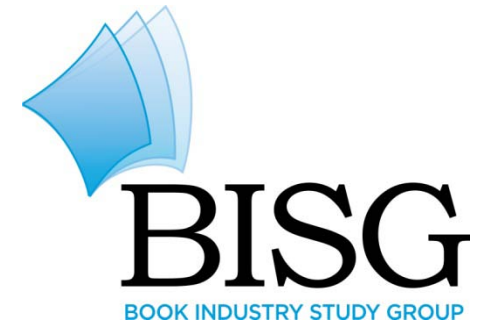
- Little support for current ISBN policy
- General move to 'production' format policy
- No business case
- Library supply problematic
- Continued need for education
- Limitations of ISBN for future needs
- Metadata Issues
 - Quality
 - Distribution
 - Consistency

Conclusions

- Difficult to change current embedded behavior
- US market leading indicator of market direction
- ISBN “policy issue” symptom of longer-term issue(s)
- Benefit to normalizing policies and procedures
- Gaining support of ISBN International important
- Participants exhibit no collective desire to ‘fix’ problem

Recommendations

- Production format approach to identification
- Defined period of consultation (6mths) to chart long term approach
- Require industry support in advance of initiative
- Re-evaluate 'work-ID' requirements
- Examine library segment for relevance to future consumer models
- Establish relevant metadata guidelines: quality, distribution



Detailed Review

Prepared by
Michael Cairns, Managing Partner at Information Media Partners,
for the Book Industry Study Group, Inc.

Project Summary

- Completed 55 interviews, 75 people, 35 hours
- Spectrum of supply chain
 - Trade, academic and education publishers
 - Traditional and online retailers
 - Wholesalers and distributors
 - Data aggregators and information providers
 - Libraries and library vendors
- Wide cooperation from participants
- Transcribed interviews
- Completed draft deliverable and draft presentation
- Next steps & process to conclusion

Detailed Review: Companies Interviewed

Bowker*
Firebrand*
Ingram Book Group*
Open E-Book
Barnes & Noble*
NISO
UC Press
UM Press
Kaplan
Book Rights Registry
Liguori
Zumaya Books
Yankee Book Peddler
Baker & Taylor
Taylor & Francis
HarperCollins
Pearson Education
John Wiley
NCSU
McFarland
BookNet Canada
Kobo Books
RoyaltyShare
OnDemand Books

Macmillan
Hachette Book Group
Sourcebooks
Impelsys
APEX
Harlequin
Random House
Copyright Clearance Center
Chegg
Perseus
Smashwords
CrossRef
Cengage
Cornell University
Simon & Schuster
BookGlutton
Oxford University Press
Diesel Books
International ISBN
EDItEUR
Penguin
OCLC
Lifeway Christian Resources

* Two Interview Sessions

“But I think if we had had a clearer roadmap of how we needed to manage this with our supply chain partners, that would have really informed our decisions. I think a lot of what informed the decisions that were made about how we were going to manage this with our fulfillment center – and also now we have to do it in our digital warehouse this way, too – was just all anecdotal. ‘Random House says they do it this way, therefore we should do it this way.’ And I think that that's not a good way for a publishing company to operate its business. We should be operating in a standards compliant universe.”

“But I think if we had had a clearer roadmap of how we needed to manage this with our supply chain partners, that would have really informed our decisions. **I think a lot of what informed the decisions that were made about how we were going to manage this with our fulfillment center – and also now we have to do it in our digital warehouse this way, too – was just all anecdotal.**

‘Random House says they do it this way, therefore we should do it this way.’ And I think that that's not a good way for a publishing company to operate its business. We should be operating in a standards compliant universe.”



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Key Findings

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Key Findings

- “Bad Practice” structurally embedded
- Enablers at all levels
- Definitions and nomenclature inconsistently applied
- Messaging & communication lacking
- Business case unclear
- Definition of ‘product’ fluid
- ISBN relevance challenged
- Library market problematic
- Bibliographic metadata substandard
- Solution(s) not obvious

1. "Bad Practice" structurally embedded

"Well...in a sense it's not helped by the fact that, certainly in the US, the intermediaries and retailers have managed to provide work-arounds which enable the system to be misused."

1. “Bad Practice” structurally embedded

“Bad Practice” structurally embedded

- Current e-book ‘context’ historically consistent*
- ISBN practices always inconsistent
 - Historic ‘traffic cops’ enforcing better/appropriate conduct disappear
 - Expediency vs. policy
- Major retailer operates outside ISBN system
- Rules bent for expediency: “work-arounds” the norm
- Policies and procedures continually in flux

*Difference: e-books will drive industry’s future

1. “Bad Practice” structurally embedded

Current practice

- No ISBN at all
- Print ISBNs assigned to e-book versions
- One ISBN assigned for all e-book file formats
- Unique ISBNs assigned to individual (production) file formats
- Unique ISBNs assigned to platform specific versions
- Proprietary (non-publisher) ISBNs assigned to e-books
- Proprietary (non-ISBNs) identifier assigned to e-books
- EANs assigned to e-book content
- “Made-up” numbers

1. “Bad Practice” structurally embedded

Enablers at all levels

- There are no ‘best practices’
- Everyone adapts
- Spend time, effort and money to address business objectives
 - Retailers
 - Aggregators
 - Distributors
- Under invested in technology

2. Definitions & nomenclature inconsistently applied

Definitions & nomenclature inconsistently applied

- Key terminology miss-used
- “Flexible” definitions enable specific arguments
- Need for education and champions
- Policy consistently and uniformly adopted

2. Definitions & nomenclature inconsistently applied

Sample of Definitions

- Format
- E-book
- Chunks
- Digital Content
- Supply Chain
- Traditional Supply Chain
- Tradable Product
- Bundle
- Blended Content
- Enhanced e-book
- Monograph
- Non-tradable Product
- Work
- Product
- SKU
- UPC/EAN
- ISO
- Download(able)
- Version
- Manifestation
- PDF
- DRM
- P-book
- Platform
- EDI

Messaging & communication lacking

- Industry groups
- ISBN Agency (and International) is anonymous
 - Existing image is largely negative due to pricing and 'business model'
- Context within ISO irrelevant or unknown
 - Policy: "recommendations" and "best practices" and "guidelines"
- Community
 - Competitors & partners
- Inconsistency & allowances

Business case unclear

- Presumed expense exceeds benefit
- Ever-increasing number of consumer platforms
- Arguments viewed theoretical not practical
 - Controlling metadata
 - Data/market analysis
 - Consumer experience and 'discovery'
- Format proliferation in mid-1990s

Definition of 'product' fluid

- No longer static printed product
- PDF giving way (slowly) to ePub
- "Product" expected to become consumer defined
- Never return to 'static' product paradigm
- DRM at the discretion of the retailer

ISBN relevance challenged

- ISBN not future tested
 - Immediate need for work IDs
 - Books lose structure, vendors proliferate and content is atomized
- Revision & adaptation too slow for industry pace
- Can ISBN cope?
 - Increasing atomization
 - Increasing customization for consumers

Library market problematic

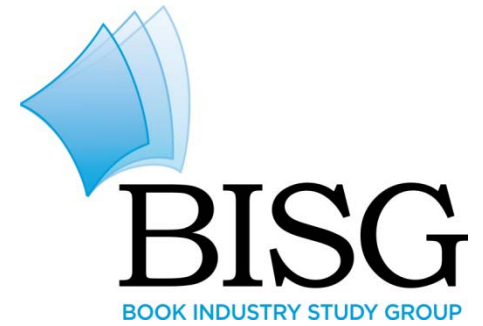
- Significant work flow issues
- Cataloging conundrums
- Publisher, platform, wholesaler supply same item – varying approach to item identification
- Pricing packages: rights and restrictions, lease vs. buy, subscription, multi/single user, etc.
- ISBN by item, vendor, pricing method
- Potential microcosm of future consumer market
 - Content available from many sources, for any/specific platforms, with varying rights and varying price models
- Segment experienced, but without a solution

Bibliographic metadata substandard

- Larger 'trade houses' print metadata OK
- E-book metadata consistently poor
 - Complete, consistent, current – Fails on all counts
- Separate e- and p- metadata processes
 - Synchronization
 - "Data rot"
- Outsourced e-book metadata
- ONIX 3.0 partial answer, but roll-out slow
- Mechanics of 'managing data' substandard
 - Update process
 - Adds/changes/deletes
- "Four days to process a file"
- Work ID

Key Findings

- “Bad Practice” structurally embedded
- Enablers at all levels
- Definitions and nomenclature inconsistently applied
- Messaging & communication lacking
- Business case unclear
- Definition of ‘product’ fluid
- ISBN relevance challenged
- Library market problematic
- Bibliographic metadata substandard
- Solution(s) not obvious



Conclusions

Prepared by
Michael Cairns, Managing Partner at Information Media Partners,
for the Book Industry Study Group, Inc.

Conclusions

- Addressing narrow current ISBN policies may not be 'future proof'
 - Books lose structure, vendors proliferate and content is atomized
- Benefit to normalizing policies and procedures
- Gaining support of ISBN International important *but...*
- ...can US book trade lead world?
- Difficult to change embedded behavior
- Little collective desire to 'fix' problem exhibited
 - Need 'buy-in' in advance
 - Enforcement of any eventual agreed policy will require commitment from all parties, otherwise no solution will be effective
 - It would be practical to gain this commitment in advance of defining solutions



Recommendations

Prepared by
Michael Cairns, Managing Partner at Information Media Partners,
for the Book Industry Study Group, Inc.

“I’d like to see some recommendations that not only are logical, but that can gain some wide acceptance.

That’s not to say – I think over the years, the position of the International ISBN Agency has not been illogical. It’s made sense what they’ve said, but what they were saying wasn’t getting any traction with regards to e-books. And so, at a certain point, it did become illogical for them to insist on this.

The market is headed in a different direction, so I would like us to see – I would like to see this report recommend some sort of numbering practice.”

What the industry needs

- ▶ Direction
- ▶ Consistency
- ▶ Compatibility with all markets
- ▶ “Best practices”
- ▶ Education



Short-term

- ▶ **BISG Identification of E-Books Working Group review/discussion of International ISBN Agency documentation**
 - **Business Requirements Study on ISBNs & e-books:**
 - <http://isbn-international.org/news/view/36>
 - **Guidelines for the assignment of ISBNs to e-books:**
 - <http://isbn-international.org/news/view/31>



Short-term

Also...

- ▶ Provide better definition of “production” formats (i.e., “products”)
 - Best practices & education
 - Police activity?
- ▶ Document movement of “best practice” assignment through several supply chains



Ancillary

- ▶ Anticipate what policy change means for ‘work ID’
- ▶ Examine library segment for relevance to future consumer models
- ▶ Simplify metadata file formats and transmittals
 - Tier data requirements: simple fielded file, expanded, expert
 - Establish best practices for adds/changes/deletes
 - Reduce need for full file updates



Long-term

- ▶ **Identify future ID needs...Toward a new Identifier?**
 - Specify requirements of 'new' e-book and e-content identifier
 - Define and document Gap analysis
 - Address ability of ISBN to match future requirements
 - Physical versus digital products: Can one ID do both effectively?
 - Consult with community with objective to have a strategy in place before the end of 2011



What the industry needs

- ▶ Direction
- ▶ Consistency
- ▶ Compatibility with all markets
- ▶ “Best practices”
- ▶ Education





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For More Information

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