



Product Metadata Best Practices for Data Recipients

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Book Industry Study Group, Inc.

BISAC: Book Industry Standards and Communications

BISAC Metadata Committee

Product Metadata Best Practices for Data Recipients was written and compiled for the Book Industry Study Group, Inc. (BISG) by Richard Stark and the BISAC Metadata Committee. All enquiries about this document should be addressed to BISG using the contact information given below.

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BISG develops and maintains standards that enable effective communication along all parts of the industry supply chain. We also create policies and best working practices for the industry. BISG has led the way in setting industry standards and conducting vital industry research on behalf of publishers, booksellers, libraries, and vendors.

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Preface

This document is the first revision of Product Metadata Best Practices for Data Recipients since its publication in September 2008. It is the result of several months of work on the part of the BISAC Metadata Committee. The committee members who worked on revising this document represented publishers, wholesalers, booksellers, bibliographic data providers, trade associations, and libraries. The final guidelines for each practice covered in this document were approved by a consensus of Committee members and then submitted to BISG membership and to the BISG Board of Directors for review and approval.

These best practices are voluntary guidelines that, if followed, will improve the accuracy of a vendor's data throughout the supply chain and speed the processing of that data among a vendor's trading partners. Recipients of data are encouraged to use these practices to work collaboratively with the suppliers of their data to improve the quality of the product data we all use.

About the Authors

The BISAC Metadata Committee has been a leader in the development of both national and international product metadata standards and best practices for many years. The Committee has responsibility for the development of the ONIX for Books standard in the United States. The Chair of the Committee represents the United States on EDItEUR's ONIX International Steering Committee.

Glossary of Terms

consumer-facing catalog systems: systems used by the general public to search for and purchase books and related products. Retailers' web sites (e.g., Amazon.com, BookSense.com, bn.com, etc.) are one example of such systems. Online public-access catalogs (OPACs) used by library patrons are another example. Systems that are intended for use by book-industry professionals are NOT included in this definition.

data aggregator: an organization that collects data from a variety of publishers, vendors, and other data suppliers in order to build a comprehensive catalog of product information. Data aggregators typically license their catalogs to libraries, retailers, and other data recipients.

data contact: the staff person at a data supplier, data recipient, or other organization in the data supply chain who is designated by their organization as its representative on product data matters.

data owner: the holder of U.S. sales and/or distribution rights for the ISBN (or other EAN) indicated in the product record.

If the aforementioned company(s) does not wish to have responsibility for a product's data, it may designate another party as the product's "data owner." Examples of commonly designated data owners are:

- a. The U.S. division of a multinational publishing company
In cases where a book or other product is published in the U.K., for example, and imported by the U.S. division of the U.K. publisher, the U.S. division may be designated as the data owner in the U.S. market.
- b. The vendor of record who sells the publisher's books into the U.S. retail market
This class of data owners includes both distribution companies and sales agents. Distribution companies may be other publishers or companies whose sole business is distribution. A wholesaler of books may serve as the vendor of record for a publisher and therefore the wholesaler could be the data owner for that publisher's books.
- c. The service provider who is contracted to provide product data services to the publisher
Publishers and distributors may designate a data service company to serve as the data "owner" for their books. Examples of such companies are Firebrand Technologies, NetRead, Ingram Book Company, Baker & Taylor, and R. R. Bowker.

data recipient: an organization that receives and loads product data into its catalog and/or other database systems. Libraries, retailers, wholesalers, and distributors are all examples of data recipients.

data supplier: an organization that sends product data to data recipients. Publishers, distributors, wholesalers, publishing systems vendors, and data aggregators are all examples of data suppliers.

distributor: a company that provides warehousing, shipping, and/or other supply-chain services to a publisher or other product manufacturer. For the purposes of Product Metadata Best Practices, distributors often serve as data owners or data suppliers for their clients' products.

postponed indefinitely: It is a normal part of the publishing business for the release of an announced title to be postponed indefinitely. These are books where pre-release data has been supplied to a publisher's trading partners, but where the publication of the book has been subsequently postponed to an indeterminate date in the future. Such books should be distinguished from books whose release date is merely delayed by a period of weeks or months. Such books should also be distinguished from books that were announced only to have their publication subsequently cancelled.

process a product data file: The term *process* shall, in the context of Best Practices for Product Data Recipients, mean that a data file has been loaded into all applicable *internal* database systems of the data recipient.

It does NOT necessarily mean that not-yet-released products are made public on consumer-facing catalog systems. Practices on publishing data on public catalogs vary from one data recipient to another, however, updates to product records that are already viewable by data recipients' customers should be published on consumer-facing catalog systems as soon as is practical and no later than five business days of the receipt of the file.

Best Practices for Recipients of Product Data

1. At a minimum, a data recipient should be prepared to process and display critical data points in a timely manner:

Recipients should process, in a timely manner, updates to critical data points (i.e., data points that may be displayed on public-facing websites, or data points that affect customer-messaging on public-facing websites). Timely processing and dissemination of the data in these fields not only maximizes opportunities for sales and promotion, but it also minimizes the chances of disappointing customers by displaying information that is out-of-date. It is therefore recommended that data recipients process and display updates to the data points listed below within two business days of, but not more than five business days after receiving those updates from the publisher or vendor of the affected products.

It is acknowledged that the quality controls recipients place on incoming data might delay file processing beyond two business days, but it is nevertheless recommended that recipients make every effort to process these critical data points in a time-frame as close as possible to two business days.

The critical data points requiring prompt attention are:

- **ISBN-13/EAN/product identifier** (ONIX <productidentifier > composite)
- **On-sale Date** (ONIX <j143> tag)
- **Locally-applicable price**, including price type and territory(s) where price applies (ONIX <price> composite)
- **Territorial rights composite** (ONIX <salesrights> composite). This is critical information to process, but only locally applicable sales rights information needs to be displayed to consumers.
- **Publication status and availability** (ONIX tags <j141>, <b394>, <j396>). This is critical information to process, but only updates that affect consumer availability (e.g., a book has gone out-of-print) need to be displayed to consumers.
- **Cover image** (ONIX <mediafile> composite)
- **Title**, including subtitle (ONIX <title> composite)
- **Contributor(s)** (ONIX <contributor> composite)

It is further recommended that recipients successfully ingest and display the following data point within five business days of receiving updated data:

- **Description** (ONIX <othertext> composite). This recommendation is limited to text that is appropriate for public display; some descriptions are intended for internal use and not appropriate for public display.

2. Data recipients should have a clearly defined system for contacting their organization regarding product data

Recipients should provide a list of the persons (and the contact information for those persons) in their organizations that are responsible for product data. Although recipients may elect to use “generic” contact information or “blind” mailboxes (e.g., productdata@acmebooks.com), they are encouraged to also provide the names and contact information of their staff members who can troubleshoot any product data problems. Whenever it is feasible, a single primary contact person (who can communicate with other concerned parties at their company) should be named, with back-up contacts noted.

Recipients should be registered in the BISG ONIX User’s Directory, with current contact information. This Directory will be updated by the BISG office on a regular basis.

3. Data recipients should acknowledge that files have been received

Recipients of product data should acknowledge the receipt of incoming data files within two business days of a file’s receipt. This acknowledgment may be active (such as an e-mail message) or passive (such as a web service that allows a supplier to query the recipient’s FTP logs).

4. Data recipients should establish a service level for file processing

Recipients of product data should process incoming weekly delta files, in the order they were received from data suppliers, within five business days of the file’s receipt. The recipients should process every delta update on all of the data points specified in supplier Best Practices. Updates to the data points listed above under Section no. 1 should be processed within two business days of the receipt of those updates.

Price updates to products sold under agency terms should be processed in accordance with the specific terms of any agency pricing agreement that exists between the publisher of those products and the recipient of the data.

Daily delta files should be processed within two business days of their receipt, in the order they were received.

Recipients should process a full catalog file as often as they request such a file, or at least once each year. Recipients of product data should process incoming full catalog files from data suppliers within ten business days after a file is received.

A confirmation that the product records in a file have been processed (i.e., loaded into the recipient's database systems) or an indication of what prevented timely processing should be provided to data suppliers within three business days after a file has been processed (or an attempt has been made to process).

5. Data recipients should provide data suppliers with a clear statement of their practices for processing and displaying data

This statement should include an indication of when data will be processed (e.g., within two business days after it is received), as well as when it will initially display on consumer-facing public catalog systems (e.g., 90 days prior to a book's publication date). This statement should be publicly available to all data suppliers from whom a recipient receives product data. This statement should include some description of pre-release sales practices (e.g., the recipient will begin accepting customer orders on new book products 60 days prior to a book's publication date), as well as an indication of whether the recipient receives data on a publisher's books from other sources.

This statement should detail how a recipient treats products whose release dates are postponed. Recipients should indicate under what conditions postponed products would stop being displayed on consumer-facing public catalog systems and under what conditions such products would begin displaying again on said catalog systems (see Section no. 10 below for specific guidelines on products whose release has been postponed indefinitely). Recipients should also detail how they treat products that become temporarily unavailable. An indication should be made of how long a product is unavailable before the recipient cancels customer orders.

6. Data recipients should use delta files on a regular basis instead of full weekly files

Data recipients should inform their data suppliers how often they wish to receive a full file (i.e., a file containing ALL of a data supplier's records for products that have been active during the past year). Recipients should process a full file from each supplier at least once each year, although some data recipients may wish to receive full files quarterly or semi-annually.

Data recipients should inform their trading partners how often they wish to receive update files.

7. Recipients should, upon request of the data owner, identify the source of data from suppliers other than the data owner

Data recipients (including data aggregators) are free to load product data from any source they wish to use. Data owners, however, should be informed by data recipients, upon request, of the source of a given piece of relevant product data to the extent that the recipients are legally able to do so under their agreements with other data suppliers.

Data recipients should store information on the source of their current product data for at least one year after the data is received; that data should be made available to data owners, by request, on a case-by-case basis.

Data recipients should reply to such requests within five business days.

8. Data recipients (at the request of a data supplier) should allow data owners' data feeds to overwrite data that was manually entered by the recipient

As a general practice, data recipients are encouraged to establish policies that allow updates from a data owner to overwrite data the recipients have manually updated in their systems. In cases in which recipients have "locked" data they have manually entered in order to prevent said data from being updated by subsequent data feeds, it is incumbent on the data recipient to work with the data supplier to allow newer, mutually agreed-upon data to update older data, even if that older data was entered to correct information previously sent by the data supplier.

Data suppliers must, therefore, commit to a practice of including any manual updates they have requested since their last update file in their next batch update file. Data recipients should provide an explanation for any case in which they do not allow a data supplier's update files

overwrite the recipient's existing data. Data recipients should provide such explanations within five business days after receiving a request for such an explanation.

9. Data recipients should provide facilities for "emergency" updates

Data recipients should provide data suppliers with a clear statement of the procedures that data suppliers should follow to make "emergency" updates to product data in the recipient's systems. Any such updates should be made within one business day of a data supplier's request and an acknowledgment that the update was (or was not) made should be provided to the data supplier within one business day.

Data recipients should provide data suppliers with a clear statement of their practices for emergency updates. A given data recipient's practice may simply be to supply a list of key contact persons and the contact information for each of those persons.

Such updates will often require the manual update of data and therefore it is incumbent on data recipients to allow subsequent batch updates to the data in question (see above).

For the purposes of these Best Practices, an "emergency" update should be considered any correction or addition to the data on a product that could, if it is not acted upon, cause legal action to be brought against the data supplier or recipient, or cause significant harm to the reputation of a data supplier or recipient.

Simple updates to data on books that are not attracting a great deal of media attention are NOT emergencies. Updates to strict on sale dates on high-profile titles are emergencies. A significant change to a product's price is an emergency; an update of one dollar in a product's price as a part of a normal reprint process is NOT an emergency.

10. Data recipients should have a clear policy for releasing embargoed title data

Recipients should have the ability to prevent embargoed data from displaying on consumer-facing catalog systems and other public web sites before the date and time set by the data supplier (as indicated in the ONIX announcement date field, for example). A recipient's policies and practices regarding embargoed data should be publicly available to all data suppliers from whom a recipient receives product data.

11. Publications whose release has been postponed indefinitely should be made active again upon the receipt of updated status data from the data supplier

Data recipients should allow titles that have been postponed for normal reasons (i.e., titles that have been delayed due to legal considerations are NOT included in the definition of postponed for “normal reasons”) to be updated through a data supplier’s regular data feeds. It should not require manual intervention on a data supplier’s part to have such books reinstated on a recipient’s catalog systems. Data recipients always have the final decision, however, on what products they wish to list in their catalogs. Data suppliers must, therefore, supply revised availability dates or status updates as soon as they are known.

Titles that have been postponed due to legal considerations will require that data suppliers notify recipients using the emergency update provisions detailed in Section no. 8.

12. Publications that are postponed indefinitely or cancelled should not be displayed on consumer-facing catalog systems

Publications whose release has been cancelled or postponed indefinitely should, within one month after their release was postponed, be removed from public-facing websites. Catalog systems designed for use by book industry professionals are specifically excluded from this practice; however, such systems should indicate the correct status of any cancelled publication. Any outstanding consumer orders for such publications should be cancelled.

13. Products that are marked with Notification Type of “Delete” should be removed from sale on consumer-facing catalog systems

Products are sometimes sent out in an ONIX message in error and should subsequently be removed from sale and display on consumer-facing catalog systems. Recipients should act upon the <NotificationType> tag, especially when the Notification Type is “delete”. Product records that are marked with an indication that a record should be “deleted” should be removed from sale.

Data recipients may display, for purposes of facilitating third-party sellers, listings of “deleted” products AFTER the publication or on-sale date for those products has been reached.

In cases where the product is a retailer-exclusive edition, the retailer for whom the edition is produced should confirm that any “delete” notification they receive is applicable to them.

14. Products that are marked as being only for sale in certain markets or sales outlets should not be sold outside those markets or sales outlets

Recipients are expected to respect all territorial and market-segment sales restrictions on new products. For example:

- A U.S. bookseller should not sell new copies of a U.K. edition of a book if the publisher or distributor of that book does not have the right to publish or distribute that book in the U.S. Used copies of such U.K. editions may be sold by U.S. booksellers.
- A U.S. bookseller should not sell new copies of books intended for sale only in library or school markets. Used copies of such books, however, may be sold by U.S. booksellers.
- Booksellers should not sell new copies of books that are published for exclusive sale in particular outlets. Used copies of such books, however, may be sold by other retailers.

15. Publications that are withdrawn from sale for legal reasons should not be displayed on consumer-facing catalog systems

Recipients should remove publications that are described by their publishers as “withdrawn from sale for legal reasons” from sale and display on consumer-facing catalog systems as soon as possible. Catalog systems designed for use by book industry professionals are specifically excluded from this practice; however, such systems should indicate the correct status of any product withdrawn from sale. Any outstanding consumer orders for such publications should be cancelled.

Data recipients who wish to continue selling used or second-hand copies of books that have been withdrawn from sale for legal reasons should consult with the publishers of such books regarding the legal ramifications of selling used or second-hand copies of such books.

16. Data recipients should not display, on any consumer-facing catalog systems, data on products whose release date is more than two years in the future

Products whose release dates are more than two years in the future are prone to significant changes to their data, especially data surrounding their release dates. Recipients of data should

not display data on such products to the general public. Catalogs that face industry professionals only are excepted from this practice. Such a practice minimizes the chances of disappointing customers by displaying information that likely to change.

17. Data recipients should provide mechanisms for suppliers to view or compare data

Data recipients are encouraged to provide means for data suppliers to query the recipient's product database(s) for purposes of auditing the supplier's product data. This service may be provided by web services, secure web sites, ONIX, or Excel reports pushed to suppliers, or any other secure means for data suppliers to get this information.

18. Data recipients should document what systems are updated from the data sent by data suppliers

Recipients should document how suppliers' files are used and what internal systems are updated by the data received from the suppliers. This information should be shared by providers upon request. For example, if a supplier's files are used to update public catalog systems (e.g., retail web sites), purchase-order systems, billing systems, returns systems, and warehouse operations systems, a supplier should be given a clear indication of how its data is being used by each of the recipient's systems.

Re-distributors of product data (such as data aggregators) are NOT required to document how their customers use product data; however, they should (to the extent that they are legally able to do so and insofar as it does not harm their business), upon request, provide a list of the companies to whom they are re-distributing data.

Recipients should indicate if a supplier's data is being utilized in any of the following types of systems, and they should indicate what data from a supplier is being used in each system:

- **consumer-facing catalog systems and retail e-commerce web sites** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records for such web catalog systems)
- **consumer-facing portable devices** (e.g. a recipient might use ONIX product records to display information on books on a handheld reading device such as a Kindle, iPhone, or NOOK reader)
- **purchasing systems** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records for purchasing systems but also rely upon EDI purchase order acknowledgments and advanced shipping notices to update certain data points related to product availability)

- **store operations systems** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records to populate a store's catalog system used by booksellers)
- **point-of-sale reporting systems** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records to update sales-reporting tools used by their trading partners)
- **warehouse operations systems** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records to populate systems used to receive and traffic products through the recipients' warehouses)
- **returns systems** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records to populate systems used to generate and process product returns to their suppliers)
- **in-store kiosks** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records to populate consumer-facing catalog systems in retail stores)
- **online public-access catalogs (OPACs)** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records to populate consumer-facing catalog systems in libraries)
- **union catalogs** (e.g., a recipient might use ONIX product records to populate shared catalog systems used by library consortia)

sample monthly calendar to illustrate Product Metadata Best Practices for Data Recipients							
week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
week one	Sender transmits weekly product data delta file to recipients 1	Recipients pick-up product data file and begin processing the data 2	Recipients should have finished processing any updates to critical fields by the end of this day (2 business days after receipt) 3	Recipients may still be processing updates to non-critical fields 4	Recipients may still be processing updates to non-critical fields 5	Recipients should have finished processing any updates to non-critical fields (5 business days after receipt) 6	7
week two	Sender transmits weekly product data delta file to recipients (for this file, the rest of week proceeds as in week one above) 8	Sender requests an emergency update to a product record 9	Recipient should have acted on emergency update request and replied to sender (1 business day after request) 10	Recipient requests full catalog file from sender 11	12	13	14
week three	Sender transmits full catalog file, as requested by recipient 15	Recipient picks-up full catalog file and begins processing the data 16	Sender requests a recipient to identify the source of data on a sender's product(s) 17	18	19	If recipient has not finished processing full catalog file, the upcoming delta file should be held and processed after the full file. 20	21
week four	Sender transmits weekly product data delta file to recipients (for this file, the rest of week proceeds as in week one above) 22	Recipient should have replied to request to identify the source of product data (5 business days after request) 23	24	25	26	Recipient should have finished processing requested full catalog file (10 business days after receipt) 27	28
week five	Sender transmits weekly product data delta file to recipients (for this file, the rest of week proceeds as in week one above) 29	30					