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ONIX, a New Product Information Standard

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The book trade does not have a good record of supplying accurate, timely and rich bibliographic data to libraries and booksellers. Indeed, there has never been a trade standard for product information to compare with MARC, which is not itself well suited to trade requirements.

This is now changing dramatically. Driven largely by Internet booksellers who want "richer" information, the book world is moving beyond the transmission of purely bibliographic data. Such rich data can include descriptions, abstracts, tables of contents, reviews, jacket images and general promotional information. The usefulness of such data is not, however, restricted to the trade. Both acquisition librarians and library users want this type of information. It has been suggested that OPACs could benefit from some of the information that their users commonly see on the Internet bookselling sites.

ONIX is an international standard for communicating rich metadata about books and other material dealt with by libraries and the book trade. Its guidelines comprise content specification, data elements, tags and code lists and an XML DTD.

ONIX includes:

- Comprehensive bibliographic detail
- Text: descriptions, reviews, author biographies, extracts
- Images: jackets, thumbnails, author photos
- Audio and video, website links
- Territorial rights
- Prices and availability in different markets
- Promotional campaign information

It is primarily intended for communication, but is also acting as an in-house database design blueprint for publishers, intermediaries and others. ONIX has drawn heavily from IFLA's Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, EDItEUR's Product Information Communication Standards (EPICS) and the work of the <indecs> Project, all of which were concerned with establishing sound models for metadata in an electronic environment.

ONIX is the outcome of a collaboration between EDItEUR (the international body for e-commerce standards in books, serials and epublications), the Association of American Publishers (AAP) and the Book Industry Study Group (BISG) in the United States and Book Industry Communication (BIC) in the United Kingdom.

Already becoming widely adopted by the book trade In the US and UK ONIX is now being implemented in Latin America, France and Germany with the book trades of many other countries committing to implement it. The International ISBN agencies are also planning to adopt an ONIX subset as core metadata for ISBN assignment and the International DOI Foundation is basing its own core metadata requirements on it.

There has also been considerable interest in ONIX from the Library sector. The British Library has mapped ONIX to UNIMARC and the Library of Congress has mapped it to MARC21. A study has been carried out in the UK, funded by the BNB Research Fund, on the feasibility of using ONIX International as a standard for bibliographic data transmission between the book trade and libraries. ONIX is also being investigated as a format for electronic CIP submission from publishers to National Libraries. Libraries are well represented on both the US and UK ONIX groups and there is considerable excitement at the prospect of a continuum of bibliographic information in standard formats throughout the supply chain.

ONIX is developed and maintained by EDItEUR, guided by the EDItEUR/ ONIX International Steering Committee which oversees policy and priorities and has representation from BISG, BIC and representatives from other national and regional groups. An ONIX support team is responsible for technical development and documentation and EDItEUR maintains a listserv which is open to all users or intending users.

ONIX started life as a traditional book-centred standard but is now developing in a number of directions. The new release 1.3, to be published in June, will be a true multimedia product standard with the potential to include not only e-books but also video and recorded music.

There is also considerable demand for ONIX for serials, providing for structured multi-level bibliographic information that can be used as rich catalogue data, enable despatch, check in and alerting services and improve management of library holdings. Work is well advanced and there should be some pilot implementations of ONIX for serials during this calendar year.

In summary, ONIX is a standard that can increase and enhance the flow of bibliographic and other product information throughout the supply chain. It is also a great opportunity for collaboration between the trade and library sectors. Anyone interested should take a look at the guidelines on <http://www.editeur.org/onix.html> and contribute to the discussion on the e-group at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ONIX_IMPLEMENT