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The new ISSN Standard makes life easier for the serials community

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*With warm thanks to
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ABSTRACT

A new edition of the International Standard, ISO 3297:2007, Information and documentation –International standard serial number (ISSN) has just been published.

The main new feature is the Linking ISSN or ISSN-L. The ISSN-L is a mechanism which enables collocation or linking among different media versions of a continuing resource.

While keeping a separate ISSN assigned to each of the various media versions of a title, it will be possible to designate one single ISSN-L for all those media versions of the title.

Among other improvements, the ISSN-L will facilitate search, retrieval and delivery across all media versions for services like OpenURL, library catalogues, search engines or knowledge bases.

Introduction

ISSN opens a new page in its history, in the continuity which characterizes the ISSN since its inception in 1973: a responsible determination to identify serials and other continuing resources. To this end a new edition of the ISSN Standard has recently been published by ISO.

In addition to a clarification of the scope for ISSN assignment, the main issue deals with a new concept and a new feature: the ISSN-L or linking ISSN. This new mechanism falls harmoniously within the main tasks of the ISSN, which are to identify serials and other continuing resources whatever the medium of publication or production, and to manage and disseminate the ISSN Register, the database established by the ISSN Network. For the time being, the Network, supported by 85 National Centres and the International Centre, actively identifies the continuing resources published in their respective countries and from International Organizations.

The new ISSN Standard

The new and fourth edition of the International Standard, *ISO 3297, Information and documentation –International standard serial number (ISSN)*, was published on September 1st, 2007, after a unanimous vote of the Member Countries of ISO/ TC 46. The finalizing of this standard was made by a Working Group, under the umbrella of ISO/TC 46/SC 9, after 3 years of revision work.

The revision process

In 2003, the 5-year review on the third edition of ISO 3297, published in 1998, resulted in the ISO vote recommending its revision. The ISO/TC 46/SC 9/WG 5, established in January 2004, was composed of representatives from all the professional sectors with a direct stake in the implementation or application of the ISSN system: representatives of the popular press, STM publishers, subscription agents, periodical distributors, OpenURL implementers, representatives of ISBN, DOI and CrossRef, librarians and others. This large professional representation of users and producers of ISSN has been of great value, enabling questions such as “what should ISSN identify?” and “what are the needs of ISSN users?” to be answered.

These experts established a long list of cases showing that ISSN are needed and used, and provided a broad view of users. However, there are different expectations for each category of users and the way they want to use the ISSN, and two significant diverging needs emerged:

- 1) the need to have the ISSN identify serial titles at an ‘abstract’ global title, collocating level, this need was expressed by representatives wishing to identify content, not product.
- 2) the need to have the ISSN identify at the ‘product’ level, for those communities dealing with products, for example communities managing subscriptions, which have a need to identify the exact product, to differentiate between the different prices for the print and electronic format of the same title.

The users wanted the ISSN to be reliable at both levels, and did not want another system at either of these levels, and this provided a challenge for the system. The decision was made to work together to find a solution that would fit both needs. Therefore the solution was to continue to identify each medium version of a resource by different ISSN, and to develop a new function of collocation with the new concept of ISSN-L.

Furthermore, the WG identified and addressed the following key areas in the revision:

- An inclusive definition of serials and new continuing resources in light of the growth of electronic serials and digital resources;
- Maintaining the current structure of the ISSN while allowing and supporting identification at multiple levels of granularity;
- Clarifying ISSN assignment policy to define ISSN assignment of resources in a defined medium, to support flexibility and ensure consistency;
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of the ISSN Centres;
- Describing the ISSN interoperability with other identification and linking systems (such as DOI[®], URN, and OpenURL).

All these issues were treated and included in the body of the Standard or as normative and informative annexes, particularly regarding the new linking function of ISSN and the description of the ISSN interoperability.

Overview of the new ISSN Standard

- Clarification of the scope

The Standard confirms that “each ISSN is a unique identifier for a specific serial or other continuing resource in a defined medium”. Therefore, “when a continuing resource is published in different media, with the same title or not, different ISSN and key titles shall be assigned to the different editions”. The scope specifies also that “ISSN are applicable to serials and other continuing resources, whether past, present or to be published or produced in the foreseeable future, whatever the medium of publication or production”.

The application rules on the scope in the *ISSN Manual* specify that ISSN are assigned to the entire population of the serials and to ongoing integrating resources. A Working Group, with ISSN members and users, was set up in October 2007 to define criteria for assigning ISSN to integrating electronic resources. For the time being, the following electronic resources are not eligible for an ISSN: advertising and individual home pages, online diaries, personal weblogs, and web sites consisting exclusively of links. The scope of the standard also introduces “a mechanism, the “linking ISSN (ISSN-L)”, that provides for collocation or linking among the different media versions of the same continuing resource”.

- **Wording of definitions readable by many communities**

The bibliographic terms, like continuing resource or serial, are defined in order to be readable by communities other than libraries. The definition of the “linking ISSN” is added: “ISSN designated by the ISSN Network to enable collocation or linking among the different media versions of a continuing resource”. Definitions of “ISSN Network”, “ISSN Register” and “ISSN metadata” are also included.

- **ISSN-L or the Linking ISSN**

The ISSN-L is created “to enable the use of ISSN in cases where finding or linking to a continuing resource without regard to medium is desired”.

“ISSN-L shall be designated from among the different ISSN assigned to the different media version of a continuing resource”. The first ISSN assigned in the ISSN Register to any medium version of a continuing resource shall be designated by default to function also as the ISSN-L and shall apply to all other media versions of that resource identified in the ISSN Register. A normative annex of the standard defines several application rules of ISSN-L, in particular the designation of an ISSN-L for each continuing resource, “even if the resource exists in only one medium”. In any case only one ISSN-L will be designated regardless of how many different medium versions of a continuing resource exists.

Examples:

- Continuing resource in only one medium form:

ISSN-L 1748-7188

Online resource: Algorithms for molecular biology = ISSN 1748-7188

- Continuing resources in two medium forms:

ISSN-L 0264-2875

Printed version: Dance research = ISSN 0264-2875

Online version: Dance research (Online) = ISSN 1750-0095

- Continuing resources in three medium forms:

ISSN-L 1188-1534

Printed version: Plant varieties journal (Ottawa) = ISSN 1188-1534

Online version: Plant varieties journal (Ottawa. Online) = ISSN 1911-1479

CD-ROM version: Plant varieties journal (Ottawa. CD-ROM) = ISSN 1911-1460

The designation of the ISSN-L shall be carried out either by a Centre of the ISSN Network or will be performed automatically as records are added to the ISSN Register by the ISSN International Centre. The first step towards implementation of the ISSN-L is the retrospective designation of ISSN-L which will be performed on the entire ISSN Register. Once this retrospective designation process is completed, ongoing designation of ISSN-L will be done either by the ISSN International Centre, or by those ISSN National Centres

that are able and willing to undertake this responsibility. In those cases where records entering the ISSN Register lack ISSN-L, the ISSN-L will be supplied automatically by the International Centre based on the linking entries for the other edition in another medium, present in the records.

A main rule specifies that “ISSN-L shall be included as a separate data element on each of the metadata records to which it pertains in the *ISSN Register*”. ISSN-L shall be recorded in a specific subfield of the fields used to record the ISSN in the MARC formats. In MARC 21, ISSN-L will be included in the subfield “l” of the field 022 (ISSN). A separate subfield “m” has also been defined in MARC 21 for cancelled ISSN-L. In UNIMARC, ISSN-L will be included in subfield “f” of the field 011 (ISSN).

In the most common situation, where the titles of all medium versions change at the same time, the ISSN-L for the new group of medium versions will be the ISSN that was assigned to the first-registered new medium version. Rules and examples for handling unusual title change situations will be included in the *ISSN Manual*.

ISSN-L will be made available in several different ways:

- ❑ via a table which will list the ISSN-L and the corresponding ISSN linked to the ISSN-L. This table will be available free of charge on the ISSN International Centre web site (www.issn.org) during the latter part of 2008;
- ❑ via the ISSN Register (each metadata record in the ISSN Register will include the medium-specific ISSN assigned to the resource described in the record, and the designated linking ISSN, as separate data elements). ISSN-L will be available in ISSN Register records via the ISSN Portal (<http://portal.issn.org>) during the latter part of 2008;
- ❑ via the ISSN National Centres, which will communicate to publishers the ISSN-L designated for newly assigned ISSN;
- ❑ via the resources themselves, provided that publishers print or display this information according to the recommendations in the Standard. Publishers will be encouraged to display ISSN-L, along with medium-specific ISSN on their resources.

- **Updating of the ISSN assignment rules**

Several rules prescribe that “each distinct continuing resource in a particular medium ... shall be assigned only one ISSN”, and “each ISSN shall be permanently linked to the key title ...”. The *ISSN Manual* defines the application of the rules, and in particular the ISSN assignment according to title changes or other changes in the resources.

- **Practical recommendations on the printing and display of ISSN**

As usual “the ISSN shall be presented as two groups of four digits separated by a hyphen and shall be always preceded by the prefix ISSN and a space”. The printing and display of ISSN and ISSN-L are presented for the different types of resources.

- **Presentation of the ISSN metadata and the metadata required for ISSN assignment**

Two tables are published in an annex to list the metadata linked with ISSN assignment. One table indicates the metadata which are required for the ISSN assignment from publishers or other requesters. The other table lists the metadata which are established and maintained by the ISSN Centres with every ISSN registration. The definition and application of the data elements (mandatory and optional) are described in the *ISSN Manual*.

The metadata of the serials and other continuing resources are used to establish manual bibliographic ISSN records or are included automatically in new ISSN assignment

procedures. These procedures are built to maximise the use of metadata from the serial product flow, to improve the data processing of the resources, and finally to speed up their identification and to enlarge the coverage of the *ISSN Register*.

- **Administration of the ISSN system**

An annex lists the roles and responsibilities of the International Centre and the National Centres. It indicates in detail the functions and services that IC and NCs have to perform, in accordance with the clauses of the working agreements.

- **Use of ISSN and ISSN-L with other identification and linking systems**

An annex presents the different uses of ISSN and ISSN-L with systems like DOI®, OpenURL, URN, and EAN barcodes. In every case, the syntax and examples are given in accordance with the recommendations of the corresponding system: these practical and operational rules have been finalized thanks to the active cooperation of representatives of these systems. This annex draws up the different schemes of interoperability between ISSN and ISSN-L with other identification and linking systems.

ISSN are heavily used in the resolution mechanism for citation linking in scientific and technical articles, as implemented in the Open URL scheme.

The ISSN-L will further enhance this process by allowing for more precise requests from citations (query strings) and better hit rates at the end of the resolution procedure. It should be possible for query strings generated from citations, depending on the context, to encode both the ISSN (pointing, for example, specifically to the electronic resource itself) and the ISSN-L (pointing to all the different media versions of the publication). The ability to use ISSN-L in addition to, or instead of ISSN in citations should lead to more consistent results in citation linking, even if different ISSN are used at both ends of the resolution chain (for instance a “print” ISSN at the citation level and an “electronic” ISSN in the list of serials available through the library hosting the resolution server).

The new ISSN Manual

The new *ISSN Manual*, Cataloguing Part, will be available this year on the ISSN Web site.

The two main reasons to publish a new edition of the ISSN Manual are to apply the new edition of the ISO Standard on ISSN and to describe the application of the formats MARC 21 and UNIMARC for the creation of ISSN records.

The new ISSN manual includes the new rules for the designation and the management of ISSN-L, but also the other application rules of all parts of the ISO standard on ISSN.

The uses of the bibliographic format standards, MARC 21 and UNIMARC, for the ISSN registration, simplify the exchanges of records in the ISSN Network and with the users. The application of these format standards allows the inclusion of new data such as the numbering or titles and names of issuing bodies in original script, if applicable.

Conclusion

The new challenge for the ISSN system, implementation of ISSN-L, is both ambitious and realistic, encompassing both innovation and continuity with the past aimed at accommodating user needs and relying on the Network’s database and infrastructure strengths. The new standard sets out an expanded future for the ISSN, which depends on the ability of the ISSN to accommodate all the resources it has to identify. Each new edition of the ISO Standard has been associated with qualitative changes in the ISSN system. This time, the new Standard not only introduces qualitative changes, but also a quantitative one. Implementing, assigning, and distributing ISSN-L is a new goal that the ISSN system is embracing along with the new Standard.