

Book Industry Communication

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CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF E-BOOKS AND DIGITAL CONTENT

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General principles

BIC supports the principle stated in the ISBN standard that ‘each different format of an electronic publication that is published and made separately available shall be given a separate ISBN.’

The ISBN is the book trade’s only identifier for trading products in the supply chain. All products delivered through the traditional supply chain must therefore be assigned ISBNs.

Publishers should assign ISBNs to e-books and downloadable audio books whenever there is a need to do so:

- for the purposes of trading through conventional channels;
- for search and discovery in publicly accessible retailer databases;
- for item/product-level sales reporting (whether for royalties or for sales data reporting);
- or to facilitate sales tracking of individual items.

If ISBNs are allocated internally for non-traded products, activities or files, such ISBNs should not be notified to the bibliographic services or to others – retailers, wholesalers, libraries - within the supply chain.

Publishers

Publishers must retain responsibility, wherever possible and appropriate, for the metadata of the products they publish, in all formats, print and digital. Publishers should not assign ISBNs to non-product source or production files which are not being traded in the supply chain. If they do so for internal reasons, they should ensure that these ISBNs are not released externally.

E-books sold by intermediaries through a single channel (e.g., Amazon Kindle, library e-book vendors) may not require ISBN assignment unless this level of detail is required by the publisher for sales reporting or sales tracking. It is expected that consumers and librarians will discover such single-channel digital formats through dedicated resources rather than through the bibliographic services and industry databases.

Where a title is supplied to an intermediary with multiple distribution channels each traded item should be assigned an individual ISBN in consultation with the intermediary in order to facilitate trading individual digital products and appropriately granular sales reporting.

Publishers have expressed concern about the ‘systems bloat’ potentially resulting from the allocation of separate ISBNs to fragments (chapters, ‘chunks’ of text, and so on) sold separately. In most cases it is anticipated that such ‘chunks’ will be solely distributed by the publisher itself or by its sole digital distributor. In such cases, internal system SKU file-names or identifiers (which might be an ‘internal’ ISBN) will probably meet all the publisher’s needs. Where entire chapters or other components are being traded through third parties, they should be assigned their own individual ISBNs.

Bibliographic services

Bibliographic services should make every effort to capture and record the publication of digital products which are traded through multiple distribution channels, and which are available through conventional book trade channels.

This will involve the collection of data both from publishers but also from intermediaries reselling e-content on a non-exclusive basis.

It is recommended that the bibliographic services should only record and disseminate information about products which are available in the supply chain and have been assigned unique ISBNs.

Intermediaries, resellers and digital asset distributors

Intermediaries must decide on the basis of their own trading requirements – and in discussion with suppliers, where appropriate - the cases where an ISBN is required when it has not been previously assigned by the publisher.

Changes in the ISBN rules allow intermediaries to assign their own ISBN to an e-book or downloadable audio product if the publisher has not done so; but this is discouraged as not being good practice.

Publishers should assign ISBNs from their own allocations to such digital products; and mechanisms for rapid and automatic assignment of publishers’ ISBNs should be put in place.

Where intermediaries and resellers assign their own prefix ISBNs these should be notified to the publisher as soon as possible.

Sales reporting should be by ISBN to the level of granularity required by the publisher to fulfil author or management information obligations. Reports should be in the industry standard format recommended by BIC.