



BIC Digital Audiobook Best Practice

EDItX Business Case

Prepared by Stephen Long
June 2023 Version 1.0

Copyright © 2023 Book Industry Communication Ltd.



This document is one of a set that Book Industry Communication has produced. Together, these provide a detailed standards and best practice overview of the digital audiobook supply chain.

BIC strongly recommends that you download and read the full set of documents. These currently comprise:

1. Supply Chain Diagram
2. Glossary, including
 - a. Terminology
 - b. Organisations
 - c. Roles and Responsibilities
3. Metadata Requirements
4. Good File Management
5. FAQs
6. EDItX Business Case
7. Sustainability Checklist
8. Accessibility Checklist

A single document including all of the above is also available.

1. Introduction

August 2022 saw the launch of Book Industry Communication's Digital Audiobook Best Practice Project, the purpose of which was to document and promote best practice for the management of the digital audiobook supply chain and address a variety of issues captured in BIC's 2021 Digital Audio Supply Chain Mapping Report. These included the inconsistent application of **standards**, ambiguous **workflows** and variable **timelines** amongst the challenges.

Organisations represented on the project included international standards bodies; trade, academic and specialist audio publishers; audio platforms, third party solutions providers, wholesalers and data aggregators.

The project ended in June 2023. A set of best practice documents has been published, leveraging well-established industry standards, describing best practice and also making recommendations about how and where to make further improvements.

2. An Overriding Business Need

Year on year the popularity of audiobooks has grown. The COVID pandemic saw even greater consumption of digital audio streams and downloads.

Whilst this growth has been good for consumers and the books sector, it has put additional pressures on the audio supply chain.

The market is fragmented, comprising a small number of larger players from outside the traditional book industry, as well as established publishers and start-ups. Whilst there are recognised standards that can help players in the audiobook market ensure their products are discoverable and tradable, there are different degrees of compliance (or non-compliance) and no overarching set of best practice guidelines that defines how to achieve the best outcomes.

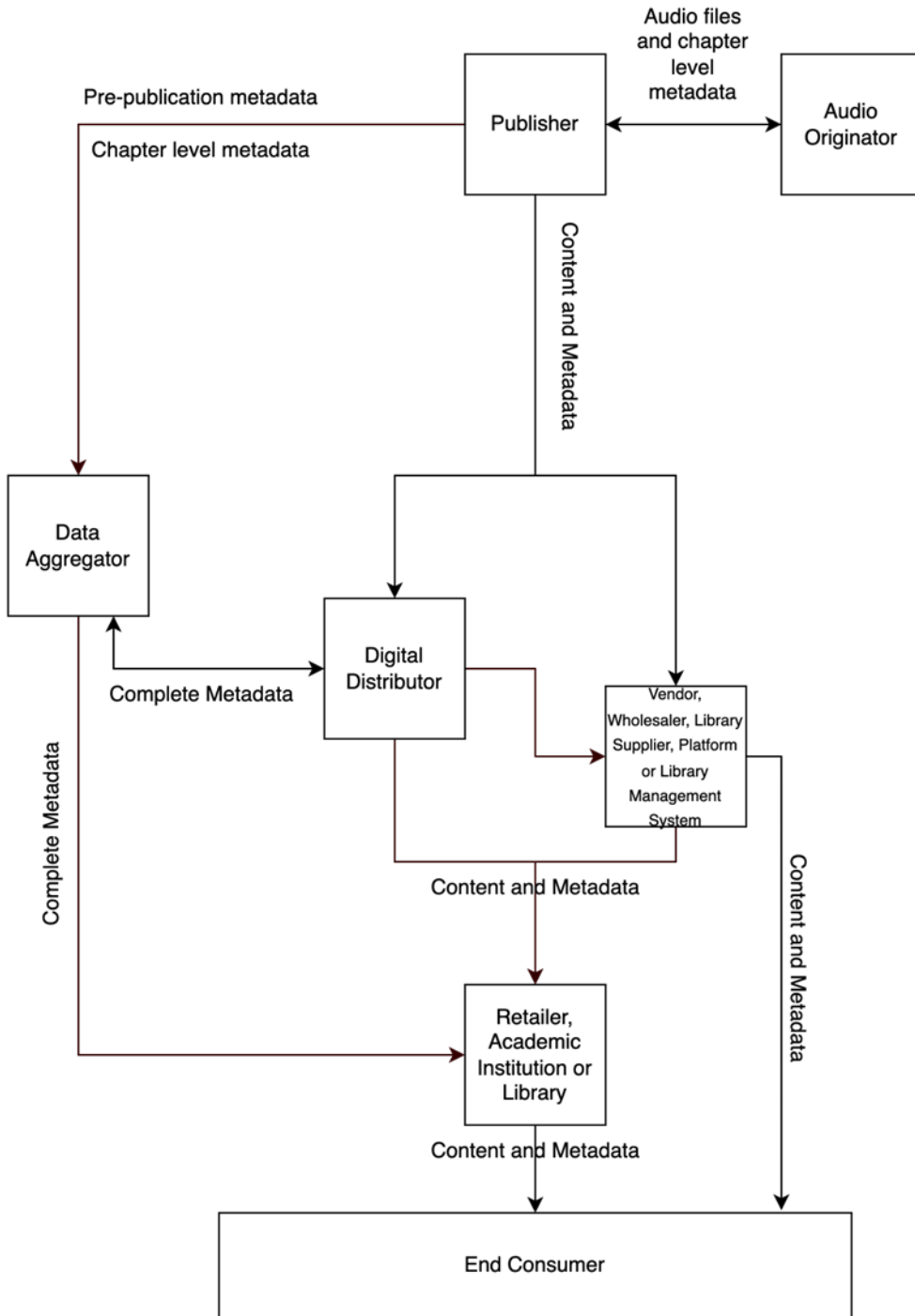
The result is a supply chain in which partial automation and standardisation are linked by ad hoc, manual processes. This is very evident in the way in which publishers currently establish the on-sale status of their digital audio assets with vendors, platforms and retailers. They are often forced to visit each retailer website, for each product, in order to check the status. Alternatively, they have to rely on ad hoc feedback (e.g., by email) or simply hope for the best.

This process undermines the automation that already exists and risks causing delays, misunderstandings and errors.

[continued overleaf]

3. Current Supply Chain

As a reminder, the current digital audiobook supply chain is illustrated below. Even in this high-level diagram, it is clear that intervention may be required at various points in a digital asset's journey through the supply chain to establish its status.



4. The Solution

The EDItX standard offers an automated solution for checking the status of digital audio assets and metadata.

This standard comprises a set of mostly transactional messages and reports in XML that extend the functionality of traditional X12, TRADACOMS and EDIFACT EDI messages in the trade and library sectors. EDItX was developed by EDItEUR with input from BISG and BIC. It is a recognised global standard (not just relevant to the English language) and is actively maintained and developed. It caters to different supply chain and commercial models (think pricing and sales territories).

BIC's Digital Audiobook Task & Finish Work Group (T&FWG) project team agreed to build a business case for the adoption of EDItX, highlighting its relevance to digital products.

The specific EDItX report in question is the Inventory Report for which there is no EDI equivalent. This is intended for use by a retailer, distributor or other intermediary managing inventory on behalf of a publisher or content owner. Indeed, it could be used by a publisher or audio originator too. The purpose of the message is to report on inventory levels or movements in the supply chain. It captures the status of digital files where the inventory holder does not hold physical copies. Digital inventory reporting is date and time specific. It focuses on the status of master files and metadata, as well as the on-sale status of the product. In the Inventory Report, the XML tag terminology and use of code lists align wherever possible with that used in ONIX.

The Inventory Report provides a feedback loop through which receipt, acceptance and on-sale status can be confirmed by an intermediary or reseller to a publisher or other upstream partner. It removes the need for human intervention and interaction with others to establish an asset's on sale status.

The T&FWG also agreed to provide feedback to EDItEUR on the usability and relevance of EDItX Inventory Report version 1.1 to their respective digital supply chains, propose a set of error messages that would significantly enhance the report's usability and relevance in the UK and Ireland, and engage their respective organisations and trading partners in discussions about EDItX implementation. Version 1.2 of the report, due in July 2023, will include updates and revisions to take account of this feedback.

5. Resources Needed

Given that the EDItX Inventory Report is already in use, particularly in Germany and Scandinavia, its adoption by project members, the wider BIC community and even the broader book industry, does not warrant a project to determine the best way forward. EDItX is the way forward.

In effect, each organisation interested in the adoption of EDItX needs to have a clear understanding of what's involved, the resources available and an appreciation of its potential impact on their respective supply chains. With this information it can establish its strategic importance.

a) What's Required

From a technical viewpoint, knowledge of the XML format is required. EDItX is specified in an XML schema. The tag terminology and code lists will be familiar to users with a working knowledge of ONIX 3.0.

Those with commercial responsibilities should have an understanding of the digital audio supply chain and how the use of EDItX can simplify, standardise and automate feedback loops. Reducing customisation and the need for ad hoc processes can lessen support overheads whilst also enhancing business relationships.

Not all players in the digital audio sector use the same terminology, so standardisation is the ideal way to remove potential confusion and misunderstandings.

b) Resources and Expertise Available

The Inventory Report Schema is available on the EDItEUR website: www.editeur.org. EDItEUR runs an email list and discussion forum via Groups.io, as well as managing the EDItX International Steering Committee.

BIC Digital Audiobook Best Practice project members EDItEUR, Gardners Books and HarperCollins have experience of an Inventory Report trial undertaken in 2019. Should you wish to contact the trialists, this can be done via the Contact Us page on the BIC website.

BIC maintains the BIC Realtime standard for instant business transactions and reporting in the trade and library sectors. Realtime transactions are a form of EDItX and are particularly gaining traction with libraries.

c) Potential Impact

- i) A “real solution to a real problem” (Luc Audrain, EDItX Steering Committee).
- ii) Addresses a current supply chain challenge without the need for manual intervention.
- iii) It enhances product discoverability and tradability.
- iv) As an actively maintained, global standard, it provides a recognised and authoritative set of guidelines reflecting book industry needs.
- v) It removes the need for trading partner specific (bespoke) formats and routines.
- vi) It reduces development, support and cost overheads.
- vii) It reflects the needs of the digital audio supply chain and its stakeholders.
- viii) It complements and extends the use, relevance and applicability of existing EDI standards and message sets.
- ix) It reflects the immediacy of today’s supply chain and the familiarity with self-service tools.
- x) It comes with schema validation.
- xi) The Inventory Report is actively used in Germany and Scandinavia. It has been trialled by EDItEUR, Gardners Books and HarperCollins.

6. Summary

Using an existing business standard that has been developed collaboratively, with the needs of both current digital and physical book supply chains in mind, offers a straightforward way to simplify and automate manual processes.

There is a clear opportunity to confirm the on-sale status of digital assets, thereby maximising discovery and revenue, at the same time as reducing support overheads.

7. Addendum

In considering the applicability of the EDItX Inventory Report, supply chain professionals are reminded that this isn’t the only report relevant to the digital audiobook supply chain.

The EDItX Sales Report can be used by digital distributors, platforms and other intermediaries to report sales to a publisher or audio originator. Again, standardising reporting reduces the development and support overheads. XML tag terminology and code lists will be familiar to users of ONIX 3.0 in this report too.