Data Recipient Best Practice

Product Record Deletion

Disclaimer:

Please note: The information provided in this document is intended for guidance purposes only. Those involved in the creation, collection, management or distribution of product metadata are strongly advised to seek guidance on compliance with the business policies of their respective organisations.

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1. What We Don't Mean By 'Delete', 'Deletion' or 'Deleted'

There are a limited number of circumstances where a product record is created in error, duplicated, disseminated much too early or given the wrong record reference or identifier.

Similarly, external factors, beyond the control of publishers or those responsible for the creation and management of product records, can lead to situations where a swift and specific action is required to remove a record from view.

All too often it is wrongly assumed that 'deleting' a record is a recognised and acceptable way of dealing with the above situations. 'Deleted' is neither a valid publishing status for an existing record (to be applied when a product is no longer available), nor is it a reliable way of responding to situations requiring the prompt removal of a record.

To complicate matters further, publishing system solutions and title management systems will not usually have a 'delete' function (or one that can expunge data once it has been communicated to external partners).

Different organisations will define 'delete', 'deletion' or 'deleted' uniquely according to their business needs, so it is not our intention to define these terms in this document. Rather, we will describe common scenarios where such an action might be contemplated and describe the steps that *should* be taken.

2. Using Publishing Status to Correct Issues

For clarity, where an appropriately defined publishing status exists in the current release of the ONIX Publishing Status Code List 64, then that status should be applied rather than deleting or requesting that a data recipient 'delete' a record. In such cases the dissemination of the corrected metadata is the appropriate action to take. It is important that data recipients such as retailers, platforms and resellers (and their clients or consumers) understand how the publishing status of the product has changed, particularly if the product has been available to order. The provision of a current and accurate publishing status informs a range of supply chain activities such as pre-publication sales, invoicing, reprints, alternative sources of stock and substitute items. There are a variety of ONIX publishing status codes, covering situations such as:

- Planned new product abandoned prior to publication
- Planned new product postponed indefinitely
- Published product is temporarily withdrawn from the market or is otherwise unavailable
- Published product is out of print or permanently withdrawn
- Take this product off sale

More information is available on the EDItEUR website: https://www.editeur.org/14/Code-Lists/

Where an accurate and valid publishing status exists, apply this to the product record to update it (or as a data recipient, request that the owner of the data does so). Some codes may require the inclusion of a date (publication, out of print or permanently withdrawn from sale date) that may be current, past or in the future. Other status codes may specifically exclude the need for a date (where the status is temporary, or there is no publication date).

3. Other Scenarios Requiring a Different Approach

When updating the publishing status cannot correct a situation where a product record is created in error, duplicated, disseminated much too early, given the wrong record reference or identifier or

requires prompt removal from view, a different approach is required.

Determine whether the record has or has not been communicated externally. By that we mean beyond the confines of the business responsible for the creation, management and communication of that specific product record to third parties including printers, distributors, wholesalers, booksellers, platforms, resellers, data aggregators and service or systems providers:

a. In cases where it can be confirmed that the product record has not been communicated externally (usually within 24 hours of the record being created or sooner according to the business cycle for communicating product metadata to other parties), then it may be safe to 'delete' all traces of the record, rendering it undiscoverable and untradable. A 'deletion' is neither a temporary state nor an end state. It is irreversible and does not reflect the lifecycle of the product – because there isn't one. Taking this action also means that there is no audit trail for future reference, should there be a query about the action taken, by whom and when.

b. Where the record has been communicated externally, then 'deletion' may neither be the safest nor most efficient way of ensuring that data recipients correctly manage and interpret the status of the product. Indeed, a degree of coordination between the data sender and possibly multiple recipients will be required to ensure the product is neither discoverable nor tradable, especially if the recipient is an intermediary rather than end recipient. A global business may also need to consider the need for 'deletion' (or not) in multiple markets and coordinate with overseas branches of their own business or the relevant representative in each territory. Moreover, recipients' processes for managing inbound data may dictate that once a product record is received, a continuous audit trail is required. A record that disappears because it has been 'deleted' may only cause further problems, rather than resolve them. Requests for 'deletion' should be notified and action taken as soon as possible after the issue has been identified to avoid the record being communicated to even more data recipients as well as the potential for sales orders to build. In ONIX, it is best practice to use <NotificationType> code 05 and an explanatory <DeletionText> with this type of notification to highlight why the data should be 'deleted'. The most appropriate action in scenario B maybe to 'suppress' the product record, rendering it invisible to most (usually end consumers), whilst remaining visible but distinctive to those responsible for the management of the product record. In such cases, ONIX's <DeletionText> or an appropriate notes field in the title management system should clearly state why the record has been suppressed and for how long. It is important that such records are not communicated further downstream.

c. Similar to B above, external parties, such as law enforcement or legal professionals, may request that a record be 'deleted' because the product in question is subject to court or legal action (including copyright infringement and libel). To ignore such a request could lead to contempt of court or other legal proceedings against the publisher, retailer or other third party. In these situations, it is important to retain but suppress the product record. Again, those responsible for metadata management need an audit trail to show that the record has been suppressed, the reasons for that suppression and be confident that the record is not discoverable (and the product not available to buy or order) by end consumers. Retaining an audit trail provides visibility of what actions were taken when, by whom and for what reasons. The outcome of the court or legal proceedings would inform next steps (continued suppression of the record or not). It is also important that all editions (ISBNs, related works, physical, digital) of the title in question (in all territories) are captured and suppressed as part of such an exercise. It is critical that such records are not communicated further downstream.

Where product records are shared in a non-ONIX format, it is important that there is a process in place between the sender and recipient of the metadata to ensure that information relating to the 'deletion' or suppression of a record is communicated in a clear and timely way, that avoids further downstream dissemination of the record.

In all situations, metadata professionals who are asked to 'delete' or suppress a product record should consider the implications of the request and seek further advice and clarification if necessary.

4. Summary

The purpose of this document is to identify situations where the potential need to 'delete' or suppress a product record may occur and describe how to respond in such cases.

In the context of BIC's Data Recipient Best Practice Project, one of the key challenges identified is the need to ensure that data recipients not only process in bound messages (product records) in the right sequence, but have a complete, accurate and continuous audit trail for each product record. The audit trail needs to reflect the lifecycle of the product and inform both business to business and business to consumer actions and decisions further along the supply chain.

Messages can include additions, updates and potentially 'deletions' to product records and reflect publishing statuses that range from cancelled, forthcoming and active, through to out of stock, recalled and out of print. There is no publishing status that reflects 'deleted'. The previous lack of guidance matters because gaps in a product record's audit trail (or its complete disappearance) can cause confusion and uncertainty.

In today's 24/7, global supply chain, complete and accurate product records including publishing and availability status drive business and consumer decisions.

5. Questions and Prompts

a. Do you really need to 'delete' a specific record?

b. What are you trying to achieve by way of 'deleting' a record?

c. Would any of the following publishing statuses in ONIX Code List 64, Publishing Status (Issue 66), be more appropriate than 'deletion'? The codes include: 00 Unspecified, 01 Cancelled, 03 Postponed Indefinitely, 05 No Longer Our Product, 06 Out of Stock Indefinitely, 07 Out of Print, 08 Inactive, 09 Unknown, 10 Remaindered, 11 Withdrawn from Sale, 15 Recalled, 16 Temporarily Withdrawn from Sale, 17 Permanently Withdrawn from Sale.

d. Is the product physical, digital or both? Which does the proposed 'deletion' affect?

e. What are the implications, if any, for your colleagues and trading partners up and down your supply chain, if you 'delete' a product record?

f. Should you provide additional information to colleagues and trading partners to substantiate the reason for 'deletion' and to inform what steps they might need to take?

g. What further action, if any, is required after the product record is 'deleted'?

h. Are there transactions linked to the product record (fulfilled, unfulfilled)?

i. What should happen if the 'deletion' is itself a mistake?

EDItEUR has published an Application Note on 'Deletions' in ONIX more generally. Pages 2 – 4 of that document are relevant:
https://www.editeur.org/files/ONIX%203/APPNOTE%20Deletions%20in%20ONIX.pdf