BIC Data Recipient Best Practice

Trading Partner Requirements

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May 2025 Version 1.0

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). INTRODUCTION

As with any situation requiring two-way communication between individuals (iMessage, WhatsApp), both parties need to establish how they're going to communicate (platform, software) as well as how frequently that communication is going to take place (ad hoc, situation dependent or to a particular timetable).

Business to business communication and collaboration is no different. In this document we focus on businesses exchanging product metadata. For simplicity we will assume that the flow of information between two businesses will be in one direction (from sender to receiver), although there may be a need to send and receive message responses or provide feedback when issues arise.

Each organisation is described as a 'trading partner', and the trading partners need to agree on the following in advance of establishing their business to business (B2B) trading relationship:

- How they are going to communicate (communications options)
- What they are going to communicate (the type of information, standards, format, content)
- The permitted uses of what is communicated
- What additional requirements exist (unique to an organisation)
- When they are going to communicate (to what frequency)
- How issues will be addressed when they occur
- Who the key contacts are and what the escalation process is

Another way of describing this is as a 'trading partner agreement', covering the key technical and operational aspects of the proposed arrangement. There may well be commercial implications too. This 1:1 relationship is common in the book industry. However, depending on the scope and scale of a business, each may be managing a smaller or larger number of these 1:1 as well as one to many relationships.

2). COMMUNICATION OPTIONS

The method of authentication and data transfer will require consideration of the merits of each option (including security, file compression and the file naming conventions to be used). Non-secure options such as ftp and http are not recommended. The following are preferred:

a. SFTP, FTPS
b. HTTPS
c. AS2, AS3

Basic information on managing file transfers is available on the EDItEUR website.

3). WHAT IS BEING COMMUNICATED

Metadata can be exchanged in a variety of ways. BIC recommends the use of ONIX 3.0 with the most recent version of the ONIX Code Lists as the minimum requirement, though the later 3.1 is preferred, and BIC recognises that non-ONIX formats are also used. Users can find more information on ONIX at www.editeur.org . Note that version 2 (and earlier) of ONIX and the associated code lists are obsolete and no longer supported.

Agreement will also be needed on the subject classification scheme to be used. Now that BIC Subject Categories are obsolete, use the current version of *Thema*. Information on the current version can be found here: https://bic.org.uk/resources/thema/ or via the online browser at https://ns.editeur.org/thema/en.

There may be specific situations where standards other than ONIX are required to fulfil specific trading partner requirements, such as for the subset of product information for price and availability (P&A) enquiries. The implication is not that ONIX cannot fulfil the business need (it can), rather that for operational or commercial reasons, another option may be preferred. The recommended standards for P&A are BIC Realtime (Retrieve Price and Availability, April 2020) and EDItX (Stock Enquiry and Response/ Status Report v1.2, February 2014). Further information can be found on the BIC and EDItEUR websites respectively. The use of TRADACOMS Price and Availability Updates File (PVUINF) or EDIFACT (PRICAT) Price/ Sales Catalog Message are not recommended.

Where the two trading partners decide not to follow best practice by adopting current versions of ONIX and *Thema*, agreement is still required about how and in what format the data will be exchanged.

The two main choices are:

a. Use one of the industry title management systems available. Users either manually enter the product information on a title-by-title basis via a web browser or use a pre-defined template to enter and upload multiple product records. More information on the use of templates is detailed below. The title management system provider is responsible for validating and transforming the data into ONIX and communicating that information to interested parties on behalf of the creator of the metadata. In effect, the system provider manages trading partner relationships on behalf of the creator.

b. Alternatively, the owner/ creator of the metadata can exchange files (such as text or Excel, comma or tab separated) directly with its trading partners, providing that the partners agree the file format to be used in advance. This needs to include the specific data elements to be captured, the sequence in which they must appear in the file and the format for each piece of data. If this approach is taken, BIC still recommends that data senders and recipients use codes from the ONIX controlled vocabulary (e.g., use code BB instead of the text 'hardback' in your Excel column for 'format') to ensure maximum compliance and minimal issues. These are all points that ONIX is designed to address: standardised structure (syntax and grammar) accompanied by semantic consistency (nature and meaning of the data). In theory, one ONIX output should cater for all possible data recipient requirements, whereas distinct arrangements (file formats) may be required for each trading partner that receives the data in a non-ONIX format.

4). OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

a. 10-digit ISBNs were sunsetted in 2007 and a 13-digit ISBN must be provided for each book product. Note that ISBNs beginning 979 are becoming common in the supply chain, in addition to those beginning 978. For non- book items, use the GTIN whenever available. Failing that, a pre-agreed unique product identifier should be provided.

b. ONIX uses GLNs and SANs to identify senders and recipients of metadata in the sender composite. The GLN is the recognised global standard, whilst SANs are common in some markets and bespoke schemes are used elsewhere.

c. The GLN and/ or SAN are specific to a business at a specific location. Be aware that multiple GLNs and/ or SANs may be used at a location, each performing a specific business function.

d. In the UK and Ireland, information on book industry SANs and GLNs is available from Nielsen BookData, which operates the agency on behalf of BIC. Note that SANs assigned by the Nielsen SAN Agency only can be converted to GLNs as well, by prefixing them with a 'magic

number' and recalculating the check digit. Larger, non-traditional organisations should contact GS1UK for GLN information.

e. ONIX also uses SAN and GLN information to identify sources of supply in a particular market (product supply) as well as uniquely identifying publishers (publishing detail).

f. ISNI or the International Standard Name Identifier is a unique and persistent identifier for a contributor to a creative work, intended to avoid ambiguous attribution, for example, where two authors share a single name. ISNI can also be used to identify publishers. ISNI applies across the book industry, and also in music, movies and TV, and other artistic and creative sectors.

g. ORCID or Open Researcher and Contributor ID is a persistent identifier for individuals involved in research. The identifier is supported by an ORCID record connected to an ID as well as a set of APIs enabling communication between ORCID member organisations.

5). ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Assumptions can be made by both the sender and recipient of metadata regarding the actual content of the ONIX message (composite and data elements) that will be exchanged.

There needs to be a clear agreement on what data will flow between the parties. The type of product, business and purpose should help inform what data is exchanged. The metadata required to underpin a bricks and mortar store selling physical books will be somewhat different to an online platform or vendor selling digital audio or e-books, or a retail website that is highly dependent on frequent (and accurate) updates to price and availability information to fulfil orders and maintain a consistent standard of customer service.

An ONIX message is comprised of blocks, composites and data elements. The latter are either mandatory (always required, conditional (dependent on the specific situation) or recommended (nice to have but add value to the content).

A good starting point for a discussion about what information needs to be exchanged is to consider the blocks (or groups of composites) in ONIX. A block groups data by function. The blocks are listed below in the order in which they appear in an ONIX record:

Block 1, Product Description – the primary physical, digital and bibliographic attributes of the product

Block 2, Marketing Collateral Detail - descriptive text, reviews, cover images and other marketing materials

Block 7, Promotional Detail – promotional events such as readings, author signings etc

Block 3, Content Detail – chapter specific metadata such as author names in a contributed volume, chapter timings in audiobooks

Block 4, Publishing Detail – the publisher, branding, sales rights and restrictions

Block 5, Related Material – links to similar products

Block 8, Production Detail – manufacturing information for POD, e-books and digital audio

Block 6, Product Supply – commercial distribution, wholesaling and pricing information

6). TRADING PARTNER QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

Preparatory Work

a. What character set and encoding will be used (ideally use Unicode and UTF-8)?
b. Confirm the version of ONIX and Code Lists to be used.
c. Will truly unique record references be provided? This offers a uniqueness where data for the same record may be received from multiple sources.
d. Confirm whether Reference Names or Short Tags will be used in ONIX.

Licensing

e. For what purpose will the metadata be used?
f. How will the recipient use the product records? As is? Or will the data be supplemented, edited or partially overwritten?
g. Are there specific license conditions or obligations to be aware of?
h. Will an implied data licence be sufficient? Or is an express license required?
i. For what markets do you require product information?

Inventory

j. Are there specific selection criteria for the products that should be included or excluded? For example, it is best practice to ensure that all key data is available 16 weeks ahead of publication date for physical and digital products, and 3 weeks for digital audio products, as a minimum. Conversely, for how long after a product is permanently withdrawn from sale or made out of print should the record continue to be included in the metadata feed?
k. Are there specific *Thema* subject categories that are relevant or irrelevant to your business?
l. Are there particular ONIX composites or data elements that you require/ do not require? Note that it is very much simpler for a recipient to ignore unwanted data than it is for the sender to remove it.
m. Do you accept all lists in the current set of ONIX code lists? Or do you only use selected lists or subsets of codes in specific lists?
n. Do you map specific codes in specific lists to your own proprietary coding scheme(s)? Note that it is very much simpler for a recipient to map ONIX codes to their own internal subset than it is for a sender to carry out that mapping.
o. Do you map other types of data to proprietary schemes for business reasons (such as subject categories)?
p. Are there specific requirements to take account of, such as age ranging?
q. Do you expect to receive a record for each title in the sender's inventory or are there criteria to filter out particular records (by status, cost, subject category, format, market etc)? It may be best to create the most comprehensive set of data possible that recipients can filter according to their needs.
r. How will supporting resources such as jacket images be provided? They can be 'pushed' from ONIX sender to recipient, or the ONIX may contain URLs from which the recipient must 'pull' the resources.

Marketing, Branding

s. Are there specific requirements regarding records for point-of-sale material, dumpbins, counter packs etc?
t. What about retailer exclusives or channel specific items? There may be commercially confidential stipulations to take account of here.

Business As Usual Routines

u. How often should full files be sent? An occasional full file can help 'clear out' any errors that have accumulated in the recipient's system.
v. How will updates be managed (delta files or ONIX block updates)? To what frequency?
w. Will the recipient of the ONIX file acknowledge receipt using the ONIX Acknowledgement Message? Or by some other means to confirm the correct sequencing and application of files (additions, updates, deletions)?
x. Are there any non-standard requirements to take account of? What are these? Note that non-standard requirements should be very rare as there is a significant cost to the sender to support tailoring of the data, and most requirements can be met with standards-compliant ONIX.
y. In the case of queries, is the sender the originator of the data? This can be made clear using <SenderName> and <RecordSourceName> within the ONIX data.
z. What are the data validation routines? There should at a minimum be a requirement that the supplied ONIX conforms to the standard and is valid when checked with the latest version of EDItEUR's XSD schema.
aa. Will there be a period of testing prior to 'go live'? EDItEUR's 'strict' XSD schema can be useful in the testing phase.
bb. Is the ownership of the data dependent on the record, subset of data or an individual data element?
cc. Is a service level agreement required?
dd. Where do Discount Group Codes fit in? in the UK and Ireland, these can enable communication of discount percentages in a confidential way, without requiring per-recipient tailoring of the data.
ee. How should routine liaison be maintained (points of contact on both sides)?
ff. How should a rare 'metadata emergency' or legal takedown requests be handled?

7). PREREQUISITES CHECKLIST

a. GLN and/ or SAN in preference to a VAT ID or a name for an identifier.
b. Software to manage product data, transform, translate and validate files.
c. Communications solution with a secure file transfer utility and credentials.
d. Server, folder structure and audit logs as applicable.
e. A web browser.
f. Broadband internet connection.
g. Antivirus software.
h. Details of the standards, versions, file types, transaction types and formats to be used.
i. The specification detailing exactly what information is to be exchanged and the associated controlled vocabulary.
j. Key contact information, including escalation routines and out of hours contacts.
k. Documentation describing daily, weekly, monthly as well as annual routines and processes. This should also detail troubleshooting.
l. Confirm compliance with applicable legal directives (such as data security, tax).
m. List of approved trading partners.
n. List of strategic partners (third party, software, other providers critical to maintaining business as usual).