



# **Industry Returns Initiative (IRI) Review**

## **Updated Introduction**

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This Industry Returns Initiative (IRI) document is one of a set that Book Industry Communication has produced.

Together, these documents provide a detailed operational, commercial and technical overview of IRI. As the needs of returns stakeholders evolve, so BIC has updated and supplemented these best practice materials.

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

1. Introduction (updated July 2025)
2. BIC Bite
3. The Value of IRI (new June 2025)
4. Stakeholders
5. Process Specification (with updated pages 11 - 14, Revised Response Codes, June 2025)
6. Revised Response Codes Rejecting or Acknowledging the Requested Return or Claim for Credit (updated June 2025)
7. The Role of Sales and Returns History (updated June 2025)
8. IRI Rule Book
9. Process Flow.
10. FAQs (updated May 2025)
11. Glossary (updated May 2025)

## INTRODUCTION

The book Industry Returns Initiative, or IRI for short, is a cross-industry standard designed to reduce the cost of returns processing.

Whilst there are direct financial implications for processing returns, the time and effort expended on identifying, documenting, authorising, packing, shipping, restocking books and managing what can be at times an opaque and adversarial process should not be underestimated. Indeed, in an era where 'responsible consumption and production' is one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, far from being a drain on limited book industry resources, the adoption and implementation of IRI is a must. It delivers a set of clear and unambiguous rules-based guidelines for the management of returns.

Many organisations in the book industry recognise the need for overstock returns and agree that IRI has been responsible for huge cost reductions in returns administration and processing. No longer a wholly manual and labour-intensive set of routines, the automation of returns authorisation processes enables booksellers to request permission to return books and receive a rapid authorisation or rejection message from computer systems with access to accurate product metadata as well as sales and returns history.

## VALUE

IRI has been an integral part of the book supply chain for more than 20 years and has been adopted by well-established and internationally recognised organisations including Cambridge University Press & Assessment, Gardners, Hachette Distribution, HarperCollins, Macmillan Distribution, Penguin Random House UK, Waterstones, John Wiley & Sons and many independent bookshops.

The value of IRI lies in the automation of significant and labour-intensive parts of the returns process. It recognises the diverse nature of our physical supply chain and the inherent complexity that such a supply chain has created over an extended period. Key stakeholder roles and responsibilities are documented.

**FAIR.** IRI is based on a set of rules that ensures that no organisation can seek or gain unfair commercial advantage through the process. The rules apply equally to all participants and this transparency reduces the potential for returns related disputes.

**RELEVANT.** The book supply chain is stretched with too many demands being made on too few personnel. IRI has a role to play in helping manage returns and ensures that only legitimate returns re-enter the supply chain.

**RESPONSIBLE.** There is a heightened awareness of how we as individuals and supply chain professionals contribute to social and environmental pressures on our planet. One of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals focuses on ensuring responsible consumption and production patterns. Implemented and operated well, IRI does not increase returns or returns waste. In fact, it can have the opposite effect by providing reassurance to retailers that books can be kept in front of consumers for a reasonable period before requesting authorisation to return and obtaining credit in a timely manner – assuming the necessary IRI criteria have been met.

**EFFICIENT.** The whole returns process, from identifying returns, through listing on paperwork and seeking authorisation, is labour intensive and heavily reliant on manual intervention. In an industry where publisher and distributor organisations are constantly acquiring and divesting themselves of publishing houses, imprints and partial lists, it is difficult to keep track of who is responsible for granting/ refusing returns authorisations and what the specific commercial terms for returns are. IRI simplifies the process by automating repetitive and time-consuming tasks and removing unnecessary human intervention that causes delays, queries, misunderstandings and errors.



**RESPONSIVE.** By automating returns requests as well as the calculations on which returns authorisations and rejections are based, an inherently lengthy process has been reduced, for most returns requests, to a matter of minutes.

BIC welcomes feedback from IRI stakeholders and potential adopters. It regularly reviews returns documentation to ensure that it remains relevant, fit for purpose and reflects current industry best practice. Please contact BIC via email: [info@bic.org.uk](mailto:info@bic.org.uk) or telephone: +44 (0) 20 4551 1570.

## IRI PARTICIPANTS INCLUDE

Organisation	Organisation Type
Batch Returns	Service provider
Canongate	Publisher
Gardners	Wholesaler
Hachette UK Distribution	Publisher, distributor
HarperCollins	Publisher, distributor
Hewson Books	Independent retailer
Ingram Publisher Services	Distributor
KNK	Service provider
Macmillan Distribution Ltd	Publisher, distributor
Penguin Random House	Publisher, distributor
Waterstones	Retailer
John Wiley & Sons	Publisher, distributor