



Physical Supply Chain

Resources for print books



Practical advice for book industry professionals on how BIC can help to create and maintain a consistent, efficient and responsive physical supply chain.

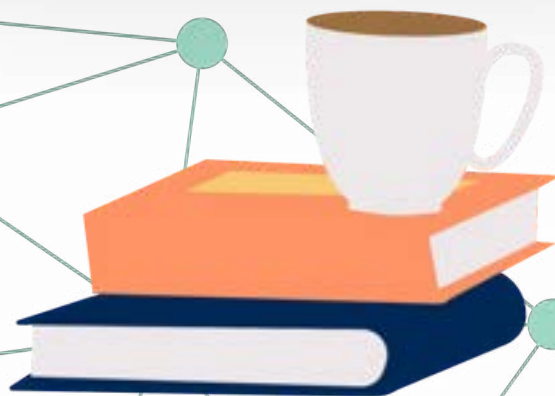




DID YOU KNOW

In the UK, **195 million print books** were sold in 2024.

SOURCE: NielsenIQ BookData



Physical Supply Chain

The physical supply chain has continually evolved over its long history in the book industry. The pace of that change has accelerated rapidly since the pandemic and combined with a focus on making environmentally conscious decisions means that **effective standards and best practices are critical.**

Organisations across the industry must have the tools required to create and maintain a consistent, efficient, yet adaptable and responsive physical supply chain.

We'll explore a core range of projects, standards, best practices, training, accreditation and more in the sections listed below.





PROJECTS

Projects, Standards and Best Practices

This section captures a small selection of BIC's core projects, standards and best practices in the book industry's physical supply chain. Signposting to more in-depth information can be found below and also within Section 4: Access and Recognition.

INDUSTRY RETURNS INITIATIVE (IRI)

The IRI is the book industry standard designed to **automate, streamline and remove costs** from the returns process. Now 20 years old, the IRI was last reviewed in 2025 by the BIC IRI Review Group. As a result the subsequent updates have provided further clarity to the collateral with the addition of a new document -The Value of IRI.

The emphasis is on ensuring that both current implementers and potential adopters of IRI have a robust commercial, operational and technical overview of automated returns management.

For a complete overview of IRI with all corresponding documentation, visit the [resources page](#) on the BIC website.

ACQUISITIONS AND DIVESTMENTS FOR PHYSICAL PRODUCTS

BIC has compiled documentation designed to offer guidance and advice on best practice with regards to the wide range of necessary considerations (including, but not limited to data changes, systems changes, metadata etc) involved with changes of ownership via acquisition, divestment or merger.

The documentation covers:

- **An introduction to the role of your legal team**
- **Infographic for Digital and/or Physical Acquisitions and Divestments**
- **Best Practice Guidelines for Physical Products across a range of scenarios**

Included in the scope of these documents are printed books. Note that we provide a **separate document** for ebooks, downloadable products and digital products.

ORDERING BEST PRACTICE

Ordering Best Practice promotes best practice for the B2B ordering of printed books in the physical supply chain to aid the flow of books from printer to the end consumer with maximum efficiency, and to reduce avoidable waste.

The following **documents and information** can be assessed via the BIC website:

- Trading Platform Capabilities Directory
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Order and Acknowledgement Style Guide
- Code List 55 Order Action Codes
- Combined Code Lists
- Invoice Style Guide
- The Value of Advanced Shipping Notices (ASNs)
- View the Receiving Scenarios document
- Glossary



OUT OF PRINT BEST PRACTICE

Is the industry clear on what is meant by the term Out of Print? Is it fully known what this means and what impact it can have on the supply chain? On customer experience? The Out of Print Best Practice Guidelines explain all and cover all areas of and key stakeholders in the supply chain including data aggregators, distributors, publishers, retailers and service providers and so on.

The full [guidelines document](#) is freely available to download from the BIC website.

BIC REALTIME

BIC Realtime for Trade and Libraries establishes a set of industry standard Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) for all book businesses which are designed to facilitate and improve business communication in the trade and library sector's physical and digital book supply chains.

Further information can be found in our [resources section](#).





PROJECTS

WEIGHTS AND DIMENSIONS BEST PRACTICE

Most product metadata is trusted by recipients. However, Weights and Dimensions data are often not trusted and are re-measured by each recipient causing wasteful duplication when the data could have been correct at source. Errors in Weights and Dimensions data can lead to a number of issues including poor customer service and increased shipping costs.

Download the [**BIC Weights & Dimensions Best Practice Guidelines**](#) for full information.

ELECTRONIC DATA INTERCHANGE (EDI)

Electronic Data Interchange has underpinned efficient supply chain practices in the book industry for many years. Standards evolve and the BIC approved documents reflect current best practice as a result of decisions reached on implementation issues at BIC's regular Technical Implementation Clinics.

Given the global nature of the book supply chain, there are implementation guidelines, code lists and transmission structures provided for both the UK TRADACOMS standard maintained by BIC; as well as the international EDIFACT and EDItX XML standards maintained by EDItEUR.

For further information and access to documentation, please visit the [**EDI section**](#) of the BIC website.

Benefits of BIC's Projects

Collectively, the outputs of these BIC projects and collaborative initiatives help organisations and the wider industry to:

- ★ Remove unnecessary costs
- ★ Streamline and simplify processes
- ★ Minimise returns and waste
- ★ Improve the efficiency of problem resolution and resources
- ★ Maintain an efficient and effective physical supply chain, and hence enable an optimised customer experience
- ★ Gain clarity on definitions, roles and responsibilities
- ★ Define and adhere to/implement a trusted, industry recognised set of operating procedures, standards and best practices
- ★ Require that trading partners adopt the same industry recognised best practices/standards





Access



ACCESS

Physical Supply Chain Committee (open to BIC members only)

Composed of expert representatives from BIC member organisations, this committee consults across a range of physical product conversations and topics helping to deliver efficiency and accuracy for operations through the creation and promotion of standards, best practice, training, workshops, various initiatives and accreditation schemes. Current agenda items include: trading internationally, returns, shipping and freight issues, distribution challenges and sustainability.

Supply Chain Excellence Award (SCEA) Accreditation

This scheme enables book industry organisations to demonstrate the efficiency of their supply chains for both physical and digital products. It rewards organisations large and small for their investment in automation, standards and best practice, and for innovative solutions to the supply chain issues they face; it enables them to be recognised by trading partners and the book industry as the best in their class for business efficiency, customer service, environmental concern and innovation.

MEA Accreditation

BIC's Metadata Excellence Award (MEA) scheme is for both physical and digital book product records and is designed to encourage publishers to appreciate the contribution made by accurate and timely product data to their sales; to enable them to demonstrate their commitment to making that data available in the supply chain; and to enable them to benchmark their performance against their competitors.

BIC's accreditation schemes are open to BIC members and non-members alike, with application deadlines spread across the year. For full information visit the [accreditation overview](#) page.

Technical Implementation Clinics (open to BIC members only)

An agile real-time way of managing technical issues or queries raised by our members. Representatives from all BIC member organisations are invited to discuss and share, queries and issues they may be experiencing against areas for which the Technical Implementation Clinic is responsible:

- EDI (Tradacoms/EDIFACT)
- Invoicing standards/requirements
- BIC Realtime for Trade and Libraries
- ONIX implementation and related issues
- Industry Returns Initiative (IRI)
- SANs Libraries Communication Framework (LCF)
- RFID in Libraries
- Any other technical implementation issues pertaining to standards or best practices falling within BIC's remit

For full information visit the [Technical Implementation Clinics](#) page of the BIC website.

Training

BIC has an array of production courses which are currently taking registers of interest, scheduling a date for the following courses when a full list of delegates has been identified. These include Colour Book Production, Digital Printing for Books, Making and Managing Monochrome and many others. Visit the [product training page](#) for more information.

Full information on our wider selection of training can be found in the calendar on our website.

Emails

COMMUNICATION

Keep up to date with **BIC projects, resources, training** by joining our **mailing list**.



Scan to sign up to
the BIC Mailing List



Social Media

We regularly post news, reminders, support and resources via our **LinkedIn**, **Bluesky**, **Facebook**, or **YouTube** channels.

