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ONIX and More: EDItEUR's Standards in the Library Supply Chain

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Pelikan's Antidisambiguation from page 106

It's a reasonable guess that business owners have run the numbers to determine the sweet spot balancing between the costs of offering these savings on the one hand, and increased profits from increased return visits on the other. I'd guess businesses don't persist in the practice if they lose money on it. And truly, the customer has signed away the right to be surprised, appalled, or ashamed by these practices — what, you didn't read the Terms of Use?


If a company has secured your blanket permission, they needn't ask you any further for permission to gather, store, retrieve, rent, sell, or otherwise put-to-business-use anything about you at all they've gathered under the Terms of Service. You're free not to give that permission, just as you're free not to use Web search, online book or merchandise vendors, or the services of telecommunications companies. So what are people complaining about? We're perfectly free to don burlap sacks and live in the woods, too.

But since I'm in a guessing mood, I'd guess that most folks reckon they've come to realistic terms with what life in the twenty-first century is all about, even though maybe, just maybe, they'll make a note to "Review the blankety-blank Terms of Service this year, and for Real this time!" to their list of New Year's Resolutions. That way it'll be certain to happen, right? 🌱



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ONIX and More: EDItEUR's Standards in the Library Supply Chain

by **Tim Devenport** (Lead Consultant, Serials & Subscriptions Standards, EDItEUR, United House, North Road, London N7 9DP, UK) <tim@editeur.org> www.editeur.org

A Bit of Background

"Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin!" So ran the introductory lines to a children's story time program, broadcast for many years by the **British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)** and imprinted indelibly on the memories of a certain generation of listeners. The story of ONIX and **EDItEUR** is perhaps a little more prosaic than some of the gems broadcast by the **BBC**, but we hope still of interest to **ATG's** readers.

The international standards organization **EDItEUR**, with its unusual, French-sounding name, was born during the 1990s out of a European Commission (EC) sponsored research project into electronic data interchange (EDI) standards in the publishing and particularly books industry. Over the intervening years **EDItEUR** has grown and evolved into an organization with multinational membership and representation from all parts of the supply chain.

As we'll see later, **EDItEUR's** interests cover three main, and complementary, areas: standards and best practice, identifiers and their supporting metadata, and project/consultancy

work. Probably the most widely known of its outputs is the descriptive metadata standard ONIX for Books, now accompanied by several more formats (or should we say, ONIX for Other Things?!) designed to support a variety of metadata exchanges.

Beyond these descriptive exchanges, **EDItEUR** is also actively involved in standards supporting transactions like ordering, claiming, etc. These include continuing support for some EDIFACT messaging, more recent work on EDItX formats, and lots of involvement in the standards developed for the serials community by ICEDIS.

Stakeholders, Membership and Governance

EDItEUR is a nonprofit, based in London, UK and funded by a mixture of membership revenues and project fees. Its member organizations — now numbering nearly 110 and based in at least 23 countries around the world — are absolutely central to its mission. All of its activities are ultimately focused on listening to and responding to requirements articulated by the members. Based on those needs,

we endeavor to develop robust, efficient, and unambiguous ways of communicating information exchanges or transactions between business partners.

EDItEUR's members are also directly involved in shaping business directions and providing governance. Representatives of its charter members constitute the **EDItEUR** Board, whilst ONIX national and international groups (for books) and the ICEDIS Committee (for serials) are responsible for commissioning new standards and for signing off new or modified formats as fit for purpose.

Descriptive and Transactional Standards

The distinction between "descriptive" and "transactional" formats is mirrored in the naming of **EDItEUR** standards that have been developed since 2000. The ONIX standards are all descriptive metadata formats (the classic "information about information").

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And the similarities go much deeper than the name — all ONIX standards share a common architecture, vocabulary, and controlled value codelists, and all are expressed in XML. Not only does this reduce the maintenance workload for all concerned: it also means that any organization that has successfully implemented one ONIX format will very probably recognize and understand the main features of another ONIX format too.

On the transactional side of the house, **EDItEUR** looks after two main families of standards. For books, the **EDItX** group of standards have built upon tried-and-tested **EDIFACT** formats and then re-expressed and extended them in XML that is very similar to that used in ONIX. In the world of serials and subscriptions, the mainstays are still the legacy standards designed by **ICEDIS** in the 80s and 90s. In recent years work has started on an XML-based redesign to better support the profound changes and new business models that have evolved since that largely paper-based era.

The Evolution of ONIX

About 15 years ago, with Internet book-selling in its infancy but rapidly expanding, the book trade in North America and Europe began to show a voracious appetite for descriptive product metadata in electronic form. The information had to be reliable, extensive, and easily ingested into online product catalogs. The **Association of American Publishers** and **EDItEUR**, supported by **BIC** (in the UK) and **BISG** (in the United States), rose to the challenge and devised version 1.0 of a new standard, ONIX, which was released in 2000.

Since that time, ONIX has gone from strength to strength. ONIX for Books is now on to version 3.0, and provides comprehensive support for both “e-books” and “p-books,” as well as a wide range of non-European scripts and languages. Uptake in trade book markets across the world has been considerable, with heavy usage in North America, Europe, Australia, and more recently Japan, China, and South Korea.

A number of ONIX sibling standards have been created to address specific needs elsewhere in the supply chain. Notably, ONIX-PL provides machine-readable expressions of publication licences, ONIX-PC offers a serials catalog and pricing format, ONIX-PH carries details of preserved e-journals, while ONIX-RS deals with diligent searches for rights holders and the identification of orphan works.

ONIX and Serials/Subscriptions Standards

Some years ago, **EDItEUR** and **NISO** sponsored a Joint Working Party to assess whether ONIX-like standards might have any applicability in the serials world. After great collaboration from many colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic, the JWP produced initial versions of what became known as “ONIX for Serials.”

These covered formats designed to cover three functional areas — Products and Subscriptions, Online Holdings, and Release Notifications. A later addition was an extremely comprehensive module known as the Serials Coverage Statement, which made it possible to cope with just about all the (known) vagaries of journal enumeration. Whilst very valuable results were achieved, it's possible that the ONIX for Serials work was slightly ahead of its time, and uptake of the original formats has been relatively sparse.

Reacting to this situation, **EDItEUR** decided to refocus on more targeted formats aimed at satisfying very particular needs. We also took into account that bundled subscription products, broadly defined, can very well include non-serial components such as individual eBooks.

The first product of this revised approach was the serials price catalog ONIX-PC, supporting complex annual product-definition and pricing exchanges between publishers, agencies, and others. This has already met with some success: four of the biggest international publishers — **Taylor & Francis**, **Wiley Blackwell**, **Elsevier**, and **Springer** — have implemented the standard to date, and **Swets**, **LM Info**, **Harrassowitz**, and **EBSCO** are all either receiving the files or planning ingests to cater for them.

A second example is ONIX for Preservation Holdings (ONIX-PH), which arose after requests from agencies like **EDINA/The Keepers Registry**, **Portico**, **CLOCKSS**, and others to automate the exchange of information on who exactly is preserving which bits of which e-journals.

In recent years we have adopted the more generic rubric “ONIX for Subscription Products” to group these and earlier formats. The original ONIX for Serials standards are still available but not actively maintained, and **EDItEUR** increasingly views them as valuable “toolkits” for modeling parts of more targeted messages.

Where ICEDIS Fits In

Some readers from publishers or subscription agencies will be familiar with **ICEDIS** — the International Committee on EDI for Serials. Originally (from the mid-to-late '80s) this was an initiative by a number of leading players to bring some automation to the renewal ordering process. Its main outcomes were twofold: firstly a workhorse standard for exchanging renewals information that is still in widespread use, and secondly a forum for discussing process automation and efficiency that also continues to this day.

Along the way, **ICEDIS** has also morphed somewhat so that it is now **EDItEUR's** special interest group for serials and subscriptions questions and it provides business direction and governance for the serials standards that **EDItEUR** supports.

The **ICEDIS** Committee meets three times a year, with one of those occasions being a North American session (the other two coincide with the **Frankfurt Book Fair** each October and the spring **UKSG Conferences**).

This year the **North American ICEDIS Meeting** will once again take place at the **Charleston Conference** — specifically at 10:00 am on Wednesday, November 5th at the Holiday Inn Charleston Historic Downtown, 425 Meeting Street, Charleston, SC 29403. **ATG** readers and **Charleston Conference** attendees are very welcome to attend and find out more about **ICEDIS** and other **EDItEUR** initiatives.

Licensing and Rights

ONIX for Publication Licenses (ONIX-PL) was created by **EDItEUR** and industry partners as a way of expressing license terms in a machine-readable way. It arose from the increasing requirement both to codify licensing for online resources and to make it easier to analyse and compare the terms involved. Along with the comprehensive documentation that accompanies this and other ONIX standards, **EDItEUR** has provided sample ONIX-PL expressions of CC-BY 3.0, SERU, and the **LIBLICENSE** Standard Agreement to better illustrate how the format works.

A number of leading publishers have used ONIX-PL to express their own standard template licenses. This effort received a boost in recent years with projects supported by **NISO** and by **Jisc** in the UK to produce what amounts to a small portfolio of ONIX-PL licenses to “prime the pump” for LMS vendors, librarians, and others keen to explore the potentialities of this approach.

We Like Identifiers, Too!

Well-formulated standard identifiers perform vital roles across the supply chain, removing ambiguities and enabling machines (and humans!) to be sure that they are actually talking or communicating about the same things. Imagine for a moment a world with no DOIs, ISSNs, or Ringgold IDs: a return to the Tower of Babel would swiftly beckon!

Making sure that unique identifier numbers or strings are assigned to each entity is, of course, only a part of the story. Carefully structured and accurate supporting metadata is of equal importance and this metadata element bridges neatly to the second group of **EDItEUR's** activities: support for standard identifiers.

Most notably, **EDItEUR** runs the **International ISBN Agency**, coordinating book/eBook identifier allocation and policies across over 150 national ISBN agencies. In recent years it has also started to offer similar management services, although on a smaller scale, to support the **ISNI** (International Standard Name Identifier) and the **ISTC** (International Standard Text Code, an identifier at the abstract work level). We have also supported initiatives on **RFIDs** (Radio Frequency IDs) in both trade and library applications and have written short formats for identifier registration (for example, ONIX for ISBN Registration).

Controlled use of these and other identifiers (including ISSNs, ORCIDs, and many others) is actively promoted across the whole range of **EDItEUR** standards and included in the structured codelists that underpin each of the standard formats.

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her local library could lend her a screwdriver (the tool, not the drink), she has more than once lamented that it was too bad libraries didn't circulate children. I think this is also a complaint that few of her own great-grand children live near her. Setting that reason aside, what she said was that being able to check a child out when she wanted to go to the zoo, share the joy of cotton candy, or provide an excuse to go see a film like **MonsterU** would be a great service. I didn't argue with her (mothers are always right, right?), but I sensed that if libraries provided such a service, they would soon be labeled something worse than agri-terrorists.

None of these very handy supplements to regular library fare take the place of comfortable places to study; small group study/meeting rooms; as well as books, journals, CDs, DVDs, and special collections materials, etc. Patrons still love the library as a place and for its carefully selected information resources. We need to make sure we spend most of our time on these basics, and just a part of our time on all the unusual stuff needed by our readers. When we do, people will love and protect our libraries. 🌱

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Project Activity

The third main section of **EDItEUR's** work lies in project activities and selective involvement in consultancy around areas close to its core interests and expertise. Every initiative is, of course, different but some recent projects have included:

Partnering with **WIPO** (the **World Intellectual Property Organization**) and others to explore ways in which publishers can build greater accessibility into their books and eBooks, with particular reference to the needs of visually impaired readers.

Contributing a standard messaging system to help automate searches for rights holders and identify so-called "orphan" works, as part of the EC-sponsored **ARROW** project.

Exploring partnerships between commercial publishers and the cultural heritage sector in setting up infrastructure for the safe preservation of digitized versions of cultural artifacts.

Cooperative Ventures: EDItEUR and Other Standards Bodies

As well as contributing directly to standards formulation, **EDItEUR** actively cooperates with other agencies that are working in related areas, such as **NISO**, **BISG**, **W3C**, **ISSN**, and the **International DOI Foundation**. We are firmly of the belief that the widest uptake of well-formulated standards brings the greatest benefit to all the stakeholders involved, and we therefore readily partner with related bodies — of which **NISO** has been a prime example — to pool ideas and generally "spread the word."

What's Bubbling Under

Just as business models and product offerings evolve, standards development never really stands still. Improvements or extensions to existing formats are regularly needed to keep pace with market expectations; fortunately, the architecture and XML underpinning of the **ONIX** family have thus far proven pretty resilient and extensible.

That said, **EDItEUR** is busy in at least three new directions at present. First, we have been exploring alternate ways of expressing our standards — particularly via the use of linked data and **RDF**. In-house prototyping has shown that many **ONIX-XML** constructs could, if and when necessary, be re-expressed as a series of linked data triples, so if the library and publisher communities eventually move in that direction **EDItEUR** should be well positioned to accompany and support them.

Second, the subscriptions landscape has changed hugely since **ICEDIS** first piloted its standards in the late '80s, when those standards were

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designed to support the supply of almost exclusively print journals. With the best will in the world, these legacy standards struggle to cope with the wholesale shift to online delivery, packaged products, open access models, and the emergence of new identifiers like Ringgold ID, not to mention Internet trading and technology change.

We are working with **ICEDIS** members right now to establish business use cases and priorities for an eventual migration to a new generation of subscriptions standards. These will be expressed in **XML** and modeled closely on **ONIX**-like structures and some important building blocks — **XML** standards for ordering and claiming and a comprehensive model for structured name, address, and other "party information" — are already in place.

Finally, we have recently released and taken over the development of **Thema**, an international subject classification scheme aimed in the first instance at the global books trade. **Thema** is a flexible standard that allows each national market to retain its unique cultural voice while still presenting a unified subject hierarchy that rationalises book classification. The goals of **Thema** are to reduce the duplication of effort required by the many distinct national subject schemes, and to reduce or eliminate the need for scheme-to-scheme mapping, by providing a single scheme for international use. It can be used alongside existing national schemes like those of **BIC**, **BISAC**, **WGS**, or **CLIL**, and has the potential to eventually replace them (though this is not an immediate goal).

For More Information

Documentation and technical resources for all of the standard formats and organizational bodies described above is freely available from the **EDItEUR** Website www.editeur.org. If you are attending the **Charleston Conference** and would like to learn more about our work please do come along to the **ICEDIS** meeting on November 5th. And if you need any further information or advice just email me, **Tim Devenport**, via tim@editeur.org. 🌱