

Guidelines for the Implementation of 13-Digit ISBNs

International ISBN Agency
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Introduction

Since its inception in 1970, the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) has been internationally recognised as the identification system for the publishing industry and book trade. An ISBN accompanies a monographic publication from its production and onwards throughout the supply and distribution chain.

The ISBN system serves as a key element of ordering and inventory systems for publishers, booksellers, wholesalers, libraries and other organisations. It is the basis for collecting data on new and forthcoming editions of monographic publications for directories used throughout the book trade. The use of ISBN also facilitates rights management and the monitoring of sales data for the publishing industry.

The revised ISO standard, due to be published at the beginning of 2005, represents the first change there has been to the structure of the ISBN since its inception. To facilitate the continued smooth operation of a supply chain dependent on this identifier, all participants in the book trade will need to ensure that their systems are able to accommodate the new number structure without disruption when it is brought into effect on 1 January 2007. Every system in use that carries the ISBN, internal as well as those used for external communication, will need to be reviewed; as will the display of numbers on publications and in related documentation.

These implementation guidelines do not attempt to solve every possible problem that might arise. Many of the issues that will emerge will only be able to be resolved by individual discussion with users, between trading partners, and with systems providers. These guidelines exist to help those confronting the change to know what it is necessary to achieve by 1 January 2007 and give general guidance on how to approach particular issues and identify other sources of guidance (see *Useful Links and Further Sources of Information*, below).

Number structure

The new ISBN will consist of 13 digits: the 3-digit prefix that identifies the book industry (currently 978), followed by the core 9-digit number and the recalculated check digit that validates the internal integrity of the whole number. As such it will also be identical to the EAN 'Bookland' 13-digit code that already appears encoded in the bar code printed on the back of the book.

The need arises for a new number structure for ISBN because the supply of numbers available to meet the growing number of publishers and publications worldwide is beginning to run out. When it becomes necessary – at some point after January 2007 - the book industry will be able to use the additional

EAN prefix 979. When ISBN agencies in some parts of the world run out of their current allocation of ISBNs, they will be authorised to assign ISBNs with 979 prefixes. It is likely that, due to the availability of different publishers' ranges, an agency may be issuing some ISBNs with the 978 prefix and others with the 979 prefix.

The methods by which 13-digit ISBNs will be allocated will be different from current arrangements. It is most unlikely that publishers will be allocated their existing prefixes when 979-prefixed ISBNs are allocated. Therefore one cannot assume that 978 + publisher identifier will be the same as 979 + publisher identifier.

All these considerations make it essential that all parts of the industry are ready to work with 13-digit ISBNs from 1 January 2007, as all books published after that date must carry 13-digit ISBNs.

Retrospective conversion

Publishers will need to recalculate all their ISBNs and accommodate the new number format in their systems. This will include ISBNs for all titles in print, probably all or most out of print titles for which orders or other enquiries might be received, and for all outstanding unallocated ISBNs supplied by local agencies.

Software will be widely available for small-scale conversions; and systems providers may supply conversion programs to their customers. Some publishers, particularly those with a substantial number of unallocated ISBNs, may be tempted to continue the use of 10-digit ISBNs for internal systems or create other fixes that simply make it seem as if the number has changed whereas, in reality, the ISBN structure is still based on the 10-digit ISBN. This is discouraged because of the ambiguity that becomes possible once 979 prefixes are in circulation. This would be a particular danger for users who truncate ISBNs just down to product number and check digit in internal systems, omitting even the publisher prefix.

Booksellers will need to process 13-digit ISBNs for ordering, invoices and other functions from 1 January 2007 and may wish to be in a position to do so as soon as possible. Most booksellers' systems will already be capable of handling 13-digit product numbers used by the EAN system; the ability to read and process an identical number structure for books and for other merchandise without the risk of ambiguity should be a considerable benefit. Manual stock control and other systems may require conversions to be made from 10- to 13-digit ISBNs.

Libraries and library systems

Libraries and library system vendors using ISBN for catalogues and bibliographic databases will need to support both existing 10-digit ISBNs and new 13-digit ISBNs as much in advance of 1 January 2007 as possible and continue to do so well into the future.

These systems must be able to accommodate whatever form of ISBN appears in the published work in the bibliographic record, as well as permit a patron to use either format in a search of the database. Retrospective conversion of existing bibliographic records is not anticipated.

However, in the modules supporting online searching, or in the user dialogue designed for those transactions, some accommodation must be made to allow numbers belonging to the 978 series and all the 10-digit ISBNs to be searched for equally in both forms, regardless of the format of the ISBN in the individual bibliographic record.

For book purchasing and other trade-related requirements, libraries and library system vendors should be prepared to move over to the 13-digit ISBN for all book ordering, etc., by 1 January 2007 at the latest.

ISBN implementation changes

The new standard will include a revision of the guidelines for the scope of ISBN use. These are unlikely to change significantly from the existing guidelines in terms of the applicability of ISBN to eligible products or the rules about format and edition changes. They will, however, be rewritten to accommodate newer forms of product such as the delivery of electronic product (e-books). Complete information about the scope of the ISBN may be found by consulting the User Manual and ISBN agencies.

Timing for the use of 13-digit ISBNs

There is likely to be a fairly long transition period leading up to the adoption of 13-digit ISBNs on 1 January 2007; the speed with which the industry moves forward will depend on the requirements of individual trading partners. Some organisations implementing new systems are likely to want to force the pace by requiring their trading partners to adopt 13-digit ISBNs sooner rather than later. This in turn may lead to a chain reaction which makes 13-digit ISBNs widely used ahead of 2007.

Since publishers will inevitably be holding stock carrying 10-digit ISBNs for many years to come, they may feel that it would be sensible to move towards printing the 13-digit ISBN on their books as soon as possible, in conjunction

with the 10-digit ISBN until 2007. It is highly recommended that, if this decision is taken, the numbers should appear on the title page verso, and on the book cover if there is no bar code, in the following style:

ISBN-13: 978-1-873671-00-9
ISBN-10: 1-873671-00-8

This will enable the ISBN-10 to be deleted from reprints after 2007 with minimal or no cost.

For titles published after 1 January 2007, the style should revert to that adopted now:

ISBN 978-1-873671-00-9

The bar code symbol on the back cover of the book will be unchanged, except that the eye-readable number should be changed for titles published after 1 January 2007 to the full 13 digits preceded by the letters ISBN, with hyphenation retained for clarity. Publishers and printers using their own software for creating bar codes should ensure that it is adapted to this new requirement and should check that third-party suppliers of film masters or electronic bar code data have correctly interpreted this requirement.



Example of bar code with eye-readable 13-digit ISBN

The algorithms to enable both 10- and 13-digit ISBNs to be validated and split for display purposes will be found in the User Manual. The data files referred to in the algorithms will be available from the International Agency's web site shortly.

Particular care will have to be taken with catalogues and stock order forms around the time of the introduction of 13-digit ISBNs. It is recommended that publishers print both 10-digit and 13-digit ISBNs in these in the period preceding the change. Abbreviated ISBNs should be avoided to prevent misunderstanding.

It is certain that some booksellers will want to place orders using 13-digit ISBNs ahead of the changeover date. This must be subject to agreement between the trading parties and publishers must decide with their systems suppliers whether they should convert all incoming ISBNs to the 13-digit format when that begins to happen. In any event, they must be in a position to process all 13 digits after 1 January 2007 to avoid possible ambiguity.

Responsibility for changes

Organisations are recommended to review all existing systems – manual and electronic - as soon as possible, develop an action plan and allocate resources as necessary. It is recommended that a senior executive in each organisation be nominated to oversee the necessary transition in all relevant areas. These will primarily affect systems, but they will also impact on editorial processes, sales and marketing, design and production departments as well as royalty and accounting functions in publishing houses.

A possible – but not exhaustive – list of systems that might be affected in a publishing organisation is as follows:

- ISBN allocation;
- product information;
- editorial management;
- production systems;
- e-Book supply systems;
- order fulfilment/warehouse management;
- accounting;
- rights and contracts;
- rights management and royalty systems.

Booksellers will need to review, among other possible areas:

- ordering systems;
- stock control;
- point of sale systems;
- accounting.

Libraries will need to review:

- cataloguing policy;
- circulation systems;
- OPACs;
- acquisition and accession systems;
- all other ISBN-related systems.

Communication with trading partners

Clear decisions, and communication of them, about timing and methods of implementation are crucial to the smooth introduction of the new standard. All organisations are encouraged as part of their own internal reviews to share

their implementation plans and timetables with all their trading partners and ensure that those partners are also taking similar implementation measures.

Other considerations

With the possibility available to the book trade to adopt further prefixes for 13-digit ISBNs in the future, the system is likely to remain in its newly-defined structure for many years to come. However, developers may be wise to bear in mind some additional possible scenarios relating to field lengths:

- Some organisations are taking an interest in a 14-digit GTIN (Global Trade Item Number) where the 13-digit ISBN is prefixed by an additional digit that can be used as a packaging level indicator by agreement between trading partners.
- The use of the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) or of Uniform Resource Names (URN) may become more widely adopted in parts of the industry supply chain; these are variable length identifiers that can accommodate ISBNs.

The ISBN system is set to be robust and stable in its new form for all currently known applications but it may be advisable to build in flexibility required to address the supply chain issues of the future.

FAQs

What happens to ISBNs that have already been obtained by a publisher but are not yet assigned?

The publisher should continue to use these until they are exhausted but must convert the number formats to the new 13-digit standard, prefixed by 978.

e.g. ISBN-10: 1-873671-00-8

is converted to

ISBN-13: 978-1-873671-00-9

Will new ISBNs have to be assigned to products that have already been published?

No. Existing ISBNs should be converted from the 10-digit format to the 13-digit format (prefixed by 978) by 1 January 2007. This will apply to records for any title for which transactions may occur and should therefore include out of print titles as well as those currently in the catalogue.

The ISBN and bar code on books will not need to be changed until the book is reprinted as the bar code already represents the EAN13 which is identical to the new 13-digit ISBN.

May I re-use existing 10-digit ISBNs on a new product adding a 978 prefix?

No. The addition of a 978 prefix to a previously used ISBN does not make a new ISBN and for that reason must not be assigned to a new product.

Will I be able to communicate with trading partners using 10-digit ISBNs after 1 January 2007?

After 1 January 2007 the ISBN will be a 13-digit number and all mechanical systems will have to be able to accommodate its use in that form. Support for 10-digit ISBNs will be unknown after that date. In the transitional period, however, arrangements may be made between trading partners to support both formats.

Will publishers have to change to 13-digit ISBNs or can they continue using the 10-digit ones?

Publishers will have to change all their systems to accommodate the 13-digit ISBN by 1 January 2007 in order to avoid the possibility of ambiguity (when the additional 979 prefix comes into use). Although this possibility will be remote to begin with, publishers are strongly encouraged to make the necessary conversions no later than that date. It is essential that mechanical systems are adapted by that date to enable communication with trading partners to continue without interruption.

If our company still has lots of 10-digit ISBNs, why do we need to reformat them as 13-digit ISBNs?

The International ISBN standard is changing. The ISBN system drives all trading in the industry internationally and the allocation of ISBN is organised on an international basis. The 13-digit ISBN is necessary because existing stocks of numbers in certain parts of the world are running low. In order to maintain the system, therefore, the additional 979 prefix is being adopted to expand number availability.

May I use the 979 prefix on my existing 10-digit ISBNs?

No. See next FAQ below.

Will our company get the same prefixes in the new 979 range as we have in the 978 range?

Almost certainly not. One of the reasons for the current shortage of 10-digit ISBNs is that prefixes were allocated too generously in the past, resulting in some publishers having many more numbers than they require. ISBN

agencies will seek to assign smaller blocks of numbers in the future and this will lead to new criteria for the allocation of prefixes.

Should both a 10-digit and a 13-digit ISBN be printed in a publication?

For books published after 1 January 2007 only the 13-digit ISBN should be printed. In order to minimise the amount of change that will be required, publishers are recommended to print both the 10-digit and 13-digit ISBNs on the title verso of their publications as soon as possible in such a way that the 10-digit version can be deleted from reprints after that date.

For titles published after 1 January 2007, publishers are recommended to print the 13- digit ISBN in eye-readable form above the bar code on the back cover of their publications, retaining the correct hyphenated structure.

Useful links and further sources of information

ISO ISBN Web Page (including progress report on the ISO ISBN standard)

<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/iso/tc46sc9/wg4.htm>

Frequently Asked Questions about changes to the ISBN

<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/iso/tc46sc9/isbn.htm>

International ISBN Agency (including ISBN User Manual)

<http://www.isbn-international.org/international.html>

Information about EAN.UCC GTIN

<http://www.ean-int.org/products.html>

Information about DOI

<http://www.doi.org>

Information about URN

<http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2611.txt>

EDItEUR

<http://www.editeur.org>