Frequently Asked Questions about ONIX for Books

EDITEUR FAQ on ONIX 3.0

Release 3.0

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Release 3.0

What is ONIX 3.0?

It is a major new release of the ONIX product information format for book publishers and other organizations in the book supply chain. It's the first major release since 2001 (when ONIX 2.0 was released), and is the first in which digital products have been treated as a 'core' elements in ONIX coverage. It is the first release since 2001 which is not backwards-compatible with previous releases.

Why did EDItEUR decide that the time was right in 2009 for a new release?

The ONIX International Steering Committee took the decision that the time had come to move to a new release for two main reasons: first, the need to improve the handling of digital products – the nature of which had changed radically since 2001 – and second, the recognition that the price of maintaining backwards-compatibility was the increasing number of 'deprecated' elements which had to be retained to preserve backwards compatibility. These needed to be supported in 2.1 even though they were not recommended for use, often resulting in two or three different ways of expressing the same information, increasing complexity and cost for data recipients.

ONIX for Books 3.0 deleted all 'deprecated' elements, as well as others that were made redundant as a result of other changes in the new release. It also enabled digital products to be described more comprehensively and consistently than before, and greatly improved the handling of complex international supply chain arrangements. At the same time, the opportunity was taken to introduce important improvements in other areas of the message, some simplifications, and some improvements in the various XML tools available.

But it's worth noting that many areas of the specification needed little or no updating, and at least half of ONIX 3.0 is essentially unchanged from 2.1. ONIX 3.0 is arguably simpler than 2.1, as there's usually only a single way of expressing some particular facet of the metadata, and there are in fact fewer XML tags in 3.0 despite its wider range of functionality.

What is the status of previous releases of ONIX?

With the release of ONIX 3.0 in 2009, all ONIX 1.x releases were formally withdrawn, and EDItEUR no longer supports them.

ONIX for Books 2.0 (first introduced in 2001) is also no longer actively supported, though there are still a few users, archived documentation is still available, and many updates to the ONIX Codelists apply equally to 2.0 and 2.1.

ONIX 2.1 will continue to be fully supported until the end of 2014 (the 'sunset date'). This includes documentation, updates to codelists used in 2.x, and any fixes that prove necessary to the various XML tools EDItEUR provides. Following sunset, documentation will be archived, various XML tools will not be supported, and updates to codelists will be more limited.

The International Steering Committee announced the timetable for planned reduction in the level of support for 2.1 three years in advance, to ensure that organizations could plan and budget for their migration to ONIX 3.0 effectively. It is expected that by the sunset date, the adoption of ONIX 3.0 will have reached a point where it is appropriate to cease further support.

All EDItEUR development is now focused on Release 3.0 and ONIX for Books users are encouraged to adopt this version as early as is practicable. The latest minor update of ONIX 3.0 is 3.0.2, which was released in January 2014.

When do you expect that ONIX 3.0 will be widely implemented?

Implementation is at different stages in different markets. In the US, UK and Germany, ONIX 3.0 implementation remains at a relatively early stage, but some major metadata aggregators can already receive ONIX 3.0, and others plan implementations in 2013 and 2014. The major suppliers of IT systems to publishers can already supply 3.0-capable systems, or are close to doing so.

In other markets – particularly those where 2.1 was less widely implemented – ONIX 3.0 implementation is already much more advanced.

What are the specific advantages of ONIX 3.0?

Some of the advantages of Release 3.0 over previous ONIX for Books releases are:
- redundant elements have been eliminated, and the design of the standard has been updated to reflect several years of experience;
- digital products can be more fully and consistently described, and the groundwork has been laid for further development in this area, as new product formats and content packages evolve;
- the handling of series, sets and multiple-item products – an acknowledged problem in earlier releases – has been greatly improved. As part of this improvement, there is a new extended title composite, which enables title detail to be more accurately expressed;
- publishers and others are able to specify a much greater variety of 'marketing collateral' – typically web resources – to support the promotion and sale of physical and digital products;

- for ONIX users working in complex international markets, for example the international English language market, supply-related elements in ONIX 3.0 have been regrouped to allow the status of a product in different markets to be more clearly and accurately described;
- the *Specification* allows the provision of multi-lingual metadata, for those supply chains where more than one language is in use;
- with the introduction of the ISTC (International Standard Text Code), products can be related to a parent 'work', to identify groups of different manifestations of the same text, or of texts derived from a common source;
- ONIX 3.0 Product records are 'blocked' in a new way which will permit updates to be sent without complete record replacement, and without the need for a separate 'Supply Update' message type (which was necessary for this purpose in ONIX 2.1). This message structure potentially greatly reduces the parsing and ingestion effort required to keep records up to date throughout the lifecycle of the product;
- the ONIX 3.0 schema definition is available in the ISO RELAX NG schema language, as well as in DTD and W3C XSD schema languages;
- there is a global *Implementation and Best Practice Guide*, which aims to ensure that ONIX 3.0 data is highly interoperable on a global basis (rather than being bound to a particular set of essentially *national* best practices).

As a guide to those considering upgrading from Release 2.1 to 3.0, there is a more detailed summary table in the Appendix of the *Implementation and Best Practice Guide*.

EDItEUR
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