

ONIX for Books

Product Information Message

Application Note: Lifecycle dates in ONIX

Through a book's lifecycle, there are some key dates – publication date, out of print date and others – that need to be shared across the metadata supply chain. Each can be included in ONIX metadata in a very specific way, but it is noticeable that publishers' and retailers' internal terminology and internal definitions of these dates can vary enormously. Yet if supply chain partners disagree on the definitions of these dates – on exactly what each date *means* – then there can be no true communication and dates sent in the metadata may well be misinterpreted by data recipients.

Where are lifecycle dates recorded in ONIX

There are numerous places within an ONIX Product record where dates are included, although not all refer to events in the lifecycle of the book – some relate to the use of marketing collateral and other resources. The most obvious dated events include:

- Publication date
- Sales embargo date
- Out of print date

But other less frequently used dates can also be important:

- Date of first publication
- Date of first publication in original language
- Trade announcement date
- Public announcement date
- Expected warehouse date
- Expected availability date
- Last date for returns

All of the above dates can be recorded in <PublishingDate>, <MarketDate> or in <SupplyDate>, though there are other date locations in an ONIX Product record:

- Copyright date
- Contributor birth and death dates
- From... and Until... dates on prices, or covering the use of marketing collateral

Many data composites containing dates are repeatable, with a 'role' that can be varied, so one composite can be used to carry many different types of date. For example, the publication date of a product can be combined with a sales embargo date:

```
<PublishingDate>
  <PublishingDateRole>01</PublishingDateRole>           <!-- Publication date -->
  <Date>20210622</Date>                                   <!-- 22nd June 2021 -->
</PublishingDate>
<PublishingDate>
  <PublishingDateRole>02</PublishingDateRole>           <!-- Sales embargo date -->
  <Date>20210622</Date>                                   <!-- 22nd June 2021 -->
</PublishingDate>
```

Key definitions

Experience shows that organizations sometimes have differing views on what these dates *mean*. For example, publication date is commonly viewed as “the first date on which an end customer may purchase and take possession of a physical product”, or perhaps the date on which an end customer may access and use a digital product. In fact, many – probably most – products are available to end

customers a few days *prior* to the publication date. If a bookstore receives physical books a few days before the publication date, they are in all likelihood put on sale immediately. Only those products that *also* have a sales embargo date are held back until the embargo expires.

Dates in ONIX should be interpreted in the following way.

Publication date – this is the date on which the product is nominally ‘published’. This is *the* key date in the books world, the date that your supply chain partners look at first and base many decisions around. The date is used for planning purposes, and is associated with various business processes: it may be used as the invoice date for product copies delivered prior to publication, linked to delivery guarantees offered to retailers, used to set the timing of promotional activity, or in bibliographic cataloging. However, it is not necessarily the date on which copies of the product will be delivered to retailers, nor the earliest date a retailer may begin retail sales to consumers, nor is it the earliest date on which a consumer may place an advance order (‘pre-order’) a copy of the product. Actual availability of stock to the retailer may be no more than a few days prior to the nominal publication date, and (excepting cases of issues with distribution) no later than the publication date. If stock arrives at the retailer before the publication date, it typically goes on sale immediately, *unless* a Sales embargo date is also supplied.

All ONIX Product records should include the publication date (or a planned pub date), unless no date is available – for example in the case of a Cancelled product whose publication has been announced then subsequently abandoned prior to publication, or a when publication has been Postponed indefinitely. Note that products with a <PublishingStatus> with codes 01 or 03 (Cancelled or Postponed indefinitely) should *not* include pub dates – since by definition, any date will be misleading. Recipients of such records lacking a publication date should take care to delete any previously-held dates.

Sales embargo date – this is the earliest date on which a customer can take possession of a product (*ie* the date the embargo expires) ¹. In general, it is assumed that retailers may begin retail sales of the product (or begin to fulfill orders placed in advance) as soon as stock is available. This is commonly several days prior to the nominal Publication date. If for any reason a publisher wishes to control the earliest date of retail sale or pre-order fulfillment, a Sales embargo date should be supplied in addition to the Publication date. If retailers receive stock prior to the stated embargo date, it must be sequestered by the retailer until the embargo has expired – and in many countries, this is backed by an industry-wide code of practice.

While almost all Product records should include a Publication date, a Sales embargo should only be included if the publisher wishes to exert particular control over the *exact* date of the first retail sales – most Product records do not include a Sales embargo date, but Sales embargo may be needed where a serialization is planned in a newspaper or magazine, where initial sales need to be synchronized with a movie release or where high-profile launch events are planned.

Of course neither Publication date nor Sales embargo prevents retail orders being placed in advance (‘pre-orders’), but *fulfillment* of advance orders must obey any embargo. (It is common for pre-ordered copies to be mailed a day in advance of expiry of an embargo, for delivery after the embargo expires.)

¹ In ONIX 2.1, this was the <OnSaleDate>, and is also sometimes termed the ‘street date’

Not just dates...

Many of these 'dates' can also incorporate exact times, whenever it proves necessary. For example, the carefully-timed retail release of a high-profile and heavily promoted book might be set for mid-day:

```
<PublishingDate>
  <PublishingDateRole>02</PublishingDateRole>      <!-- Sales embargo date and time -->
  <Date dateFormat="13">20210622T1200-0400</Date>    <!-- noon EDT, 22nd June 2021 -->
</PublishingDate>
```

In cases like this, the *dateFormat* attribute must be used to specify the format used for date and time – normally, you don't need the attribute because most dates default to the YYYYMMDD years, months and days format, but *dateFormat="13"* above means YYYYMMDDThhmm, optionally followed by Z for times in UTC or ±hhmm for a specific time zone.

Note that inclusion of a time zone (the -0400 in the example) means the time relates *to that time zone* – in the example, noon Eastern Daylight Time, which is four hours behind UTC. The embargo expires at noon in New York, and at 5pm in London and 6pm in Paris, all at the exact same moment. If the time zone is omitted, then the time is local, so noon in New York, but six hours earlier in Paris because noon in Paris occurs when it is only 6am New York.

Date of first publication – this is the Publication date of the very first version of the work ², so for Jane Austen's *Sense and sensibility*, each modern version (there are many) has its own contemporary Publication date, but *all* modern versions share a single Date of first publication, the publication date of the very first version in 1811.

The *dateFormat* attribute can also be used for approximate dates (month or year only), when the day or month detail isn't known or is irrelevant, so:

```
<PublishingDate>
  <PublishingDateRole>11</PublishingDateRole>      <!-- Date of first publication -->
  <Date dateFormat="05">1811</Date>                <!-- 1811, month and day unknown -->
</PublishingDate>
```

More generally, a paperback published in 2020 might commonly have a Date of first publication of 2019, when it was published as a hardback.

```
<PublishingDate>
  <PublishingDateRole>01</PublishingDateRole>      <!-- Publication date -->
  <Date>20200915</Date>                            <!-- Sept 15th 2020 -->
</PublishingDate>
<PublishingDate>
  <PublishingDateRole>11</PublishingDateRole>      <!-- Date of first publication -->
  <Date>20190917</Date>                            <!-- Sept 17th 2019 -->
</PublishingDate>
```

² First version of the work in any format (HB, PB, e-book etc), but a distinct and of course earlier **Date of first publication in original language** can also be given for works in translation. In this context, translations, abridgements, compilations and dramatized adaptations all constitute new works, so all have their *own* first publication dates

Out of print date – at the end of the book’s lifecycle, the publisher declares the product ‘out of print’ (commonly just ‘OP’). This means the publisher – or more likely, the publisher’s distributor – will no longer accept trade orders for the book. Critically, this does *not* mean the book is necessarily unavailable, as stock may still be available from wholesalers and retailers.

For copies sold on ‘sale or return’ terms, the declared Out of print date may also begin a countdown – for example, of 90 days – that leads to a **Last date for returns**, the date after which the distributor will no longer accept returns for credit. Declaring a product OP should ideally be accompanied by the deadline for returns.

For digital products, an Out of print date should be interpreted as a permanent withdrawal of the product from the market: retailers and retail platforms should cease sales.

Market-specific dates

Aside from the returns deadline, the dates above are ‘global’, in the sense that they apply to the book ‘from the publisher’s point of view’. A book has only *one* publication date. However, where a product is made available across multiple markets ³, these dates can be ‘overridden’ in specific markets. For example, a product may be published in one market – the Americas, for example – while it is delayed by one or two months in another market (Europe, for example). In fact this difference in dates may in some cases be the primary differentiator between the two markets.

A later release in Europe is described in ONIX as a <MarketDate>. This uses the same codelist for <MarketDateRole> as the global <PublishingDate> composite ⁴, and market-specific dates override global dates in that part of the market. So:

```
<PublishingDate>
  <PublishingDateRole>01</PublishingDateRole>           <!-- GLOBAL publication date -->
  <Date>20210622</Date>                                   <!-- 22nd June 2021 -->
</PublishingDate>
. . .
<MarketDate>
  <MarketDateRole>01</MarketDateRole>                   <!-- MARKET publication date -->
  <Date>20210720</Date>                                   <!-- 20th July 2021 -->
</MarketDate>
```

suggests that the product is ‘published’ in a specific market around a month later than the ‘global’ publication date. The market-specific ‘publication date’ as above is in reality just a matter of delayed availability: the term ‘market pub date’ is commonly-used but a little misleading. And the existence of the separate market-specific date implies there is *another* market where the book will be published earlier.

Where there are several markets, the global publication date must be the *earliest* of all the market-specific dates. Conversely, a global Out of print date should be the *latest* of any market-specific OP dates. And for any market where no market-specific date is supplied, the ‘global’ date applies.

³ In ONIX 3.0, multiple markets are described by multiple repeats of the <ProductSupply> composite. Each <ProductSupply> describes a single market, and is usually defined geographically (using <Market>) and by an exclusive distribution arrangement within that market territory

⁴ However, not all values in the codelist make commercial sense as market-specific dates, and Trade and Public announcement dates (below) would be practically impossible to manage at market-specific level

Supplier-specific dates

In the month or two leading up to publication, it can be useful to include a couple of dates that are important for logistics purposes, using the <SupplyDate> composite. The returns deadline is one of these, but there are others:

Expected warehouse date – this is the date on which physical stock is expected to be delivered to the supplier, from the manufacturer or from a primary distributor. For the distributor or wholesaler (the supplier) this is the expected ‘goods in’ date.

Expected availability date – this is the date on which physical stock is expected to be available to be shipped from the supplier to retailers, in effect the earliest ‘goods out date’⁵. In theory, retailers could receive physical stock more or less immediately, or at least within a couple of days, depending on their geographical proximity to their supplier (so one or two days in a physically small country – but it could be ten days in a geographically large country). And of course, in the absence of a Sales embargo date, the product could be physically on sale immediately upon delivery to the retailer.

```
<SupplyDate>
  <SupplyDateRole>08</SupplyDateRole>          <!-- Expected goods out from supplier -->
  <Date>20211720</Date>                        <!-- 17th June 2021 -->
</SupplyDate>
```

If a product is available from multiple suppliers, each might have a different Expected availability date.

For digital products, the Expected delivery date is the date the digital ‘master files’ are expected to be released by the publisher or digital asset distributor to retailers or their retail platform providers. Again, in the absence of a Sales embargo date, the e-books could go on sale more or less immediately – though some time for some technical quality assurance should be allowed.

Dated pricing changes

Most products do not just have one single price. There are likely to be multiple prices, based on one or more of country and currency, customer type, date and other parameters. For example, price X may pertain until September, but it’s useful to state in advance the new price Y to be introduced in October.

```
<Price>                                          <!-- current price -->
  . . .
  <PriceDate>
    <PriceDateRole>15</PriceDateRole>          <!-- Until... -->
    <Date>20210930</Date>                      <!-- 30th September 2021 -->
  </PriceDate>
</Price>
<Price>                                          <!-- future price -->
  . . .
  <PriceDate>
    <PriceDateRole>14</PriceDateRole>          <!-- From... -->
    <Date>20211001</Date>                      <!-- 1st October 2021 -->
  </PriceDate>
</Price>
```

⁵ In ONIX 2.1, this was <ExpectedShipDate>, and is also sometimes called the ‘release date’ – although publishers’ use of that term varies greatly and it is not used in ONIX

Note that such From... and To... dates are always *inclusive* – the price is assumed to change between the 30th Sept and 1st Oct business days. Of course you can add exact times to these dates if a midnight change isn't what you want.

Trade announcement and Public announcement dates

These two dates should be used to control the distribution of *the metadata*, not of the product.

Trade announcement date – a data aggregator or distribution platform in receipt of an ONIX record is normally free to re-distribute that record immediately (in original or modified form) to its data customers within the book trade. But if included in the record, a Trade announcement date is effectively an embargo on such re-distribution. The product's metadata can be used for internal purposes within the aggregator, for example quality checking and enhancement, but cannot be shared with other book trade organizations or with the public until the embargo expires.

Public announcement date – an ONIX data recipient in receipt of an ONIX record is normally free to display that metadata in public immediately, for example on a public-facing website, in a customer-facing in-store system or in promotional material. But if included in the record, a Public announcement date is an embargo on such public disclosure. The product's metadata can be used for internal purposes within the data recipient organization, and shared with other book trade organizations, but the metadata must not be made available to the public until the embargo expires.

```
<PublishingDate>
  <PublishingDateRole>09</PublishingDateRole>          <!-- Public announcement date -->
  <Date>20210421</Date>                                <!-- 21st April 2021 -->
</PublishingDate>
```

Unfortunately, not all ONIX data recipients can support these metadata embargos, and data providers should ensure they only send embargoed data to recipients which have the necessary controls in place. This means that data recipients who *cannot* support Trade and Public announcement dates may receive data later than their competitors, as the embargos expire.

Copyright dates

The copyright date for the content of the product is infrequent in ONIX, but can be useful to library data recipients, particularly where it is significantly different from the publication date. For example, it can be used to calculate when the content enters the public domain. Note there is no date in ONIX that specifies when a work becomes public, as the calculation varies across different countries (the *term* of copyright protection varies) – a work may be public domain in one country while still being protected in another.

```
<CopyrightStatement>
  <CopyrightType>C</CopyrightType>
  <CopyrightYear dateformat="00">20041118</CopyrightYear>
  <CopyrightOwner>
    <PersonName>Amelia Winstanley</PersonName>
  </CopyrightOwner>
</CopyrightStatement>
```

Copyright dates are frequently recorded just as years, so the example above might be interpreted as '© Amelia Winstanley 2004', but the data in fact carries a more precise date (18th November 2004). The copyright date is usually *not* the same as the publication date – though for obvious reasons it cannot be *later* than the publication date. Copyright pertains to the work rather than a particular

product, so a contemporary paperback should carry a copyright date predating or matching the publication of the hardback (or the first product with the same content), and an e-book of *Lord of the Flies* should carry a copyright date of 1954 when it was originally published.

Note that the <CopyrightType> is optional, and if omitted it defaults to the normal © intellectual property right – but neighbouring Phonogram rights on audio (often indicated with a ®) can also be specified. And while dateformat="00" (YYYYMMDD) is usually unnecessary on dates because it is the default for most though not all <Date> fields, the default for <CopyrightYear> is dateformat="05" (YYYY).

Updating dates

ONIX is designed to allow all metadata to be *updated*. This includes adding new data as it becomes available, *modifying* existing data as it's revised – and *removing* data as it becomes outdated or irrelevant.

As an example, a book originally scheduled to be published in April might well be postponed until May or June. The ONIX Product record should be updated with the new publication date in place of the old date, and the updated record should be distributed to supply chain partners (usually as either a 'delta update' or as a 'block update' containing Block 4).

As a second example, in the early and middle parts of the lifecycle of the product, the Out of print date will not be known. But as stock is exhausted (perhaps slightly in advance of it being exhausted, or maybe after a short period where no stock is available but a reprint is under consideration), an OP date can be set. This should be added to the ONIX Product record and distributed to supply chain partners. This ONIX update usually occurs long after publication – it's important to keep metadata up to date throughout the product's lifecycle, and updates are not restricted to the pre-publication period.

Finally, some dates – for example any Sales embargo or Public and Trade announcement dates – are largely irrelevant after they have expired. Consideration should be given to removing such past dates from the ONIX Product record (though they do no harm if kept, and might be useful as explicit demonstration that an embargo was previously in place). In contrast, removal of a Publication date is critical in the case of Cancellation or Indefinite postponement, since any previously-held date is extremely likely to mislead.

Graham Bell
EDItEUR
24th January 2021

Added paras on market-specific dates – 3rd Feb 2021
Added para on handling Cancellations and Indefinite postponements – 12th Mar 2021
Added para on copyright dates – 19th May 2021