ONIX International Steering Committee Minutes

Wednesday 13th March 2019, 1:30–3:15 GMT (UTC), The Dark Room, Olympia, London

Attendees:

Luc Audrain (Hachette Livre / CLIL)  
Graham Bell (EDItEUR)  
Marie Bilde (Pruneau)  
Susan Breeuwsma (CB)  
Francis Cave (EDItEUR consultant)  
Ricardo Costa (Metabooks)  
Tim Devenport (EDItEUR / ISNI-IA)  
Emad Eldeen Elakehal (ibiidi.com)  
Fride Fosseng (Bokbasen), chair  
Alain Fournier (BTLF)  
Noah Genner (Booknet Canada)  
Fernanda Garcia (CBL)  
Alexander Haffner (MVB/VLB)  
Inari Haapaniemi (Kirjavälytyys)  
Paola Mazzucchi (AIE)  
Tomasz Meka (Elibri)  
Brian O’Leary (BISG)  
Karine Pansa (CBL)  
Simonetta Pillon (IE-Online)  
Jesús Peraita (FGEE)  
Christer Persløv (Bokinfo)  
Lisbeth H Petré (Bokinfo)  
Tuula Pelkonen-Tiri (Kirjavälytyys)  
Johanna Roden (Bokinfo)  
Bibi Satayesh (MVB)  
Chris Saynor (EDItEUR)  
Marion Seelig (Bonnier)  
Henning Schönberger (Springer Nature)  
Karina Urquhart (BIC)  
Howard Willows (Nielsen)

Summary of decisions in this meeting:

- Minutes of the previous meeting were approved
- Proposals for issue 45 of the codelists were approved (subject to a small revision of a code in the Price type list)
- Proposals for promotional events were not agreed, pending further feedback. Submissions are requested from national groups by the end of the first week in April

1. Welcome and introductions

FF welcomed attendees to the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves.

2. Minutes of ISC Meeting held 10th October 2018, Frankfurt Book Fair, and matters arising

FF introduced the draft minutes of the meeting, which and been previously distributed. There were no comments and the minutes were approved.

3. Reports and updates from the National Groups

FF announced that the reports from various National Groups would be brought forward from item 6 on the agenda, so they were considered next.

KU reported for the UK: Looking at BIC’s metadata accreditation scheme, 51 publishers were accredited, of which 30 have the ONIX 3.0 badge – the first time that over half of accredited publishers are using ONIX 3.0. GB reported that nearly three-quarters of new data feeds to Nielsen were now ONIX 3.0 (compared with only half a year ago), and training in the UK is exclusively ONIX 3.0. KU also noted that the revised accreditation scheme (to be announced ‘soon’) will require ONIX 3.0 for the top level award as well as a wider range of data elements and improvements in data quality.

NG reported for Canada: approx 75 publishers sending ONIX 3.0 in the Canadian data supply chain (all are able to supply 2.1 as well). A couple of national retailers are now asking for data elements that can only be
delivered in ONIX 3.0 (specifically the home town of the author): although the publishers can provide this, BookNet Canada is having to process the ONIX and deliver ‘sidecar files’ to the retailers.

BOL noted for the US that following the Frankfurt Book Fair, the BISG metadata committee was suspended – though this pause was limited to about three months, and the committee was rechartered in February. The committee now intends to focus on the marketing value of extended metadata, without discussing 3.0 explicitly (while acknowledging that some extended metadata is effectively 3.0-only). The 2012 report written by BOL (while a consultant) will act as a framework for this discussion. BISG’s efforts to promote 3.0 during 2018 were not as successful as hoped, and expectations for progress during 2019 need to be realistic.

MB reported for Denmark that a subset of ONIX that would support the Danish supply chain was agreed prior to the Frankfurt Fair 2018. Since then there have been a few adjustments, prompted by new stakeholders joining the Danish group. Generally, she noted the supply chain is very optimistic about the broad use of ONIX.

HS said there remained a mixed picture in Germany. AH recognised there were an increasing number of ONIX 3.0 providers, including both large publishers and two major service providers – he guessed the relative proportion of 2.1 and 3.0 was half and half (as GB noted, a considerably improvement over the previous couple of years). HS noted that the next meeting of the IG ProduktMetadata April 2nd, and said considerable work had been done on promotional events and translations of some key ONIX codelists (eg lists 150 and 175). GB reminded the committee of the value of the consistent translations available via the multilingual ONIX codelist browser.

AF reported for French Canada that BTLF’s online title submission tool has proved to be a good way of introducing ONIX 3.0 (on which it is based). BTLF is also working on metadata for journal and magazine products too. He also noted a trend towards service providers aggregating data from many publishers, though with less than perfect ONIX 3.0. GB asked whether there was anything EDItEUR could do to help those providers improve, but AF replied that unfortunately it was not a question of pointing out errors – they were aware of issues but not yet able to change.

For France, LA described progress on v7 of CLIL’s practical guide to ONIX in the French supply chain. It is a narrowly technical guide, though accompanied by simpler marketing-focused documents. ONIX 3.0 is almost universal in France because it is mandatory for supply of data to Dilicom – all publishers had to update. Dilicom then delivers to retailers in 3.0 or proprietary formats (he reported that Amazon was among the retailers recently subscribing to the 3.0 feed from Dilicom, and there is a hope that use of 2.1 in France might be stopped entirely after Amazon’s feed is bedded down). LA noted that from March, Hachette is now including its e-book accessibility metadata in its ONIX feed.

EEE briefly described the issues within the Arabic book market, where a lack of suitable tools prevents the creation of high-quality standards-based metadata. ibidi.com is building a (free) service where it aggregates any available metadata, then checks and and converts it to ONIX 3.0 format. Ibidi hopes that demand for this service – and for the resulting ONIX data – will grow as internet bookselling grows in the region. EEE estimated 50 publishers were already ‘in the system’. He also noted the Arabic translation of the codelists was behind the latest releases, but there are plans to ‘catch up’.

IH reported that in Finland, most of the publishers and retailers have already switched fully to ONIX 3.0.

In Italy, SP noted that IE-Online is testing ONIX 3.0 and expecting to able to deliver 3.0 from summer 2019 (and this will also include Thema codes). Italian publishers and retailers are generally behind – IE-Online receives only two ONIX 3.0 feeds – but the goal is to have 25% of data supplied in ONIX 3.0 by the end of 2020.

SB noted that in the Netherlands, ONIX 3.0 is not an issue – the bigger issue is which fields are actively used (publishers are reluctant to broaden their set of fields). As a consequence, CB is focusing on
introducing *Thema* in 2019, and investigating the use of an author ID (such as ISNI) and a series ID. She noted that forthcoming training delivered by EDItEUR will help focus attention on the value of improved metadata.

For Poland, TM noted a similar focus on the addition of *Thema* codes into publishers’ ONIX.

In Sweden, as LHP reported, the transition to 3.0 has been complete for several years – it is ‘business as usual’, as it is mandatory for publishers and distributors to use ONIX (and *Thema*), and virtually all is 3.0.

RC reported for Brazil, where publishers are using the MetaBooks platform because they have poor systems in-house. The biggest booksellers are receiving ONIX from Metabooks, and smaller booksellers are using a variety of services. 80% of the top publishers on Nielsen Bookscan Brazil are using Metabooks’ ONIX services (representing 70% of sales across the market).

JP said that in Spain, use of ONIX 3.0 is increasing as new publishers and new data recipients are adopting it, and there is good awareness of the benefits of 3.0. The focus for 2019 is a campaign to improve the quality of the data – this is the biggest problem in both ONIX and non-ONIX data. Over 2000 personalised messages highlighting data problems (with specific ISBNs) have been sent to publishers, and JP said this had produced noticeable changes.

For the UK group, HW echoed JP’s concerns about data quality that are inevitable with millions of records produced by thousands of people. Nielsen’s (relatively new) ONIX 3.0 output is now available to its customers.

GB noted this question of data quality is widespread: in the UK, data recipients often point out data that’s in the right format but is simply not correct (for example, unbelievable physical measurements). FF said that in Norway, there are price incentives to publishers to deliver high-quality data, and Bokbasen is now looking at retailers (where the discount is earned for making use of the data delivered). Even simple rules and relatively small financial incentives have a large effect. FF also reported that in Norway, full use is now being made of new ONIX features like Price qualifiers Price constraints – particularly in projects covering education books and e-books for academic libraries and students. (In these projects, *ordering* is a larger problem, and upcoming changes to EDItX are likely to be important. GB informed the group about the EDItX steering committee, and changes to ensure the sophistication of ONIX pricing with qualifiers, conditions and constraints can be matched in EDItX sales reporting and trade ordering messages.)

4. **Report on current ONIX development work**

GB introduced his report (separate document), starting with ONIX 2.1. This had moved through sunset, twilight and moonlight support phases and was now at ‘midnight’ (each phase has implied a distinct level of support for the legacy format). While ongoing use of 2.1 will continue for several years, but there have been no issues.

For ONIX 3.0, EDItEUR understands the differing progress made in different markets, and GB noted the US market was viewed as the most problematic. He hoped the rechartering of the BISG committee will allow that market to move in a more positive direction.

EDItEUR has recruited a couple of key new members, including Flipkart in India (where ‘mobile phone cases’ is the only product category with more SKUs than the ‘books’ category). Flipkart is using ONIX 3.0 and *Thema*, and is likely to form an ONIX national group for India (as well as a *Thema* group).

The majority of work on ONIX 3.0 since Frankfurt has been focused on the way that ONIX 3.0.5 was ratified in late 2018. This was divided into two – part was agreed and part (promotional events) continued to be developed (see below). The DTD, XSD, RNG schemas were updated, as was the strict XSD schema. The strict schema is now reliable enough for production use (though it is perhaps most relevant during an onboarding process for new vendors). GB reiterated the willingness of EDItEUR to assess and report on technical correctness of sample ONIX files (not everyone has the capability to use the strict schema, since it
requires XSD 1.1 and is only compatible with Saxon, Xerces and Raptor XML parsers). And he noted that feedback from use of the strict schema has prompted IT system vendors to improve aspects of their systems.

Training remains a focus for EDItEUR, as we can supply in-house courses (for both members and non-members of EDItEUR) and third-party courses (as for example through BIC and BISG). The training tempo increases a little each year. GB highlighted the available courses: ONIX essentials is held most often, and the ONIX advanced topics is also well established. There is a new Metadata primer course that is intended as orientation for those new to the industry, as well as an established Thema essentials course. Each course can be delivered in either English or French.

Work over the next period is expected to centre on the publication of a minor revision of ONIX (3.0.6), further development of the strict schema, and collecting requirements for production information intended to inform a future Block 7.

5. Proposals for Codelists issue 45

GB introduced the proposals for Codelists Issue 45. He explained that the largest single proposal concerned codes for description of batteries and battery safety. This affects a small proportion of the products in our supply chain – for example children’s books with embedded sound chips and the associated batteries – but those products are heavily regulated. These regulations, and the data required to ensure compliance, are an onerous barrier to international trade. The batteries concerned range from zinc-carbon, through manganese batteries to rechargeable lithium batteries. Data required includes:

- Does the product contain, or come with batteries?
- What kind of battery chemistry? What size and how many?
- Specifically for lithium batteries, there is a requirement to list the exact amount of lithium (even if it is only a few grams)

These new codes are spread across several ONIX codelists. EDItEUR has consulted with several shippers, retailers etc to ensure the proposals meet their requirements. There were no particular comments.

Other proposals concern Price types – here the proposals mostly involve adding notes to help make the price types clearer (most particularly for those whose first language is not English). However, GB noted the four new codes for ‘temporary promotional prices’, and asked SB of the Dutch ONIX group to explain their requirement.

SB explained that some products in the Netherlands are fixed price and some carry recommended price. For those with recommended prices, the Dutch group has asked for a price type for temporary ‘actionprice’. GB explained that the proposed new codes are not required because Dutch ONIX users could use Price type qualifier to indicate ‘actionprices’. CP confirmed that this usage of the qualifier was already common in Sweden. LA said this was used in France too. AH asked whether these promotional prices were lower consumer prices or lower business-to-business prices, and GB confirmed that in the Dutch case, these were lower consumer prices. GB also noted the possibilities of the two price method (normal and temporary promotional prices) and the three price method (normal, temporary and new normal prices). SB accepted this would likely work in the Netherlands. GB recommended a discussion between SB and CP, and encouraged SB to come back to EDItEUR if the Swedish methodology was not suitable.

LHP and GB discussed the proposal for clarification of code 05 (net price) which – contrary to the proposed clarification – may in fact be subject to further discount. MS also questioned the proposed wording. GB suggested a modification of the proposed notes for code 05 [which was later accepted].

Other proposals did not attract particular comments, and subject to the modification of notes accompanying Price type 05, the proposals were accepted.
GB noted that revisions of the codelists often require updates to the strict XSD schema, since for technical reasons, some codes are embedded directly in the schema. In contrast, the ‘classic’ XSD schema does not require updates for each codelist issue.

6. Proposals for ONIX 3.0.6

GB introduced the proposals for 3.0.6, which primarily consists of a revised and much more mature and detailed suggestion for promotional events.

LA reported that the French ONIX group was astonished at the level of detail in the proposal, and questioned whether such detail was necessary. FF agreed.

AH asked whether EDItEUR could potentially design a separate message format solely concerned with promotional events. GB replied that it would certainly be possible to create a separate XML message, but there is a natural desire to deliver the book and event details together. He noted that the cover image, long description, reviews and other promotional material are carried in ONIX linked to each book that they are promoting. One or several events are no different – they are just ‘promotional resources’. And equally, each promotional resource (e.g. a description) is repeated in the ONIX for each individual product (hardback, paperback, e-book...) to which it is linked. In ONIX, the record for the book carries information about the promotional resource. But if a separate message were developed, then each promotional event record would have to carry information about the book. PM noted the challenge of this, and GB pointed out that the special event message would have to contain significant information about the book and its contributors – with attendant risk of contradicting the information in the main ONIX record.

GB recognised the concern about ‘overloading’ the ONIX, but also that if promotional events were added, they would be easy to ignore.

HS noted the potential for event identifiers (initially for conference events, which CrossRef is considering, but perhaps in time for promotional events too). He also stressed the real and continuing demand from publishers to improve the visibility of author signings and tours, festival events and other promotional events, and cautioned against creating a large and complex separate message. MS said that her company organised 8–9,000 such promotional events per year, but not making information about these events in a structured way – the desire was to be able to display events on a map for consumers (‘my favourite author is appearing in a nearby city’), perhaps in a centralised directory, to provide the information to professionals about how products are being promoted in order to encourage demand, and to make clear that particular authors are available for future promotion events.

FC observed that you can either present event information ‘in place’ with each associated book, or invent some way to ‘reference’ the event information elsewhere. Each would require the same level of complexity in the description of the event. GB pointed out that, at present, very little in ONIX is done ‘by reference’, and usually then only by reference within a single product record. References outside the product record are limited to using proper product identifiers or URLs. Implementing promotional events by reference would be counter to the current processing model for ONIX whereby each product record can be processed by the recipient in isolation. FC noted there could be a simple URL within the ONIX – although this would then require careful specification of the resource information that the URL resolved to.

BOL commented that there is little commonality among publicity and marketing systems that help publishers manage event information, and asked whether the proposal would encourage useful standardisation across system vendors. GB replied that comments had been received from system vendors who said they held event information within their systems but they lacked any useful way to distribute that data. BOL supported the proposal since it would provide opportunities to such vendors (and their userbases) to distribute the data in a robust way.

GB noted that the Committee was split.
LA questioned how under the proposals an event could be promoted when it was not linked to a specific book (e.g., a small book fair). GB stressed that the proposal does not cover this – the event is always ‘in the context of a book’.

HW supported the proposal, though he noted that not all options had been discussed by his national group.

FF asked for a vote (GB indicated in advance this was indicative, rather than binding), and the indication was that a majority were in favour of the proposals. However, there was some opposition (e.g., from LA, FF). As HS’s suggestion, GB invited detailed feedback from national groups by the end of the first week in April, indicating ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the current proposals, and if ‘no’, putting forward a concrete alternative.

7. Any other business

FF called for any other business. GB noted the meeting following immediately after about e-book accessibility metadata, sponsored by the Italian LIA Foundation (for which EDItEUR had provided the room).

8. Next meeting

There being no other business, FF closed the meeting with confirmation that the next meeting would be in Frankfurt on October 16th, time and room to be confirmed (but likely to be the same as 2018).

Graham Bell
EDItEUR
19th March 2019