ONIX International Steering Committee Minutes

Wednesday 16th October 2019, 13:15–15:00 CEST (UTC+2), Room Facette, Halle 3 via West, Messe Frankfurt

Attendees:

Luc Audrain (Hachette Livre)  Tomasz Meka (Elibri)
Graham Bell (EDItEUR)  Kasia Nakonieczna (Biblioteka Narodowa)
Detlef Bauer (Libri)  Brian O’Leary (BISG)
Marie Bilde Rasmussen (Pruneau)  Simonetta Pillon (IE-Online)
Maria Börman (Bokinfo)  Jesús Peraíta (FGEE)
Francis Cave (EDItEUR consultant)  Christer Perslöv (Bokinfo)
Maya Fakundiny (BISG)  Simonetta Pillon (IE-Online)
Fride Fosseng (Bokbasen) chair  Vincent Poulvelarie (Dilicom)
Alain Fournier (BTLF)  Tom Richardson (BookNet Canada)
Bente Franck-Sættervoll (Bokbasen)  Suzanne Rozario (EDItEUR)
Noah Genner (BookNet Canada)  Sophie Salmon (CLIL)
Alexander Haffner (MVB/VLB)  Bibi Satayesh (MVB)
Inari Haapaniemi (Kirjavälitys)  Chris Saynor (EDItEUR)
Lada Kris (Penguin Random House)  Henning Schönberger (Springer Nature)
Vit Krobot (Karolinum Press) observer  Karina Urquhart (BIC)
Gabrielle Maisonneuf (BTLF)  Julie Vasseur (Hachette Livre)
Paola Mazzucchi (AIE)  Howard Willows (Nielsen)

Summary of decisions in this meeting:

- Ratification of proposals for Issue 47 of the codelists (with the exception of a change in list 29)
- Ratification of proposals for ONIX 3.0.7 including Block 7 for Promotional events (including a Promotional event identifier)

1. Welcome and introductions

FF welcomed attendees to the meeting, and the attendees introduced themselves.

2. Minutes of ISC Meeting held 13th March 2019, Frankfurt Book Fair, and matters arising

FF introduced the draft minutes of the meeting, which and been previously distributed. CS noted a correction that Dilicom uses only ONIX 3.0. There were no further comments and the minutes were approved.

3. Reports and updates from the National Groups

FF asked for updates from each of the national groups in turn.

VP reported that in France all publishers use 3.0 or (for small publishers) a form on the Dilicom website to provide their data. CLIL has guided this standardisation, and the Commission FEL has updated the best practice documentation to v7, and this guidance is only available on the web.

AF reported only a little change since last time. In French-speaking Canada, almost all publishers are using ONIX 3.0, but some data recipients are lagging behind and still requiring ONIX 2.1. All data recipients agree the move to 3.0 is desirable, but they wish to retain the Availability code data element, which has been discouraged even in 2.1 for more than a decade – discussion is ongoing. He also reported that BTLF had developed its own XSD – which turns out to be almost identical to the EDItEUR standard XSD – and used the same schema design as a database scheme. AF had given a presentation on this at the International Supply Chain Seminar the previous day.
KN noted that the Polish group is working with publishers to increase the use of ONIX in Poland. One current concern is with the description of jigsaw puzzles and the need to express the number of pieces, and the number of players, time of play and the rules for board games. GB replied that this proposal would be included in the next issue of the codelists (48). CS noted he was aware of work on games, puzzles and other children’s products in France. GB agreed this was a growth area in the trade, and said that if there are items like this that are widely traded in the same supply chain as conventional books, then EDItEUR would try to ensure they could be adequately described in ONIX. He invited other national groups to suggest additions.

GB outlined the usual timetable for codelist additions. Updates are quarterly, and usually published in mid-January, April, July and October. The four to six weeks following each publication are the ideal ‘window’ for new suggestions for the next issue, ensuring EDItEUR has enough time to consider and compile proposals, and to circulate them for comment to the national groups. Of course, any proposals that miss the ideal window can be incorporated into the following revision cycle.

SP reported that IE-Online had implemented ingestion and export of ONIX 3.0 files, and that it had changed the main record structure in its database to match ONIX 3.0 more closely. PM spoke about close alignment between AIE and LIA on accessibility work, and noted there were a group of requests for re-wording of various headings in List 196. She noted that further proposals will follow. GB explained that the expression of accessibility metadata in ONIX (using list 196) should be largely interoperable with the expression of accessibility possible inside the e-book (using schema.org accessibility vocabulary). Some work on improving the crosswalk has already been done, and improvements will continue.

BFS explained that in Norway, Bokbasen is beginning to use advanced ONIX features to describe e-books with multiple licence models, and BFS and FF had presented on this at the International Supply Chain Seminar. Bokbasen also schedules regular training sessions and has implemented small financial incentives for publishers to increase the quality of the ONIX that enters the Norwegian data supply chain. One particular focus is to encourage better use of the marketing material that can be present in the ONIX data. GB noted that attendees at the Seminar had appreciated the combination of business and technical approaches in the presentation.

CP reported that in Sweden, the current focus is on ensuring comprehensive sales rights information is included in the ONIX, including retailer exclusives and channel exclusives. Looking forward, Bokinfo is looking at Price identifiers and the price constraints and conditions that are already being used in Norway.

BOL said that the US market appears to be moving slowly towards ONIX 3.0, largely driven by testing ONIX 3.0 with Amazon. While the Metadata Summits in 2018 were inconclusive, they increased awareness of activity in this area. BOL also reported the development of a rights taxonomy (for publishing rights rather than sales rights) and BISG will work with EDItEUR to explore whether this can be incorporated into ONIX. He also noted that BISG’s metadata committee had been re-constituted after a period when it did not meet. GB said that he felt recent meetings had been more constructive, and that the tone had changed.

LK hoped that interest in ONIX (and Thema) would grow in Czechia to allow the creation of a Czech national group for each of the standards.

HW reported steady if unspectacular growth in the proportion of ONIX 3.0 in the UK data supply chain. Live feeds to Nielsen using ONIX 3.0 approach 50%, and test feeds are more than two-thirds ONIX 3.0. Of the top 20 publishers, at least 13 are feeding ONIX 3.0 to Nielsen. Testing is also ongoing between many publishers and Amazon Europe. However, UK-based recipients of data remain less able to accept 3.0, so this is an area of concern. GB noted that the largest UK and UK physical bookstore chains are now under common ownership, and this might provide some opportunities.

IH reported on e-book licensing developments in Finland along the same lines as in Norway and Sweden. Some publishers also want to use ONIX 3.0 to deliver prices for individual parts of multi-component and multi-item products (which is already possible).
Similar to the position in Italy, NG explained that accessibility for digital products has become an important work item for BookNet Canada. Government money is available for publishers to make more accessible products, so discoverability of these accessible products is a priority – but little of the data yet includes accessibility information. ONIX 3.0 activity in Canada remains limited but increasing a little (as with the US), and BookNet Canada is now taking some ONIX 3.0 data into its metadata products (even though those products largely remain ONIX 2.1). That ONIX 3.0 is most often for digital products.

MBR said that in Denmark, the ONIX data supply chain remains largely for digital products, and for the physical realm, ONIX is developing only slowly.

LU noted that Hachette has been producing highly accessible e-books since 2018, and it has been contributing to the work on accessibility metadata. A limited test of ONIX accessibility data has been carried out with Dilicom, but further work is awaiting improvements to the mapping between List 196 and the schema.org accessibility data. He also trailed the briefing on the European Accessibility Act later during the Book Fair. GB reminded the group that work on the mapping had already been carried out over summer 2019, and further improvements would be made.

JP reported that since DILVE had been developed to support ONIX 3.0, it could accept both 2.1 and 3.0 and output both 2.1 and 3.0. All data users were aware of the advantages of using 3.0, and all the large players (eg Planeta, Random House) have moved to use 3.0. DILVE has also tackled the data quality: since it does not edit publisher-supplied data, this has been a serious problem. DILVE has sent out a series of mailings to all publishers, listing specific issues with each publisher’s data (eg internal contradictions in availability), with lists of ISBNs, and this has helped. The current struggle is with different ‘flavours’ of ONIX – for example a specific retailer demanding that all books have a sales embargo (even though in reality, only a few books are embargoed). JP suggests that all national groups should resist the spread of recipient-specific requirements that are not part of the standard itself. He also noted a widely varying ways of expressing collection information.

GB noted that these ‘flavours’ of ONIX are a widespread problem, though frequently they are a symptom of poor communication within a retailer, rather than genuine retailer-specific business or technical requirements. JP asked whether – for some specific issues – EDItEUR could produce reports highlighting the standard and global best practice, that could be used to counteract retailer-specific demands. GB replied that one could simply make reference to the current documentation, or request additions to EDItEUR’s range of Application notes. SP said one of the biggest issues is retailer’s apparent unwillingness to abide by Public announcement dates embedded in ONIX records – an Application note on the various dates and their meanings could be useful.

HS reported on the upcoming IGPM meeting, which is a twice-yearly plenary meeting of the multiple IGPM interest groups. On ONIX 3.0, he reported the German trade remained well below 50%. There is a desire to keep things as simple as possible, and GB and HS had discussed a couple of issues prior to the meeting where the old 2.1 approach seemed simpler than the 3.0 equivalent (specifically, the use of ROW and the requirement for tax percentages). These, he felt, were dissuading German ONIX users from implementing 3.0. He looked forward to further discussion on Promotional events. DB noted that the Tolino alliance was using 3.0, Amazon Germany was beginning to request 3.0, but Libri was still delivering 2.1 to Kobo (despite accepting 3.0 in other markets).

FC commented on ISO work on e-publication accessibility which has progressed to a vote on a Draft International Standard. There is some concern to ensure that the eventual ISO standard should be largely compatible with ONIX. The draft standard is closely based upon the W3C’s EPUB Accessibility Specification.

4. Report on current ONIX development work

GB introduced his report (separate document).
No issues have arisen with respect to ONIX 2.1, and the number of queries has noticeably dropped over the past year. Meanwhile, interest in 3.0 has continued to increase. In particular, he noted the way the tenor of the conversation in the US has changed to be more favourable (following the poor outcome of the BISG summits in 2018).

Codelists 45 – ratified at the last meeting of the ONIX ISC – and 46 had been published. Issue 45 focused on batteries and safety, which in part came from Amazon but also had significant support from various shippers. Some wholesalers and shippers simply won’t accept children’s or other products containing batteries because of the onerous nature of data collection. Issue 46 added codes for dyslexia-friendly and high-readability editions – this, he said, illustrated the problem of choosing appropriate terminology for codelists where terms used varied across countries, and where terms recommended in one country might be offensive in another. EDItEUR puts effort into choosing terms that are broadly acceptable.

The online browser for the codelists has had a couple of updates, in particular to speed up searches for very short words, and there have been numerous updated translations.

GB recalled that the first model for Promotional events was proposed at Frankfurt in 2018, though it was fair to say that particular proposal was not ‘fully mature’ – and as a result it proved unacceptable to the International Steering Committee. He emphasised that this is how the ISC is supposed to work – its remit is to ensure that changes to the standard are well designed and broadly beneficial to all stakeholders. A more developed set of proposals were put forward in London, but these were widely viewed as too complex and no decision was made on them. The proposals have been simplified and – in particular, they have been pulled out into a separate Block 7 to make them more clearly separate from the other marketing collateral in Block 2. He hoped they would be accepted by the committee in their new form.

The strict schema continued to be updated (not least because it needs updating each time the codelists are revised). Some Xerces-related bugs had been fixed, and it is now considered relatively robust and ready for production use. (NB the strict schema uses XSD 1.1 technology and works with only three known XML parsers – Saxon, Xerces and Raptor – and GB noted that because of this, the strict schema will never replace the ‘classic’ XSD which forms a part of the ONIX specification). It is the first tool EDItEUR reaches for when checking ONIX files, and he recommended its use during, for example, onboarding any new data feed.

GB highlighted the ONIX Application notes – 4–8 page papers on specific aspects of ONIX – available from the EDItEUR website. Topics include use of HTML, pricing, block updates, open access, audio products and some of the less well-known parts of ONIX. He invited suggestions for new topics (and see the discussion of ‘flavours’ of ONIX above).

He outlined the priority work for the next period will focus on publication of whatever is ratified at the current meeting, and the beginning of work on a ‘production block’ or enhanced file manifest (which has been discussed in broad terms before but now has a critical mass of interest). EDItEUR will assemble a working group to gather expertise on POD, audio products and e-book conversion. (NB EDItEUR’s work will not overlap significantly with the W3C’s audio packaging format, but will be more concerned with the production of audio rather than final delivery to the device.)

In response to a query from BOL, GB explained the likely membership of the working group. This would be by invitation, and the aim would be a group of no more than 8. The key is expertise, and EDItEUR would look first to the EDItEUR membership, but this would not preclude inviting non-members to contribute.

5. Proposals for Codelists issue 47

GB introduced the proposals for Codelists Issue 47, which he felt were largely uncontroversial. He went through the proposals one by one, explaining the reasoning behind each new proposal and modification.

BFS queried the modifications to list 29, as they appear to indicate a widening of the scope to ‘all books’, since almost any content could be offensive to someone. It’s clear the intention is to have warnings for
only the most offensive content, and PM noted that serious offense tends to be cross-cultural. GB asked BFS what wording she would suggest, and suggested she work with EDItEUR on revising the wording. LK noted that this is the publisher’s judgement, and GB said that this judgement has to be contextual (perhaps based on the market the book is published in). JP said publishers were sensitive to this, and sometimes the value might lie in the case of a legal dispute. HW suggested that use of the code might be extended to ‘young adults’, but there was little support for this (‘young adult’ in ONIX is means teenagers as young as 12, and while purchasers may be concerned about content, it tends not to be as extreme as would make a warning for adults appropriate). BFS reminded the group that we should be wary of defining what is offensive, and all agreed. Work on improving the wording of the notes for this code would be tacked later.

AF raised the issue of code ADP in list 139, which is a supplier rather than a retailer. Little can be done about this at present.

Other proposals were agreed without any issues. With the exception of the change in List 29, the proposals were ratified by the Committee.

6. Proposals for ONIX 3.0.7

GB introduced the proposals for 3.0.7, which centre around Promotional events. He explained that the proposals brought forward from earlier meetings had been modified and simplified in two ways, first by eliminating details of ticket pricing and second by isolating the Promotional event information in a separate Block within ONIX 3.0 – Block 7, which perhaps confusingly occurs between Blocks 2 and 3 in the message. He noted the demand for this, and invited comments from the Committee.

AH raised the issue of the repetition of information about an event which directly promoted two or more products. He would not want to store the information multiple times. PM and JP agreed, and a Promotional event identifier would be the first stage of a solution here. GB and FC proposed a Promotional event identifier composite at event and occurrence level be added to the proposals, and – while flattening and repetitition of data is the current ONIX ‘style’, a Promotional event reference could be added later to eliminate such repetition.

LA commented the isolation of Promotional event information in a separate block is important, as this Block is likely to be subject to very rapid update in the period following publication. He saw this as a catalyst for wider adoption of block updates. VP noted that in France, the ability to deal with block updates is already widespread because of the requirements adopted by Dilicom.

BFS emphasised that although the Norwegian group had previously been negative towards the Promotional event proposals, with the isolation in Block 7, it is very happy to support the proposals.

The committee approved the proposals. HS thanked the group.

The committee also approved the other minor proposals in 3.0.7, which GB said would be published in late October or early November.

7. Election of a new chair for the International Steering Committee

FF had completed her three year term as chair of the ONIX International Steering Committee, so it was necessary to appoint or elect a successor.

GB noted there was only a single candidate for the position – MBR – and the committee congratulated her on her appointment. She will take over from at the next meeting in London.

GB also thanked FF for her service to the committee.

8. Any other business

FF called for any other business. BOL suggested that a discussion of ‘flavours of ONIX’ should be added to the agenda at the London meeting, and GB agreed.
HS reiterated his comments about making ONIX 3.0 simpler where possible in order to encourage greater migration to 3.0. Specifically he called out the removal of a ‘rest of world’ option from the Price composite, and the requirement for tax percentages instead of tax rate codes. DB emphasised that for most ONIX users a ‘home market’ and a ‘rest of world’ represented reality, and his feeling was that the current structure was overcomplex (though it met the need of the English language publishing market). GB noted it is critical to balance the needs of data suppliers for simplicity with the need of recipients for specifics.

9. **Next meeting**

There being no other business, FF closed the meeting with confirmation that the next meeting would be in London on March 11th, time and room to be confirmed.

Graham Bell
EDiteUR
16th October 2019