ONIX International Steering Committee Minutes

Wednesday 11th March 2020, 13:15–15:00 CEST (UTC+2), by videoconference

Attendees:

Luc Audrain (Hachette Livre)  Vincent Pouvelarie (Dilicom)
Graham Bell (EDItEUR)       Tom Richardson (BookNet Canada)
Marie Bilde (Pruneau)       Johanna Roden (Bokinfo)
Maria Börman (Bokinfo)      Sophie Salmon (CLIL)
Francis Cave (consultant to EDItEUR)  Bibi Satayesh (MVV)
Piera Costantini (Informazioni Editoriali) Chris Saynor (EDItEUR)
Fride Fosseng (Bokbasen)    Henning Schönengger (Springer Nature)
Alexander Haffner (MVV)     Marion Seelig (Bonnier)
Inari Happanieni (Kirjavalit) Siva Subramanian (observer, Amazon)
Brian O’Leary (BISG)       Julie Vasseur (Hachette Livre)
Jesús Peraita              Karina Urquhart (BIC)
Christer Perslöv (Bokinfo)  Heather Weaver (observer, Amazon)
Simonetta Pillon (Informazioni Editoriali) Howard Willows (Nielsen)

Apologies were received from BTLF and the JPO, who could not attend the online meeting.

Summary of key decisions in this meeting:

• Ratification of proposals for Issue 49 of the codelists

1. Welcome and introductions

MB welcomed attendees to the meeting, and the attendees introduced themselves. The meeting had been switched to an online videoconference at very short notice due to the coronavirus epidemic and the cancellation of the London Book Fair.

2. Minutes of ISC Meeting held 16th October 2019, Frankfurt Book Fair, and matters arising

MB introduced the draft minutes of the previous meeting, which had been previously distributed. GB called for comments or corrections, and there were no particular comments and the minutes were approved.

3. Reports and updates from the National Groups

MB asked for updates from each of the national groups present.

LA reported that JV will replace him on the group. He noted that Hachette has begun to deliver ONIX 3.0 to Amazon, and was encouraging other data partners to switch – only a few remained using v2.1. He also noted that accessibility data was fully available in ONIX for Hachette’s e-books (this had begun for simple books in 2018 but was now comprehensive).

VP reported that Dilicom was continuing to work on its ONIX 3.0, particularly for digital products and children’s products. The FEL commission was also investigating the listing of children’s toys and similar products in ONIX, as they are increasingly traded in the book supply chain.

BOL said that BISG had been working to increase the adoption of ONIX 3.0 in the US, particularly in the light of the deadlines for removal of support for v2.1 for print products by Amazon announced in November 2019. BISG had developed a timeline encouraging all development activity be completed by August 2020.
He noted that four complete days of ONIX training delivered by EDItEUR just a few days before the meeting were sold out, and there were bookings for future courses in April [NB for obvious reasons, the April course was cancelled]. There were also plans for a 2-hour webinar on the migration from 2.1 to 3.0 in early May [which did go ahead – https://bit.ly/3dryR3i]. He also reminded delegates that ISBNs beginning 979 (specifically 979-8-) had been introduced by the US ISBN Agency in January 2020: this had been envisioned at the time of the 2007 introduction of 13-digit ISBNs, but the use of the 979 range had not been required in the US until now [though they have been in use in some other countries for some years].

CP confirmed that BokInfo in Sweden had implemented support for sales rights and was now working on implementation of price identifiers, price conditions and price constraints – this will benefit e-books in particular.

HS reported on behalf of the German IGPM, which had postponed its pre-Steering Group face-to-face meeting from March to May. He noted a 50/50 split between use of v2.1 and 3.0 in Germany, but he expected some development of this over the following quarter. HS and GB had discussed various minor updates to ONIX and was looking forward to – he hoped – ratifying the Promotional Events proposals. The German language ONIX implementation forum mailing list had recently moved from Yahoo! to the Google Groups service. GB noted the English language mailing list had moved from Yahoo! to Groups.io at the end of 2019.

KU updated the committee on activities in the UK. In particular the revised BIC Product Metadata Accreditation Scheme was now live and Nielsen was beginning to assess publisher’s metadata. In the revised scheme, use of ONIX 3.0 is mandatory to achieve Gold or Silver level accreditation, and the first awards are expected in March 2021. Use of Thema is also mandatory, and use of ONIX codelist values for key fields is mandatory even for the lowest Bronze level of accreditation when the data is supplied using a non-ONIX method (eg ONIX codes in an Excel spreadsheet column). She noted that 42 out of 60 currently-accredited publishers already used ONIX 3.0. HW reported he was receiving many more enquiries about ONIX 3.0, and noted that for the first time, all new data feeds currently being tested by Nielsen were ONIX 3.0 feeds. HW also emphasised the potential value of the BISG timeline in setting expectations and encouraging data suppliers to move forward.

IH reported ‘business and usual’ in Finland, though new codes may be required for the new High School curricula to be introduced in 2021. GB had already noted this for the forthcoming issue of the codelists.

JP said that ONIX v3.0 in the Spanish market was progressing well. Testing with Amazon had revealed a few issues, but these had been dealt with. Around 60% of Spanish books were uploaded to DILVE (the national data aggregator) using ONIX 3.0, including those from all the large publishing groups.

FF noted that Bokbasen was making significant revisions to its database in line with ONIX 3.0, and adding support for many new data fields, including <ProductPart>, multiple prices for licensed products and chapter-level data for audiobooks.

SP updated the group on the Italian market. IE-Online had implemented ingest and export of ONIX 3.0 in 2019, and was now encouraging its data suppliers and customers to switch to 3.0 (and to Thema). She noted that testing with Amazon was not as smooth as reported by JP, but the testing process was ongoing. IE-Online was not providing formal training for publishers, but was providing a great deal of support ‘on the job’ as publishers worked on their data.

TR said that comments made by BOL and HW applied also to English Canada. He noted that many Canadian data suppliers were ready to deliver ONIX 3.0, but because few recipients were ready, this capability was almost unused so far: the degree to which data suppliers were able to deliver good 3.0 was unknown. Major distributors and retailers were not able to use 3.0 data, and struggled to understand the need for migration. However, he noted some upcoming training and hoped BookNet Canada could supply the necessary ONIX 3.0 experience to the trade. [Unfortunately, this training planned around BNC’s Tech Forum event, had to be cancelled, though some Tech Forum programming was delivered online.]
SS reported that his team was responsible for the tool in Amazon’s Vendor Central that publishers use to switch their Amazon data feeds to ONIX 3.0. They had ONIX 3.0 from around 100–150 publishers so far, and further migrations and support were ongoing. He was also looking to work with data aggregators in many countries to boost the proportion of ONIX 3.0 feeds.

Finally, MB said that in Denmark, there was now very good support for ONIX 3.0 in the digital supply chain, but that for physical products, v3.0 was less common – lots of moral support but so far, little action. There is a demand for training, which is likely to be delivered by the Publishers Association during summer 2020.

4. Report on current ONIX development work

GB introduced his report (separate document).

He noted that there were no particular issues raised from the drawdown of ONIX 2.1 support, and only a couple of simple queries had arisen. In many countries, version 2.1 were no longer an issue, with the US, UK and Germany being the main places where 2.1 was still in widespread use. Amazon’s deadline announcement has boosted interest in 3.0 and EDItEUR has noticed a considerable increase in queries, requests for evaluations of test files, interest in training and so on. GB outlined EDItEUR’s training plans for the second quarter of 2020 in Canada, France, the US and UK, but also noted these might well be affected by travel restrictions if the ongoing Covid-19 health emergency continued to grow. [In fact, these training plans all had to be cancelled, but some have since been rearranged and delivered as online training.]

For clarity, GB reiterated Amazon’s announcement, that all v2.1 data feeds for physical books, in all countries, must be switched to ONIX 3.0 by the end of 2020, and GB noted that Amazon had indicated that a similar deadline for digital products were likely to follow soon after.

He expected that publishers still using 2.1 with an off-the-shelf data management solution would mostly be okay, as there was six months to go and virtually all solutions in the market were 3.0-capable. Data suppliers who have the biggest issues are those that have built in-house solutions. He encouraged completion of development work before the beginning of the fourth calendar quarter, to avoid system changes during the key selling season. GB also noted he expected pressure to increase on data recipients able to accept only 2.1, as few data suppliers will be keen to maintain parallel feeds in both versions of the standard – he sympathised with developers at publishers and data recipients, as their work would be under considerable time pressure, but noted that it would be good for the industry as a whole to focus on a single version of the standard.

Turning to the 3.0.7 revision of ONIX ratified by the previous meeting of the steering committee in Frankfurt, the updated Specification, Implementation and Best Practice Guide, schemas and necessary codelists were published on the EDItEUR website at the end of October 2019. As expected EDItEUR was not yet aware of any implementations of <PromotionalEvent> yet. GB also highlighted the importance of the new <TextSourceDescription> field to give context around the name of a book reviewer or endorsement of the product.

Codelists issue 48 was agreed and published in mid-January, and this in particular introduced some codes for coverage of games (particularly board games) which were requested by French, Polish and other ONIX users. GB also highlighted additional codes for accessibility, and the numerous clarifications of the notes associated with various codes.

GB explained a little about the ongoing development of the ‘strict’ XSD, and the differences between validation using DTD, ‘classic’ XSD and ‘strict’ XSD. He said the strict XSD was not robust enough to be used in production, not just for testing, though feedback remained very welcome. GB also highlighted the two Application notes that are step-by-step guides to validation on Windows and on Mac, written with help from TR. The strict XSD is definitely useful during new feed onboarding.

Looking forward, a working group has been formed to consider the next extension to ONIX, the ‘production block’, formerly called Block 7 but now likely to be termed Block 8. This will be a new ONIX
block to carry production manifests to support POD manufacturing, or digital services around e-book and
digital audio packaging (eg a list of PDFs for printing, or a selection of WAVs for transcoding into mp3). The
initial meeting of the experts in the working group laid out a timetable for development of Block 8,
focusing first on POD and digital audio, and then extending to cover e-books. GB suggested that initial
proposals would likely be ready for Frankfurt but that there might be some additional considerations for e-
books. The working group will take a view on whether to put forward a proposal that might be incomplete
in 2020, or whether to wait until early 2021.

MB invited comments from the committee. LA recommended the working group deliver proposals as soon
as possible, even if they are not entirely ‘mature’. BOL noted also the development of the W3C standard
audiobook package, and clarity on any overlap would be important [NB the two do not overlap, but might
both form a part of the same workflow. JP also agreed, and noted that wider feedback would be best. GB
thanked the delegates for their comments and noted that working group output would be shared at the
earliest opportunity.

5. Proposals for Codelists issue 49

MB asked GB to discuss the proposals for Codelists Issue 47 (separate document), which had been
circulated to ONIX national groups in February. Since circulation, a few modifications had been
incorporated into the proposals, based on comments from those national groups.

Issue 49 covered additions or minor changes to around 15 different lists. GB covered some of the most
important of the proposals.

List 17—a ‘flag’ for peer review—it might be viewed as slightly unusual to treat it as a contributor role, but
it makes sense when combined with ‘Anonymous’ in <UnnamedPersons>.

List 19—the new code allows credits for voice talent used as the basis for synthesised voices based on AI
or machine learning.

GB noted that List 23 had two almost duplicated sets of extent type, one based on words and pages, the
other based on minutes and hours. In fact, this is unnecessary, as the units of measurement are given in
another field <ExtentUnit>. He asked national groups to consider whether this should be rationalised, and
he agreed to provide a couple of samples (perhaps with the proposals for issue 50 or 51). CP asked
whether character extent excluding spaces had been considered, and GB said no, because counting spaces
is more meaningful. If character counts without spaces are needed, then it can be added as an option in
the future.

There were some significant clarifications in Sales restriction types in List 71, mostly in order to remove any
suggestion that the restricted product was a special edition of a particular title. Other changes were
intended to highlight the fact that codes come (mostly) in complementary pairs. HW highlighted the need
to avoid double negative sales rights and restrictions—for example ONIX that says ‘not for sale in Australia,
restricted to libraries’ to imply that the product is for sale in Australia except to libraries. This is a question
for the Best practice documentation, and GB agreed to review and where necessary clarify that sales
restrictions should in almost all circumstances only be used in concert with positive sales rights. LA asked
whether there were any issues using the newly-clarified codes in Block 6 (Group P.24), and GB assured him
there were not. The meanings of the various codes had not changed, even though the expression of that
meaning in the headings and notes had been modified to make it clearer. AL also noted that any data
supplier and recipient still using ONIX 3.0.1 or earlier cannot properly express sales restrictions at all
(certainly not in any complex case), and support of sales restrictions (other than in the simplest of cases)
requires 3.0.2 or later.

List 28—there was a proposal to add an Audience type for the ‘family’ audience (ie all adults, young adults
and at least some children), essentially being a ‘shorthand’ for those three separate audiences. AH
supported this proposal for an all-ages ‘family’ audience, in particular for games. In contrast, HW reported
that the UK ONIX group had serious reservations, and that Nielsen had struggled to find books that appealed to all of adults, young adults and children of a wide range of ages. He also suggested that it would add complexity to subject scheme mappings, and while it might be appropriate for some games, it might detract from clarity of audience descriptions for books. For the French group, VP supported HW’s position. JP agreed broadly with the UK and French position, stating that ‘family’ has implications beyond ‘all ages’ that might also be undesirable – if kept as a broad ‘all ages’, the heading itself should not be ‘family’. AH asked whether there was another way to assign a broad ‘all ages’ of family target audience? GB noted that the <Audience> composite is repeatable, so children, young adults and adults can be expressed through three repeats, and other combinations (professional and scholarly). AH suggested that his expectation for a ‘family’ code would be to express something about the target audience as a group, rather than as a set of ages, and clarified that he believed it would be most useful for games, ot books. TR suggested that combining multiple audiences was undesirable (and thus a single, all ages code would be useful), but also agreed it would not be appropriate for many books. CP, FF, MB all noted that Sweden, Norway, Denmark did not see value in this proposed code and have worries about the social implications of ‘family’. Summing up, GB suggested this code should be rejected, but that the group should consider other ways of denoting ‘family games and toys’. This was accepted by representatives of the German group. CS commented on the ongoing work within the French ONIX group, and ‘target audience’ should be considered as that work. GB agreed that work would be valuable, and stressed the aim was to cover ‘toys and games in the book supply chain’, and not to extend ONIX to cover all aspects of the toys and games market.

With that, the group ratified the publication of Issue 49 of the codelists (minus the ‘family audience’ code). HS agreed that a discussion of separating ‘flap copy’ and ‘back copy’ should be postponed. MB also suggested postponing a discussion of the ‘flavours of ONIX’ question - BOL asked that it be higher on the next agenda.

6. Any other business

MB called for any other business.

LA announced that he would be retiring from Hachette, and graciously thanked members of the ONIX National Steering Committee, Mark Bide (former Exec Director of EDItEUR), GB, CS and the late Laurent Dervieu (former chair of the International Steering Committee). He noted he would continue offering consulting services to Hachette, particularly in the area of ‘inclusive publishing’ and e-book accessibility. GB thanked LA for his work in this group and others (including various W3C committees and working groups), and wished LA all the very best for his retirement.

7. Next meeting

There being no other business, MB closed the meeting with confirmation that the next meeting would be at the time of the Frankfurt Book Fair –14th October at around 1:30CEST (exact time to be confirmed) – either face-to-face or online.

Graham Bell
EDItEUR
11th March 2020