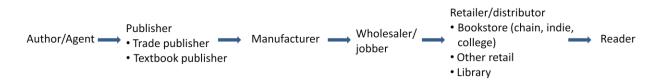**Introductory Paper – The Book Industry Study Group (BISG)**
Standards and Best Practices in the Age of the E-Book

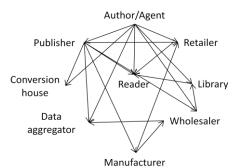BISG has its roots in the print supply chain.

We were first conceived in 1975, at the annual conference of the Book Manufacturers Institute. A few publishers and manufacturers met informally with representatives of several trade associations to discuss the urgent need to improve the U.S. book industry's research capabilities.

Soon after, this small group invited others to join in sponsoring a seminal study of book industry information needs on which a future program of research could be based. BISG was incorporated as a not-for-profit in February 1976 and the *Report on Book Industry Information Needs* was completed and published in April 1976. The report confirmed the feasibility of a program of major research studies by and about the book publishing industry.

Once organized, BISG quickly become a conduit for building industry consensus around supply chain issues. From standardized invoices and purchase orders, to machine readable codes, BISG became the nexus of industry thought and discussion on standards and best practices. But the supply chain was simpler in those days.

Today, with a fully blended print and digital ecosystem, the supply has grown far more complex.

The result is a greater need for standards and best practices, and a greater need for consensus and communication. Consider the following three examples:

Identification

The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) was published by the International Standards Organization as ISO standard 2108 in 1970 and quickly became the de facto standard for identifying books, which at the time were entirely print-based.

Identifying printed books is fairly straight forward. Once an edition is created, it does not change. A hardcover retains the characteristics of a hardcover. There are some issues with usage rights – library binding versus trade book – but those are still intrinsic to the particular expression of the content, and are dealt with simply: Each format of print book gets a unique identifier.

E-books are something different. The first ISBN was assigned to an e-book in the very late 1990s. At that time, e-books were simply digital reproductions of print books. Much has changed.

The characteristics of an e-book today are fluid. The same product may be produced in a variety of digital formats, it may allow for printing or lending in one sales channel but not another, and it may have a variable price depending on market conditions. This poses a complexity of issues to resolve, and requires the attention of the entire supply chain. BISG is at the center of this effort.

In December 2011, BISG published *POL-1101: Best Practices for Identifying Digital Products*. This policy statement provides detailed guidance on how, and in what instances, to uniquely identify an e-book, and whether or not to use an ISBN. The document was created with input from dozens of companies from every corner of the book industry.

In addition, the ISBN standard is up for review with ISO next year. BISG's Identification Committee will feed commentary and opinion into NISO, the National Information Standards Organization, on the future development of the ISBN, using our policy statement as a roadmap. This process will be critical to ensuring U.S. input into ISO's deliberations.

Metadata

Books, in both print and digital form, face a challenge of discoverability. The serendipity of the off-line browsing experience has not yet been replicated for books in an online environment. Many have tried, and many more will, but success has been limited.

The core issues are a lack of complete, accurate metadata; and a dissonance between metadata repositories when metadata does exist. We know from a Nielsen study that there is a direct correlation between metadata and ROI, so this is an issue of critical importance.

The answer lies again in an end-to-end supply chain solution, this time through product metadata certification. BISG has a program of data certification in which we vet publisher metadata before it reaches downstream partners. The standard against which we judge metadata quality is developed and maintained by BISG's Metadata Committee. This committee is chaired by a representative from Barnes & Noble, and includes members from Kobo, Amazon, R.R. Bowker, other trade organizations, and virtually all of the large publishers. This committee also represents the ONIX standard in the U.S., reporting back into EDItEUR, the U.K.-based standards group that manages ONIX worldwide.

As more of our industry becomes Web-based, and takes advantage of Web-services, we need voices from technology verticals represented as well. Participating in this W3C conference as a sponsor and co-organizer is an important step to further integrate the world of technology with the world of letters, and we look forward to having those involved with W3C engaging in these important book industry discussions.

EPUB

While IDPF develops and administers EPUB, that organization has limited resources, and there is a need for further education about, and propagation of, the standard.

With this in mind, for nearly a year, BISG has maintained the EPUB 3 Support Grid. Designed to provide critical information to publishers, the support grid shows how EPUB 3 functionality has been implemented by the various reading systems. This document has been widely used and cited throughout the book industry.

BISG also issued a policy statement formally endorsing EPUB 3.0, stating:

> *The Book Industry Study Group (BISG) endorses EPUB 3 as the accepted and preferred standard for representing, packaging, and encoding structured and semantically enhanced Web content — including XHTML, CSS, SVG, images, and other resources — for distribution in a single-file format.*

Our relationship with IDPF is critical for both organizations, and provides a useful framework for how BISG and W3C can work more closely together.

Conclusion

Even as new debates begin to take shape – e.g., the container model for publishing content vs. a browser-based model – the need for consensus, and the need for standards and best practices, remains paramount. In order to ensure that our content reaches the widest possible audience, we need to speak in one common tongue.

We look forward to continuing our relationship with IDPF, and to growing our relationship with W3C to achieve these goals.