Publishing and the Open Web Platform: The Book Industry Study Group Position Paper

ABOUT BISG

The Book Industry Study Group, Inc. (BISG) is a United States-based not-for-profit trade association supported by a diverse membership of publishers, retailers, manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, librarians, and others involved in both print and digital publishing, in the U.S. and abroad.

For over 35 years, BISG has been working on behalf of its members to advance its mission of creating a more informed, empowered and efficient book industry. As such, BISG is in a unique position as the only U.S. trade association acting on behalf of all segments of the publishing supply chain. In seeking support from and representing every sector of the book industry, BISG affirms its belief in the interdependence of all industry segments.

BISG'S POSITION

While the transition from a primarily print to a blended print and digital publishing ecosystem is taking place in every corner of the globe, the transition in the United States, when compared to other markets, is in a significantly more mature position. As a result, BISG and its members have learned valuable and practical lessons about the challenges and opportunities of migrating to a digital value chain, not the least of which is the need for a set of uniformly adopted standards for the creation and distribution of content.

The key standards occupying BISG's focus can be grouped in the following three areas: 1) Identification, through the use of common identifiers such as ISBN, EAN, and ISNI; 2) Content Classification, through the implementation of subject codes; and 3) Metadata, through the U.S. adoption of the international ONIX framework.

Though BISG has historically maintained a primary focus on the application of standards across the U.S. industry, the domestic marketplace is rapidly internationalizing, signifying the critical need for more global standards.

BISG's recent activities in support of standards for Content Classification are a good example of how our efforts are increasingly global. In the mid 1990s BISG developed the BISAC Subject Headings list, the U.S. industry standard for the classification of print and digital books. Recently, BISG, working in concert with colleagues across the globe, played a critical role in the development of Thema, an international subject classification scheme. Our Subject Codes Committee, comprised of industry volunteers, is currently engaged in mapping the BISAC Subject Headings to Thema.

BISG believes that while the use of keywords and tags will be vitally important, there is still a need for an organized, structured content classification system to aid in both discoverability and back-office processes. As the Open Web Platform increases both the presence of and access to rich metadata, linking various components of this data to attribute meaning will be of great importance.

Further, the diversification of methods and formats for publication and distribution of print and digital works propelled by the Open Web indicate a greater need for an open dialogue between the publishing industry and Web ecosystems. Our primary interest in attending the W3C workshop is to participate in this dialogue, bringing insight into the publishing industry standards now in place, with the goal of consolidating efforts towards a more efficient means for the creation, description, distribution, and preservation of content worldwide.