

TO: Priscilla Caplan

FROM: Kristin Lindlan, Chair,
ALA/ALCTS/CCS/Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access

RE: Five-year review of ISSN standard (ISO 3297 (1998))

Below are the comments that CC:DA wished to send regarding the 5 year review of the ISSN standard. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

1) SCOPE

- i) AACR2 defines a continuing resource as “a publication that is issued over time with no predetermined conclusion. Such a publication is usually issued in successive or integrating issues which generally have numerical and or chronological designations. Continuing resources include serials such as newspapers, periodicals, journals, magazines, etc. and ongoing integrating resources such as loose-leaf publications and Web sites that are continually updated.”

Should the scope of ISSN assignment be broadened out to refer to “continuing resources”, using this definition?

CC:DA:

Note: the definition of continuing resource in AACR2 is: “A bibliographic resource that is issued over time with no predetermined conclusion. Continuing resources include serials and ongoing integrating resources.”

The scope should probably be broadened to include ongoing continuing resources, but there are some cataloging issues to consider. ISSN standard follows successive entry cataloging practice based on the key title. AACR2 and ISBD(CR) now follow integrating entry cataloging conventions for the type of resources included in the new scope. This means that whenever there is a major change in the title of an integrating resource (database, loose-leaf, website) the ISSN Network will be creating successive records and assigning new ISSN & key titles to the later iterations while the AACR community will be using a single record approach. This not only affects the use of ISSN records, but it also affects what appears in CONSER records in OCLC, as the records NSDP supplies to the ISSN Network are derived from their OCLC/CONSER records. It also affects the cataloging prepared in other countries following ISBD(CR). Possible solutions to this discrepancy are:

- a) Accept the discrepancies. Since ISO 3297 doesn't rely on ISBD(CR) but only references it, the two standards can exist simultaneously, even though this may have consequences (e.g., lack of record portability, user confusion). ISSN centres whose ISSN records are part of a shared cataloging environment that follows ISBD/AACR practice will either produce duplicate records following a different entry standard (in the case of the US and Canadian ISSN centers, this will be a problem as OCLC Bib Formats & Standards specifies following AACR2, specifically LC & CONSER practice) or will have to accommodate AACR/ISBD practice within their cataloging routines (either by having a separate reporting structure for integrating resources or by developing conversion algorithms so that a single ISBD/AACR integrated entry record can be converted to multiple ISSN successive entry records).
- b) Change the ISO 3297 proposal to accommodate integrating entry. This would require introducing the concept of integrating resource into the standard and de-linking the key title and ISSN for integrating resources, so that the key title could be changed over time while the ISSN remains the same. ISSN record structure and practices would also need to be revised. This might not be difficult to implement with the ISSN Network in the process of conversion to a new ILS.

Also, one of the goals of recent serial cataloging harmonization efforts was to reduce the number of new ISSN assignments. Having ISO 3297 incorporate integrating entry cataloging for integrating resources would further reduce the number of new ISSN assignments.

The definitions in the ISSN standard are not AACR2 or ISBD definitions. AACR2 has in the 2002 revision:

Continuing resource. A bibliographic resource that is issued over time with no predetermined conclusion. Continuing resources include serials and ongoing integrating resources.

Serial. A continuing resource issued in a succession of discrete parts, usually bearing numbering, that has no predetermined conclusion. Examples of serials include journals, magazines, electronic journals, continuing directories, annual reports, newspapers, and monographic series.

- ii) Under this definition, ISSNs could be assigned to databases. Would this be a useful/appropriate use of ISSN?

CC:DA: We're not sure that the time it would take to assign ISSN to databases would be worth the effort. One person suggested that there would be another chance later to broaden the ISSN coverage, if the continuing resource concepts hold up over time.

If ISSN is assigned to databases, perhaps it should be done selectively – perhaps to those that already exist in print. For database titles whose print counterparts already have an ISSN, it would seem natural to assign ISSN -- and the publishers of these titles would probably consider ISSN to be a useful identifier for their online database versions.

Loose-leaf publishers may also consider ISSN to be a natural identifier since many loose-leaf publications have ISSN assigned to their updates. It is a logical extension that the ISSN can now be assigned to the loose-leaf itself, rather than only be used to identify the update. Online services might take the form of a database, so the concept of ISSN as the identifier for these might be natural. Other publishers may not be aware or think of ISSN as the first choice of identifier for their integrating resources.

Additional comment regarding scope: one person suggested it could be advantageous to have ISSNs assigned to government-issued publications. Has this exclusion been based purely on workload considerations, or is there some philosophical basis for the exclusion? Might the discussion surrounding this exclusion be revisited? We think it would be beneficial to have ISSN assignment for some of the more substantial government document serials.

2) CONSTRUCTION OF AN ISSN

- i) Should the ISSN remain an eight-digit string, consisting of the numbers 0 to 9 or (as the check digit only) X?

CC:DA: Yes, because it's already identifiable and systems are already set up to handle this construction. We see no reason to change just for "change's sake." If the number needs to be longer to accommodate a greater number of titles, then that would be a good reason to expand the string. There may be other good reasons to change the format, but they were not presented for consideration. We suggest alternatives in 4) ii) below.

- ii) Should the ISSN remain a "dumb" number, i.e. contain no meaningful elements to identify language, country or publisher?

CC:DA: yes, keep the number "dumb" and let it continue to be used as effectively as it has been (e.g., in linking from A&I services). We need a stable and unique number for each serial publication. Changes in language, country and publisher, all of which happen with serial publications, would complicate use of a "smart" number. How would the ISSN change if one publisher bought out the titles of another? Who would maintain the numbers in the ISSN database? Does anyone really want to redo the ISSNs for the serials once published in the Soviet Union, but now published in one of the post-Soviet Union republics?

Since there are ten million possible ISSNs using the 7-digit plus check digit standard and over one million have been assigned to date, we're not sure about the long term viability of using one or two digits to identify language, country or publisher. It may be possible, but should be done with an eye towards efficiency.

3) DISPLAY OF AN ISSN

- i) Should an ISSN continue to be displayed (whether in print form or on a screen) as two four-digit blocks separated by a hyphen?

CC:DA: Yes. This is a recognizable format with or without preceding letters "ISSN." What would be gained by changing it? What would be lost? We would not be in favor of changing it just to change it.

- ii) Should the ISSN be represented in machine-readable form as a bar code?

CC:DA: We were not certain what this question was asking. If they are suggesting a mechanism in which a barcode display is added to the eye readable display for the ISSN on publications, it is already being used on some print serials as one element in a SICI standard in a barcode and this is useful for check-in purposes – if it is printed in a form that existing barcode readers can read. Wandering a barcode is quicker and more accurate than typing an ISSN. It would also make it easier to machine-read the ISSN for linking to metadata and other tools that rely on the ISSN.

- iii) Would it be useful to include the media format associated with the ISSN in display?

CC:DA: Some of us concluded that it would be useful to include the media format in the display, as is done with the display of ISBNs in catalog records. However, one person said that different media should receive different ISSN numbers.

4) ELECTRONIC VERSIONS

The current standard says that serials "published in different media ...shall [have ISSNs] assigned to the different editions".

- i) What would be a better term than "editions" - versions? formats? manifestations?

CC:DA: We do not think only a single term can be used here. "Editions" is still an appropriate description in many cases, but "versions" may be a better description in other cases (e.g., "print version" vs. "web version" vs. "PDA version" vs. "Pocket PC version"). While there is still so much discussion about where "manifestation," "expression," etc. will be used, it might not be wise to

pick one or another. A microfiche version of a print serial might be another manifestation, but the electronic version may be a different expression. If they want to limit the ISSNs to print, online and direct access electronic resources, perhaps they should just name the three.

- ii) Should the current practice of assigning different ISSNs to online, CD-ROM and print versions only be continued?

CC:DA: That depends on what the ISSN is meant to identify. If it is to identify the work, then we need one ISSN per title. If it is meant to identify all of the different products that can be bought and sold, it might require many ISSNs per title.

Some publishers want different ISSN to identify different versions for ordering, marketing, etc. purposes, whereas some publisher want the same ISSN and somehow indicate outside the standard (suffix) which version is referred to. A&I services are tending towards using only the print ISSN, so that the ISSN identifies the work (serial) associated with a particular article and thus having two ISSN associated with a particular journal (one for electronic, one for print), introduces an unnecessary complexity into bibliographic records and link resolvers.

Currently, ISSN policy states that a reproduction in microform uses the same ISSN as the print. Why wouldn't electronic versions with the same content as the print version also be assigned the same as the print? Thus the only e-serials getting separate ISSN are those with different content than their print counterparts.

One suggestion that the majority of us liked was the idea of using a single ISSN for a title with some means to note its different versions – though at times it may be difficult to tell whether you have exactly the same thing in a different format or not. One was to alter the ISSN guidelines slightly to alleviate the multiple-ISSN problem identified with the A&I services -- and which is also a problem for aggregators, publishers and OPAC designers, and when creating links to holdings. In this scenario, the basic eight digit ISSN structure, including check digit, would be retained and extended at the end by a single extra “version digit.” Publishers could append at the end of an ISSN a “version digit,” either from a standardized list or randomly, thus allowing them and all of us to use the elongated nine-digit ISSN in our publisher-subscriber communications, but use the basic eight-digit ISSN in the A&I service, aggregator, OPAC, etc., databases for system linking purposes.

Example (hypothetical):

8765-4321-0; or just: 8765-4321 (print version) [*This could be a default*]

8765-4321-1 (Web version)

8765-4321-2 (PDA (Palm) version)

8765-4321-3 (Pocket PC version)

8765-4321-4 (CD-ROM version)
 8765-4321-5 (e-mail HTML version)
 8765-4321-6 (e-mail text version)
 8765-4321-7 (Microfiche version)
 8765-4321-8 (Reprint)

There would be no reason for a “version digit” to be limited strictly to true versions, though. Nor would there be a reason to limit it to numerals; single letters could be used as well. One person also suggested that publishers might find it useful to have different designations for different subscription types, such as:

8765-4321-a (Personal subscription - print)
 8765-4321-b (Member subscription - print)
 ...
 8765-4321-j (Single institutional subscription - Web)
 8765-4321-k (Consortium subscription - Web)
 ...
 8765-4321-n (Single institution - Print and Web)
 8765-4321-o (Consortium subscription - Print and Web)

If the addition of an additional digit to the ISSN is problematic, perhaps an indicator value or another subfield code could be assigned to identify versions, subscription types, etc. Use of indicator values or subfield codes might be less problematic for system linking purposes than a version digit.

5) METADATA

- i) How should the ISSN international, national and regional centres hold metadata related to electronic versions? (Currently, the data elements list only includes “Physical medium” and “Has other physical medium (media)”.)

CC:DA: We’re not sure what this question means. Is it asking about what format-specific information should be recorded or is it asking what record standard should be used? We think each entity assigned an ISSN would have a description of that entity in the ISSN record.

- ii) Should the International Standard Text Code (ISTC) be included in the list of data elements, acting as a common identifier underpinning all versions and formats of a continuing resource, i.e. the ISTC would identify the continuing resource as an abstract Work rather than its particular Manifestation or Expression?

CC:DA: If the ISSN is not a “work” number, the ISTC could be used as a “work” number. However, some of us have concerns about implementation and acceptance of the ISTC.

6) ADMINISTRATION

Should it remain the right of any interested party to apply for an ISSN, or should this be limited to the publisher only?

CC:DA: Including ISSN applications by interested parties serves additional purposes: 1) if notification is sent to the publisher, it supports additional use and knowledge of the standard among publishers, thus improving bibliographic identification; 2) it also serves as a means for ISSN agencies to identify changes (both major and minor) that can happen to a resource over time. Publishers cannot be expected to understand cataloging rules and may not identify when a new ISSN would need to be assigned.

7) EDITORIAL SUGGESTIONS

3.1

The definition of International Standard Serial Number could be changed to: An eight digit number, including a check digit and preceded by the alphabetic prefix ISSN. It is assigned by the ISSN Network. That isn't exactly the definition in ISBD(CR), which includes something on key title, but it is closer.

3.2

The definition of key title could use a "the" at the beginning.

3.3

The definition of serial is mentioned above.

7.4

It might be better to use "publications" than "editions" at the end, given our discussion of alternative words above.

Annex

In the Annex, in the list of data elements, "publication, distribution, etc." should replace "imprint". "Imprint" is no longer used in AACR2 or the ISBDs.

In the Introduction, 7th line, "that" should be used instead of "which." And in Annex A, 2nd line, "that" should be used instead of "which"

In 6.2, 2nd paragraph, 2nd line, change to "distinguished either by adding"

In the Bibliography of Annex C, the last reference should be to ISBD (CR): International standard bibliographic description for serials and other continuing resources. Revised from the ISBD(S): International standard bibliographic description for serials. Munchen, 2002. Or whatever parts are needed of the description. It was published by K.G. Saur in print, but it's also available on the IFLAnet.