

INTERNATIONAL ISBN AGENCY

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ISO 2108 (International Standard Book Number) is currently under revision. A working group is going to meet on June 18/19 in New York and on Oct. 12/13 in Berlin to prepare a revised draft. ISO standards are routinely checked for revision in regular intervals, usually four years. The present effort is not a matter of routine, however; it was triggered by the expectation that the current contingents of numbers would not suffice for future needs. Also, ISBN – in contrast to similar identification systems – has been a voluntary system without contracts and financial contributions. Now, with more than 160 countries in the system and evergrowing workload, especially also a need for continuous training and education, the feeling is that ISBN should be turned into a membership organisation in order to secure proper funding and promote efficient administration.

Therefore there are two major goals to be achieved by the working group:

- to devise a method of extending the existing contingents of numbers
- to suggest a suitable infrastructure for the ISBN system.

The group hopes to be able to have a finalised draft ready by the end of the year.

The suggested changes will have to go through the usual ISO TC 46 ballots and are expected to take effect as of 2005.

The need for additional numbering contingents occurred because of the growing volume of electronic publications, especially in North America. Also, a number of these items are offered in different formats, and for the purpose of unique identification (e.g. for ordering) each of these formats has to receive an individual number.

While it is too early now to make statements about the changes it seems that a thirteen-digit ISBN is favoured for the future as the International Agency owns the EAN prefix 979. With regards to the infrastructure of the system there is a tendency towards membership contributions to keep the system running. This would require contracts with all national and regional agencies.

As national libraries administer the ISBN system in many countries CDNL seems the proper group to inform about the current revision process. The suggested changes will probably affect cataloguing, too: so far many systems allow only 10 digits for an ISBN.

It may be added that quite a number of ISBN agencies from Asia, Africa and Latin America have not provided their ISBN publisher data for inclusion in the International Publishers Directory. This is unwise for several reasons:

- The Directory is the international key to the ISBN system: If e.g. a publisher or bookseller in London wants to get in contact with a publisher in Tanzania he will look for address and telecommunication in the Directory. If there is no entry there will be no business.
- If the Directory data are not up-to-date, the same will happen.
- All agencies that contribute their data on time will receive a complimentary copy of the publication which costs €300.00.

Therefore all national libraries that run ISBN agencies are kindly requested to provide their publisher data for inclusion in the Directory.

ISBN annual reports and other information will be found under: www.isbn-international.org

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