

How Standardization in the K-12 Educational Publishing Industry Can Help Grow Business

A position paper jointly presented by The Association of Educational Publishers and R. R. Bowker

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Executive Summary

The trade publishing industry has used ISBNs for decades to standardize the data that libraries, distributors, bookstores, and resellers use for research, purchases, and inventory control. In return, companies operating in this sector are better able to track their internal sales data and competitive data against the market.

The K-12 educational publishing community is a growing subset of the publishing industry. However, the materials range beyond print books including software, DVDs, manipulatives, and flash cards. Thus, many publishers have not purchased and assigned ISBNs to all of their products.

Purchasing books for differentiated instruction, ELL, individualized instruction, and the increasing need for supplemental materials to augment basal texts, have made schools/districts look to multiple sources for educational materials. In addition, the global education community is seeking supplemental materials from U.S. companies. Publishers should make the research and purchasing process as easy for their customers as possible.

If all educational materials have a unique ISBN, schools and school districts will be able to research and purchase school products more efficiently. Supplemental publishers will have a standardized data format to track their sales, and if desired, compare to competitors. Moreover, by assigning an ISBN to all educational products and registering them with the BowkerLink database, the materials will reside in a global directory where libraries, stores, schools, and distributors around the world will be able to find them.

Introduction

This position paper is a joint statement by The Association of Educational Publishers (AEP) and R.R. Bowker. Its purpose is to familiarize the educational publishing industry with the purpose of the ISBN and to state the case that all educational materials should have a unique ISBN.

For many years educational publishing has embraced the Internet as a tool to reach current and new customers. While existing clients know where to find these companies' materials, the vast nature of the web makes it impossible for all publishers to be found by someone searching for a product. Buyers are limiting their time on the web—trying to do as few searches as possible to find the most information. General trade materials are already in online databases, such as BooksInPrint, where customers can research and compare materials between companies. Educational publishers need to have maximum exposure across all sales channels and be available for purchase in the same venues as their competitors.

In addition, the customers' needs for tracking their purchases and sharing the information electronically with their schools, teachers, and administrators have changed. Having a standard identifier with corresponding bibliographic data for all educational materials will simplify the process for the publishers and the customers and open new possibilities for both. Moreover, publishers need to be able to get accurate data about their sales from these channels and markets.

Every K-12 publisher should acquire and assign a unique ISBN for every individual item that they would display in a catalog. Assigning an ISBN is not enough, though. After the ISBNs are assigned, publishers must register each product with BowkerLink in order for the title and its bibliographic data to be entered into the global publications database. This will enable customers to find their products in multiple places, allow publishers to track market data and compare with their competitors, and help companies identify the holes in their inventory and areas that present growth opportunities.

About the ISBN

The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is a 13-digit number that uniquely identifies books and book-like products published internationally. Its purpose is to establish and identify one title or one unique edition of a title from one specific publisher. An ISBN allows for more efficient marketing and cataloging of products by booksellers, libraries, educational institutions, wholesalers, and distributors. In addition, ISBNs create unambiguous bibliographical records for search, discovery, and cataloging and facilitate sales reporting at the individual product level between business partners for analysis, bestseller listings, and royalty accounting.

While the initial use was for print books, ISBNs are now a common identifier on DVDs, e-books, and software. For educational publishers qualifying products are any educational materials they produce, including print books, manipulatives, software, DVDs, curriculum kits, e-books, games, etc.

Obtaining ISBNs

Purchasing an ISBN is easy. Publishers go to the Bowker site (www.bowker.com) where there is a link to buy ISBNs from a secure website. ISBNs may be purchased in blocks of 10, 100, or 1000. (Costs vary according to the number bought and the requested turnaround time on the order.) ISBNs do not need to be assigned to a product at the time of purchase; they can be assigned to old, current, and new products as needed. (AEP is currently exploring a partnership with Bowker that will allow AEP members to purchase ISBNs and upload the title information through the AEP website.)

Using the ISBN

Once an ISBN has been purchased, publishers assign it to a specific edition of a specific product. The number is placed with the copyright information and on the back of the product. If the product has a bar code as well and the bar code has the ISBN encoded on it, the bar code is still put on the back of the product with the ISBN included with the copyright information.

Assigning the ISBN is only the first step. The product will not appear in publications databases unless the title and its corresponding ISBN are registered with BowkerLink. By using this free submission tool, publishers are able to add important details to their titles' listings that let people know more about it -- author/contributor names, packaging specs, audience information, and even cover images.

R.R. Bowker's Role in the ISBN Process

Bowker® is the exclusive US ISBN Agency. The use of ISBNs is governed by the International ISBN Agency, but only R.R. Bowker may distribute them to United States publishers. Bowker also offers many tools for publishers and their customers to take advantage of the ISBN information.

After the titles have been registered with BowkerLink, they are eligible for a free listing in various online and print directories that are sourced from Bowker's extensive bibliographic database. The list of these directories include: Books In Print, Books In Print on CD, BooksInPrint.com, GlobalBooksInPrint.com, FictionConnection.com, Books Out Loud, Characters in Fiction, and Forthcoming Books.

In addition to the free bibliographic databases, Bowker provides publishers with purchasing and market analysis tools.

- PubEasy provides e-commerce solutions to publishers, distributors, wholesalers, and their bookselling customers. It is a business-to-business service that uses the Internet to facilitate access to order placement, order tracking, title, price, and availability data. This service is available 24 hours a day and is free to vendors (Publishers must pay to use the service.)
- PubTrack is a sales data analysis instrument. It gives publishers the tools to predict trends, manage inventories, and reduce mistakes. PubTrack combines sales data with robust title, publisher, bestseller, and award information giving publishers quick, actionable answers that will help them improve their bottom line.

The Benefits of Standardization in the Trade Industry

One of the most important benefits of all trade publishers using the ISBN is that booksellers are able to easily search, identify, and purchase the materials they need. Although purchases are still made through the individual companies' commerce systems, the ability to use similar interfaces, such as PubEasy, and to track data from all publishers using the same format (the ISBN) makes the process simpler. The data can be easily exchanged without translation software, and the knowledge is easily transferred from one person to another—there is no cumbersome system to learn for each publisher.

Next, when publishers and vendors track their inventory and sales using the same data, conversations between the two are smoother. There is no confusion about the product, the audience, etc. Plus, internal sales data is easy to gather and compare over the years. By using PubEasy publishers have quick data at their fingertips:

- Who sells their products
- Where the best sellers are located
- What types of products different sellers buy
- New clients versus existing clients
- Frequency of purchases
- What sales channels are working and which ones aren't

Furthermore, one of the benefits that has emerged for other industries from standard ISBN use is the ability to track and measure important data. Publishers who subscribe to and submit their sales data to PubTrack are able to compare their information to their competitors and analyze their market share against the industry. Through PubTrack they learn about:

- The key players
- Trends in subjects and titles
- Trends in packaging
- Trends in growth/decline for specific topics, audiences, etc.
- Overall and niche market sizes

Currently, there are PubTrack systems for Higher Education, Christian, and General Trade publishing. Each industry determines the statistics they want to gather; individual publishers may submit as much or as little data as they desire. Based upon the detail of data provided to PubTrack, reports may be aggregates and benchmarks for the whole industry, or they may contain detailed analyses of participating companies. Just as the ISBN allows publishers to track data from sellers using the same bibliographic data, it also allows them to determine their current market position and see where they can improve and grow. Participants in the PubTrack system collectively determine at what level they wish to share data and the system is capable of showing as much or as little of this data based on this industry-wide decision.

The Need for Standardization in K-12 Educational Publishing

All K-12 educational publishers should assign ISBNs to their products and register the titles with BowkerLink to create an industry standard for product cataloging, data tracking, and

customer interaction. The institutionalization of data will allow K-12 publishers to reap the benefits that higher education and trade books have experienced for years and expose their materials to markets beyond the reach of sales representatives and individual websites. K-12 companies will also have the ability to join with other publishers in creating industry metrics, which currently don't exist.

The benefits of standardizing data in K-12 market include:

- Maximizing product exposure to a wider range and new types of customers.
 - If titles have an ISBN and are registered with Bowker, the products are listed in Books In Print, which is globally accessible.
 - Teachers purchase some of their own products through teacher stores, retailers, and online sites like Amazon.com where ISBNs are required.
 - Companies will reach schools that are outside of their target zones as the schools and districts will be able to look at all materials for a subject or audience in one place.
 - Stores monitor sales to see what they should stock, and they use services from Bowker that track via ISBN.
 - ISBNs can be assigned to previous inventory. Once the products are entered into BowkerLink, you have a new audience for your older materials.
- Normalizing databases and sales tracking within your own company no matter what the product or audience.
- Easily conversing with customers when both the publisher and the client use the same data to track and discuss purchases.
- Selling products to schools and districts via a standard interface that will be familiar to all buyers. Bowker is creating PubEasy School and will be actively courting school districts to sign up and use the system and will also be integrating it with third-party district software providers in areas like e-procurement and text management software (e.g., ESchoolMall and Hayes TIPWeb systems). PubEasy School comes directly from the publishers; the data included will be specific to the market, e.g., subject areas, grade levels, and state standards. Additionally, PubEasy allows a link from the publishers that enables the user to link to the vendors website through the PubEasy application to get additional information (PubEasy School will be piloted this summer and is expected to launch in the fourth quarter of 2008.)

Recommendations

- K-12 educational publishers should obtain an ISBN for all products.
- They should enter the titles with complete bibliographic data into BowkerLink.
- They should use a purchasing system, like PubEasy School, that will take advantage of the ISBN and bibliographic data to makes sales and data tracking easy for both the publisher and the customer.
- K-12 companies should join with other educational publishers to create a sales database to track industry metrics.

About AEP

The Association of Educational Publishers (AEP) is the professional association for publishers of supplemental educational materials. Its membership represents the breadth of educational content developers and service providers delivering progressive products in both print and electronic formats to today's schools and colleges. Founded in 1895, AEP now assists its members in navigating the global realities of publishing in the 21st Century through its professional development programming, government relations efforts, and opportunities for collaboration and partnership. For more information visit www.AEPweb.org.

About Bowker

Bowker is the world's leading source for bibliographic information. The company provides searching, analytical, promotional, and ordering services to publishers, booksellers, libraries, and patrons through national and international brands, including: Books In Print(r), Global Books In Print(r), Syndetic Solutions(tm), Pubnet(r), PubEasy(r), PubTrack(tm), AquaBrowser(r), and more. In the U.S., Australia and Puerto Rico, Bowker is also the exclusive ISBN and SAN Agency and a DOI registration agency for the publishing industry. Bowker is headquartered in New Providence, New Jersey, with operations in East Grinstead, England, and Port Melbourne, Australia. For more company details, please visit www.Bowker.com.