

ISBN/ISSN CHALLENGES IN LIBRARIES: THE WAY FORWARD

Joyce Chinyere Oyadonghan (PhD)

Librarian, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State

Joyceoyadonghan@ndu.edu.ng>,

Joyceoyan@Yahoo.Com

+234806475859

Kakiri, Inemotimi Flint (CLN)

Library Department, Niger Delta University

inemotimi@yahoo.com

+2348039336925

ABSTRACT: *ISBN/ISSN is unique identifiers for information materials. Using them is beneficial to all the stakeholders in the book-chain. The features of the identifiers are enumerated as well as a brief history of how they came into being. Libraries use ISBN/ISSN numbers when they need to acquire new resources, when they process the new materials and when they offer services to patrons. However, as trusted institutions for reliable resources and information, libraries do face challenges at different points as pertains to the use of ISBN/ISSN. The publication of a Nigerian Publishers Directory as a standalone quick reference resource or embedded in the National Bibliography and African Books in Print and Other Media were suggested as pathways that could be followed to assist librarians when facing challenges associated with ISBN/ISSN issues.*

KEYWORDS: ISBN, SSN, Libraries

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of the ISBN is to determine the identification of the title or edition of any information material from a particular publisher as exclusive and distinctive. ISBN coordinates and standardizes the use of identifying markers (numbers) so that each ISBN is unique to a title, edition of book, or monographic publication, Braille, microform, and electronic publication, as well as audio books, educational/instructional videos/DVDS and software published or produced by a specific publisher or producer. In addition, ISBN uniquely identifies whether a book is hardcover or paperback or the e-book edition of a particular title. In 1966, Gordon Foster a statistician came up with the idea of Standard Book Numbering (SBN) to assist booksellers in their business. This was escalated in United Kingdom by David Whitaker and Emily Koltay in USA into ISBN by 1967 and 1968 respectively. W.H.Smith, the largest single book retailer in Great Britain, used the Standard Book Numbering (SBN) to organize books in its new computerized warehouse in 1968. By 1969, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) recommended that the ISBN as a 10 digit number become a vital part of the International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD). ISO produces documents that establish global standards. The documents list requirements and specifications that ensure that goods and services all over the world are created and used safely, efficiently and effectively and are consistently applicable in every case. However, since 1 January 2007, ISBNs have been made up of 13 digits to effectively take care of the global

information explosion. In addition, the 13digit number conforms to the European Article Number (EAN) barcode format found on most products. This allows ISBNs to be accessed and checked with the same software as commercial products (International ISBN Agency, 2012). While ISBNs are assigned to text-based non-continuing resources, the ISSN is an 8-digit code used to identify newspapers, journals, magazines and periodicals of all kinds (journals, magazines, reports, directories, blogs) and on all media—print and electronic (ISSN UK Centre, 2018). The ISSN system was first brought out as an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) international standard in 1971. Since the revision of the ISSN Standard (ISO 3297) in 2007, ISSN has also been assigned to selected integrated resources including databases, websites, and continually updated online directories. A significant revision of the ISSN standard which also took place in 2007 is the expansion of the scope of the identifier to include all continuing resources. The linking ISSN (ISSN-L) was introduced. This allows for different physical formats of a serial to be linked thus enabling for title level identification regardless of format (Reynolds & Hanson, 2017).

In many countries including Nigeria, an ISSN is mandatory for all continuing resources, serial publications and ongoing integrated resources subject to the legal deposit law. ISSN does for serials what ISBN does for books and book related products. However, an ISSN, unlike the ISBN code, only identifies the serial title without additional information about the publisher or location where the serial was published.

Features of ISBN/ISSN

ISBN is an international bibliographic tracking system that carries national/geographic, edition, volume number, title, format and publisher identifiers.

However, the ISBN has distinguishing features as each has -

- A prefix which identifies the EAN group. Currently, 978 or 979 are the generally used prefixes.
- The second group of numbers separated by a hyphen identifies the individual country or territory where the book is published. It is usually made up of 3digit numbers. It is structured in such a way to accommodate all countries in the world. Nigeria's prefix is 978. However, countries such as Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Austria, Switzerland do not have the 3digits because the languages they speak and use to publish are same with the country thus they are mostly allocated single or double number prefixes as language groups.
- The registered element identifies the particular publisher or imprint. Publishers after due process are assigned a block of numbers up to 100. The publisher would then allocate the numbers to different titles as they publish. This may be up to 1-7 digits in length. A publisher with a large number of printed materials will have a shorter publisher identifier number to that of a smaller publisher. This group of numbers can also indicate the number of books published by a company.
- The publication element identifies the title and format of the work.
- The last number is the check digit which validates the rest of the number. It is an inbuilt error detecting system as it is easy to make mistakes in keying in a large string of numbers. Mathematically, based on the previous numbers, one can deduce if an ISBN is wrong (Friedlander, 2009). However, in Nigeria the National Library can most easily assist one to detect errors in ISBN.

Benefits of ISBN/ISSN

ISBN assists librarians, bookshops, publishers, book wholesalers, bibliographic services, internet retailers and readers to perform their duties more effectively and efficiently.

For publishers or booksellers, ISBN/ISSN is likely to help them to sell books and market journals. Books and journals that cannot be ordered and distributed using ISBN/ISSN and that are not listed in Book Catalogue listings may not sell as many copies as those that are listed. Libraries and readers order what they know exists. Even if they know that the book or a journal exists but that it does not have ISBN/ISSN or has a questionable ISBN/ISSN, other books and journals with similar content would be preferred over it. A book or a journal with ISBN/ISSN can be successfully marketed in Nigeria and other countries. All that is required is for the publisher or author to contact the ISBN/ISSN agencies in other countries to inquire about the conditions to be met for the inclusion of the book in their national catalogue for books in circulation (books in print). Furthermore, only books with ISBN can be listed by internet retailers such as Amazon. Thus, ISBN can be used to maximize sales. Also, ISBN/ISSNs can help libraries, book dealers and publishers to save time as they can be used to replace long bibliographic descriptions accurately with full differentiations of edition and format. The compilation and updating of book catalogues and bibliographies are made easier when publishers, authors and book distributors comply with ISBN/ISSN regulations in the country. The 13digit ISBN is machine-readable in the form of a EAN-13 bar code. This makes the processing of books fast and efficient for those with the machine-readable facilities (Kanel, 2018).

Libraries' interactions with ISBN/ISSN

Libraries use ISBN/ISSN numbers when they need to acquire new resources, to make orders and choose even from the same titles published by different publishing houses. Also, ISBN/ISSN identifiers become crucial when processing the new resources for accessibility and storage and in the services of libraries especially when patrons have to demand for books in a particular format. If a patron requests a specific format of an information resource from a reading device, but receives an incompatible format because the same ISBN was also assigned to the electronic publication of a work this would mark the library out as one that is unable to meet the needs of a patron though the needed resource is available (Stoneham, 2017). Lack of ISBN/ISSN or a counterfeit one on an information resource can lead to confusion in a computerized library system or may make it difficult for the resource to be easily discoverable.

ISBN/ISSN dilemma for libraries

As library collections expand and the availability of choices of titles in the same subject area widens, ISBN/ISSN identifiers assume critical importance. The librarian though spoilt for choice would always pick books and serials with ISBN/ISSN. However, it becomes interesting from here. Libraries are trusted information resource centres. It is globally acknowledged that libraries stock reliable information resources. Libraries cannot afford to be seen to have 'counterfeit' materials in their holdings. Nonetheless, most information resources now have the identifier numbers but how can a librarian determine if those numbers were arbitrarily given to an information resource or are the original/correct numbers issued by the National Library of Nigeria. This becomes very challenging when libraries have to acquire many information resources at the same time from different book vendors.

Furthermore, the rise of self-publishing has created room for sharp practices in the book industry. Individuals and organisations can write and get published without using the services

of publishers with well-grounded editors and proof-readers that provide quality checks for their publications. Most times, the face value would pass library acquisition policy criteria while the content value would be questionable. Do libraries choose such information resources even with the original ISBN/ISSN identifiers or do they stick to publications from known sources. This is a dilemma for libraries and librarians.

Matters become so much more compounded for online materials. Many databases and sites provide free resources. Librarians are encouraged to download and manage in the cloud or save to their servers. These books beef up online services that can be offered even through mobile devices. A popular site such as bookboon.com has books with ISBN numbers clearly shown in the advertorials. This assures one of the genuineness of the book and gives librarians the tools to verify the book for authenticity. However, books from mobile9.com and some from pdf.net do not show such details and the librarian is in a dilemma – can books without ISBN/ISSN be added to the library stock without such identifiers. Should the library overlook such and latch on to the availability of free books.

It is also challenging for librarians when the ISBN displayed on a downloaded book identifies it as a physical book but yet is accessed by the library as a digital material online because a physical book with all the information on it was uploaded online without acquiring another ISBN for the e-copy. Can the library use the available ISBN and process the resource and will that be ethical. It has also been observed that many blog posts in different fields are rich in information. Should libraries list them as resources when most do not have ISSN? These and many more are some of the dilemma face by libraries and librarians in their quest to make information services affordable and accessible to all.

The Way Forward

Libraries would find most useful, updated and current editions of Nigerian publishers' directory with their ISBN identification markers either as a standalone resource or embedded into the National Bibliography of Nigeria. This would be a quick reference that would provide libraries with the avenue to search out the authenticity of ISBN on books. However, it calls for collaboration between the National library, publishers and book distributors on many fronts. When big publishing houses are given blocks of ISBN, they need to regularly submit returns of the titles they have allocated such to, so that the National Library would keep on updating its records. Other library types in the country should also key in by alerting the National Library when they come across counterfeit ISBN/ISSN as they acquire new information resources. A phone line dedicated to this service can be made available so that libraries would know who to contact when facing such a situation.

The National Library can liaise with the IT Section; Nigerian Library Association to ensure that standard practices that would assist librarians when they face challenges about ISBN/ISSN issues in online environments are addressed promptly. More awareness needs to be created about the benefits of ISBN/ISSN. These identifiers create global publicity that the Nigerian book industry need to key into. The world has become a global village that keeps on shrinking in size. Placing books and other information resources published in Nigeria on global markets is needful especially in this era of global inclusiveness in development.

Again, are encouraged to work in collaboration with other stakeholders in the book industry, it is recommended that this effort be led by the National Library of Nigeria who can liaise with other National Libraries in Africa to have an *African Books in Print and other Media*. This

would bring a lot of positive exposure to the Nigerian book industry as the books and journals published in Nigeria and other African countries would be listed with ISBN/ISSN. From 1992-2006, an individual Hans M. Zell, had started the publication of *African Books in Print* in 1992. The latest edition was in 2006 and was edited by Lomer, C. 2006. The book covered only 45 out of the 54 African countries (Lomer, 2006). The National Library through the National Libraries Sections of African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) can spearhead a more encompassing publication covering information resources in all types of media with ISBN/ISSN published biennially by AfLIA. Consequently, while providing a forum where Nigerian book industry can showcase their prowess, the entire intellectual output of our continent can be covered effectively and efficiently.

CONCLUSION

The ISBN/ISSN as identifiers is beneficial to all in the book-chain. As the search and discovery tools for libraries move over to the cloud, standards such as ISBN/ISSN can add value without contradicting credentials or betraying core principles of libraries as trusted institutions. However, libraries still face challenges pertaining to these information tools. The National Library of Nigeria is strategically placed to drive collaboration with all stakeholders in the book-chain to explore and create avenues to overcome every challenge associated with the use of ISBN/ISSN.

References

- Friedlander, J. (2009). Self-publishing basics: how to read an ISBN. Retrieved March 3rd 2019 from <https://www.thebookdesigner.com/2009/09/self-publishing-basics-isbn/>
- International ISBN Agency (2012). What is an ISBN. Retrieved on March 19, 2019 from <https://www.isbn-international.org/content/what-isbn>
- Kanel S. (2018). From 10 Digits to 13: Why the longer ISBN? *Science Editor*, 31(2):44. Retrieved on March 29, 2019 from <https://www.Councilscienceeditors.org/wp-content/uploads/v31n2p044.pdf>
- Lomer, C. (Ed.) (2006). *African Books in Print*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Saur. Retrieved April 3rd, 2019, from <https://www.degruyter.com/view/product/2715>
- Reynolds, R. R. & Hanson, M (2017). Revising the ISSN Standard - the challenge of change. *The Serials Librarian*, 72(1-4):172-176.
- Stoneham, C. T. (2017) Running head: The International Standard Book Number: A success Story. Retrieved on 26th March, 2019 from <https://informationscience.unt.edu/sites/default/files/Stoneham-cara-Isbn-5208-2017.pdf>.