



# An Introduction to ONIX for Books

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## **What is ONIX?**

ONIX for Books is a standard data format that is used to transmit information about books and related digital products between publishers, distributors, wholesalers and retailers in the book trade. The ONIX message is written in XML (eXtensible Markup Language) and is generally sent over the internet using FTP (file transfer protocol) or by email attachment.

ONIX has been created to meet the need of the book industry to transmit rich bibliographic information about books and related digital products between participants in the supply chain in a standard way; and thereby to enable recipients and aggregators of that information to process and redistribute substantial volumes of information in a functionally identical manner. Allied to this, it provides a framework of structures, conventions and code lists that may be used within publishers' database systems to hold information about their products.

ONIX therefore has a dual function: of facilitating the transmission of complex information about books to data aggregators, customers and other trading partners; and by extension of forming a structure and language in which such information can be held in management systems and databases by publishers.

ONIX is an open standard, created and maintained by EDItEUR, the international book industry standards organisation, and is overseen by a steering committee representing the countries where it has been adopted. These currently include the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Korea, Russia and most of the West European and Scandinavian countries. Each of these countries provides input to continuing development through representative organisations: in the UK it is Book Industry Communication (BIC). There is no cost attached to using ONIX.

## **The benefits of ONIX**

ONIX came into being because retailers could not depend on the accuracy and timeliness of title information available from publishers. They needed reliable information, frequently updated, on which to base their store systems or online catalogues. ONIX provides the ability to retailers and data aggregators to process substantial volumes of information automatically without the delays that would be caused by the need for a variety of different automated programs or for human

intervention. From the publisher's point of view, the speed and accuracy with which information about available titles is moved down the supply chain is crucial to ensuring that sales are not lost.

The discipline that ONIX provides in terms of the structure and content of a product record has also been of great benefit to publishers. Where in the past information about your books may have been held in numerous separate systems and with no guarantee of consistency, ONIX has encouraged the establishment of a single definitive repository for information about your titles; and that includes not just a bibliographic summary but also detailed descriptive content, reviews, marketing plans and links to cover images and other marketing collateral.

Above all, though, the benefit of ONIX to publishers is that you are able to distribute a single identical 'product catalogue' file at the touch of a button: to data aggregators, customers, affiliate companies, and so on. Many publishers have also extended the potential of ONIX by using their records to create advance information sheets, catalogues and other promotional material based on the same core data.

### **Who uses ONIX?**

Almost all the major publishing groups in the UK now use ONIX to transmit their product information to Nielsen BookData, Bowker and BDS, as well as to other data partners.

In total, however, Nielsen BookData and Bowker in the UK are receiving ONIX from around 100 publishers. These figures represent a very high proportion of all the books published in the UK. Some publishers are also supplying ONIX feeds direct to wholesalers and retailers such as Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.com. Nielsen BookData and Bowker are now able to supply aggregated ONIX feeds to booksellers if required.

### **How to start with ONIX**

ONIX is by its nature a complex standard and may seem not for the faint-hearted. It is certainly possible to start from scratch and build a bespoke system using the ONIX guidelines and documentation which are published on the EDItEUR web site at <http://www.editeur.org>, but this will need resources and technicians experienced in XML. Many larger publishers have this kind of resource and have successfully implemented ONIX using their own in-house systems. An easier way, however, is to invest in an ONIX-compatible product management system. Almost all such systems now on the market are capable of producing ONIX files for transmission to Nielsen and Bowker and others. This solution provides a ready-made ONIX feed as well as a sophisticated publishing management system, though it should be borne in mind that whichever course is adopted it is necessary to prepare for the culture changes in your organisation that may

be required. Neither a good product management system nor ONIX itself can mend inadequate or conflicting data.

Publishing management systems suitable for publishers from the largest to the very small include Vista's Product Information Manager, the Virtuales Biblio and Biblio Lite software, Anko's Publishing Manager; and software supplied by Focus on Publishing, Trilogy and Avatar. BooksoniX is a web-based service which enables publishers to manage their title information online and supply ONIX feeds. Contact information for these suppliers is listed at the end of this paper.

### **Finding out about ONIX**

As mentioned above, the definitive source of information about ONIX is the EDItEUR web site (<http://www.editeur.org>). The home page lists three main links:

- To the latest releases (currently version 2.1 revision 2.0 and version 3.0). Here you will find links to documentation and DTD (Document Type Definition) and Schemas. These are designed to ensure that the ONIX you provide is correctly formed and valid. Your XML professionals will understand this!
- To the latest code lists. These are updated and published separately from revisions to the ONIX messages themselves, usually every six months or so, and reflect additional functionality requested by users.
- To an ONIX Supply Update format, intended to enable users to send partial records chiefly covering availability status, but this has not yet been implemented in the UK.

You will also find links to a number of other ONIX-branded messages which have been created to provide other functionality in other parts of the wider publishing industry, for example for journal publishers. As an ONIX for Books user you can ignore these. They share much of the character and structure of ONIX but their applications are not relevant to your needs.

### **Establishing an ONIX feed**

Once you have ONIX capability, there are several steps you need to take before you can start transmitting product information.

The first, as mentioned above, is to make sure your data is clean and accurate (this task should not be underestimated) and that you have established who in your organisation is responsible for it and who will be allowed editing rights. Establishing clear processes, roles and responsibilities

for data creation and maintenance is vital if your ONIX capability is to deliver any business benefit.

The second is to decide which elements of ONIX you are going to use and which you plan to send to data partners (they may not be the same if you are using the ONIX structure internally to support parts of your business) since ONIX attempts to address all product data requirements and not all of it will be appropriate to you. In the UK Nielsen BookData has published guidelines for a practical minimum set of elements which are expected in any ONIX feed and which can then be communicated in outbound feeds to booksellers and libraries. This can be found at [http://www.nielsenbookdata.co.uk/uploads/BookData%20ONIX%20Guidelines%20V3\\_2.pdf](http://www.nielsenbookdata.co.uk/uploads/BookData%20ONIX%20Guidelines%20V3_2.pdf).

The third step is to contact data partners and aggregators and tell them that you will have ONIX files available. They will then submit your files to a testing and validation routine until they are happy that your feeds can be ingested automatically into their systems. This may prove to be a laborious process but will be well rewarded once everything is agreed.

### **Updating ONIX records**

It is important that you continue to update your records whenever changes are made to the title information. This is liable to happen quite often during the publication process and will necessitate the establishment of a routine to send replacement records. You will need to discuss this with the recipient. Once a title is published, however, the bibliographic record generally remains unchanged apart from supply arrangements (typically, price, ordering source and availability status). Some publishers continue to communicate this information using ONIX but others arrange for their distributors to send it using quicker and more effective methods. This information is critical to customers' ability to buy your titles and, whatever process you adopt, close attention should be paid to its accuracy.

### **Accreditation**

BIC has set up an accreditation scheme which enables publishers to demonstrate their ability to supply accurate and timely information to the supply chain. Called the BIC Product Data Excellence Awards, these require the sending of a defined set of elements (consistent with the Nielsen guidelines mentioned above) within strict timing guidelines. The Gold and Silver level awards are only available to ONIX users. Full details of the scheme and those companies which hold the awards can be found at <http://www.bic.org.uk/9/Accreditation/>.

## **Which version of ONIX?**

ONIX was first published in May 2000 and has been subject to continuous development ever since. Version 1 and its subsequent revisions are no longer supported. Most users and systems suppliers have adopted version 2.0 or 2.1, which provide an adequate level of functionality for most purposes. In 2009, however, a new Version 3.0 has been released which, while carrying forward many parts of ONIX 2.1, is not backwards compatible with earlier versions. The new release has come about for two principal reasons: one is to remove elements in earlier versions which have for various reasons been ‘deprecated’; and the other is to facilitate the description of e-books and other forms of digital delivery.

Nielsen and Bowker expect to be able to receive the new version during the first half of 2010 and it is expected that systems suppliers will also be upgrading their products relatively soon. Although ONIX 2.1 will be supported by the major UK recipients for the foreseeable future, it is likely that newcomers to ONIX will want to comply with the new release from the outset, and documentation to allow development work to begin is now available.

## **Help with ONIX**

ONIX for Books is supported in the UK by BIC (Book Industry Communication) and its UK ONIX Group, which provides input to the international development of the standard. BIC also has direct access to the consultants who have been the chief architects of the standard since its creation. Since ONIX is an international standard with a global installed user base, however, many of the technical and practical issues which arise from implementation are resolved – either by ONIX consultants or by other users – through a free Yahoo group specifically devoted to its implementation. This can be accessed at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ONIX\\_IMPLEMENT/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ONIX_IMPLEMENT/) and you can join it by emailing [ONIX\\_IMPLEMENT-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:ONIX_IMPLEMENT-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

## Contacts and resources

### Book Industry Communication

39/41 North Road  
London N7 9DP  
T: 020 7607 9021  
E: [info@bic.org.uk](mailto:info@bic.org.uk)  
[www.bic.org.uk](http://www.bic.org.uk)

### Nielsen BookData

Midas House  
62 Goldsworth Road  
Woking  
Surrey GU21 6LQ  
T: 0870 777 8710  
E: [pubhelp.book@nielsen.com](mailto:pubhelp.book@nielsen.com)  
[www.nielsenbookdata.co.uk](http://www.nielsenbookdata.co.uk)

### Bowker (UK)

18-20 St Andrew's House  
St Andrew Street  
London EC4A 3AG  
T: 7832 1770  
E: [datasubmission@bowker.co.uk](mailto:datasubmission@bowker.co.uk)  
[www.bowker.co.uk](http://www.bowker.co.uk)

### Bibliographic Data Services (BDS)

Annandale House  
The Crichton  
Bankend Road  
Dumfries DG1 4TA  
T: 01387 702251  
E: [info@bibdsl.co.uk](mailto:info@bibdsl.co.uk)  
[www.bibliographicdata.com](http://www.bibliographicdata.com)

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### Anko Publishing Software

ArcLabs Research and Innovation Centre  
WIT West Campus  
Carriganore, Co Waterford  
Ireland  
T: 00 353 51 396764  
E: [info@anko.ie](mailto:info@anko.ie)  
[www.anko.ie](http://www.anko.ie)

### Avatar (Littlejohn)

1 Westferry Circus  
Canary Wharf  
London  
E14 4HD  
T: 020 7516 2200  
E: [avatar@clbf.com](mailto:avatar@clbf.com)  
[www.avatar-software.com](http://www.avatar-software.com)

### Booksonix

Maybrook House  
97 Godstone Road  
Caterham  
Surrey CR3 6RE  
T: 01883 343000  
E: [contact@booksonix.com](mailto:contact@booksonix.com)  
[www.booksonix.com](http://www.booksonix.com)

### Focus IT Services Limited

Unit B205 Faircharm Trading Estate  
8-12 Creekside  
London SE8 3DX  
T: 020 8469 4000  
E: [info@focusservices.co.uk](mailto:info@focusservices.co.uk)  
[www.focusservices.co.uk](http://www.focusservices.co.uk)

### Virtusales Publishing Solutions

Hove Technology Centre  
St Joseph's Close  
Hove  
East Sussex BN3 7ES  
T: 0845 458 4020  
E: [info@virtusales.com](mailto:info@virtusales.com)  
[www.virtusales.com](http://www.virtusales.com)

### Trilogy Enterprise Services

Aries House  
43 Selkirk Street  
Cheltenham  
Glos GL5 2HJ  
T: 01242 222132  
E: [publishing@trilogygrou.com](mailto:publishing@trilogygrou.com)  
[www.trilogygrou.com](http://www.trilogygrou.com)

### Publishing Technology (Vista)

Unipart House  
Garsington Road  
Oxford OX4 2GQ  
T: 01865 397800  
E: [vistasales@vistacomp.com](mailto:vistasales@vistacomp.com)  
[www.vistacomp.com](http://www.vistacomp.com)