

BIC BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR RECIPIENTS OF PRICE AND AVAILABILITY DATA



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General principle

Publishers remain at all times responsible for the quality and integrity of metadata and should take steps to provide authoritative and reliable information about their titles.

Where publishers delegate the provision of critical market-specific data - e.g. current stock availability, published price of existing stock - to third-party organizations (e.g. distributors, sales agents) recipients should respect and give priority to the acknowledged authoritative source.

Service levels

1. Data recipients should implement a standard service level for file processing

Recipients of price and availability data should process incoming files, in the order they were generated by data suppliers, and make them available to customer-facing systems normally within two business days of the receipt of those updates, but no longer than five business days.

The critical data points for updates are considered to be:

- On-sale date
- Locally-applicable price
- Territorial rights information
- Publication status and availability

It is acknowledged that the quality controls recipients place on incoming data might delay file processing beyond two business days, and where this occurs, recipients should notify suppliers of the delay.

Whilst data recipients reserve the right to refuse to process any file received they deem unacceptable, full communication of the reasons and any remedial action required should be communicated to the data supplier within two business days of the file receipt.

Price updates to products sold under agency terms should be processed in accordance with the specific terms of any agency pricing agreement that exists between the publisher of those products and the recipient of the data.

2. *Data recipients should normally use delta files instead of full files*

Routine updates should be sent only for those records where changes have been made, but the periodic supply of a complete full file may correct any errors in the recipient's database arising from changes to publication date, publishing status and market availability.

Data recipients should expect suppliers to supply updates for any title within their supply until the title becomes unavailable, where it should be retained for the purposes of inclusion in full files when requested.

Special attention must be paid to the message sequence, to guarantee that messages are processed in the correct order, and that no messages are skipped for any reason.

The receipt and processing duration of full files should be mutually agreed between data recipients and data suppliers (i.e. a file containing ALL of a data supplier's records for products that have been forthcoming or active at any point during the past year) but it is recommended that this should be no less than twice per year, and data recipients should normally complete processing of such feeds within ten business days after a file is received.

On completion of the processing of the full file, any delta files received within the full file processing period should be loaded in the sequence received, and routine loading of delta files should be resumed within ten business days.

3. *On request, data recipients should provide data suppliers with a clear statement of their practices for processing and displaying data*

This statement should include an indication of when data will be processed, as well as when any changes will be available in customer-facing systems. Recipients should include in this statement a note detailing their treatment of any trade or public announcement dates, some description of their pre-release sales practices (e.g. the recipient will begin accepting customer orders on new book products 60 days prior to a book's publication date), as well as details of other sources from which the recipient receives data on the publisher's books. The statement should highlight how data from those other sources might interact with data from the primary data supplier.

Products whose release dates are more than two years in the future are prone to significant changes to their data, especially data surrounding their publication dates and prices. Although it may be acceptable to record such data for the purposes of trade-facing systems, it is recommended that recipients of data should not display data on such products to the general public.

The statement should detail how a recipient treats products whose publication dates are postponed, or where a publication is indicated as having been abandoned prior to publication. Recipients should indicate under what conditions these products would stop being displayed on customer-facing systems and under what conditions such products might begin displaying again. (See paragraphs 13 and 14 below for specific guidelines on products whose release has been postponed indefinitely.) Recipients should also detail how they treat products that become temporarily unavailable. An indication should be made of how long a product is unavailable before the recipient cancels customer orders.

Communications

4. Data recipients should acknowledge that files have been received

When it is mutually agreed to do so, recipients of product data will acknowledge the receipt of incoming data files within two business days of a file's receipt. This acknowledgment may be active (such as an e-mail message) or passive (such as a file no longer being held on an ftp server). Recipients should inform the sender of parsing errors in any data supplied, and inform the sender of any message sequence errors (e.g. when a delta update is missing), within two business days of the error becoming apparent.

Recipients should expect prior notification from suppliers when a delta file is to be supplied where the volume of updates are regarded as outside the usual pattern of supply and should reserve the right to suspend file processing from the supplier until an agreed treatment of the file is resolved.

5. Data recipients should have a clearly defined system for contacting their organisation regarding product data

Recipients should provide suppliers with details of the appropriate person(s) in their organisations who are responsible for product data. Although recipients may elect to use 'generic' contact information (e.g. productdata@acmebooks.com), they are encouraged also to provide the names and contact information of their staff members who can troubleshoot any product data problems. Whenever it is feasible, a single primary contact person (who can communicate with other concerned parties at their company) should be named, with back-up contacts noted. Recipients should expect suppliers to provide suitable contact details in return.

6. *Data recipients should document what systems are updated from the data sent by data suppliers*

Recipients should document how suppliers' files and the individual data fields within them are used and what internal and customer-facing systems are updated by the data received from the suppliers. This information should be shared with data suppliers upon request.

Data aggregators and other re-distributors of product data are NOT required to document how their customers use product data; however, they should (to the extent that they are legally able to do so and insofar as it does not harm their business), upon request, provide a list of the companies to whom they are re-distributing data (and relevant technical contacts).

7. *Data recipients should provide mechanisms for suppliers to view or compare data*

Data recipients are encouraged to provide means for data suppliers to query the recipient's product database(s) for purposes of auditing the supplier's product data. This service may be provided by web services, secure web sites, ONIX or Excel reports pushed to suppliers, or any other secure means for data suppliers to get this information, and should be free of charge.

Special situations

8. *Data recipients should provide facilities for 'emergency' updates*

Data recipients should provide data suppliers with a clear statement of the procedures that data suppliers should follow to make 'emergency' updates to product data in the recipient's systems. Where agreed that the update is an emergency, any such updates should be made, and an acknowledgment of the outcome of the update should be provided to the data supplier, within one business day.

Such updates will often require the manual update of data and therefore it is incumbent on data recipients to allow subsequent batch updates to the data in question (see paragraph 11 below).

For the purposes of these guidelines, an 'emergency' update should be considered any correction or addition to the data on a product that, for example, could, if it is not acted upon, cause legal action to be brought against the data supplier or recipient, or cause significant harm to the reputation of a data supplier or recipient.

9. *Data recipients should have a clear policy for releasing embargoed title data*

Recipients should have the ability to prevent embargoed data from displaying on consumer-facing catalogue systems and other public web sites before the date and time set by the data supplier (as indicated in the ONIX public announcement date, for example). A recipient's policies and practices regarding embargoed data should be made available on request.

Sources of data and overwriting

10. *Recipients should, upon request of the data owner, identify the source of data from suppliers other than the data owner*

Data recipients (including data aggregators) are free to load product data from any source they wish to use. Data owners, however, should be informed by data recipients, upon request, of the source of a given piece of relevant product data to the extent that the recipients are legally able to do so under their agreements with other data suppliers.

Data recipients should store information on the source of their current product data for at least one year after the data is received; and that data should be made available to data owners, by request, on a case-by-case basis.

Data recipients should reply to such requests within five business days.

11. *Data recipients (at the request of a data supplier) should allow data owners' data feeds to overwrite data that was manually entered by the recipient*

As a general practice, data recipients are encouraged to establish policies that allow updates from a data owner to overwrite data the recipients have manually updated in their systems. In cases in which recipients have 'locked' data they have manually entered in order to prevent that data from being updated by subsequent data feeds, it is incumbent on the data recipient to work with the data supplier to allow newer, mutually agreed-upon data to update older data, even if that older data was entered to correct information previously sent by the data supplier.

Data suppliers must, therefore, commit to a practice of including any manual updates they have requested since their last update file in their next batch update file. Data recipients should provide an explanation for any case in which they do not allow a data supplier's update files to overwrite the recipient's existing data. Data recipients should provide such explanations within five business days after receiving a request for such an explanation.

Postponements and cancellations

12. *Publications whose release has been postponed indefinitely should be made active again upon the receipt of updated status data from the data supplier*

Data recipients should allow titles that have been postponed for normal reasons (i.e. titles that have been delayed due to legal considerations are NOT included in the definition of ‘postponed for normal reasons’) to be updated through a data supplier’s regular data feeds. It should not require manual intervention on a data supplier’s part to have such books reinstated on a recipient’s catalogue systems. Data recipients always have the final decision, however, on what products they wish to list in their catalogues. Data suppliers must, therefore, supply revised availability dates or status updates as soon as they are known.

Titles that have been postponed through use of the emergency update procedures (for example due to legal considerations) will require that data suppliers also notify recipients of reinstatement using the emergency update provisions detailed in paragraph 8.

13. *Publications that are postponed indefinitely or cancelled should not be displayed on consumer-facing catalogue systems*

Publications whose release has been cancelled or postponed indefinitely should, within one month after their release was postponed, be removed from public-facing websites. Trade-facing catalogue systems are specifically excluded from this practice: but such systems should indicate the correct status of any cancelled publication. Any outstanding consumer orders for such publications should be cancelled.

14. *Products that are marked with Notification Type of ‘Delete’ should be removed from sale on consumer-facing catalogue systems*

Product records are sometimes sent out in error, and should subsequently be removed from all recipients’ database systems. For ONIX data feeds, recipients should act upon the <NotificationType> tag where the tag indicates a Delete by either removing the record in its entirety, or removing it from both consumer-facing and ‘normal’ internal-facing display (while it might be retained in the system for ‘admin-level’ access only).

However, Delete messages should be strictly confined to cases where records are distributed in error, and should not be used in cases where sales of a product are not allowed through a particular outlet for any reason. Abandonments, postponements, changes in sales rights or outlet restrictions should never be treated as Deletes.

Legal obligations

15. *Products that are marked as being only for sale in certain markets or sales outlets should not be sold outside those markets or sales outlets*

Recipients are expected to respect all territorial and market-segment sales restrictions on new products. For example:

- A UK bookseller should not sell new copies of a US edition of a book if the publisher or distributor of that book does not have the right to publish or distribute that book in the UK.
- Booksellers should not list, display or sell new copies of books that are published for exclusive sale in other outlets.

16. *Publications that are withdrawn from sale for legal reasons should not be displayed on consumer-facing catalogue systems*

Recipients should remove publications that are described by their publishers as ‘withdrawn from sale for legal reasons’ from sale and display on consumer-facing catalogue systems as soon as possible. Trade-facing catalogue systems are specifically excluded from this practice; but such systems should indicate the correct status of any product withdrawn from sale. Any outstanding consumer orders for such publications should be cancelled.

Acknowledgments

This paper is based on the Best Practice Guidelines for Data Recipients published by the Book Industry Study Group in New York, and with BISG’s kind permission. Although some adaptation has taken place to take into account UK practice, the specific advice, such as timing parameters for the processing of incoming files, has been retained wherever possible.