

Libraries and the Book Trade: Electronic Dialogue or Discord?

As libraries, publishers, booksellers, distributors and library suppliers all become more dependent on computer-based systems there is a growing recognition of the benefits which would flow from the adoption of standards for data transmission between these groups. Although librarians should be now well acquainted with the usefulness of standard formats for the exchange of data through their familiarity with MARC records, the book trade generally, and the Australian book trade particularly, has not had the benefit of much experience with standards in this area. Progress in establishing common standards of use to both libraries and the book trade has been slow but there are encouraging developments in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.

BISAC, PUBNET and SANS

The United States is leading the way through the work of the Book Industry Systems Advisory Committee (BISAC) which was established in 1977 initially to encourage the use of ISBNs. Since then the Committee has been active in promoting the use of format standards, a standard telecommunications protocol and Standard Address Numbers (SANS). Two standard formats for purchase orders have been developed: a fixed record length format and a variable record length format. Nearly 100 organisations are currently using these formats in the United States.

The US book industry recently launched PUBNET, a data communications network linking publishers and booksellers. PUBNET is based on the use of ISBNs, SANS and the BISAC data format. The system will be tested in a pilot program involving 15 bookstores and six publishers before PUBNET is made available more widely.

BISAC has produced an Invoice Communications Format and a Title Status Format which provides for the communication of information about new titles and changes in the status of current titles such as availability, price and publication date. The Committee has also been active in promoting the use of SANS which are a discrete code for each address within or served by the book industry. The SAN is an American National Standard (ANSI Z39.43-1980). R.R. Bowker Co. are the national SAN agency for the United States and as such assign SANS to all relevant organisations.

Variety of formats in the UK

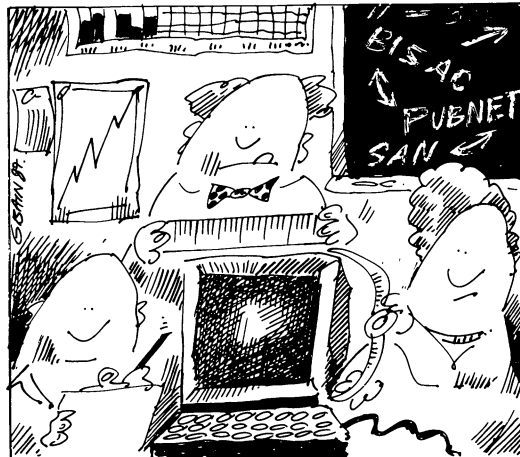
There are no common standards as yet in the United Kingdom but there is movement towards them. Late last year a seminar on electronic transmission standards for the book world was held in London. The seminar confirmed that a variety of formats are in use in the UK. The Trading Data Communications (Tradacoms) fixed length format is being used by many British companies outside the book trade. Many people, particularly librarians, see a need for a standard variable length format. As a result of the seminar a working party on Booktrade Electronic Data Interchange Standards (BEDIS) has been established.

In a separate development John Menzies Library Services has been working with vendors of automated library systems such as OLSI, GEAC and McDonnell Douglas to de-

velop a format designed specifically for transmission of orders, reports and invoices by electronic mail.

ABTC and the Australian scene

Most of these problems are now being addressed in Australia. The three essential ingredients for progress toward an ordered, rational development of interlinked computer based systems which will serve booksellers, publishers and librarians are: ISBNs, SANS and standard formats for the exchange of data.



The Australian Book Trade Committee (ABTC), comprising representatives of booksellers, librarians and publishers has consistently promoted the use of ISBNs and has been working toward the introduction of SANS and standard formats in Australia. The ABTC has sought to identify an appropriate organisation to act as an Australian SAN agency to take responsibility for the administration of SANS in Australia. It seems likely that the National Library of Australia will shortly agree to take on this role.

The ABTC has also established a working group to examine the question of standard formats for the exchange of data. The working group is monitoring overseas developments whilst evaluating the BISAC formats for purchase orders, invoices and title status for use within Australia. Discussions are also underway with the Overseas Telecommunications Commission to identify a standard format suitable for the transmission of data via the MINERVA system. Members of the working group would welcome any comments on these matters from interested parties. Comments may be directed to me C/Flinders University, Bedford Park, SA 5042 (08) 275 2435.

Bill Cations
Convenor/ LAA Representative ABTC



LAA Study Grant Awards for 1988

The Library Association of Australia will make funds available each year to support practising librarians wishing to undertake a study project. The number of awards in any year will depend upon the funds available and the estimated costs of proposals received.

The Association's intention in offering study grants is to provide an opportunity for librarians to undertake projects they would otherwise be unable to do because of the time and costs involved.

Conditions

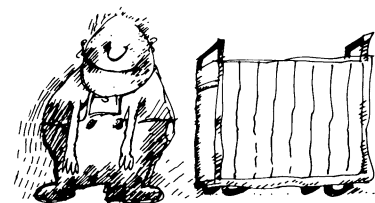
- Available to a practising librarian in a supervisory or middle management position, with a minimum of three years' experience in library and information work.
- For the purpose of undertaking a study program on a selected library/information issue or problem of present and future relevance to the development and improvement of library and information services in Australia.
- The study may include opportunity for preliminary work, local or overseas visits/consultations, attachment to another organisation, preparation of a publication, further educational qualification.
- The study is to culminate in a written report in two parts, provided to the Association. The first is a chronological summary of the project components together with a statement of the value derived, provided within one month of the project's culmination. The second component is a comprehensive report provided within four months of the project's culmination.
- It is expected that the study project will provide an opportunity for self development as well as benefit to the successful applicant's institution and present position.
- The award is not intended to be used to fund research projects.
- Applicants should complete an application form which gives:
 - A brief description of the study project, including aims; benefits to the individual and to the institution; possible outcomes of a project.
 - Identification and reasons for choice of particular institutions, persons or activities.
 - Itinerary, timetable, travel/accommodation costs involved.
 - Details of any other funds or facilities being provided for the study project.
 - A curriculum vitae.
 - 2 referees' reports.
- Applicants must be financial members of the LAA.

Application forms are available from LAA House and applications for an award in 1988 should reach the Assistant Director, LAA House, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo NSW 2007 by 1 September 1987.

KILNERS

Moving? Call in the experts

- Libraries
- Households
- Offices
- Removals
- Storage



KILNERS COMMERCIAL CARRIERS
28 Richland Street, Kingsgrove NSW 2208 Tel. 502 1611