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## **Improving the Information Supply Chain with Standard Institutional Identifiers**

NISO's Institutional Identifier (I2) working group is determined to make the information supply chain work better. The I2 initiative is a follow-on to a pilot study done for the journal supply chain (available at: <http://www.journalsupplychain.com/>). The study, which focused on the ordering and delivery of e-journals, concluded that workflows could operate more efficiently if all parties (libraries, subscription agents and publishers) used the same identifier for the same institution. A prime example of the problem is where a publisher receives orders for online journals for the same institution from multiple sources (e.g. one or more agents and even one or more departments in the university. Without a standard identifier it is difficult (and expensive) to make sure all orders are assigned to the correct online account of the institution – failing to do so can result in loss of access, frustration and the added expense to diagnose and correct. The problem of institution identification is real and the savings from correcting this problem could be significant. The problem is not just limited to journal subscriptions. Another example would be a cross-institutional repository, such as an international repository of digital theses and dissertations. The I2 would enable a collaborative repository to successfully manage resource deposits by participating institutions and to associate theses and dissertations with the correct owning institution, which is often complicated by the fact that professional schools (law, medical, public health, etc.) may issue dissertations separately from the parent institution. A further example would be interlibrary loan, which remains a labor intensive process because of the difficulty in authoritatively identifying a potential lender, in part because many libraries have multiple identifier codes and in part because different departments or branches in a library lend different materials.

Over the past 2 years NISO's working group has been looking at different business scenarios where a standard institutional identifier would prove effective. They have also been looking into the infrastructure that would be needed to implement a standard institutional identifier in a way that would be scalable and successful. The work included looking at other standards that might offer a solution. This is where the International Standard Name Identifier (or ISNI) comes in.

### **ISNI offers a solution**

ISNI is a standard that has received strong support from organizations in the publishing and information access arenas that want to have a standard identifier for people (such as authors, characters, etc.) and the institutions they are affiliated with (publishers, universities, etc.). ISNI is an approved ISO standard, currently in publication, and the infrastructure to implement and manage the identifiers is being built by the ISNI International Agency (ISNI IA) – a not-for-profit that has been established for this purpose.

ISNI has the potential to be the solution for identification of institutions within the information supply chain. First, the notion of identifying institutions is within the ISNI mandate; and second, the supporting infrastructure is being put in place. But there is more that makes ISNI appealing - their approach and their business model is as well.

ISNI IA is establishing an infrastructure that includes a central registry that is responsible for assigning and managing the identifiers for the entities being identified. Real time systems will be used to allow business partners (Registration Agencies) to obtain a new identifier or look up an existing one. For example, a subscription agent could become a registration agency so that as they take on a new customer, their system would send an automated request to the ISNI central registry asking for an identifier for the new customer. The central registry checks to see if the institution is already registered and would return the existing identifier if it exists; or if not, it would add the institution to the registry and return the newly assigned identifier. This model allows many organizations to be registration agencies and is designed to allow the identifiers to be obtained at point-of-need.

The business model is such that there is a nominal cost for an identifier to be assigned, but once assigned, there is no restriction on how the identifier can be used or shared.

### **Making institution identifiers a reality**

NISO's I2 working group has committed to working with ISNI IA to ensure that the ISNI infrastructure effectively meets the needs for the identification of institutions within the information supply chain. But the success of any such initiative comes with successful adoption and this is where community engagement is needed – particularly among organizations that provide services to libraries.

Organizations within the information supply chain that agree that such a standard identifier would help their business run more smoothly are encouraged to consider becoming a registration agency for ISNI. If being a registration agency is not appropriate at this time, they can still begin preparing their systems so that they can capture and use a standard identifier for the institutions they work with – the ISNI business model encourages the diffusion and use of ISNIs once they have been established; therefore, it is quite reasonable to expect these identifiers to be used by organizations who are not formal registration agencies. The basic requirement is being able to handle an identifier of 16 decimal digits (the last is a check digit).

More information on the NISO I2 initiative is available at <http://www.niso.org/workrooms/i2> or by contacting committee co-chairs, Grace Agnew ([gagnew@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:gagnew@rci.rutgers.edu)) or Oliver Pesch ([opesch@ebSCO.com](mailto:opesch@ebSCO.com)).