

THE FUTURE OF ICEDIS

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Paper presented at the ASA seminar 'The Internet: opportunities for agents and publishers', London, February 1998

This paper traces the history of electronic communication between subscription agents and publishers, the setting up of standards, and present and future developments.



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Introduction

Most publishers have made substantial investments in the recruitment of staff and procedures to allow the electronic delivery of their journals.

The staff who create these products, and place them in the 'electronic warehouse', are costly and far more expensive than the warehouse operatives who are required to despatch the printed products.

However, publishers and agents are willing to spend a great deal of money in the electronic arena without knowing what, if any, return they will see for their money in this century, or the early part of the next century. Paper products, the subscription model and the renewal season will be around for a long time.

But I wonder just how many have invested in the backroom support services, which are essential for the positive cash-flow of companies and distribution of their products, be it electronic or paper. Or do publishers create products especially for their 'electronic warehouses' without reference to the 'back room guys'? By backroom services I mean:

efficient:

- cash collection and pricing procedures;
- order fulfilment procedures;
- customer services procedures;
- marketing reports/information; and
- supply of information to the warehouse, paper or electronic.

Librarians usually choose to use the services of an agent for the placing of their journal subscriptions. This tradition appears to remain even with the invention of the Internet. Journal orders, claims, pricing queries etc., from the librarians are, therefore, first placed with the agent. The agent, in turn, sorts through the paperwork which is then transferred to the relevant publisher. Consequently, a paper mountain is created and continues to grow in vast quantities. The same piece of paper is being handled by three different organisations and who knows how many different people within each organisation.

ICEDIS recognised many years ago a need to improve the flow of business information and to reduce the overheads of processing transactions within our industry.

Background of ICEDIS

Founded approximately 14 years ago, ICEDIS is The International Committee for Electronic Data Interchange in Serials.

What is Electronic Data Interchange?

(abbreviated by the folks in the 'know' as EDI).

This is where one computer, based anywhere in the world, may automatically transmit data to another computer without manual intervention, using, for example, the Internet or value-added networks, (known as VANS). The Internet is the preferred mode of transportation for ICEDIS members.

There four main objectives/aims of ICEDIS:

1. for publishers, agents and other intermediaries to work together to exploit EDI to enable the growth of cost-effective and value-added services within the STM industry as a whole;
2. to work in close liaison with other standard bodies, representing our industry whilst at the same time maintaining our independence;
3. to be pro-active in the specification, development, testing and implementation of agreed EDI standards, thus ensuring the acceptance of such standards within the whole industry;
4. to be the recognised international body for the above three aims.

In other words, the committee works to ensure that the backroom services are not ignored, and that they function in a cost-effective way which will support the growth and changes within the industry.

ICEDIS membership

There are two types of membership of ICEDIS - full and corresponding. The Committee is self-funding. The full members, apart from paying an annual subscription, must also be prepared to send representatives to both the business and technical meetings. They must also be prepared to

work together to develop, test and implement trading standards that will benefit the STM industry as a whole.

The full membership companies are:

Elsevier	publisher
Kluwer	publisher
Taylor and Francis	publisher
Royal Society of Chemistry (represented by Turpin Distribution)	publisher
Dawson/Faxon Group	agent
EBSCO	agent
Blackwells/Readmore Group	agent
Swets	agent
Academic Press	publisher
Harcourt Brace	publisher
John Wiley & Son	publisher
Springer Verlag	publisher

The corresponding members, who recognise the need for the committee and support the work of ICEDIS are:

ADIS International	Australia
Akateeminen Kirjakauppa	Finland
R R Bowker	USA
CAB International	UK
Carfax Publishing	UK
DA Information Services	Australia
East View Publications	USA
George Thieme Verlag	Germany
Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers	USA
Institute of Physics	UK
Karger AG	Switzerland
Kinokuniya Publication Services	Japan
Maruzen Co Ltd	Japan
Munksgaard International Publishers	Denmark
RoweCom	USA
Scandinavian University Press	Norway
Teldan Information Systems	Israel
University Microfilms	USA
ASSOC Corporation	Japan
Vista Computer Services	UK
Wennergren-Williams Information Services	Sweden
W H Everett & Sons Ltd	UK

As you see a truly international body, with world-wide support.

Corresponding members must also pay an annual subscription fee, which is half that of the full membership, but are not required to send representatives to any of the meetings. A full set of business minutes is sent to each corresponding member to keep them abreast of developments.

ICEDIS concentrates on the flow of information between agent and publisher. The flow of information between librarian and agent is handled by another committee called SISAC (Serials Industry Systems Advisory Committee). This committee is based in the USA. These two committees send representatives to each others' meetings to ensure that the work carried out in each sector of the STM industry is compatible.

What did ICEDIS achieve before the Internet?

One of our biggest successes was the introduction of the transfer of subscription renewals by magnetic tape.

Priority was given to dealing with the paper mountain which had grown up round our industry especially during the renewal processing season, which takes place in November/December of each year. It was obvious that there was a duplication of effort in the re-keying by publishers of orders received from the agents. It was also obvious that this re-keying of orders by the publishers was open to error.

The production of vast volumes of paper output from the agents to the publishers was also very time-consuming and, therefore, expensive. In many instances, librarians have already paid and placed their orders with the agents weeks before these orders are redirected to the publishers. In order to avoid a break in service between one subscription year and the next, publishers must, in a very short time during the months of November and December, process anything between eighty and ninety percent of their journal subscriptions serviced through the agents.

Most journal publishers will be using the Magnetic Tape Standard. This standard, although not true EDI, transformed much of the industry during the renewal season in the late 80s and early 90s, from companies that were swamped in paper and inaccurate keyboarding, to companies that supplied libraries with a faster and more efficient service. This standard supports the backroom services by allowing a speedier update and more efficient order fulfilment procedures.

Other ICEDIS Standards

Despatch data

Why did ICEDIS choose this as their next project after the introduction of magnetic tape?

A survey conducted by one of the ICEDIS publishers showed that up to 65% of their claims/queries received within their customer services department could be classified as premature claims. These are pieces of paper concerning non-receipt of a journal issue. The issue had either not yet been published, or the librarian had not allowed sufficient time for receipt.

Publishers can now supply despatch dates of each journal issue, electronically to the agent, using the Internet. The production of this information by the publishers, and its use by the agents, significantly reduces the number of premature claims received within a publisher services department. It also allows for a speedier response by the agents to the queries that they receive. How often the publisher transmits this data to the agent is up to individual agreements between trading partners. Some publishers also include their despatch information on their Web site to again give assistance to the librarian.

Claims and claims responses

If 65% of the claims received are premature, there is still a substantial number of paper queries to be dealt with.

Standards were created to cope with the claims that escaped the Despatch Data Standard. Some of these queries can be dealt with by supplying a standard electronic response. Others may need further investigation. Therefore, these may be down-loaded from the PC screens, investigated and a more detailed response given via e-mail.

Subscription rates

Pressure from agents to supply publication programmes and prices in July has grown over the past few years. By developing the standard for sales information and price lists, to be transferred electronically, it is hoped to release this pressure on agents and publishers. Agents no longer need to re-key publisher data during the summer months.

This standard became available for use at the beginning of the 1997 renewal season. It was a

difficult standard to achieve because of the many different pricing structures and policies that publishers operate. Not many companies introduced this last year. I think most of the development carried out by companies last year was concentrated on the introduction of electronic services and products.

Orders and invoicing

This standard is for orders that are not included in the bulk renewals by magnetic tape. This will allow agents to submit orders electronically using the Internet protocol. This standard will be used for late renewals or for orders that require invoicing or the supply of a quotation first. This area is still in test and awaiting acceptance by our Committee.

Future work of ICEDIS

Migration of standards

When ICEDIS was 'born' it was decided to use the American standard ANSI X12. EDIFACT the international standard, had not then defined sufficient transaction sets for the Committee to adopt. However, there has been much progress during the past few years within the EDIFACT transaction sets and ICEDIS are now committed to migrating all their existing standards to this International standard, and no new transactions will be developed in ANSI X12. This task in itself is a considerable undertaking.

Consolidation addresses

For the 1999 renewal season, the magnetic tape standard will be adapted to include the final address for those librarians that use the consolidation services offered by agents. This is where the agent asks the publisher to deliver the product to the agents' own address and not direct to the library. The agent will consolidate all publishers' products and allow for a 'check-in service' on behalf of the library and deliver one consignment of multi publishers products.

In the past, the delivery address on the tape would be that of the agent only. This new enhancement will allow the agent to include the final destination of the product, thus allowing more accurate sales and marketing information.

Apart from the importance of the marketing information, it is also a crucial enhancement, as many publishers link the paper subscription to that of an electronic subscription. Therefore, publishers need to know which university/library is receiving the paper edition to allow access to the electronic version.

Often access to the electronic product is by IP address. What is an IP address? I am told that a good way to describe this is 'each PC holds its own post code'. Therefore, each PC has its own identity. ICEDIS are also looking at this whole area of IP addresses and whether or not to create or enhance the order standard yet again for the transfer of this information.

Also during the year 1998 ICEDIS will be looking at transferring the traditional information at present carried on magnetic tape to a new medium using again the Internet protocol. It is felt that magnetic tape is old technology. However, many of us feel that it has worked well, therefore, don't mend it if it doesn't need fixing!

The year 2000

There is a working party within ICEDIS to ensure that any standards, especially the bulk transfer of orders, will meet the requirements necessary for the update of renewals.

The Euro

Again, there is a working party within ICEDIS looking at the effect it may have on our industry if we must trade within Europe using the Euro.

Reports are to be presented to our business meeting in April 1998 on the above two items. These reports are being prepared by EBSCO and Harrassovitz respectively.

The future of ICEDIS

Development and the introduction of these standards has not been as we would like. As with many committees, progress has been slow. In the past, ICEDIS has relied on all the work to be undertaken by the companies within the full membership category. These people also have their own jobs to carry out. Last year many heads of companies decided to use their technical staff in the development of electronic products. ICEDIS standards were not seen as a priority.

Consequently, ICEDIS decided to give assistance to the technical team by working with outside organisations to help speed up the development and migration of our standards.

These outside organisations, such as EDItEUR and Tele-ordering, will be involved in any future mapping and testing of transactions.

We also decided to give further support to the business team. ICEDIS has employed a part-time Business Administrator, Michele Benjamin, to assist in the organisation of projects and any testing, etc. that the Committee may have to carry out. Michele, will also create a publicity programme to ensure that publishers are aware of the work of ICEDIS, and encourage those who have not already done so to adopt the ICEDIS standards.

Most agents employ the standards of ICEDIS, but not all publishers do. Agents have many publishers to deal with. The overheads and maintenance would be reduced if all publishers were to use the same standards.

The measure of success of our committee is to see our standards being adopted internationally. As mentioned earlier, many publishers are investing in the electronic journal, publishers should also invest in industry standards which will assist in the running their of order fulfilment and customer services departments.

Servicing of subscriptions is going to be here for some time, be it for paper or electronic products, therefore we must all ensure that we have the best working practices in place to allow us to invest in the future.

We hope that, by the changes we have made to our committee, before the end of the century, most publishers will be using ICEDIS standards and the Internet to transport the business information.

Should anyone wish further information on ICEDIS, please direct your enquiries to our new Chair, Jan Peterson of Information Quest, 5838 Edison Place, Carlsbad, CA 92008-6596, USA.
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