

Thoughts on the Standardisation of Information on Journals Covers

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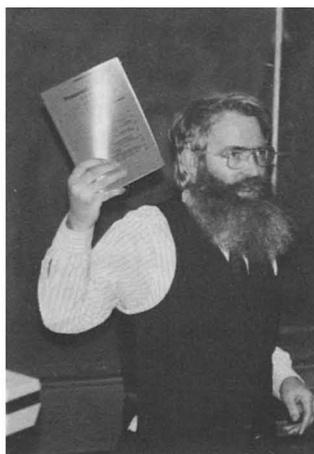
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This paper was written following a session on this topic held at the 12th Annual Conference of the UKSG. By its nature the talk as given was preliminary. It was a framework in which it was hoped that there would be interaction, particularly between publishers and serials librarians. I have included the message of this interaction as perceived by me and indicated where there seemed to be a consensus and I have also mentioned where further specific information is being made available to me. Nevertheless this must be regarded still as a draft. Any attempt at standardisation must be made by appropriate representative bodies and it is hoped that they will pronounce where appropriate.

Readers are invited to send to the Editor any additional views and comments they may have relating to "information on journal covers" and these will be published in future issues of Serials.

Introduction

The purpose of the UKSG is to bring together all parts of the processing agencies who ensure that the information set out by those who write papers and articles in serials reach the reader, the end user; they have been very successful in their aim. However, the fact that such an organisation is necessary, not really duplicated for books, testifies to the existence of something of a gap between what publishers do and what librarians need or want. Perhaps the gap is in part due to



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the fact that the group who characteristically bring publishers and librarians together, the subscription agents, do not actually themselves handle journals - unlike booksellers who are very aware about what information is presented on or in books and are vocal about it. Be that as it may, this paper is an attempt to approach a discrete area of problems in what is hoped is a practical and positive way.

For publishers there are factors involved other than the consideration of the needs of librarians. Journals new and old are fighting to gain subscribers in a competitive market place. Most libraries do not take on new serials without cancelling old ones. Modern methods of display and the use of sample copies as selling tools place a premium on the design of journal covers to achieve impact. Publishers want the end user to be motivated to pick up the journal, to look inside and decide that this is something he must ask his library to get or that this is an appropriate medium for his own communication.

The editors of journals also want their journals to look right. Obviously they are part of the same community as the end user but they do not necessarily in practice have the needs of their readers in mind and certainly they are often very resistant (especially when gathered together in learned bodies) to the needs of librarians.

A good example of the problems publishers have in this area is presented by cover design. Prospective journal editors often have strong views on what "their" journal should look like; either like other recent successful journals which in many fields means a new micrograph on the front cover of each issue or like nothing previously done, eg: a symbolic abstract shape or art object. Publishers' designers, where they exist, view the cover as an art object too. They see it as a painting or design of rectangular shape without spine or back or lettering. This can and does cause difficulties.

In what follows I have taken the main components of the information which appears on the outside

of journals, front cover, spine and back cover and tried to work out what, from the librarians' point of view, should go where.

The Title

It was agreed that the title should not be any longer than necessary but that it should be really descriptive of the content of the journal. Neologisms are not popular though they seem to be perennially of interest to inventive editors and publishers. It is not a good idea to go for a one word or very short title followed by an ample subtitle which does not get picked up by retrieval services. Obviously there are certain cases where there is an American and a British version of the same journal (to give one example) where some sort of subtitle is not only advisable but necessary.

There was an especial loathing of acronyms. They seem trendy to some. Are they the new title or an abbreviation which is part of and supplements the old title? Either way they confuse and should be avoided. On this point one delegate offered to send correspondence with a US journal, where all these issues are raised pointedly.

If there is a change of title, which publishers emphasize is sometimes necessary though not to be undertaken lightly, the old title should be carried on the outside following the new title for at least a year or for two years if the journal has a low frequency and of course inside for considerably longer. Certainly there should never be a change of title in the middle of a year/volume.

It is a publisher's view which is of interest to the end user that the title must be clearly seen against its background. Cluttered covers mask the title and weak colours against the inevitable micrograph result in the message being lost. Librarians who do not use the Roman alphabet with ease, find kinky lettering difficult to work out; the more standard typefaces may be boring to some but they mean successful communication to most. In addition, all the words in the title must be more or less the same size so that the less essential words, e.g. **international journal**, do not appear so inconspicuous that the really important word, e.g. **CANCER**, is seen as the sole title.

The consensus is that it is really helpful that the title should be in the top section of the cover but not so high up that it cuts out the ISSN - on which more anon ...

Finally on titles, whatever the title is, it must be the same on the front cover, on the back cover, on the contents page and on the spine as well as inside : the same and complete.

Volume/Issue

It is now generally accepted that a volume represents what is bindable so the old custom in some humanities circles of calling each issue a volume is not sensible nor is a volume of twelve fat issues covering a year. It does not matter if the constituent parts of the volume are called issues, numbers or parts so long as there is consistency; but it does matter that if the issue (for example) is divided into parts, the information is not hidden away inside. It is a great help (but rarely done) if the last part of a volume can have an indication on the cover by some such wording as "This is the last part/issue of volume 18". *The Journal of Chromatography* was praised here.

Obviously the year should be set down alongside the volume and issue but there was no consensus about the month of issue. All publishers have journals that may have a schedule but which run late for long periods. There is a strong argument that in such regrettable cases it is better not to give a month rather than to give one that is clearly going to be unrealistic. It is generally agreed that names of seasons are misleading, e.g. in the Southern hemisphere, and should be avoided.

There was no discussion about the location of this information on the cover. Would it be foolish to assume that in this case location is relatively unimportant?

Identifiers

The most important is the International Standard Serial Number. The standard instructions on procedures for obtaining and using ISSNs makes it clear that the ISSN should preferably be printed on the top right hand corner of the [front] cover. There was a consensus among librarians present that this is important to them and significantly eases their task of accessing in many cases. It has been put to me by a librarian from outside the UK that in libraries where low level staff without much command of English are used for accessing, it is difficult, if the ISSN is an identifier used, for such staff to locate the ISSN on a crowded journal cover. Publishers are curiously reluctant to follow this clear expression of preference : the ISSN does not fit pleasantly into many designs and the end-user or editor sees it as an irrelevance. Education is needed here.

There are still some publishers who do not realise that when the title is changed a new ISSN should be obtained.

There is some evidence that the CODEN (as assigned by the International Coden Service of Chemical Abstracts) have largely been

superseded by the ISSN and they are certainly not popular among library theoreticians. However, it is the case that some librarians use the CODEN for accession purposes in an automated context and there could therefore be a reason for at least continuing with the use of this identifier where it is already in use.

For some years there has been pressure from the International Serials Data System for the use of barcodes following on from the fairly widespread introduction of the barcode on the back cover of books by book publishers and benefiting from the experience of these publishers. The barcode would use the ISSN or presumably an issue identifier expanding it and the place of the ISSN would presumably be naturally located under the barcode for those who are working manually. One publisher (Kluwer) has taken the step of introducing barcodes on the back cover of all its journals as an experiment and they seek feedback. Librarians present at this meeting showed noticeable lack of enthusiasm, but it seems to me that there is every likelihood that barcodes will come in and provide a labour-saving way of accessing journals in the long term. From the point of view of the publisher the demands of barcode technology involve certain colours only being used on journal covers and the objects themselves are intrinsically unattractive and will not go down well with the academic communities. Kluwer are putting the codes on the back of their journals more or less in the place where barcodes on books are placed, but I understand that the instructions suggest placing the code on the front of the journal in one of the bottom corners. I await the information which is handed out by the relevant agency.

Contents

The placing of the contents of journals on the outside cover is a significant topic which there was not time to cover fully. The general opinion was that it is useful to have the contents on the back. It is better to have contents on the back than on the front because many librarians attach circulation slips etc. to the front but there was at least one dissident voice which practised a reverse arrangement. The consensus was that it is important that the contents should be in a form which can be photocopied for circulation, which means that there is some restriction on colours used and also means that there should be enough information above and below the contents to indicate not only the journal but the volume and issue and also the publisher. There was also general agreement that where the contents were listed on the outside cover, this did not cut out the

need for a contents page inside because (and here the discussion fell outside the scope of the paper) the practices of publishers in their supply of index and volume contents left much to be desired and could not be relied upon. The point was also made that where the contents overflowed from the back, the location of the overflow section should be clearly indicated at the foot of the cover.

Librarians should note in addition that those journals that attract advertising in any serious way, are tempted to utilise the back cover as a prime space. The income involved must make it difficult for the publisher to consider the needs of either librarian or end user as much as would be appropriate in an ideal world.

Spine

Again discussion was cut short through lack of time. It is my perception that publishers are on the whole rather more consistent in their supply of the information that is needed on the spine than they appear to be in their choice of what goes on the cover. Lettering etc. must run from top to bottom and there are some publishers who do not follow this basic rule. The information required (journal title, volume number, issue number, year and publisher, etc.) does usually seem to be given.

Additional Copy

A glance at the covers of journals reveals that publishers do put other information on. Clearly it must be expected that they will advertise their names on the front cover though surprisingly there are some who are reticent, but from the point of view of the librarian there is no need for full addresses or long lists of offices which belong inside if anywhere. There was a consensus that there certainly is no need for long lists of editorial board members on a front cover and it could be surmised, though this did not explicitly come up, that a lack of clutter is viewed as an advantage.

There was no discussion related to format or the type of material used in the making of the case, except that one speaker from the floor regretted the preference by some publishers to use dark glossy material which cannot be written on.

Summary

It must be worthwhile for publishers to listen and for librarians to explain. There is no need for the providers of information at one stage to make the life of those who pass it on further more difficult than it needs to be and minor irritations and inconveniences lead to plenty of person hours being taken up in the long run with trivia.