

The new edition of the ISSN international standard makes life easier for the serials community

A new edition of the ISO international standard on the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) – ISO 3297: 2007 – has just been published.

The main new feature is the Linking ISSN or ISSN-L. The ISSN-L is a mechanism which enables collocation or linking among different media versions of a continuing resource. While keeping a separate ISSN assigned to each of the various media versions of a title, it will be possible to designate one single ISSN-L for all those media versions of the title.

Among other improvements, the ISSN-L will facilitate search, retrieval and delivery across all media versions for services like OpenURL, library catalogues, search engines, or knowledge bases.

ISSN-L should be available from the latter part of 2008, free of charge (www.issn.org).



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Introduction

On 1 September 2007, the fourth edition of the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) – ISO 3297 – was published after three years of intensive work led by an active working group representing all communities interested in the production, management, distribution of and access to serials and other continuing resources. The group included representatives of the popular press, STM publishers, subscription agents, periodical distributors, OpenURL implementers, representatives of ISBN, DOI (digital object identifier) and CrossRef, librarians, and others. This large professional representation of users and producers of ISSNs has been of great value, enabling the group to answer questions such as ‘what should ISSN identify?’ or ‘what are the needs of ISSN users?’

What were the main issues, and what is new in the new standard?

In addition to a clarification of the scope for ISSN assignment, the main issue and main new feature in the new version of the standard regards the assignment policy – or ‘what should be identified by an ISSN’.

The various communities of ISSN users expressed two conflicting needs: the need to identify at the product (or manifestation) level, for instance to identify separately the print and the electronic versions of the same title; and the need to group, or collocate those various medium-specific versions. ISSN users also expressed the wish to have those two needs met by the ISSN system, without any change in the length or structure of the ISSN itself.

The hard work included surveying various communities about possible options, after which the working group designed a solution which is based on two components: confirmation of the existing assignment policy and a new function: the Linking ISSN or ISSN-L.

The new standard re-affirms that separate ISSNs are assigned to the various media versions of a continuing resource, for manifestation, identification and product management purposes.

It also defines the ISSN-L to meet the need for a collocating or grouping mechanism that will bring together various medium versions, and thus facilitate content management. The ISSN-L is a new function for the ISSN system. It is not a new number. It does not change the length or the structure of the ISSN number. The ISSN-L will add support to the main functions of the ISSN Network, which are the identification of continuing resources whatever the medium of publication or production, the country of publication, the language or the frequency, and the management and distribution of the ISSN Register, the database established by the ISSN Network.

As defined in Section 3.9 of the new standard and further specified in Section 7, for a given title, the ISSN-L is one of the existing ISSNs assigned to the various media versions of the resource¹, which will be explicitly designated to function also as a collocating tool.

Which is the ISSN-L?

The first ISSN assigned, in the ISSN Register, to any medium version of a continuing resource shall be designated by default to function also as the ISSN-L and shall apply to all other media versions of that resource identified in the ISSN Register. When an ISSN is first assigned to a continuing resource, an ISSN-L will be designated for that resource, even if the continuing resource is issued in only one medium. Only one ISSN-L will be designated regardless of how many different medium versions of a continuing resource exist.

MARC formats

ISSN-L is a separate, specific data element, and will be identified in MARC formats by a specific subfield in a tag used already to record the ISSN. In

MARC 21, ISSN-L will be included in the subfield "l" of the field 022 (ISSN). A separate subfield ("m") has also been defined in MARC 21 for cancelled ISSN-L. In UNIMARC, ISSN-L will be included in subfield "f" of field 011 (ISSN).

Who will assign the ISSN-L?

The designation of the ISSN-L shall be carried out either by a centre of the ISSN Network or will be performed automatically as records are added to the ISSN Register by the ISSN International Centre in Paris. The first step towards implementation of the ISSN-L is the retrospective designation of ISSN-Ls, which will be performed on the entire ISSN Register by the ISSN International Centre. This processing will be preceded by a check for the presence of accurate 776 links in records. The following situations have been reported for appropriate corrections to ISSN National Centres:

- absence of 776 links between records which should probably be linked
- absence of reciprocal 776 links
- inconsistent medium codes (tag 007).

Once the retrospective designation process is completed, ongoing designation of ISSN-Ls will be done either by the ISSN International Centre, or by those ISSN National Centres that are able and willing to undertake this responsibility. A survey of the National Centres will be made to determine which National Centres wish to undertake this responsibility. Records produced by these National Centres and sent to the ISSN Register should already include the ISSN-L. In those cases where records entering the ISSN Register lack ISSN-L, the ISSN-L will be supplied automatically by the International Centre based on 776 links present in the records.

Some examples are given below:

Continuing resource in only one medium form:

ISSN-L 1748-7188

Online resource: Algorithms for Molecular Biology = ISSN 1748-7188

Continuing resources in two medium forms:

ISSN-L 0264-2875

Printed version: Dance Research = ISSN 0264-2875
Online version: Dance Research (Online) = ISSN 1750-0095

Continuing resources in three medium forms:

ISSN-L 1188-1534

Printed version: Plant Varieties Journal (Ottawa) = ISSN 1188-1534

Online version: Plant Varieties Journal (Ottawa. Online) = ISSN 1911-1479

CD-ROM version: Plant Varieties Journal (Ottawa. CD-ROM) = ISSN 1911-1460.

When a continuing resource to which an ISSN has been assigned undergoes a major change (a major change in title or other major change as defined in the ISSN Manual²) and is therefore assigned a new ISSN, the relevant ISSN-L shall be designated and recorded in the new metadata record that was created with the new ISSN assignment. In the most common situation, where the titles of all medium versions change at that same time, the ISSN-L for the new group of medium versions will be the ISSN that was assigned to the first-registered new medium version. Rules and examples for handling unusual title change situations will be included in the ISSN Manual.

ISSN-L will be made available in several different ways:

- via a table which will list the ISSN-L and the corresponding ISSN linked to the ISSN-L. This table will be available free of charge on the ISSN International Centre website (www.issn.org) during the latter part of 2008
- via the ISSN Register (each metadata record in the ISSN Register will include the medium-specific ISSN assigned to the resource described in the record, and the designated linking ISSN, as separate data elements). ISSN-L will be available in ISSN Register records available via the ISSN Portal (<http://portal.issn.org>) during the latter part of 2008
- via the ISSN National Centres, which will communicate to publishers the ISSN-L designated for newly- assigned ISSN
- via the resources themselves, provided that publishers print or display this information according to the recommendations in the standard. Publishers will be encouraged to display ISSN-L, along with medium-specific ISSN on their resources.

The new ISO Standard 3297 also includes an annex that describes uses of ISSN and ISSN-L with other

identification and linking systems. ISSN and ISSN-L are interoperable with DOI, OpenURL, URN (Universal Resource Name) and EAN (European Article Number) bar-codes. Among other benefits from the new standard, the Linking ISSN will facilitate search, retrieval and delivery across all media versions for services like OpenURL, library catalogues, search engines, or knowledge bases.

OpenURL Implementation

ISSNs are heavily used in the resolution mechanism for citation linking in scientific and technical articles, as implemented in the OpenURL scheme.

The ISSN-L will further enhance this process by allowing for both more precise requests from citations (query strings) and better hit rates at the end of the resolution procedure. It should be possible for query strings generated from citations, depending on the context, to encode both the ISSN (pointing, for example, specifically to the electronic resource itself) and the ISSN-L (pointing to all the different media versions of the publication). The ability to use ISSN-L in addition to, or instead of, ISSN in citations should lead to more consistent results in citation linking, even when different ISSNs are used at both ends of the resolution chain (for instance a 'print' ISSN at the citation level and an 'electronic' ISSN in the list of serials available through the library hosting the resolution server).

Conclusion

The new challenge for the ISSN system – implementation of ISSN-L – is both ambitious and realistic, encompassing innovation and continuity with the past, aimed at accommodating user needs and relying on the Network's database and infrastructure strengths. The new standard charts an expanded future for the ISSN, which depends on the ability of the ISSN to accommodate all the resources it has to identify, a responsibility that is granted by the ISO standard. Each new edition of the ISO standard has been associated with qualitative changes in the ISSN system.

This time, the new standard not only introduces qualitative changes, but also a quantitative one, that of implementing, assigning, and distributing about 1,325,000 ISSN-Ls, which is a new goal that the ISSN system is embracing along with the new standard.

References

1. ISO 3297: 2007, Information and documentation – International Standard Serial Number (ISSN).
2. ISSN Manual – cataloguing part, 2003, Paris, ISSN.

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