



The Nielsen Company  
Nielsen Book  
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## Press Release

### **ISTC: A CRUCIAL TOOL FOR PUBLISHING MARKET INTELLIGENCE**

22 July 2010, Woking

***“ISTCs are as revolutionary for the book trade as the ISBN was, and ISTC is the natural evolution of the ISBN in a more complex and mature book industry”.***

This was the rallying cry from Jeremy Neate of Nielsen BookScan at a seminar organised jointly by Book Industry Communication (BIC) and Nielsen Book on 2 July at Pearson’s offices in the Strand to promote the International Standard Text Code (ISTC); a new ISO identifier which identifies abstract textual works and enables individual ISBNs comprising the same work to be grouped together for search and analysis.

Neate presented a masterly analysis of the dramatic growth in the number of formats and versions in which a bestseller is made available from the average 3 ISBNs in the 1980s to as many as 24 (and counting) for a top title today.

Analysing the overall sales performance of an individual title through ISBN alone has become an unwieldy task. Combining this intelligence with library lending volume data that is now available through Nielsen Book’s LibScan service adds even further complexity to the analysis. Neate strongly made the case that the grouping of ISBNs by ISTC was now crucial for efficient and effective market analysis.

Earlier in the session delegates had heard from Aimi MacDonald, Head of User Interfaces at Nielsen Book on the importance of ISTC for efficient title discovery through online interfaces by consumers, book trade professionals and library specialists alike. Central to this was the functionality ISTC provides to bring titles into a set of search hits when they are fundamentally the same product although they appear superficially different (her example was where a book’s title had changed), and to filter out products that are superficially similar but fundamentally different (e.g. a screenplay adaptation of a novel).

MacDonald’s point was underlined and expanded by Gabrielle Wallington of Waterstone’s who provided examples of situations that had occurred on the shop-floor where existing, exclusively ISBN-driven information systems and solutions had been unable to help locate copies of products in response to customer enquiries.

A presentation on behalf of the British Library explained how ISTC was being piloted to streamline the Legal Deposit function, improve accuracy of claims, eliminate the manual overhead Legal Deposit can impose on publishers and improve resource discovery.



Owen Atkinson of the Authors' Licensing and Copyright Society (ALCS) added further examples of real-life complexity where ALCS is working with the ISTC community to simplify and improve title identification and linkages.

### **The second half of the session turned from the “why” of ISTCs to the “how”.**

In a summary of his paper published earlier this year by BIC and the Book Industry Study Group, Michael Holdsworth reiterated his call for pragmatism in ISTC assignment: practice must be rooted in everyday practical applications rather than “academic” theory. This would argue that in mainstream book trade use books that were in practice substitutable as products in the marketplace ought to be grouped together by ISTC rather than artificially separated because of minor differences.

### **Nielsen Book makes offer of support for backlist ISTC assignment**

Julian Sowa, head of Nielsen Book's ISTC Agency ran through the practical steps a publisher needed to take to implement ISTC in house, and illustrated that the technical barriers to implementation need not be as high as many might have thought. He also announced a new offer from Nielsen Book to provide ISTC assignment services for publishers' backlists, where they commit to adopting ISTCs for their front list programmes.

### **Consensus for pragmatic approach**

Graham Bell of EDItEUR concluded the session by outlining some of the practical issues implementers are likely to face based on work in his previous role at HarperCollins to assign ISTCs to their fiction list. Bell also reiterated the argument for a “loose” pragmatic interpretation of the ISTC rules on what should constitute a separate work.

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**Nielsen Book has four key brands: Registration Agencies (ISBN and SAN Agencies for UK & Ireland, ISTC), BookData, BookNet and BookScan.** The Nielsen BookData service provides comprehensive, enriched and timely bibliographic data worldwide. There is a range of information services for booksellers, libraries and publishers in 100 countries around the world. The Nielsen BookNet service provides value-added transaction services to the industry. The Nielsen BookScan service provides the world's only continuous retail monitoring service for English-language books in the UK, Ireland, US, Australia, South Africa, Italy, New Zealand, Denmark and Spain. The company launched LibScan last year, allowing the collection and analysis of library borrowing data. To-date, 44 UK public library authorities have joined the panel and the aim is to continue building this number in 2010. The group employs 120 staff in the UK. The company is wholly owned by The Nielsen Company. For more information, please visit: [www.nielsenbook.co.uk](http://www.nielsenbook.co.uk)

### **About The Nielsen Company**

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**About BIC:** BIC is an independent organisation set up and sponsored by the Publishers Association, Booksellers Association, CILIP and the British Library to promote supply chain efficiency in all sectors of the book world through e-commerce and the application of standard processes and procedures.