



MassCat Musings - January 2014 By Dodie Gaudet

More on ISBNs

ISBN stands for International Standard Bibliographic Number.

Originally, the ISBN was 10 digits – for example 1-59158-316-0 – and each piece of this number means something. The first digit (in this case 1) stands for the language of the publishing company. Books published in English speaking countries have the first digit of 0 or 1.

The second set of digits indicates the publishing company; therefore 59158 = Libraries Unlimited. Generally, small companies have longer numbers, and conversely, larger companies have shorter numbers. Random House is 394 or 679; Harcourt Brace is 15; HarperCollins is 06.

The third set of digits is the next consecutive number assigned to a book published by that company.

The last number or X is a check digit that says a particular combination of numbers you just typed is correct. If you transpose 2 numbers somewhere within the ISBN, you may get an error message depending on the program you are using.

In 2007, ISBNs grew to 13 digits to coordinate with UPCs on other products. The 978 at the beginning of all books (and CDs and DVDs) indicates published material.

If you look at a book that has both the 10- and 13-digit ISBNs, you'll see that after the 978, the numbers are exactly the same until you get to the check digit. It will almost always be different because adding 978 makes it a different combination of numbers.

The 10-digit ISBN is usually seen with hyphens separating the different elements. Many library catalogs ignore hyphens and will look for both 1-59158-316-0 and 1591583160 regardless of how the number is typed. Unfortunately, Koha is very literal and if you include the hyphens in your search, it will only look for that ISBN with hyphens. Therefore, you must also type the same 10-digit ISBN WITHOUT hyphens. As I find hyphenated ISBNs in the MassCat catalog, I am eliminating the hyphens so that all the ISBNs are consistent.

If you scan the UPC on the back of the book, the scanner will record the 13-digit ISBN without hyphens – which brings up another issue. Since the 10- and 13-digit ISBNs are the same, many catalogs will automatically convert one to the other and search both simultaneously. Our literal Koha catalog does not do that. If there is only a 10-digit ISBN in the bibliographic record, and you type or scan the 13-digit ISBN, you will NOT find the record. Again, if I find a record with missing ISBNs, I will add them.

This is why it is so important that you perform multiple searches when looking for a specific book. The book (or CD or DVD) may be there, but is lacking a specific piece of information that would make it easier for you to locate.

As always, feel free to let me know when you find any anomaly in our MassCat catalog. We all want a catalog that is accurate and where we and our patrons can find what we want quickly and easily.