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ISO Standards and Other Considerations in Starting New Journals

The IFLA Editors Round Table has placed a high priority on exploring topics that are deemed important to editors of journals in the developing nations. My original assignment was to discuss the standards of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) that deal with periodicals, paying particular attention to how these standards might be useful to editors of recently established journals. But as I delved into the topic, I quickly realized that the problems confronting an editor in a developing country are more basic than just worrying about the application of standards. Consequently, I decided to address problems that must be resolved when a new journal is launched in addition to the importance of adhering to international standards.

As one becomes knowledgeable about library developments throughout the world, it becomes increasingly obvious that there is a pressing need for additional journals that permit librarians in developing areas to communicate their ideas and common problems with colleagues. The issues involved transcend publishing concerns; they embrace matters such as salaries, status, bibliographic control, and interlibrary lending policies.

The obstacles to communication in many geographical areas are formidable. Not only must one overcome language barriers, but there is also the reality that social and economic conditions differ throughout the world. No one solution will be generally applicable to all regions. In order to communicate professionally, some countries may require only a single newsletter or journal, while others might require and be able to finance one journal for each library specialty.

The International Organization for Standardization is a worldwide federation of national standards institutes that issues standards for many types of products. Developing bibliographic standards is the responsibility of one of its many Technical Committees. ISO publishes separate English and French versions of the standards and some are also translated into Russian. ISO issues a yearly catalog that not only lists all standards currently available, and in what languages, but also the addresses of ISO member organizations. The catalog is particularly useful since it can be consulted to learn if one's own country has promulgated national standards.¹

The ISO has published numerous standards relating to periodicals that provide useful guidance to editors. These have been drawn together in a publication issued jointly by ISO and Unesco titled *ISO Standards Handbook I*. The adoption of these standards will help editors to present orderly publications, ones that readers will find easy to consult and ones that will facilitate a publication's assimilation into the international system of bibliography.

It is not clear to this author how many editors are aware of the existence of the ISO standards. Even in the United States with its long history of publishing in library science, it is safe to state that no publication currently adheres to all of its own standards (American National Standards Institute) let alone the ISO adopted or recommended standards. The author of this paper only learned about the ISO standards at the IFLA Strbské Pleso meeting.

Before describing several ISO standards in greater detail, I want to turn my attention to several issues that editors of journals particularly in countries classified by IFLA as emerging nations must resolve in order to insure the viability of a new journal. While adoption and adherence to standards is important, it is the issue of survival that will be uppermost in the minds of an individual or an organization that launches a new periodical. What good are standards if the editor cannot afford to purchase the paper on which to print the articles, or if there is no available printer, or if the printer is so unreliable that subscribers become aggravated and cancel their subscriptions.

Last year I was very impressed by a paper prepared for the Editors Round Table by Kwame Nyarko, editor of the *Ghana Library Journal*.² In his paper he vividly describes the frustrations and challenges that must be endured by his colleagues in West Africa. My growing awareness of the obstacles that colleagues in emerging nations must overcome in order to publish each issue only heightens my admiration of their professional dedication.

An editor from the United States can never fully understand or fully appreciate the problems that an editor in an African country must cope with daily. However, my own experiences to a certain degree have given me some of the credentials needed to write about the difficulties of launching a new unsubsidized journal. I'm referring to the experience of beginning the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* in 1975. My associate, William H. Webb, and I undertook the financial risk because we believed there was a need and that professional colleagues would respond to that need by purchasing subscriptions. The first two years were the most difficult. We found that potential subscribers would not spend their money until they were convinced that the journal would be worth buying and that it would continue beyond the first two or three issues. Initially we typed our own mailing lists, typeset the journal in-house, prepared invoices by hand and readied each issue for the mails. The *Journal* is about to complete its fifth year of existence, and after five years it is now well established. Many of the problems that were so crucial in the formative period are no longer pressing, but having survived the experience we now have a better understanding of what problems other editors will have to resolve. One who intends to publish a new journal must attract sufficient funding, contract with a reliable printer, establish mechanisms for distribution, attract potential readers, and be able to solicit articles of worthy quality. The most critical problem is to secure sufficient monetary support to launch the project. A publisher should be convinced that there is a genuine need, a need so pressing that support for continuation beyond the initial issues is highly probable. Financial support can be derived from reader subscriptions, advertising, association or governmental subsidies, or a combination thereof. If a publishing venture is begun with funding sufficient to guarantee only the first two or three issues, the probabilities become greater that the first two or three issues will be the only ones that will ever appear in print.

Careful attention should be paid to the physical appearance of a new journal. There is research to show that the appearance can either attract or repel readership. At the same time an editor will probably have to remain cost conscious. A well-designed, multi-colored publication may be attractive, but the cost of its design and production will be sufficiently greater than a two-color edition. Even if the first issues must be printed in a mimeographed format and stapled together, efforts should be made to assemble the publication in the most attractive manner possible. It never

ceases to amaze me how many library journals are designed so pedantically. And, why so many journals adopt type font sizes that few beyond the age of 40 are able to read comfortably. One can save money by reducing the type font from 11 points to 10 or 9 points, but the journal can also lose readers in the process. It is my recommendation that a new journal be begun modestly and that the physical appearance be improved gradually as experience is gained.

An editor must be able to publish articles that will attract and retain the interest of readers. In some respects the quality of the initial articles may be more important than those that appear in later issues. It is the initial content that must persuade readers to support the journal with both their subscriptions and their papers. The initial papers published should emphasize problems of immediate import. Scholarly treatises on esoteric topics may bring status among peers, but status will not necessarily attract subscribers.

In summary, a new journal should not be undertaken unless the publisher/editor is convinced that there is a reasonable chance for success. Since most IFLA members acknowledge that the obstacles confronting the editor/publisher in emerging countries are more formidable than those faced by their counterparts in the industrialized world, it seems even more important that a new editor engage in a thorough, realistic planning process before the first manuscript is solicited for publication.

Now let us return to the question of the ISO standards. The standards become more relevant once the decision to launch a new journal has been made. Many ISO standards have been adopted. Some are more important than others, but all of them can be useful. There are guidelines to assist authors when they prepare manuscripts for submission. The guidelines to authors, ISO-R215, provides information on the use of 1) headings, 2) preparation of synopsis and translations, 3) placement of notes, 4) bibliographic references, 5) tables and illustrations, and 6) the use of symbols and abbreviations. The guidelines to editors and publishers, ISO No. 8-1977(E), is helpful in designing the physical layout of a publication in a form that facilitates use, and it also provides specific instructions as to what bibliographical information should be included in a journal. Among the specifications cited in this standard are the following: use of running titles, numbering of pages, and layout of pages. There are also standards for the presentation of contents lists, ISO-R18, the presentation of volume indexes, ISO-999, and the preparation and use of abstracts, ISO 214-1976(E). There are other standards that an editor will find useful and, as mentioned earlier, ISO/Unesco have published a compilation of all approved and recommended standards.

It seems necessary to point out that if every editor were to follow without exception the recommendations of the ISO standards, our professional literature would become aesthetically boring. Every publication would look very much like all others, and while publishers and editors may support the concept of following standards, they also want their publications to be distinctive. For this reason editors should view most ISO standards as guides or suggestions. But, there are a few exceptions. Editors should follow standards that specify the requirements of a bibliographic citation. Complete bibliographic citations are essential if national bibliographies are to be supplied with sufficient information to merge a publication into the national and international bibliographic structure.

Of equal importance, particularly for publications intended to reach a multilingual audience, is the need to include informative abstracts. Abstracts printed in at least

one of the official IFLA languages should accompany each article. Ideally, abstracts should be printed in each of the official languages, but because of the additional cost of preparation and printing, this ideal will rarely be achieved. The Editors Round Table has consistently underscored the importance of including an abstract with each published article.

To summarize briefly, there are many existing international publishing standards that can be useful to those who desire to publish a journal. The adherence to standards will ensure that a publication can be assimilated easily into the world's bibliographic structure. For the editor who plans to launch a new journal there are questions more fundamental than the physical and bibliographical format of a new publication. The first requirement is a general recognition that a new journal is needed, second that sufficient monetary resources are available, and third, there are others who are willing and able to contribute to the new publication. If these three conditions can be satisfied, the chances are reasonable that a new publication will be a success and will contribute to communication in the international professional community.

References

- 1) Kwame Nyarko, "Library Literature in English-Speaking West Africa. Its Achievements, Problems and Prospects." Paper prepared for the 44th IFLA Congress, Strbské Pleso, Czechoslovakia, 1978.
- 2) Kwame Nyarko

[Documents can be obtained by writing to: International Organization for Standardization, Case Postale 56, CHO-1211, Geneva 20, Switzerland.]

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