The RFID Data Model Project

Background

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) systems are now employed in several Australian libraries. The technology has the potential to provide libraries with productivity benefits, new collection management tools and improved customer service. Unfortunately, international standards have not kept pace with the progress of RFID in the library community and, as a result, interoperability between RFID-equipped library services is very limited. This has prompted many countries around the world to pursue a nationally standardised tag data model. The International Standards Organisation (ISO) established a project involving a 'National Expert' from each country. Standards Australia's representative is Alan Butters. To enable ongoing representation in the project, ALIA has agreed to manage a funding project open to all library and commercial organisations.

Alan Butters provides an update on the ISO RFID for Libraries Project.

The second meeting of the International Working Group ISO TC46/SC4/WG11 was held in Copenhagen on 11 June, with National Experts from Australia, the UK, Germany, Denmark, Italy, The Netherlands, Japan, and the United States, (NISO) together with representatives from EDItEUR and the ISSN International Centre. The group has been formed to develop an international standard which will be known as ISO 28560.

The Group's purpose is to describe a globally standardised way in which information may be stored in the memory of RFID tags used to identify and manage library material. The current situation is that the data contained in library RFID tags follows a number of proprietary data formats determined by the individual suppliers of the RFID systems. These proprietary data formats severely reduce interoperability between library RFID systems, even where ISO standardised tags and reader hardware are be used.

One of the most challenging issues discussed at the meeting was how the new standard will relate to existing national data models. In addition to the vendor-specific data formats currently in use, a number of countries such as Denmark, Finland and The Netherlands have implemented their own unique national data models. These countries obviously have a level of concern regarding the compatibility of any new international data model with their own legacy formats.

In 2006, the Standards Australia working group published a proposal for a data model that attempted to address the issue of legacy data models as well as other important considerations. The proposal employs two existing standards to form the encoding 'engine' of the data model which permits great flexibility in the selection of data elements without sacrificing interoperability. The proposal has been discussed within the ISO group and has received broad support from the UK and from the North American NISO group with minor changes.

At the next meeting scheduled to be held in London on 21 September, it is hoped that further progress will narrow down the possible alternatives for a suitable international model so that the full benefits to the global library community may be realised as early as possible.

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For more information, see:
http://alia.org.au/rfidproject/
http://www.bs.dk/standards/rfid/
http://www.sybis.com.au

ALIA gratefully acknowledges project supporters: 3M, VALA and latest supporter, Civica.

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