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## PUBLISHERS WILL TRANSITION IN JANUARY FROM CPC TO BISAC CODES FOR BIBLES.

# NEW BISAC BIBLE CODES READY

>>> Watch for new product-category codes on Bibles and in electronic catalogs after Jan. 1. The Christian Retail Solutions Committee recently worked through the change from Bible Christian Product Category Codes (CPC) to Book Industry Standards and Communications (BISAC) standard codes, completing the transition of books and Bibles to the single code standard.

The Book Industry Study Group's BISAC committee approved the Bible codes this past fall after receiving proposals and recommendations from the Christian Retail Solutions Committee. The committee included publishers and retailers. Leslie Mosher, Zondervan director of strategic alignment, chaired the initiative begun several years ago with the CRSC's former Christian Product Standards Group.

The new codes will first show up in electronic data and catalogs, as publishers release new titles with the BISAC codes and make book-cover changes as existing titles are reprinted or other changes are required.

The transition creates a single product-category coding design driven by publishers so they have only one category-coding program, which helps reduce administrative and management costs and improves bookselling efficiency across multiple retail channels. CPC codes are still in use for gift and specialty products and videos. Music-product category codes remain under the CPC coding, which actually are grandfathered codes from the Christian Music Trade Assoc.

Having standardized product coding also means consumers can more easily navigate and find books at retail stores, and search books in electronic catalogs and on the Web. The codes also are used to track

## CRSC, BISG Offer Tips for Publishers' New BISAC-Code Implementation

While product category coding is very important for retailers in handling and reporting on book and Bible sales, not all publishers are intentional about ensuring each title has a category code.

Often, titles that don't receive category codes from the publisher are arbitrarily assigned codes elsewhere in the supply chain, such as by wholesalers or database-service providers who enter their interpretation of title categories. A few years ago, industry data services had about a 40% difference in how titles were categorized.

Here are some steps publishers can take to ensure their titles are coded and tracked properly:

**1** Assign a person or team with marketing background and title familiarity to make category-coding assignments. This ensures codes will be assigned and that titles receive correct codes. Category assignments should be made during product development.

**2** Check the Christian Industry Sublist. Determine the appropriate coding to be assigned to each book by comparing each title's subject with the Christian Industry BISAC sub-list and category definitions at [www.Christiansupplychain.com](http://www.Christiansupplychain.com).

Categories must be selected from the BISAC sub-list, which contains a selection of Christian-book categories and a complete Bible-category list.

**3** Develop your list. Use a spreadsheet or electronic catalogs or other data-tracking systems to include ISBNs, titles, and the assigned categories to assist in maintaining and updating category information as needed. Proper format is all-caps main category and each category separated by a space-slash-space, for example, BIBLES / New International Version / Study.

**4** Determine how to provide this information to industry participants. Industry technical capabilities are broad ranged. Some companies want mail, e-mail, fax, electronic files, or a sales rep to deliver printed information. Industry data-base services, wholesalers, retail chains, Internet companies, and electronic product catalogs may have certain protocols to accept product information. The industry is moving to ONIX (Online Information Exchange) standards to exchange product information, but most can accept simple Excel files and convert them for internal requirements.

consumers' interests by helping identify which kinds of books and Bibles they're buying.

Like the CPCs, BISAC codes are subject-based. This helps make shelving unfamiliar books quicker and easier with a glance at the back cover.

## CODING GUIDELINES

Although the codes have BISAC alphanumeric coding, the coding standard requires the category to be completely spelled out on the back of the book on a single line just above the EAN bar code. The book titles are organized primarily under BISAC's RELIGION classification followed by the old CPC supercategory—for example, Christian Life, in the second field and the former primary category in the third field, e.g., Spiritual Growth. It looks like this: RELIGION / Christian Life / Spiritual Growth. Titles heading solely to the Christian Retail Channel likely won't have the RELIGION introduction.

Bibles are organized in a separate BIBLES category, followed by the translation and the type. It looks like this: BIBLES / New International Version / Study.

## BIBLE CODE SCRUTINY

The Bible categorization received some close scrutiny after Thomas Nelson Publishing's recent research that indicated many consumers look for "felt needs" in making Bible-buying decisions more than deciding by translation. The research countered Zondervan industry research that indicated people buy based on translation. (A Bible Summit to discuss the new research's ramifications led to the realization that more study needs to be done to fully understand consumers' decision-making processes and influences at the point of sale—not just intention or shopping mission.)

Bible publishers were concerned that the BISAC

classifications might favor one consumer process over another in data-reporting, but consensus was reached when publishers determined that three field codes would enable tracking by translation and type. Additionally, previous BISAC codes included Bible translation as a primary classification.

The BISAC standards committee resisted some coding solutions, such as every translation requiring eight new codes to include translation, type, and other necessary information, and that some translations are actually copyrighted by specific organizations.

The solution was to create the separate BIBLES classification. The BISAC committee conceded that their organizational tradition of limiting codes to 3,000 was developed in a time when technology was not as robust, and that new database capabilities wouldn't constrain adding a large number of categories and a new major classification.

The categorization is built around 20 Bible translations and eight secondary categories, such as devotional, general, children, New Testament and portions, reference, study, and text (or a plain Bible).

The committee also relented on other issues, such as sticking to its traditional "100-title rule," which means a classification should have 100 published titles before actually receiving a category code. Many Bibles have less than half that. However, the standards committee came to understand that for the Christian Retail Channel to adequately classify and track Bible subjects and sales the added classifications are required.

Some translations, such as the Amplified Bible, Parallel Bible, Clear Word, Good News Bible, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Version, New English Translation, New Jerusalem, J.B. Phillips, and the American Standard Version, are included in the Other Translations category because only a few titles of each are available.

The Living Translation Bible is now under the New Living Translation.

The New American Standard Updated and the New American Standard 1977 were categorized under the New American Standard Bible.

Among other changes, BISAC's JUVENILE NON-FICTION / Religion / Bibles / Picture and ... / General categories were retired and those titles moved to JUVENILE NONFICTION / Religion / Biblical Stories category or the appropriate BIBLE category. The Product Coding Committee's next project is reworking the children's categories to streamline how children's-product titles are organized. This is mostly because of confusion over sales tracking and some publishers' concerns that separating out children's titles dilutes overall marketing impact. Some children's titles are included in both juvenile categories, regular adult-fiction categories, as well as others.

The BISAC transitions for book titles generally follows the original CPC classifications, but some general-area titles, such as fiction, business, etc., were moved to the primary BISAC fiction, business, etc. categories with an indication the title is topically Christian. One BISAC update, for example, was to add Christian fantasy books in FICTION / Christian / Fantasy.

Ingram Book Group and its Spring Arbor Distributors has been applying BISAC codes for more than 10 years, and as a result more than 98% of Christian-publisher titles have BISAC codes in the wholesaler's databases. Wendell Lotz, Ingram database development VP, said the company will be incorporating the latest BISAC coding versions this year. Other database providers have not decided whether to quickly adopt the new codes or map them from existing CPC codes until publishers actually start using BISAC codes.

## MERCHANDISING THEMES

The BISAC codes also have merchandising themes. These are assigned to titles to identify how titles might be merchandised, and to enable grouping of books by specific themes for better merchandising in stores or online. The themes relate to seasonal, cultural heritage, events, holidays, topical indications, or other frequently requested topics.

The themes are included in databases so retailers or consumers can search on these special indicators. Ingram's iPage database, for example, searches merchandising themes when retailers query about seasonal titles or titles related to current events. Merchandising themes aren't tracked for industry sales reporting. BISAC maintains its standard BISAC Subject Heading and Merchandising Themes list to simplify publishers' theme selection and provide consistent use throughout the publishing supply chain.

To make suggestions or recommend category codes, contact Mosher at [leslie.mosher@zondervan.com](mailto:leslie.mosher@zondervan.com).

I'm indebted to Mosher and wish to express my thanks for her assistance for this column's and sidebar's content. ■■■

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Send the information. Send category assignments with new-product electronic catalogs to your data partners. ONIX and other data-exchange protocols have fields to carry category codes.

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Some data partners can store more than one BISAC category for each book or Bible, so publishers can assign more than one BISAC category for each. Assigning multiple categories provides additional keywords for search engines

to find a product among a list of alternatives. Secondary categories may be selected from the entire BISAC list, but they are not used for data-tracking purposes.

For example, a title dealing with family relationships could be categorized as:

RELIGION / Christian Life / Family or FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS / Parenting / Step-parenting.

A Bible example might include two codes:

BIBLES / Multiple Translations / Study or BIBLES / New King James / Study.

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Be consistent when assigning categories, and communicate them to your customers in as many ways as

possible. This will help get the right book to the right consumer. The new BISAC Bible and book codes and implementation guides are posted at the Christian Retail Solutions Committee's Web site: [www.Christiansupplychain.com](http://www.Christiansupplychain.com) under Product Coding and at the Book Industry Study Group's Web site: [www.bisg.org](http://www.bisg.org).