

# Resource Description Access

## A Synopsis of Autocat Discussions

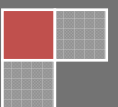
Resource Description Access (RDA) is the next standard for the future of cataloging. RDA will be a web-based standard that will incorporate digital information in order to facilitate easier and quicker access to catalog records. RDA will have its first release in January of 2009.

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The Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2) are not able to accommodate the various forms in which information can be captured in a digital world. As a result, Resource Description and Access (RDA) is an innovative standard that will change the future of bibliographic records. The foundation for RDA is based on two conceptual models, the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), and the Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD). The outcome has been a change in focus, which are the needs of a library user. As a web tool, RDA will have the capabilities for the library user to easily navigate through catalogues “to find, identify, select, and obtain a resource that will be appropriate to the information need (Oliver 2007, 251). This new standard is set to be released early in 2009. There have been many discussions and debates related to the development and implementation of this new standard.

The Autocat discussions regarding the future of bibliographic records and cataloging have centered on four central themes: redundancy and complexity of MACHine-Readable Cataloging (MARC) with existing data, harmonizing and implementation of RDA, leadership among catalogers, and change it will require for catalogers. The AACR2 standards have guided catalogers for years and this seems to be where the difficulty has its foundation.

The complexity and redundancy of MACHine-Readable Cataloging (MARC) has been noted as the result of the various interpretations of AACR2 standards/rules, and a lack of reference to them embedded in a cataloging system, or integrated library systems (Schneider 2007). Each cataloger follows the patterns of interpretation of the AACR2 standards of their library which is unique for their patrons. In a comment posted

to *Autocat Listserv* on March 19, 2008, J. McRee Elrod suggested that we should get away from “silos,” and fragmenting the description of library resources. Indeed J. Elrod may be correct in the supposition that most libraries are working in bibliographic record silos, each cataloger following the standards independently from another library. This would explain the reason for numerous complications regarding the constancy of cataloging records. Mary Mastraccio of Marcive echoes this idea that the primary issue is with the “redundancy and complex coding in MARC” (Mastraccio, 2007). Ms. Mastraccio believes that once MARC is simplified, then integrated library system (ILS) designers can create a better system of inputting data into the bibliographic records.

However, other discussions on this topic from the *Autocat Listserv* disagree with this conviction and feel that it is the actual design of MARC systems that have caused some inconsistencies and corrupt data in bibliographic records. Sandra Ballasch and Kevin Randall have similar thoughts on this issue. As noted by Mr. Randall, “Redundancy and complexity in MARC, or consistency of data in existing records, have nothing to do with the failure to design a good interface for inputting data” (Randall 2007). Catalogers who are new to the profession can be in agreement with Ballasch and Randall. The advancement in recent years makes you wonder why it has taken so long for the ILS industry to create an improved web-based system, thereby making the transition to RDA smoother. In today’s society, young adults no longer fear technology and are very comfortable with web-based programs that have embedded help menus and shortcuts, something the AACR2 and MARC systems seem to lack. I believe Mr. Randall said it best, the “condition of existing data is a red herring.” This debate will always continue regarding the standards and the design of MARC being the leading

cause of inconsistent and corrupt data. It may be a mute point on where the problem exists. It is possible with RDA that MARC records may no longer be necessary. This point was raised in January by John Myers who feels that the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR), a foundational principle for RDA, will replace MARC. According to James Weinheimer in his posting on March 28, 2008, that the most important aspect to FRBR is its functions to allow users to “find, identify, select, and obtain an item” (Weinheimer 2008). These are the functions that RDA must accommodate. Karen Schneider also brought light to this discussion paraphrasing a quote from Robert Maxwell stating, a “move from FRBR would be easier if vendors abandoned the flat-file, record-focused structure and move to an entity-relationship database that would enable far more elegant use of library data” (Schneider 2008). Whether we reconcile the differences between the standards, ILS and MARC, one thing is certain and that is RDA is coming soon. The first release of RDA is scheduled for January of 2009. As with any new change, there is uncertainty of how this will affect existing records and systems.

The harmonizing of RDA and MARC will need specific implementation strategies. The communities of RDA and MARC 21 are collaborating together to make the transition smoother. This can provide some reassurance that RDA and MARC will to some extent be compatible. This has prompted discussion by some catalogers like Marc Vezeau, who feel the most economical and speedy implementation of RDA is to “squeeze it into MARC” (Vezeau 2008). While Mr. Vezeau believes other tools will replace MARC, he does make a valid point that it will require “two generations of ILSs, since vendors are presently building the next” version (Vezeau 2008).

RDA does have limitations regarding full compatibility to MARC. James Elrod identifies the need for “crosswalks between the exact coded information” currently in existence and the “metadata of other communities” in order to prepare all data for the semantic web world and RDA (Elrod 2008). One topic that has less significance regarding RDA harmonization in Autocat is that of the relationship between works, expressions, manifestations, and items. Some catalogers feel there is no distinction made in MARC for works, expressions, manifestations, and items, like J. Elrod. Joel Hahn argues that the MARC does do this in the following way: “Authority format record = Work; Bibliographic format record = Expression + Manifestation; Holdings format record = Item” (Hahn 2008). As of March 28, 2008, the 2007 RDA draft did not address these issues. Philip Davis stated in his remarks that works like musical, legal, and religion may become part of the general structure of RDA after the initial publication (Davis 2008). This may be important as RDA is classified as a content standard and not a metadata schema (Oliver 2007. 251). The other side of the coin is that because RDA is a content standard, perhaps this will solve some display issues due to a “conceptual gap” (Schneider 2008).

In order to have a successful acceptance of RDA, will rely on the leadership of catalogers. Catalogers need to visible leaders in the amendments to RDA and make the cataloging system function better. For example, Sandra Ballash asked the question in her comments on March 21, 2008, that has “the profession been too weak to insist that ILS and other computerized systems we have bought and developed failed to keep the technology?” (Ballash 2008). This may be true in a small part, but more importantly is the action taken by catalogers to influence necessary improvements through their

participation in organizations and committees on a state and national level. Mary Mastraccio made two thoughtful statements regarding leadership in her post on March 27, 2008, her first one said, “unfortunately, no group takes the leadership need to appoint a committee to study and make proposals for those changes so no real progress happens” (Mastraccio 2008). Mary’s observation that in order to clean up MARC records, someone needs to organize a group of leaders as well as library users to do this. Mary’s second statement, “Let’s clean up MARC, focus on our part as catalogers, and then get the ILS designers to give us what we want” (Mastraccio 2008). Many catalogers would agree that this is an area for progress.

Progress requires continual change. Mr. Elrod resonates what every cataloger mentioned regarding RDA, change must be made, but exactly “what” changes are to be made is the main question. I believe the more important aspect to implementing RDA would be to account for resistance and change for catalogers. Those who are resistant to the idea of RDA are the ones who do not want to see the structured data in bibliographic records replaced with a “Google” mentality. While this is an admirable quality, we need to find ways to help all generations of catalogers deal with change. The discussions on Autocat are one way to prepare others for change, but what about those who do not subscribe to Autocat? How will the implementation for change account for them? In 2009, we will see many changes in the cataloging world and I whole-heartedly believe what Karen Schneider says in her ALA TechSource blog, “Whether we succeed or fail in this effort may well determine the future of our profession” (Schneider 2007).

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