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## DOI: STARTING A NEW GENERATION

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\* The International DOI Foundation has published the third edition of its DOI Handbook, which sets the scene for DOI's expansion into much wider information contexts than solely STM research article publishing.

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Edition 3 is not simply a user guide.  A great deal has happened in persistent identifier technology – and in the commercial development of DOIs – since the last edition was published, and it is important to keep updating users on how the pieces of the identity jigsaw fit together, and how they are responding to the continual shifts of technology and user demand.  Commercially, it is clear that DOI is on a roll.  Its increasing relevance in educational markets, the opening up of the first government usage via the UK's TSO Ltd (The Stationery Office) as a registration agency, and now the announcement that Europe's three most innovative national libraries (Germany, the Netherlands and the UK's British Library) are joining the International DOI Foundation as an informal consortium demonstrate that clearly enough.  But given the presence of several potential candidates in the persistent identifier marketplace, can DOI push through and continue to assert itself as the preferred solution of content providers – and their users?

The evidence of Edition 3 is very positive in this area.  By demonstrating that Open URL and DOI are mutually supportive one potential hurdle is cleared.  The Handbook quotes Herbert Van de Sompel compellingly: "When you don't have decent metatdata, it's hard to provide decent services.  That's why I am an enormous fan of unique identifiers for objects, and systems that allow you to obtain well-structured metadata by using those identifiers.  For me, the big deal of the DOI/CrossRef framework is not necessarily the links they provide, because that might be done in other ways.  The crucial importance of that work is in the mere fact that objects are being identified, and that identifiers can lead to metadata about objects.  That changes the whole game".  In other words, from 2001 to 2003 DOI has steadily evolved from a single resolution solution to a multiple resolution environment and now to an effective way of marshalling and indicating metadata and associated data.  Both elements are vital.  Solving problems posed by content being held in identical form in several different locations is important, and it is even more important to point the user to this right place in an automated way.  Helping users to discover the metadata that they need to make choices is critical to content organisation, and indeed at a basic level DOIs become a simple content organisation – or management – system in themselves.

There is now enough potential in DOI to unlock usage in every content domain, and also to have a real effect on web organisation in the short term.  Asked at the recent SIIA summit in New York whether he approved of DOIs and other persistent identifier schemes, Tim Berners-Lee answered strongly in the affirmative, as long as they were linked, as DOIs are, to URLs.  For the foreseeable future, numbering objects and associating knowledge about the object with the number may be the only way of protecting users against the overwhelming ability of a networked society to drown in its own output.