



ISAN Frequently Asked Questions

ISAN International Agency
rue Cornavin, 5
CH-1201 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel. : + 41 22 545 10 00
Fax: + 41 22 545 10 40
www.isan.org

Q: What is ISAN?

A: ISAN (pronounced Eye-SAN) is a global numbering system for AudioVisual (AV) content, a standard developed under ISO (International Organization for Standardization). A simple hexadecimal identifier that can be read by everyone and processed by every digital system around the world. The ISAN number, together with descriptive data about the AV content (metadata), is registered by producers or their representatives in a state-of-the-art database (the ISAN Registry). With ISAN every audiovisual work and all related versions can be uniquely identified with the required level of granularity. The ISAN system – including open online access to the ISAN registry – facilitates tracking of AV content in any country, medium and platform.

Participating countries and regions have their own agencies to assign unique, permanent, and internationally recognized ISAN to registered AV works. The centralized ISAN Registry ensures there is no duplicate registration.

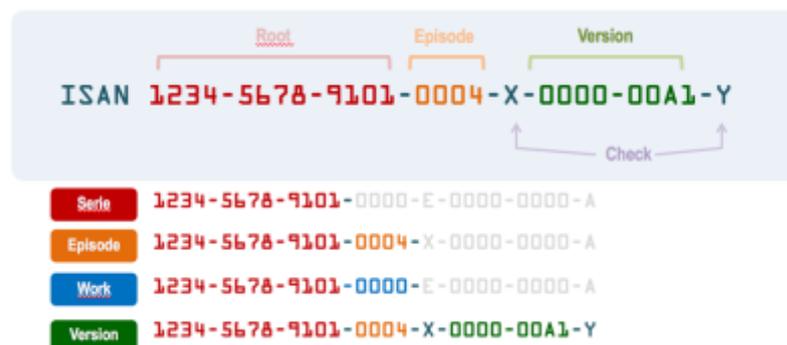
Q: Who developed the ISAN?

A: The ISAN Standard was prepared within ISO Technical Committee (TC) 46, Subcommittee (SC) 9 which is responsible for ISO International Standards for the identification and description of information resources.

The ISAN standardization project was administered by [AGICOA](#) (Association of International Collective Management of Audiovisual Works), [CISAC](#) (International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers) and [FIAPF](#) (International Federation of Film Producers Associations), all three representing several international and national organizations involved with audiovisual production. Experts from the whole audio-visual industry spent within ISO over seven years developing this standard with contributions and feedback from dozens of media companies, studios, producers, authors and collecting societies, as well as broadcast standards organizations. The ISAN ISO Standard has been made by and for the audio-visual Industry.

Q: What is the structure of ISAN?

A: ISAN has been designed to be read by humans and processed in information systems, as a 24-bit hexadecimal number. The structure of ISAN has been designed to meet the diverse needs of the entire audiovisual supply chain.



The ISAN is comprised of three segments: the root, the episode and the version component.

- **The root segment** is assigned to a root work (i.e. a distinct intellectual creation).
- **The episode segment**: subsequent film parts or episodes that relate to the root work share the same root, but have a different episode component. If a core work is not episodic, then the episode segment is filled with zeros.
- **The version segment**: episodic and non-episodic works that have been modified in some way (for example, an edit for distribution in a specific territory, different audio or subtitles, etc...) are identified with a different version segment. By default, the version segment is null (filled with zeros)

The ISAN contains two check digits (made up of the numbers 0-9 and the letters A-F) to help identifying transcription errors.

When represented in its printed form, the ISAN begins always with the “ISAN” label and is segmented in six groups of four hex. digits separated with hyphens, such as the two check digits. The resulting number appears as follows:

ISAN 0000-0000-D07A-0090-Q-0000-0000-X

When used in digital transactions, the ISAN prefix, the hyphens and the check digits can be omitted as for example :

00000000D07A009000000000

Every ISAN is encoded in a two-dimensional datamatrix barcode that can be downloaded from the ISAN Registry web interface in various resolutions and formats.



Q: What is the difference between an ISAN and a V-ISAN?

A: The V-ISAN is an ISAN that identifies the version of an audiovisual work. The V-ISAN is structured like every other ISAN (*see What is the Structure of an ISAN?*)

A “work ISAN” identifying an audiovisual work has a version segment that is null (i.e. ISAN 00AE-032A-A098-0000-X-**0000-0000-Z**), the “version ISAN” or V-ISAN identifying a version of work has a version segment that is not null (e.g. ISAN 00AE-032A-A098-0000-X-**001F-A3E7-A**).

Q: What are the benefits of having ISAN?

A: ISAN was created by experts in the audiovisual industry to meet the requirements of the digital shift and the needs of creators, owners, distributors, and consumers of AV content. It offers tremendous benefits in the administration of rights and reports, sales forecast, payments, consolidated audience measurement, etc... resulting from the various means of worldwide content distribution (theatre, broadcast, VoD/sVoD, ...).

- **Keep track**

ISAN helps you keep track of your productions from development through production and distribution to viewing – amidst millions of AV works, a global marketplace, and an ever-increasing array of distribution platforms.

- **Simplify data management**

ISAN ensures improved accuracy of data at every required granularity, simplifies database searches and data exchange, eliminates language barriers, and reduces transaction costs. ISAN is a key to automation.

- **Collect royalties**

A growing number of collecting societies around the world use ISAN for processing royalties. In some cases it is mandatory for releasing royalties such as in France, Spain, Switzerland and Belgium.

- **Enhance digital content protection**

ISAN is not an anti-counterfeiting tool, but it helps such tools to identify with certainty the content that is protected. ISAN is notably used in the Blu-ray disk copy protection system and is compliant with major digital fingerprint and watermarking systems. Also, ISAN helps content owners to track and monitor illegal uploads on YouTube or Daylimotion.

- **Streamline library**

Production companies report that ISAN is a great tool in managing their catalogue of AV works with all the various distribution versions.

- **Enhance identification**

An identifier with a central global registry eliminates uncertainty when several works or versions have the same title or characteristics.

- **Enables automation**

Users can connect their information system to the ISAN Registry through the ISAN REST API, enabling every stakeholders of the value chain to manage efficiently their content and use the ISAN public standard identifier in automated transactions.

Q: What is an "audiovisual work"?

A: The ISAN standard defines an audiovisual work as a work consisting of a sequence of related images, with or without accompanying sound, which is intended to be made visible as a moving image through the use of devices, regardless of the medium of initial or subsequent fixation.

Examples of the types of audiovisual works to which ISAN may be assigned are: motion pictures (e.g. feature films) and short films, trailers (i.e. previews, productions for television or other means of delivery, including individual episodes of television series, industrial, educational and training films, commercials, broadcasts and recordings of live events (such as sports events and newscasts), video games, music video clips, composite and multimedia works if they contain a significant audiovisual component, as well as non-linear works including compilations.

Q: What is a Version of an audiovisual work?

A: ISAN identifies audiovisual works as distinct intellectual creations. A version consists of changes within a work, or the aggregation of elements that affects the content of an audiovisual work as long as it does not result in a new intellectual creation.

Changes such as editing, the addition of subtitles, dubbing, alterations of the soundtrack (all to be considered as “**variants**” of the work), fixation of the content on a specific media (Film print, Blu-ray, digital file ...), the change of technical properties (HD/SD, encoding format...) (all to be considered as “**manifestations**” of the work), as well as content or items closely related to the work (“**related content**” or “**related items**”), can all result in the issuance of a new ISAN version or “V-ISAN”.

Q: How does the ISAN affect copyright registration?

A: It doesn't - because the ISAN is not related in any way to copyright, in either the European or North American sense of that term. The ISAN is an identification number without any legal implication or meaning. It has no value as prima facie evidence regarding the copyright status or ownership of a work.

The scope of the ISAN standard clearly states:

"The issuance of an ISAN shall in no way be related to any process of copyright registration, nor shall the issuance of an ISAN provide evidence of the ownership of rights in a work.

Q: How does ISAN apply the versions of audiovisual works?

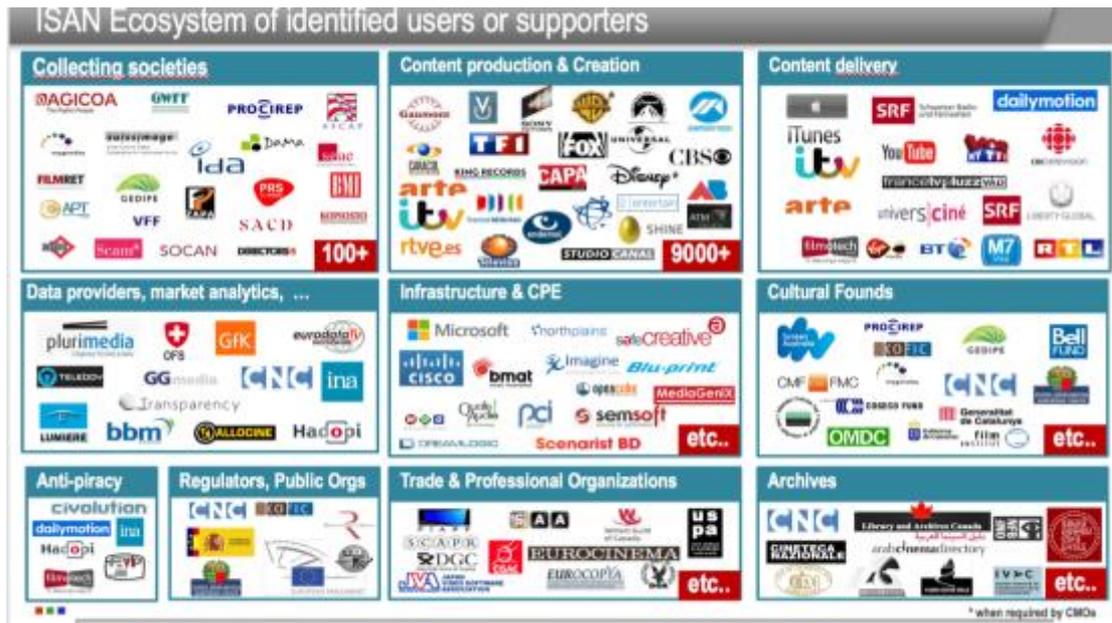
A: ISAN has been designed to apply to works and versions of audiovisual works. A specific document with detailed information is available on ISAN web site : [Applying ISAN to versions of audiovisual works](#)

Q: Who is using or supporting ISAN?

A: 12'000+ stakeholders from a large spectrum of the audio-visual supply chain have already adopted ISAN:

- Content owners and creators of all sizes and from all regions (80 countries) are registering their works or versions with ISAN.
- Public and private organizations worldwide use existing ISAN identifiers in their processes or workflows for managing audio-visual content or projects or rights, processing reports or analytics, protecting content, etc...
- Most audio-visual standards for the digital management and distribution of audio-visual content are compliant with ISAN enabling a smooth circulation of ISAN along professional media workflows.

- Major audio-visual infrastructure suppliers support ISAN in their products for post-production, broadcasting, digital platforms, rights management, content protection, etc....
- Local and Global digital platforms such as iTunes or User Generated Content (UGC) platforms such as Dailymotion and YouTube have for many years implemented ISAN as one of their content identification systems.
- Several Metadata providers and usage reporting companies deliver metadata feeds enriched with ISAN to their customers.



Q: Can ISAN be used to prevent or identify piracy?

A: ISAN as a unique identifier is not a method to protect digital assets, however it can be used in conjunction with content protection systems to improve their usage such as fingerprint or watermarking systems. ISAN is for example used in the AACS content protection system for Blu-ray disks or by content owner to identify their protected works with YouTube content ID or within the French Hadopi system.

Q: Is an ISAN required for audiovisual works?

A: Like every ISO standard, ISAN is voluntary. However, specific organizations can choose to require ISAN within their business or regulators can impose ISAN in some sectors to stimulate the adoption of a standard identifier for the general interest.

The high guaranties that ISAN offers in terms of efficiency, precision, cost, multilateral governance and openness, are main reasons why an increasing number of stakeholders and regulators are requiring ISAN:

- CMOs in Europe (France, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland,...) require the ISAN for royalties payments.

- Film funding organisations require ISAN for the audiovisual projects they finance as in France, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Canada, South Korea, Australia, ...
[ISAN registration have notably been made mandatory for all projects and works supported by the French CNC as of January 1st, 2017.](#)
- Since January 2017, ISAN is mandatory by law in Switzerland ([Art. 24 sec. 3bis Swiss Film Act](#)) when reporting the exploitation of audiovisual content on home video (DVD, Blu-ray, EST...) and video on demand (VoD, S-VoD, ...). This obligation applies to all local and foreign companies that distribute domestic and foreign audiovisual productions in Switzerland. [ISAN is for example compulsory in the iTunes Swiss store as from Aug. 1st 2017](#) (such ISAN are de facto available in all other local iTunes stores where the content is distributed).
- The communication of the European Commission "*Promoting a fair, efficient and competitive European copyright-based economy in the Digital Single Market*" (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/promoting-fair-efficient-and-competitive-european-copyright-based-economy-digital-single-market>) outlines the work the commission has engaged for the full interoperability of ISAN and EIDR and informs that it will propose the use of an interoperable common standard identifier as a requirement for the support through the EU MEDIA programme as from 2018.

Q: Who can apply for an ISAN?

A: Registering content with ISAN is reserved to audiovisual industry professionals. [Applicants must apply as ISAN registrant in the ISAN registration agency of their choice](#). Users registering [audiovisual works](#) with ISAN are the producer of said works or an authorized proxy of the producer (e.g. sales agent and/or distributor) or other appropriate entity or individual (trusted third party). ISAN registrants for [versions](#) can be any professional who need to identify a particular version of a work for a particular purpose such as content distribution. Each registrant applicant will be asked to apply for ISAN only for those audiovisual works for which he/she guarantees the accuracy of all descriptive information.

The entity or person to whom an ISAN is given should have the capacity to permanently attach or link that ISAN to the specific audiovisual content that it identifies (i.e. producer, distributor, broadcaster, digital platform...).

Q: Where do you order codes and how much it costs?

A: All potential applicants for ISAN must apply first to an ISAN registration agency for credentials to be recognized as a registrant within the ISAN system. Applicants can choose their registration agency ([see the list of appointed ISAN Registration Agencies](#)) and have the right to change later for another agency.

Registration fees are set by each registration agency on a strict cost recovery principle (imposed by ISO). ISAN registration fee is typically 20 to 30 CHF for a work and 5 to 10 CHF for a version of work. Volume discounts apply typically after several dozen ISAN and special discount apply for larger volumes (1'000 / 3'000 / 5'000 / 10'000 ISAN) as well as a flat rate for unlimited registrations. The rates for each agency is available on their web site.

The ISAN registration fee is a one off cost that covers the maintenance for life of the ISAN code and its associated metadata. The use of existing ISAN codes is free for everyone.

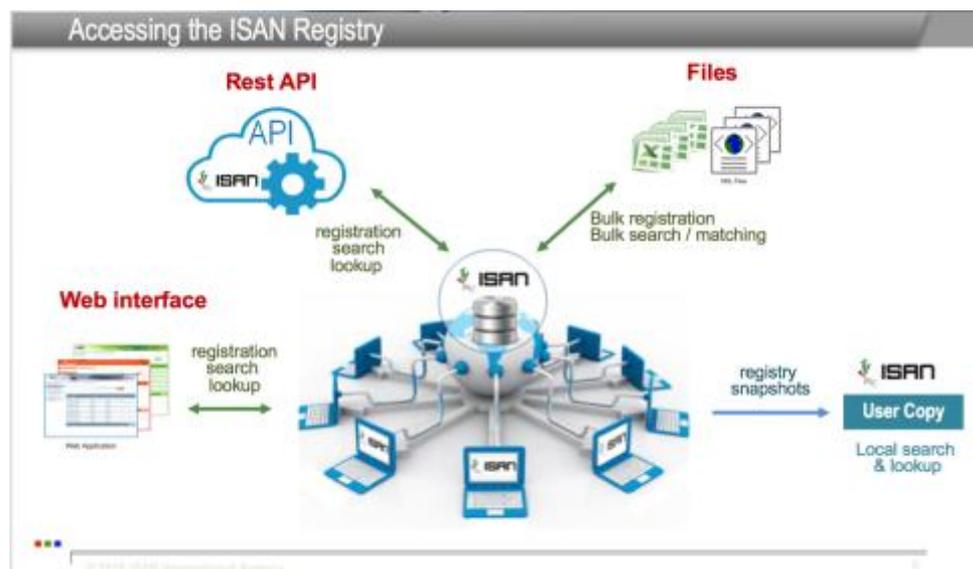
Search for existing ISAN in the ISAN registry or ISAN lookups (obtain the metadata associated to an ISAN) is not subjected to a fee. ISAN registration agencies can deliver database matching services (free or paying depending on the level of service) for disseminating all existing ISAN in users audiovisual databases.

Q: How can I access the ISAN Registry? Is there an API?

A: The ISAN system and ISAN registry are accessible online 24/7.

A public discovery search with limited functionalities and results is available from the ISAN web site (www.isan.org/lookup/). Full search functionalities are free but require credentials obtained from a registration agency.

The ISAN Rest API (www.isan.org/api/) is available for users that need to connect their system or automated workflows to the ISAN registry for searching existing ISAN, retrieving metadata associated to an ISAN (lookup) or for registering content with ISAN. Contact your registration agency or ISAN-IA (cs@isan.org) if you are interested by implementing the ISAN API.



Q: Who assigns the ISAN?

A: The ISAN registry is administered by the ISAN International Agency (ISAN-IA) that coordinates the overall system and maintains a central register of all ISAN assignments (the ISAN registry). The ISAN International Agency appoints, and oversees the work of, individual ISAN registration agencies that are established to serve specific countries, regions or market sectors. These registration agencies receive and process applications for ISAN and assign the actual numbers to specific works and related versions.

ISANs can only be issued by appointed Registration Agencies (RAs) via the ISAN System following a set of guidelines to ensure data accuracy and system integrity.

Q: What is ISAN-IA?

A: ISAN International Agency or ISAN-IA is the ISAN registration authority. ISAN-IA is mandated by ISO and operates ISAN on a contractual basis and has the obligation to follow strict ISO rulings. ISAN-IA is responsible for promoting ISAN worldwide, for appointing Registration Agencies, and for running and managing the ISAN system where ISANs as well as related metadata are stored in the centralized ISAN Registry. ISAN-IA collects metadata via authorized ISAN Registration Agencies who accept ISAN applications from registrants (producers, publishers, etc...) with specific descriptive information (metadata) about their audiovisual works or related versions

Q: What is the difference between ISAN and ISAN-IA?

A: ISAN is the ISO standard. ISAN-IA is the ISAN Registration Authority mandated by ISO to manage the ISAN standard. ISAN-IA was founded in 2003 as a Swiss Non-profit organization chartered to implement the standard worldwide including a 24/7 operation of a database and XML based web service and managing Registration Agencies worldwide.

Q: Can ISAN be used with other audiovisual standards?

A: ISAN can be used with the major audiovisual standards used in content production and distribution. Several standards have a specific ISAN field and others are using generic URN (Universal Resource Name). ISAN is a registered Universal Resource Name (URN), therefore the ISAN URN representation can be used everywhere a URN is accepted as content identifier. [ETIF RFC 4246](http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc4246.txt) defines the formal URN and Namespace Identifiers (NID) for ISAN.

