
EDITORIAL CONTENT

In Memoriam: Dr. Norman Paskin, Founding Director, International DOI Foundation Visionary Pioneer of Reference Linking, Metadata and Persistent Identifier Infrastructure

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We were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of our longtime friend and colleague Dr. Norman Paskin in March 2016.

Norman will be remembered as the thoughtful and tireless founding director of the International DOI Foundation (IDF). Some of us were fortunate to have known him in the earliest days, during those formative pre-DOI Foundation meetings when technical and political views came together to form the foundation of what the DOI is today. The early days of DOI involved many lengthy, sometimes heated, email and face-to-face discussions, and we fondly remember Norman as a sensible voice calling out in the wilderness.

Establishing sound technical foundations for the DOI was surely only a first step; the DOI's long-term success and sustainability would depend on its widespread adoption, which in turn would require a clear message, sensible policies that would benefit a wide range of stakeholders, and constant evangelism. To the surprise of no one – except, perhaps, the man himself! – Norman Paskin was chosen in 1998 as the founding director of the IDF, and set out to spread the gospel of persistent identifiers while defining the mission of the IDF. Norman conveyed the message so well that twenty years later it is hard to imagine arguments against the DOI; indeed, its example is so compelling that in domains that can't directly adopt the DOI, we see parallel object identifier systems emerging, modelled directly after the DOI.

A critical component of the DOI's success is the robustness of its underlying infrastructure, the Handle System™, created and administered by Bob Kahn's team at Corporation for National Research Initiatives (CNRI). Not long into the life of the DOI and IDF, it became clear that the long-term success of the DOI and other emerging object naming systems based on the Handle System would in turn depend on a well-considered set of Handle System governance policies. In order to consider the needs of a range of current and future stakeholders, a Handle System Advisory Committee (HSAC) was formed in early 2001; on the HSAC Norman naturally represented the interests of the IDF and its members, but also understood the perspectives of CNRI, then the operator of the Handle System, as well as other Handle System adopters.

It was our pleasure to work directly with Norman on DOI matters, including early technology demonstrators that we demoed at the Frankfurt Book Fair and other conferences in the late 1990s, and later mutually participating in HSAC meetings and various DOI strategy sessions. Whenever we saw each other, in New York, Oxford, Washington, London or Frankfurt, we would resume conversations, from yesterday to last year, via email or in person. To all who knew him, Norman Paskin set the standard both literally and figuratively; his friends and colleagues miss him tremendously, but he will persist in our professional memories and in our hearts.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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