Why BibTeX, RIS and Endnote XML will soon be broken

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November 8, 2011

BibTeX is one of the most popular file formats for bibliographies, and is therefore commonly used to transfer bibliographies from one reference manager to another, or to other applications that handle bibliographic references. RIS and Endnote XML are probably the other two bibliographic file formats most commonly used. Most reference managers support all three formats, making it easy to move references around.

All three formats have been around for a while, BibTeX for example since 1985. Reference management has of course gone through many changes during this time, and an important change will happen next year: unique identifiers for scholarly authors. In 2012 the Open Researcher & Contributor ID (ORCID) initiative will start issuing unique identifiers for researchers, and researchers, universities, funding organizations, publishers and hopefully everyone else will start using them. But ORCID will only be successful if as many bibliographic tools as possible can handle ORCID identifiers, and if these tools can exchange these author identifiers.

None of the three bibliographic file formats mentioned above can handle unique author identifiers. If we take for example this paper from ScienceCard, then the authors would look like this in BibTeX:

```
author = {Kirstein, Janine and Dougan, David and Gerth, Ulf and Hecker, Michael and Turgay,
```

And like this in RIS:

```
AU  - Kirstein, Janine
AU  - Dougan, David
AU  - Gerth, Ulf
AU  - Hecker, Michael
AU  - Turgay, Kürşad
```

I suggest we extend the BibTeX format to understand author identifiers like this:

```
orcid = {1274643, 8474644, 847412, 9183414, 7461414}
```

And RIS:

```
AI  - 1274643
AI  - 8474644
AI  - 847412
AI  - 9183414
AI  - 7461414
```

This would look similar in Endnote XML. Will we see these changes to BibTeX, RIS and Endnote XML in 2012? I don't know, but I very much hope so. Imagine what your Zotero, Mendeley or Endnote could do if the application knew about unique author identifiers, e.g. find all papers by a particular author, alert me when a particular author publishes something new, or organize your reference library by author.