

Barcodes

What is a barcode?

Barcodes as we talk about them here consist of two elements; a unique numerical code and an image based on that code. For example a code might be 1234567891200 and the image based on that code would look like this:



There are very strict rules around the way barcodes are produced, including the precise dimensions for the images. This is to ensure that the many different makes and styles of scanners used in shops and on mobiles phones have the very best chance of reading them easily, quickly and accurately.

The most common type of bar code for retail use is the EAN-13 as shown above. You will sometimes see a shortened version (EAN-8) used on small products or on retailers own-brand products. The vast majority of retailers that you are likely to come across will require EAN-13 style barcodes.

Barcodes are unique for an individual product and are not related to the particular retailer in any way. You can therefore allocate a single barcode to a single card design and stick with that for as long as you have that card in your range.

What are they for?

Barcodes are used in the retail supply chain to aid the positive identification of individual products. When you supply a product with a barcode on it the retailer will enter the code on to their system and give it a description. This has several benefits for the retailer, including:

- Prices can be entered and controlled centrally for a whole batch of products, allowing changes and amendments 'at the click of a mouse';

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- Sales can be recorded and held centrally, allowing very accurate and timely reporting;
- Stock levels can be accurately monitored, enabling timely re-orders.

How do I get barcodes for my products?

Within the UK there is only one organisation able to issue barcodes. This is to ensure that each barcode issued is genuinely unique. The first part of the barcode identifies the issuing country, the second part identifies the 'brand owner' and the final part identifies the individual product.

This organisation is GS1 (www.gs1uk.org). To get your own barcodes you need to register with them. The cost of this is currently about £270 for the first year, renewing at about £140 per year thereafter. You can only continue to use the barcodes for as long as you remain registered with them.

Every 'brand owner' must, by law, have their own registration.

Once you have registered you are able, at the basic level (based on a turnover of less than £0.5m), to issue up to 1000 individual barcodes. This is done by entering product descriptions against the issued numbers in your 'numberbank'. You can then download the list of numbers and descriptions ready for generating the image files.

We have software to generate these images in a way that guarantees their usability. There is no additional cost for this service.

If you have any questions don't hesitate to contact us.

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