Bar Code (Barcode)

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Bar Code (Barcode) is the small image of lines (bars) and spaces that is affixed to retail store items, identification cards, and postal mail to identify a particular product number, person, or location. The code uses a sequence of vertical bars and spaces to represent numbers and other symbols. A bar code symbol typically consists of five parts: a quiet zone, a start character, data characters (including an optional check character), a stop character, and another quiet zone.

A barcode reader is used to read the code. The reader uses a laser beam that is sensitive to the reflections from the line and space thickness and variation. The reader translates the reflected light into digital data that is transferred to a computer for immediate action or storage. Bar codes and readers are most often seen in supermarkets and retail stores, but a large number of different uses have been found for them. They are also used to take inventory in retail stores; check out books from a library; track manufacturing and shipping movement; sign in on a job; identify hospital patients; and tabulate the results of direct mail marketing returns. Very small bar codes have been used to tag honey bees used in research. Readers may be attached to a computer (as they often are in retail store settings) or separate and portable, in which case they store the data they read until it can be fed into a computer.

There is no one standard bar code; instead, there are several different bar code standards called symbologies that serve different uses, industries, or geographic needs. Since 1973, the Uniform Product Code (UPC), regulated by the Uniform Code Council, an industry organization, has provided a standard bar code used by most retail stores. The European Article Numbering system (EAN), developed by Joe Woodland, the inventor of the first bar code system, allows for an extra pair of digits and is becoming widely used. POSTNET is the standard bar code used in the United States for ZIP codes in bulk mailing. The following table summarizes the most common bar code standards.

Also see: ISO/IEC 24724:2011 Information technology — Automatic identification and data capture techniques — GS1 DataBar bar code symbology specification

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