



**INTERNATIONAL BARCODES NETWORK**  
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# Guide to retail barcodes

## What is a barcode?

A barcode is a symbol that can be easily read by a barcode scanner or smartphone app, and links a product to product information in a database. Each barcode is a globally unique number.

Barcodes are most commonly used at checkouts in retail stores. Retailers use barcodes to quickly retrieve the name and price of a product at checkout and to track products as they move through the supply chain. Once scanned, store owners can be alerted to low stock levels of a particular item, prompting them to reorder in good time.

Every variation of a product (e.g. each size and colour) requires its own barcode.

# Retail Barcodes



## EAN-13 Barcodes / International Article Number

International Article Numbers, formerly EAN (European Article Numbers) comprise 13-digits. They are used worldwide on all retail products excluding books and magazines. They are the most widely used barcodes globally with the exception of in the USA and Canada where UPC-A (Universal Product Codes) barcodes are more common.

Each EAN-13 is product-specific and encoded into a barcode image. This means that when the barcode is scanned into store systems, price and inventory data related to your product is recorded. A different EAN-13 number, therefore, is required for each unique product.



## UPC-A Barcodes

12-digit UPC Barcodes are used predominantly in the USA and Canada on all retail products, with the exception of books and magazines.



## ITF-14 Carton & Pallet Barcodes

ITF-14 Carton Codes are created from EAN-13 and UPC-A barcodes. They are only used in warehouses on cartons containing a specific quantity of the item that the product barcode represents. They should not be used for any products that are for sale individually at a retail level.

# Book and Magazine Barcodes



## ISBN Book Barcodes

International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) are barcodes for both hard copy and e-books. ISBNs usually start with 978 and are distributed by ISBN agencies in each country (see [isbn-international.org/agency](http://isbn-international.org/agency)). They can also be obtained through independent publishing agencies such as [bookisbn.org.uk](http://bookisbn.org.uk), used for self-publishing authors.

Note: Crossword, puzzle and colouring books are not published books so do not use ISBN barcodes. They use standard retail barcodes (EAN or UPC).



## ISSN Magazine Barcodes

An International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) is a unique 8-digit number used to identify periodical publications such as magazines and journals. They can be applied for at [issn.org/services/requesting-an-issn](http://issn.org/services/requesting-an-issn).

Only apply for an ISSN if your publications meet the following criteria:

- They are serials (journals, newspapers, magazines, monographic series etc.)
- They are ongoing integrating resources (websites, databases etc.)

# How to Get a Barcode

Getting barcodes onto your products and into retail stores involves 3 easy steps:

## 1. Buy a barcode:

- Establish where you will be selling your product to determine if you require EAN-13 or UPC barcodes.
- Decide how many barcodes you need based on product variations. Remember that different sizes, colours and flavours each require separate barcodes.
- Purchase your EAN or UPC barcode in the correct quantity online.
- Receive an email with your barcode number/s plus files with the corresponding images in the file format of your choice.

## 2. Add your barcode to your product:

### DESIGN

- Choose whichever barcode image format (e.g. jpeg, pdf) you prefer.
- Resize the image to fit into your product packaging.

### Please keep in mind the Barcode Dimensions:

Standard size is about 38mm wide x 25mm high. The smallest recommended size is 80% of standard size – i.e. about 30mm wide x 20mm high. For full specifications see: [internationalbarcodes.com/ean-13-specifications](https://www.internationalbarcodes.com/ean-13-specifications)

- Add the barcode to your product packaging in an easily visible, flat location. Don't print too close to the edge or over seams.
- If you are placing your barcode on a curved surface, e.g. a bottle, the barcode should be rotated to resemble a ladder (vertical), instead of a fence (horizontal).
- If you want the barcode printed onto adhesive labels to be manually applied to your product, follow the same principles outlined above.

### PRINT

- Check your label artwork **BEFORE** printing your product packaging.
- Check that the barcode numbers are correct and that the barcode image is of high quality and within the official size range.
- Do a **SAMPLE PRINT** and check that the barcode prints and scans correctly.

## 3. Send your product to retailers:

Once you've printed your product packaging, send the barcoded products and product information to your retailers.

The retailer will scan the barcode into their system and enter the specific product and price information for that item into their database. The correct product information will now appear whenever the barcode is scanned in that retail store.

# Extra Barcode Services

## Barcode Registration

Once purchased, you have the option to assign product and company information to your barcodes, for example, the product's country of origin, description and manufacturer's contact details. You can then register your barcode number and product details on the International Barcodes Database ([barcodesdatabase.org](http://barcodesdatabase.org)). This data is then automatically submitted to the leading barcodes databases around the world.

To register your barcode number please go to [barcodesdatabase.org/barcode-registration](http://barcodesdatabase.org/barcode-registration).

Registration is optional, but it can increase your product's profile on the internet.

### Benefits of barcode registration:

- To reduce illegal use of your barcode (an internet search will show if the number is already in use, discouraging unauthorised use).
- For greater online visibility of your product, including apps that use barcode databases.

**Note:** Barcode registration does not send product data to your retailers. You still need to send each retailer your barcode numbers and corresponding product information. Each retailer has their own system, so you need to register your products with them individually.

## Barcode Verification

Barcode verification is a test scan of your barcode to ensure it will scan well in different scanning environments. Verification is not usually required, however, this is country and retailer specific. We can provide barcode verification if you need it (please contact us if you need your barcodes verified). For information about barcode verification please see [internationalbarcodes.com/barcode-verification](http://internationalbarcodes.com/barcode-verification). For information about the stores that require verification please see [internationalbarcodes.com/barcode-acceptance](http://internationalbarcodes.com/barcode-acceptance).

## Barcode Scanning & Apps

There are many free barcode scanning apps for both Android and iPhone, such as Zebra. When you scan a barcode with one of these apps, the product information will appear if the app contains that product in its database, or draws that information from an online database or an online retail store.

## Is it safe to buy from a reseller rather than GS1?

A common misconception is that GS1 is the only way to obtain legally registered barcode numbers. However, be assured that our barcodes are completely legitimate. When GS1 merged with UCC (Uniform Code Council) in the 1990s, GS1 had a lawsuit filed against them by original UCC members pertaining to unnecessary membership fees. As a result, GS1 had to forfeit control of the original barcodes issued by the UCC, and license fees for these barcodes are no longer required.

These barcode numbers are now bought by resellers, like us, and sold on an individual basis. They are new, unused, and still part of the GS1 system.

This is why we are able to sell barcodes at a one-off cost and without any membership fees. This makes buying from us, rather than through GS1, far more cost-effective.

***Not all barcodes sold on the internet are legitimate. Some barcode numbers may be illegal or may already be in use by another organisation.***