

Barcodes are a modern invention that is very useful. How those vertical lines, little square boxes and bullseye targets actually mean anything is wondrous.

One of barcode's early commercial uses began in the 1960s for marking railroad cars. Good idea but abandoned after a 10 year run. The system was not very accurate or reliable.

Bernard Silver and Norman Woodland are attributed with patenting the first ever barcode symbology way back in 1952. The goal was a means of identifying products automatically at supermarket checkout. Between ink smears on the code and the lack of inexpensive scanners it was not accepted as the first UPC (Universal Product Code).

Fast forward to 1974 for the first scan of a UPC on a 10 pack of Wrigley's Juicy Fruit gum and as they say, the rest is history.

Barcodes are used to identify automotive and industrial parts, assemblies, and completed rolling vehicles. The cans of beans and peas in your pantry; the files in your lawyers' office, and the bottle of your favorite beverage, all utilize barcodes. In fact, almost anything worth identifying has a barcode attached to it. What's interesting is that the only barcode not to have parameters and rules to its' function is the QR code. This is the little checkerboard that's jam-packed with information. This is the code that real estate brokers like to pass around on their business cards. Most QR codes direct you to a web site. It really is a fun free-for-all. Try making your own QR code and scan it with your phone; many label printer manufacturers have free software to format your label.

Why do we need so many different types of barcodes?

All barcode types are created to meet specifications based on what the codes will be used for.

What do I need to print my own barcodes?

You will need a barcode label printer, barcode software and labels.

BARCODE LABEL PRINTER

Thermal transfer is the preferred method in barcode printing. This means your barcode will be transferred to your label through a ribbon giving you clean, clear, permanent image. Your printer must print the symbology with precision. Print resolution matters in your barcode label. The smaller the label the greater the resolution needed for scanning your barcode.

BARCODE SOFTWARE

This is the conduit between your message on the screen and the printed image coming out of your printer. The software understands the rules and conditions for each barcode symbology. Using the barcode templates supplied, your can of peas will not be mistaken for brake pads when scanned.

BARCODE LABELS

The label is very important, it's the final element. The label is what must be scanned for product identification. Just imagine that concert wristband that's not readable with that mob behind you waiting to get in? Labels must provide the contrast between the dark lines for the scanner to read them. Labels should stick on permanently. You don't want someone buying a steak and paying for ground round with a switched barcode label. By the way, barcode labels do not have prices

embedded. The barcode brings up the product information; checkout point-of-sale software reads the barcode and associates the code with a price.

Barcodes have more uses than just point-of-sale. In industry, barcodes can link the employee, the job and the parts required to do the job. Even tools borrowed from the tool inventory can be scanned and "charged" against the work in progress. If the tools are not returned, the employee and job can be charged for the replacement. This helps to keep unnecessary costs down and inventory levels accurate.

In many file rooms, barcodes are scanned to record the file removal against the person who has requested access. Again, keeping track of who took what and for how long. By adding conditions to the barcode, you can restrict access to authorized personnel.

Remember time cards? Now you scan your employee card's barcode when you enter the facility and again when you are at your workstation.

With high resolution printers, barcodes can easily be printed onto heat shrink tubing. This can facilitate tracking and identification of cables.

Barcodes are an excellent way of keeping track of anything and everything. A barcode label is very inexpensive to produce. Scanners to read the code and software to process the scan into inventory levels are readily available.

Neumann Marking Solutions can supply barcode printers, ribbons, labels, heat shrink tubing, software and scanners. Just let us know what you want to keep track of.

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