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Chaos

Barcoding for Books

by Sandra K. Paul, President, SKP Associates

As the Managing Agent for the Book Industry Study Group, publisher of the *Machine-Readable Coding Guidelines for the U.S. Book Industry*, I can not tell you how many calls we receive each day from publishers — primarily, but not exclusively new ones — asking about barcode standards for books. AND, the number has quadrupled since Baker & Taylor began charging publishers \$.10 per copy for books they receive without a barcode on the book and included our name and phone number in their letter of explanation.

So what are we talking about when we give information about barcodes for books? THE BOOKLAND EAN. It is not a hard standard to understand, so here goes. The Bookland EAN is a barcode symbology composed of the following components: The first three digits are 978. This represents the mythical country "Bookland." When the North American Universal Product Code (UPC) that you see on everything you buy here in the U.S. was adopted abroad, that first happened in Europe. They added one digit to the front of the 12 digit UPC and called it the European Article Number (EAN). They saved the first digit "0" for use in front of North American UPCs and then assigned identifiers to each country in Europe. They now exist for every country in the world and the symbology should be called the International Article Number — but we're stuck with EAN not IA. When approached by the International ISBN Agency with the explanation that ISBNs already indicate country (or at least language) of origin, the EAN Authority agreed to assign the number 978 to this mythical country, Bookland — the source of all books. The next nine digits are the first 9 digits of the book's ISBN — no matter where in the world the book originates or is published. The next digit is a "check digit" allowing a computer to verify that the preceding 12 digits plus the check digit are mathematically correct. (The ISBN check digit is based on a modulus 11, so it can have the value 10, represented by the Roman X. Since the UPC/EAN bar code can not handle alphabetic characters, the EAN check digit is based on a modulus 10 and can only have values between 0 and 9.)

That completes the first 13 large bars you find in the barcode on books. However, those bars are always (in North America) and often (in other countries) followed by five smaller bars. The content of that "add-on" barcode symbol are: If the lead digit is "9," that tells you and the scanner that the publisher is using the add-on for its own purposes and it has nothing meaningful in it. The exception is when the number is 99991, which is used for college textbooks given free of charge to professors as desk copies, and 99990 used to differentiate a used textbook from a new one. If the lead digit is 5, that means the content is the cover price of the book (without a decimal point) in U.S. dollars; a 6 is Canadian dollars, 0 and 1 are British pounds.

We could stop right here and everyone would be happy — except for the supermarkets and drug stores which are very important outlets for rack-size mass market

paperback books. They don't buy books from publishers — they simply accept what is placed on their racks by their distributor. They don't care what they sell, because they won't reorder a title — their distributor will replace hot-selling titles. So, all they need and want is a bar code that allows them to look up a price and place that price in the cash register. In order to accommodate the needs of this community and their clerical staffs (which are unable to differentiate a unique product called a "book"), rack-size mass market paperback books with returnable covers carry a price-point UPC on their back cover. However, in order to allow distributors and those in other retail outlets (with clerical staffs which CAN differentiate between a rack-size mass market paperback and other types of books) to scan a meaningful number, these books carry the Bookland EAN on the inside of their front covers.

Enough said. If you want more information about these standards that I've provided here, join the folks calling 212/929-1393 and ask us to send you a copy of the *Machine-Readable Coding Guidelines for the U.S. Book Industry*. We will do so immediately, along with an invoice for the cover price of \$7.50 U.S. — or 50750, in add-on terminology!!

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