



CodeFacts

AIDC (Automated Identification and Data Collection) Technical & Informational Documents
Written for Everyone

Information on U.P.C. and EAN Bar Codes For Products and Books Sold in North America

The U.P.C. (Universal Product Code) symbol is the most common method of identifying products that are to be sold at a retail level in North America. The UPC symbols printed on periodicals and books have different specifications with regards to layout and design. See later on in this document for information on book bar codes.

The U.P.C. is made up of twelve digits. The first number is called the number system character. This digit and the next five digits form the manufacturer's number. The seventh through eleventh characters are the product code and the final, twelfth character is a modulus check digit. (Don't worry about this last number.)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 5
|_____||_____||-|

manufacturer product check digit

Therefore, in effect, the left half of the symbol (first six characters) represents the manufacturer of the product to which the U.P.C. is attached. Each unique product, size or style is represented by the next five digits, giving 100,000 product code permutations to a single manufacturer (00000 through 99999). This product code number is decided somewhat-arbitrarily by the manufacturer and must represent a unique SKU (stock keeping unit) by which the retailer will track inventory. Product code numbers may be any five-digit number -- your lucky number or birthday is OK-but, of course, you must assign a different number for each product!

That being stated and understood (we hope!) please proceed through the following steps!

Step 1 - Get yourself a manufacturer's number.

U.P.C. manufacturer numbers are given out in the U.S. to American companies by:

Uniform Code Council
7887 Washington Village Drive
Suite 300
Dayton, OH 45459
(937) 435-3870.
<http://www.uc-council.org/>

In Canada, U.P.C.s are administrated by:

Electronic Commerce Council of Canada
885 Don Mills Road, Suite 301
Don Mills, Ontario M3C 1V9
(800) 567-7084
<http://www.eccc.org/>

In either case, get out your wallet. You'll need to pay a fee to join either organization before you'll be given your manufacturer's number.

Once you get your manufacturer's number and have decided on what product number(s) you're going to assign to your product(s), please get back to us. This is when we can really help you out!

Step 2 - Consider your U.P.C. identification strategy options

You now have to consider just how these beautiful U.P.C. bar codes are going to make their way onto your lovely products. There are basically two strategies: print the U.P.C. as a part of the packaging (i.e., have it/them printed from a printing plate on a printing press when you print the other parts of your packaging), or have the U.P.C. printed on a label, that is in turn applied to the product.

The first strategy is the cheapest by far, since you're essentially making thousands (or millions) of copies of the same thing on a printing press - a pretty economical proposition. For this purpose, we would be supply you with a "bar code master" for each and every different U.P.C. you needed.

If your package is already designed, you may either purchase preprinted U.P.C. labels, which we create in the thousands all the time, or you may buy from us some software or a label printing system for the ongoing printing of U.P.C. symbols, as required.

Step 3 - Talk to us about the different U.P.C. strategies

If you're the least bit confused, drop us a line at sandi.tough@aurorabarcodes.com or call us at (780) 483-6025. We'll clear things up for you.

Step 4 - Place an order with us

Please allow us to:

1. Provide you with one or more bar code masters in any of three formats (film negative, PMT positive, computer graphics file format -- EPS or WMF)
2. Provide you with all the preprinted U.P.C. sticky labels you could ever need.
3. Provide you with PC- or Mac-based software for printing bar codes on a laser or inkjet printer.
4. Provide you with a complete bar code labeling system (software and special label printer).

Special notes for folks wanting to put bar codes on their books:

Another commonly required bar code type is that for books. It is the ISBN (International Standard Book Number) in the form of an EAN-13 bar code symbol. The ISBN is assigned in Canada by the National Library of Canada and is a unique number for each book title. While they have not specified strict specifications with regards to size, etc., we generally follow the established U.P.C./EAN specs.

Simply put, the numbers "978" precede the ISBN in the bar code symbol, which represents 14 digits in total, including the check digit.

As with U.P.C. bar code symbols, we can provide our clients with bar code masters, preprinted labels, software for creating EAN bar codes, or systems to print these symbols.

We hope this information has been informative and look forward to working with you further.