

# Why accurate barcodes are more important than

Ian Walters, Market Development Manager – CPG Retail at GS1 UK, outlines the importance of barcodes, and why the data encoded in those black and white lines matters

## **The importance of product labelling**

Labelling a product correctly is critical. Packaging is the final selling point to the consumer and the last point at which the brand can make a real difference. Making a product stand out from the crowd by its packaging is a great challenge, not helped by the need to include all the product information that's needed – information that must be easy to read for the consumer, and meet

all regulatory requirements, such as Food Information Regulation EU 1169/2011 for example.

The design, colouring and branding all help make a product appeal to the consumer, but how effectively this additional information is displayed – and how accurate it is – can make a real difference to the product's sales. This information, including nutritional and allergen details, country of origin, ingredients,

storage instructions, expiry dates and much more, is increasingly demanded by consumers to help them make an informed buying decision.

## **Accurate product information is more important than ever before**

The quality and accuracy of this information is more vital than ever before. Consumers increasingly look at it at the point of purchase, and with the growth in online shopping, consumers can search and find the products that suit their lifestyle or diet more easily than ever before. The increased interest in the provenance or source of food is a case in point, where good quality product data begins at the farm gate and must be maintained as products move through the supply chain.

But how can we ensure that farmers, manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers and, ultimately, the consumer, all have the information they need? This is where GS1 standards come in. Not only do they make the supply chain operate more efficiently and effectively, but by



# and product information ever before

linking the data to the product – at every stage along the supply chain – they help ensure quality, accurate data is available to everyone, at all times.

## **Barcodes are key – and not just at the point-of-sale**

Barcodes, the humble black-and-white lines that we all recognise, are found on almost every food product in the world. They are used to identify each and every product type – by encoding a unique number, or GTIN (Global Trade Item Number), in each barcode.

These GTINs and barcodes all follow the global standards set out by GS1.

The GTIN is a vital component of the supply chain. Everyone uses the GTINs to identify products and shipments, and they can be used to look up additional information about the product and shipment.

But you don't just find GS1 barcodes on the final product that consumers see on the shelves and buy. Importantly, other GS1 barcodes are used on cases and shipments of products throughout the supply chain. Barcodes such as GS1-128 allow



more information, such as expiry dates and batch numbers to be encoded. This information, which is also used in EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) messages, such as ASNs (Advanced Shipping Notice), allows products to be tracked and traced along the entire supply chain – from farm to fork.

This not only helps the supply chain operate smoothly and efficiently, but when problems occur, such as the horsemeat scandal a few years ago, then all affected products can be quickly identified and removed from

the supply chain, and even the shelves in stores – protecting the consumer and also helping to protect the brand.

## **Barcodes are vital – and they keep evolving**

The barcode you see on almost every product has remained the same for over 40 years – demonstrating just what a simple yet effective system of capturing and sharing information it is. In more recent times we've seen the development of GS1 DataBar, which, like the GS1-128 barcode used in the supply chain, allows more information to be encoded



in a barcode – and scanned at the point-of-sale. GS1 DataBar has been trialled by various retailers around the world, helping products to be traced right through to the consumer.

And of course we all saw the explosion in 2D barcodes – called QR codes - which are frequently

used to help consumers access even more product information online, by simply scanning them from a mobile phone.

#### **Working with industry to tackle today's industry issues**

Here at GS1 UK, as a not-for-profit member-owned organisation, we work closely with our retailer

and supplier members to address industry issues, and help improve industry-wide processes. The ultimate goal is that shoppers can make informed purchasing decisions – and in order for this to happen, good product information needs to be shared between all parties in the supply chain. Using standards can help rule out the use of inconsistent or poor quality product information, while growing loyalty and increasing trust and confidence in brands.

We've helped the food industry understand the labelling requirements for new legislation such as Food Information Regulation EU 1169/2011. And we're currently working with a group of leading retailers and suppliers on the 'perfect order' initiative – which will help the industry tackle hidden operating costs, delays and process inefficiencies in the inbound grocery supply chain, while ultimately addressing the need to create the seamless shopping experience that consumers expect today.

We do this by helping everyone in the supply chain to have access to consistent, accurate data when labelling and sharing information along the supply chain – using EDI and barcodes. ■

#### **Ian Walters, Market Development Manager – CPG Retail at GS1 UK**

Ian joined GS1 UK in 2014 as Market Development Manager – CPG Retail.

His primary responsibilities are to develop and deliver GS1 UK's retail market strategies – engaging with retailers and their suppliers to harness the



commercial benefits of adopting GS1 standards.

Ultimately whatever we do has to have a benefit for the industry and the shopper.

His career before joining GS1 had always been in sales and marketing, working for branded manufacturers both in the UK and across Europe. He then changed direction, spending 4 years at IGD focused on improving trading relationships as well as building skills and capabilities of commercial teams.

His previous work experience includes:

- 2010-2014: Commercial Capability Manager, IGD
- 2001-2008: Various European and UK commercial roles, H.J. Heinz
- 1997-2001: Clairol, European Trade Marketing Manager
- 1976-1997: Various Sales, Marketing and Customer Marketing roles, Nestlé UK

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