



1974-2019

Happy Birthday, Barcode!

Celebrating 45 Years of the Barcode Scan



GS1 Brief History

GS1® traces its origins to a historic decision in the United States on April 3, 1973 by an Ad Hoc Committee of the Uniform Grocery Code Council (UGCC), a corporation previously formed by the grocery industry's leading trade associations, to select the linear barcode as the Universal Product Code (UPC) symbology. In September of 1974, the UGCC became the Uniform Product Code Council (UPCC) and the administrator of the barcode.

The first UPC-marked item ever scanned was a 10-pack (50 sticks) of Wrigley's Juicy Fruit chewing gum. The gum was scanned at a Marsh supermarket in Troy, Ohio at 8:01 a.m. on June 26, 1974. The shopper was Clyde Dawson and the cashier who made that first UPC scan was Sharon Buchanan. The cash register rang up 67 cents. The entire shopping cart also had barcoded items in it, but the gum was the first one scanned. This item is on display at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.

The man credited with inventing the barcode is N. Joseph Woodland. His idea for the barcode originated from his studies of Morse Code when he was a Boy Scout—he drew parallel lines through the sand with four fingers while staying with his grandparents in Miami Beach in 1948-49. His first idea for a barcode was a circular design. He and a partner, Bernard Silver, patented this bull's-eye-type design in 1952 and eventually sold their patent to Philco for \$15,000. It was all they ever made from their invention. Over time, laser-scanning technology and the advent of the microprocessor made the barcode viable. In the early 1970s, IBM's George J. Laurer designed the familiar black-and-white rectangle based on Woodland's model and with considerable input from Woodland, who was working at IBM at the time. In 1973, the grocery industry selected the linear UPC barcode as the preferred standard.

All involved in the events leading up to the historical first barcode scan did not know the impact of their creation. For example, at the barcode's inception, the Council estimated that there would only be 6,000 numbers assigned and then the council would disband. Today, the UPC has grown in versatility to power the movement of goods around the world and is scanned more than 6 billion times a day.