

Setting the record straight on GS1 Barcode Verification

In the past few months a number of inaccurate and misleading statements have been promulgated about GS1 Australia and in particular the barcode verification service, Barcode Check, we have proudly offered Australian companies for the past three decades. During that time this service has saved industry millions of dollars by helping companies identify problems relating to unreadable or inaccurate barcodes.

Until now we have chosen to keep a dignified silence and ignore the ongoing campaign that is being waged against us. However, we have an obligation to our members and Alliance Partners to ensure that the correct information is being provided and that we provide the facts so that you will not be deceived by those that are only motivated by their own profit driven self-interest.

Those that have used the GS1 Australia Barcode Check will attest that it is the most thorough and complete service available in the market. Our specialist staff are experts in the field of verification and the use of the GS1 barcode standards. So to suggest that self-assessment is an equal, cheaper alternative to having GS1 give you an independent specialist assessment is both naive and misleading.

However, it is a fact that in 2001 we offered an Accreditation Programme that allowed companies to self-assess, but after a number of years it became obvious that the cost, training and resource investment needed by companies was extensive and prohibitive. In fact many of the companies that undertook the initial programme eventually withdrew due to the cost of maintaining a quality control system purely around the barcode, which they did not see to be a core business.

We wanted to address some of the misleading claims that have been recently published and provide our fact based perspective to give a more balanced view on a very important topic.

Misleading claim: "Barcode verification is easy"

Fact: Barcode verification is not easy if you want to do it right. Our barcode verification testing specialists undergo a minimum of six months extensive training before they are able to issue GS1 verification reports, with many on the team having specialised in the field for over 10 years. The ISO standards on which we base our testing regime contain a range of complexities that must be appropriately interpreted. Even then this is not sufficient to give the confidence needed to know if it is the right barcode for a specific environment carrying the right number. This is where our unique knowledge and expertise is unsurpassed.

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Misleading claim: “It is cheaper to go elsewhere”

Fact: As a member of GS1 Australia, your first two test reports every year are free of charge as part of your membership. After that, we charge \$32 per report. This also includes a dimension check and comparison to the National Product Catalogue, confirmation you have used the right number assigned to you and verification the number has not been used on any other products in your range. Our reports are also totally independent and unbiased.

Companies promoting an alternative offering to GS1, advertise charges anywhere from 140% to over 230% of the fees that we charge per report. These companies also sell verification equipment, which can cost thousands of dollars per machine. You will need two, one to do your consumer products and one to do your outer cartons.

Misleading claim: “It only takes a few minutes to produce a report”

Fact: Another misleading statement designed to deceive you. Yes, a print out of an ISO reading only takes a few minutes. What takes a lot longer is taking that print out and producing a GS1 complete verification report that includes all of the elements needed to get a full compliance check including the right barcode type, number validation, dimensions, comparison to the National Product Catalogue, scanning environment checks as well as instruction on how to correct any errors or make improvements that will lead to better scanning performance.

Misleading claim: “It can take weeks to get a report”

Fact: This is simply untrue and has been the case for at least the past 10 years. Our turnaround times in both our Melbourne and Sydney offices have been consistently around two-to-three days with requests for urgent reports always given immediate priority.

Misleading claim: “We charge extra for urgent jobs”

Fact: Again this is untrue. We DO NOT charge extra for this service. When a customer comes to us with a genuinely urgent job, we produce their report immediately – sometimes while they sit and wait in our offices.

Misleading claim: “It would be cheaper to do it myself”

Fact: Not as simple as it might appear, there are a number of costs that need to be factored into this equation.

Firstly, there is the training of the person performing the testing. This person needs to not only understand and be able to interpret the ISO report but also understand the GS1 barcode standards and the environment that the product will be scanned - Is it point-of-sale? Is it warehouse/distribution? Is it for cartons or pallets etc..? Do they understand the different types of barcodes that could get a pass grade on ISO yet be totally the wrong barcode for scanning by retailers? If they find a problem do they know what is required to rectify it?

Second is the equipment. Verifiers are effectively scientific measuring devices. You need one that measures point-of-sale barcodes and another for barcodes that are applied to shippers or pallets. The price for each verifier can be thousands of dollars, how many reports will you need to produce to get a payback? And there are also ongoing service costs of these machines which, through our own experience, can be considerable each time an upgrade is needed.

Third is the time taken to produce the reports? All of the values from an ISO printout need to be interpreted and transposed to the appropriate report format for the retailers.

Because of the high volume of reports we produce each year, and because we are a not-for-profit organisation, we are able to offer this service on a low, cost-recovery basis whilst at the same time giving you confidence that your barcode has been checked by experienced specialists.

However, some brand owners with high volumes and particularly printing companies may wish to perform their own print quality tests during various stages of their print run to assess consistency. In this instance we encourage companies to not view this process as a substitute to the GS1 verification report but rather as an addition as it covers much more than purely the print quality of a barcode.

In Summary

For more than 35 years retailers, manufacturers and printers have trusted GS1 Australia to verify GS1 barcodes to the GS1 standards. It's the same reason the RTA, VicRoads and all the other State governments control drivers licences rather than let

you issue your own licence or outsource them to car dealerships, who just want to sell you a car.

GS1 Australia has no ulterior motive and no self-serving commercial interests. We do not believe that there are any comparable alternatives to the GS1 Australia Barcode Check service. This service will continue to give you an unparalleled trustworthy assessment of your barcode, barcode number and its compliance to the industry implementation requirements. We will continue to highlight when you are about to make an expensive mistake and tell you how to fix it, saving you thousands of dollars each time we do so.

GS1 was set up for industry, by industry and we are committed to doing all that we can to helping Australian industry achieve the best barcode quality anywhere in the world.