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Bar Codes and Readers

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TOPIC ---

I am thinking of using bar codes for some special inventory uses, but don't
know which one to choose. Can you help?

DISCUSSION --

There are industry standards for bar coding. Virtually every manufacturer of
computers and peripherals for instance has standardized on the Code 3-of-9
(Code 39) format. They have done so for a number of reasons. While most bar
code formats are numeric only, Code 39 is an alphanumeric bar code consisting
of all uppercase alphas A through Z, numerals 0 through 9, and a half dozen or
so punctuation marks. Code 39 is a variable-length bar code. Anywhere from a
single character to 30 or more characters (space and scanning hardware
permitting) can be in a bar code.

Code 39 is in the public domain, which means that programmers can freely
accommodate printing Code 39 in their programs.

UPC is clearly the most visible bar code in the US, and it is also the most
useless to 98% of the population. It is a special-purpose bar code that is used
by manufacturers whose products will be sold in retail stores with scanning
equipment. This pretty much limites UPC to supermarkets and some record stores.
UPC is hard to print and there is no reason to do so. Most currently available
bar code scanners "autodiscriminate" which means they automatically decode
several different bar code formats.
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