

GS1 Standards in Belgian Post



Keeping The Post On Track

In 2009, bpost (Belgian Post) handled more than 12 million mail items a day, of those, more than 90000 are national registered mail which means they contain vital information for both the sender and addressee.

Faced with the need to ensure that a postal item could be tracked from post office to final destination including being aware of any instance where the item does not arrive, bpost decided to integrate GS1 standards in E-Tracker, an online solution enabling customers to trace, among other things, national registered mails.

Now bpost uses a certificate of posting for registered mail that must be completed and kept by the client after being stamped by the Post Office. It carries a GS1-128 bar code printed on a self-adhesive support, the upper part of which must be removed and affixed to the registered mail. The customer keeps the certificate of posting, still bearing the lower part of the same barcode. The Application Identifiers used in this case are AI (01) (GTIN of the product based upon bpost company prefix, in this case "*national registered mail*") and AI (21) (serial number of the national registered mail). GTIN and a serial number make each national registered mail unique.

This works effectively for both parties. Bpost is able to track and trace the shipment from post office to delivery by scanning the GS1 barcode at each important point of the delivery process and the customer can follow the shipment and know at any time where its mail is by using a track and trace tool online (E-TRACKER: www.bpost.be/track). National registered mail has to be selected and the serial number encoded manually. The sender can check whether the national registered mail is still in transit or as already been received by recipient.

Standardisation Leads To Competitive Advantage

In the context of increased competition amongst postal service providers in Europe, bpost developed new solutions to enhance competitiveness, such as offering postal services or postal items outside the usual postal environment. A key development in this area was the opening of "*Point Poste/Postpunt*" counters in supermarkets and railway stations, since this enabled the company to reach more and more customers.

The issues of compatibility between commercial partners and compatibility with POS systems of the different retailers were one of the main challenges that had to be addressed. As GS1 standards are already widely and internationally spread in the retail environment, they were chosen to be sure that postal products and services could be scanned at the point of sale.

Based on the bpost company prefix, Belgian postal stamps, parcels, post cards are therefore identified with a GTIN 13 embedded in an EAN 13 barcode, opening the path for further collaboration and open possibility of many other solutions between bpost and commercial partners.



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