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Bulletin – Excerpt
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The Universal Postal Union:
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A reliable address?

Contact person: luc.hauss@upu.int

From time immemorial, any exchange of goods or services, either domestically or internationally, has required the address or location of the recipient. Today, delivery is much easier. Points of reference have evolved from natural landmarks, to a system of defined regions, provinces, municipalities, neighbourhoods, streets and houses, even down to specific delivery points such as door, floor or apartment. Geographic coordinates can also be used (altitude, and especially latitude and longitude).

Why is the quality of the address important?

For proper dispatch and delivery, a full and accurate address for the recipient is vital. With cross-border deliveries and different postal addressing systems from one country to the next, sound address management is a must. Online retailers, their partners and delivery service providers sometimes share data on clients and products. B2C or B2B4C deliveries rely on shared data, and any data exchanged needs to be reliable and standardized.

The sender's address is also important, to facilitate potential returns.

Why do countries use different address formats?

In each country, the government, regulator and operator are responsible for the design and implementation of a national postal addressing system. A national address will be influenced by customs and traditions, by the country's infrastructure, and of course by the recommendations of the national postal operator. The address format depends on whether the item will be delivered to a P.O. box, a post office or agency, the addressee's home, or to the address of a big mailer, as well

as whether the delivery will be to a rural area or in a city. An address format or type therefore depends on a number of factors. Authorities should describe the different address formats and communicate that information as widely as possible to individuals and businesses.

For proper address management, is there a list of address elements for each type of address?

UPU standard S42 (International postal address components and templates) lists around 200 international postal address components. This compilation of address components includes a description of various address types, country by country. Sound address management starts with entering the address properly in the first place, as soon as the customer makes the order.

Does that mean that it is necessary to have a database with over 200 fields for different address templates?

Address formats are specific to each country and its types of delivery. Compiling 200 fields is not really necessary, and software will accommodate different address types, according to the country. The number of fields can be reduced to about 20 to facilitate the input of addresses, optimize storage of address components and render addresses line by line for dispatch labels, for example.

What are the 23 fields necessary for proper address input and storage?

The following information is useful to facilitate international address management:

1. Name of company or organization
2. Name of unit within the company
3. Full name of addressee (if to a specific individual)
4. Male or female, title, position (if to a specific individual)
5. Address line 1 (thoroughfare/street)
6. Building number on the thoroughfare
7. Name of building or structure

8. Address line 2 (name of place, neighbourhood, industrial area, commercial area, village)
9. Address line 3 (other specific mention, e.g. "To the attention of", c/o)
10. Door, floor, apartment
11. P.O. box, mailbag, neighbourhood mailbox
12. Post office or postal agency of delivery
13. Second subdivision of locality
14. First subdivision of locality
15. Name of locality
16. Postcode
17. Second-level administrative subdivision
18. First-level administrative subdivision
19. Administrative division (state, region, province, department, canton, parish)
20. Country (full name, two- or three-character code, or abbreviation)
21. Field for notes or comments
22. Other delivery contact information (telephone, e-mail)
23. Geolocation (latitude and longitude of delivery point)

When is geolocation used (latitude and longitude of delivery point)?

Geolocation would normally be used for countries that traditionally have no residential grid, especially in sparsely populated rural areas and for nomadic populations. In such cases, the country can map mail delivery points and store them by electromagnetic reference (RFID, GSM, tags, etc.). This reference will be recognized at the sorting centre, which will then inform recipients that they can come pick up their mail at the closest delivery point. For this process, the addressee will need a mobile phone, which today is becoming the norm. In the near future, drones could be used for postal delivery in appropriate areas (rural or industrial). Geo-referencing of mail centres (for sorting, forwarding and distribution), post offices and postal agencies will then become useful. For addressing databases, integrating geographical coordinates of a central

point at locality, subdivision and street level is already an asset. Latitude and longitude information for certain delivery points will be a must in the future.

Of course, according to the type of address and the country's postal addressing system, it will not be necessary to fill in all the fields. Software applications for address input should take into account the different address formats and display only the relevant fields. For countries without a postal code, for example, it is unnecessary to include this field. The same goes for countries where the administrative division (state, region, province, department, etc.) is not required as part of the address.

Have you seen companies in critical situations?

We can advise companies and suggest a fix. Recently, we have dealt with various cases: multiple address files, each with its own structure; address fields that allow for too few characters; a field for the street but additional delivery point information in a second "comment" field; address elements entered in an adjacent field, since the relevant field was already full; use of a non-standard separator for address elements within a single field; untrained staff members responsible for address input; lack of input rules; no online help for recognized address formats; and data-sharing problems between internal software applications and between partners.

So after the addressing data has been properly defined and structured, managing the client database is easy?

A great number of problems will already have been avoided, certainly. However, the number of characters in each address field needs to be defined, as well as how to manage this data. Software for customer relationship management and data quality is useful for the management of key data, or "master data management". These tools accommodate the complex nature of addresses and make it possible to manage and maintain the data throughout its life cycle.

They will also ensure data integrity. The process starts with the input of the address or auto-completion through online address reference data, followed by validation either directly or through bulk or batch correction, deduplication, clean-up, and updates following changes of address. It is very important to save address elements in dedicated fields to optimize and streamline any subsequent address validation process for existing address files. It is also necessary to consider extensions for managing addresses in several languages, scripts or alphabets.

What do you mean by reference data for quick address input or address correction?

Auto-completion, address validation on entry, and address correction all draw on reliable and official databases. This reference data is provided by designated operators, their subsidiaries or their address management centres and is available online for address verification purposes. By databases, we mean, for example, country-specific postal addressing data: postcode lists at locality level or street and building level if possible, list of P.O. boxes available for a post office, list of possible abbreviations for address components, and structure of address types.

What entities are responsible for proper addressing?

Some clients have issues with the structuring of address components, but designated operators are qualified in address management, from production to maintenance of reference data. The UPU experts can also help countries introduce or improve an addressing system. A diagnostic is established for countries wishing to enhance their addressing system through solutions involving twinning, sponsoring or assistance, as well as through regional solutions. It is the country's responsibility to define a reliable and viable addressing system. The job of building a postal addressing database often falls to the operator. This is a vital step that facilitates postal operations (sorting, forwarding and delivery),

as well as address input and management on the customer side. The UPU technical experts are also available to help with the building and structuring of postal databases, the standardization of address types and address line elements, and the management or storage of postal data.

How can one access this expertise?

Is this vital information and data disseminated, shared and readily accessible?

The UPU Addressing Solutions unit, through its website and in cooperation with postal entities, provides a range of solutions and guidance for the public and businesses:

- Postal addressing systems by country (address formats)
- International addressing standard S42, in cooperation with ISO
- UPU S42 certification for designated operators
- Descriptions and examples of addresses by country
- Address file analysis or audit of addressing data
- Separation of address elements
- Syntactical analysis of addresses
- Advice for structuring of address fields
- Advice for address validation
- Universal POST*CODE DataBase for the input and validation of international, regional or national addresses
- Easy access to specific national databases
- Standard for dispatch labels
- Addressing knowledge centre (countries with and without postcodes, country-specific postcode structure, abbreviations in address lines, etc.)

The Addressing Solutions experts have been working in the field of postal addressing for decades. They are in constant contact with designated operators and are responsible for the collection and analysis of information, and the preparation of documentation and postal addressing reference data.

For e-commerce requirements and domestic and cross-border deliveries, your must-have address for support and guidance is: postcode@upu.int.



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UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION

International Bureau

Weltpoststrasse 4

P.O. Box 312

3000 BERNE 15

SWITZERLAND

Tel: +41 31 350 31 11

Email: info@upu.int



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