



The Global Language of Business

GS1 PREFIX-GLN-GTIN MANAGEMENT

Industry Guidance Summary

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Purpose of this document

The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) Data Driven Value Chain (DDVC) Committee launched a workstream in early 2025 to partner with GS1 to publish best practice guidance of global identification licensing, especially for companies that have complex M&A landscapes. The aim is to streamline GTIN management during corporate restructuring to ensure operational continuity and compliance. This document will raise awareness of the importance of global identification management, describe the key challenges being addressed, and raise awareness of resources, guidelines and training available to help establish internal company best practices and business processes.

1 Foundations of Global Identification

1.1 GS1 Company Prefix (GCP) Overview

A GS1 Company Prefix (GCP) is a licensed number of four to twelve digits issued by GS1 Member Organisations to a user company to entitle that user company to create any of the GS1 identification keys (i.e., Global Trade Item Number, Global Location Number, etc.). These GS1 identification keys are what is used throughout GS1 systems of standards to identify products, companies, locations, etc.

The GS1 Company Prefix can be used to determine which GS1 Member Organisation (MO) allocated the prefix. However, it cannot be used to determine where an item was produced or distributed. Although a GCP is a license to create GS1 identification keys it is not an identifier of the company to whom it has been issued and cannot be used as an identifier of a company. A Global Location Number (GLN) identifies a company within the GS1 system of standards.

1.2 GS1 Global Location Number (GLN) Overview

The Global Location Number (GLN) is the GS1 identification key used to identify locations and legal entities. Locations can be a physical place such as a warehouse, a storage cabinet or even a specific shelf within a store; they can be a legal entity such as a company, or division of a company; or they can identify a function that takes place within a legal entity, such as the accounting department.

Being able to identify locations with a unique number is vital to many business processes. Using a GLN rather than a proprietary internal numbering system for locations gives a company significant advantages because it provides a standardized way to uniquely identify locations important to their supply chain.

1.3 GS1 Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) Overview

The Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) is one of the main building blocks of the GS1 System. The GTIN is used to uniquely identify trade items which are products and services that are priced, ordered, or invoiced at any point in the supply chain, whether at the checkout, in a warehouse, in an electronic catalogue or elsewhere. Each trade item that is different from another is allocated its own separate GTIN. It is the number usually found below the barcode on trade items

As a guiding principle, if the customer is expected to distinguish a new trade item from an old trade item and purchase accordingly; or if characteristics of an item are different in any way that is relevant to the trading process, a new GTIN should be assigned to the new trade item. (see [GTIN Management Standard](#))

1.4 Unauthorized Numbers

Unauthorized numbers are identification keys that are used in open supply chains but were not issued by GS1 but are claimed to be GS1 keys or were issued by GS1, but the terms under which they were issued have not been complied with. A third category of unauthorized numbers include random numbers that fall outside of the GS1 format.

Unauthorized use of GS1 numbers undermines the integrity of the GS1 system, creates confusion in the market and disrupts the functioning of supply chains.

Key changes could be:

- Significant changes in packaging/graphics
- Significant dimensional or gross weight change
- major formulation changes
- Changes to regulated Consumer Declaration
- Changes to product brand
- changes in functionality

2 Guidance: Internal company practices & policies

2.1 Daily Operations & Governance

Data governance programs manage the actions, methods, timing and responsibilities for supporting master data within an organisation. Data governance programs serve an important function within an enterprise: setting the parameters for data management and usage, creating processes for resolving data issues, and enabling business users to make decisions based on high-quality data. A solid data governance program formalizes accountability for data management across the organisation and ensures that the appropriate people are involved in the process.

2.1.1 GS1 Company Prefix (GCP)

Below are two common examples for managing GS1 Company Prefixes. Each company will determine the best method of managing their GCP based on how their business operates.

- The centralized approach: this approach offers the advantages of centralisation and consistency in managing identifiers for product, locations, etc., but does not always offer the necessary flexibility for the allocation of GS1 identification keys across large, complex organisations.
- The decentralized approach: this approach offers flexibility but may lead to the same product, location, etc. being identified internationally with different identification numbers including different GS1 Company Prefixes.

It's also possible that a company may adopt a hybrid approach. For example, the general approach could be as described in the centralized method, but they may choose to dedicate a specific GCP to a particular product category or perhaps to a specific country.

BEST PRACTICES FOR GCP MANAGEMENT

- ✓ Identify the GCP manager
 - In a small organisation it is most likely that an individual person can perform this role. In larger organisations the responsibility may be assigned to a specific department.
- ✓ Perform an internal audit to determine how many GCP Licences your organisation has acquired
 - It is common for multinational organisations to have acquired GCP licenses from multiple local GS1 Member Organisations.
 - Merger and acquisition transactions is another source of additional GCP licenses. An acquisition of an entire company would include GCPs acquired from the acquired company previously. Alternatively, partial acquisitions and/or product line acquisitions may come with the GTINs for the impacted products but not the GCP from which they were created by the previous owner. In this case the impacted trade items will require new GTINs.
- ✓ Develop a GCP management and governance plan
 - A GCP license is an asset of the organisation to whom it has been issued
 - Establish a database where all GCPs are stored including proper staff access credentials.
 - Develop internal governance, policies, roles and responsibilities and an operations manual regarding the way GS1 identifiers are created and managed.
 - Ensure internal policies are consistent with the specifications and rules of the GS1 Standards. Refer to the GS1 General Specifications, the GTIN Management Standard and GS1 GLN Allocation Rules Standard for further information. (Links found in [Resources Section](#) below)
- ✓ Establish Roles and Responsibilities
 - Identify the function(s) that has the responsibility of creating, allocating and managing GS1 identification keys such as GTINs, GLNs, SSCCs, etc.

2.1.2 Global Trade Item Number (GTIN)

The GS1 System provides clear, structured data standards and management rules that brand owners follow when allocating GTINs to ensure that their GTINs are globally unique and in a consistent format. A separate, unique GTIN is required whenever any of the pre-defined characteristics of an item are different in any way that is relevant to the trading process. The GS1 GTIN Management Standard prescribe which changes to product attributes drive the need for the assignment of a new GTIN. In addition, the GS1 General Specifications provide the standards for GTIN data formats, product hierarchies, barcodes and application identifiers.

BEST PRACTICES FOR GTIN MANAGEMENT

- ✓ Create a GTIN for every level of the item hierarchy.
 - Identify inner packs with a GTIN even if they are not marked with a barcode. Distributors and retailers may use inner packs as their distribution units.
 - Many trading partners are requesting pallet-level GTINs for products that are shipped as a standard product configuration. If a supplier has more than one pallet configuration within a Target Market, assign a unique pallet-level GTIN for each configuration so that accurate TI-HI (Pallet Tier & Height) attributes are communicated.
- ✓ Document your organisation's processes for creating, assigning, and managing GTINs.
 - To ensure that GTINs are globally unique and in a consistent format, each organisation should have a documented process for creating, assigning, and managing GTINs, as well as institutional knowledge of the same.
 - It is recommended that all GTINs be stored in a central repository. This is especially important for companies that use the same GS1 Company Prefix across multiple business lines.
- ✓ Develop and maintain institutional knowledge of GS1 Standards (links to detailed guides in the Resources section of this document):
 - GTIN Management Standard
 - packaging hierarchies
 - which barcode to use for various applications
 - Application Identifiers
- ✓ Keep up to date with any changes to the GTIN Management Standard and develop a process to communicate any changes to the GTIN Management Standard throughout the organisation.
- ✓ As an on-going practice, periodically audit GTIN information to ensure that the data remains correct throughout the product lifecycle.

2.1.3 Global Location Number (GLN)

The [GS1 GLN Allocation Rules Standard](#) is designed to help industry make consistent decisions about the unique identification of parties and locations in open supply chains. The unique identification of parties and locations is critical for efficient logistic operations, traceability programs, recall readiness, and more.

There are a wide variety of parties and locations that can be identified by GLNs. A single GLN can be used to identify a single party or location or a combination of the two. A separate, unique GLN is required to be allocated whenever there is a need to distinguish one **party** and/or **location** from another.

- Party Identification - A party is defined as an entity that needs to be represented in a business-related transaction. A GLN identifying a party answers the question of "**who**" is involved within the use case leveraging GS1 standards. This may be a legal entity or function that defines who is transacting in a scenario.
- Location Identification - GLN identifying locations are used to answer the question of "**where**" something has been, is, or will be. A location can be either physical or digital in nature.

- A **physical** location is a tangible place that may be represented by an address, coordinates, or other means. A physical location within another physical location can be allocated to its own GLN.
- A **digital** location is an electronic (non-physical) address that is used for communication between computer systems.

BEST PRACTICES FOR GLN MANAGEMENT

- ✓ Establish a GLN implementation strategy including corresponding hierarchal organisaton charts and any relationships between the hierarchies.
 - Party hierarchy (e.g. legal entity hierarchy, functional department hierarchy)
 - Location hierarchy (e.g. warehouse system hierarchy, divisional hierarchy, co-packer hierarchy, distribution hierarchy, etc.)
- ✓ Assess the capability of Information system(s) to store, utilize and share GLN numbers and the scope of necessary changes.
- ✓ Evaluate other implementation considerations including, but not limited to:
 - Governance to ensure clear accountability, roles and responsibilities, accurate allocation and efficient execution
 - Allocation of GLNs that support the strategy
 - Labelling approach and location priorities/phases
 - Maintenance (run-model activities)

2.2 Considerations during Merger/Acquisition/Divestiture/Split Transactions

A merger, acquisition, change in company name or registration, or divestiture may affect the registration of a GS1 Company Prefix. For these reasons, it is important to notify the issuing GS1 Member Organisation of all changes.

Mergers and Acquisitions

- Scenario 1: The buying company can adopt the selling company's GS1 Company Prefix, keeping the GS1 ID Keys already allocated. If the buying company is already a member of the GS1 Member Organisation (MO) that issued the GS1 Company Prefix (GCP) an additional annual fee could apply. However, if the buying company is not a member of that GS1 MO it must first become a member.
- Scenario 2: The buying company can phase in GS1 ID Keys created from the GS1 Company Prefix to which they already held the license, for example when packaging is redesigned or reprinted. Buying companies need to be aware that if they decide to change GS1 ID Keys instead of maintaining those used by the company they acquired, their customers will need to update their systems accordingly.

Partial Purchase

- Scenario 1: The selling company may submit in writing to the licensing GS1 Member Organisation (MO) that they have sold their brand/division/range of items, and they no longer require the license to the GS1 Company Prefix used to identify these items, therefore authorizing the transfer of their GS1 Company Prefix to the buying company.
- Scenario 2: The selling company may provide written authorization to the licensing GS1 MO stating that the buying company will exhaust all existing inventory carrying the selling company's GS1 Company Prefix. And at their earliest convenience the buying company must then allocate new GS1 ID Keys to the products using a GS1 Company Prefix to which they hold the license. This would normally be done as packaging is redesigned or reprinted. Trading partners must be notified of the changes to the GS1 ID Keys in advance.

Split or Spin-off

- When a company splits into two or more separate companies it is necessary for each GS1 Company Prefix assigned to the original company to be transferred to one and only one of the new companies. Any company left without a GS1 Company Prefix will need to apply to a local GS1 Member Organisation of their choice to obtain one. The decision as to which of the new companies will take over which GS1 Company Prefix(s) should be made to minimize the number of changes to GS1 ID Keys that will be required. The decision should be part of the legal arrangements that set up the new companies.
- It is not necessary for existing inventory of items to be renumbered. However, when any of the split or spun-off companies are using GS1 ID Keys that are created using a GS1 Company Prefix to which it no longer holds the license, then it should renumber those GS1 ID Keys using its own GS1 Company Prefix, for example when new labelling or packaging is produced.

The importance of ensuring that trading partners are informed of any changes, in a timely manner, cannot be overemphasized.

3 Other Resources

3.1 Links to More Information

The resources below are the complete GS1 standards for parties looking to implement GS1 standards. Please refer to these resources when revising or implementing a new solution intended to be compliant with GS1 standards for the most current information.

- General Resources
 - List of GS1 Company Prefix assignments to local GS1 Member Organisations: <https://www.gs1.org/standards/id-keys/company-prefix>
 - GS1 General Specifications: <https://ref.gs1.org/standards/genspecs/>
 - For License Management & M&A considerations, see section 1.5 of the GS1 General Specifications
- Global Location Number (GLN) Resources
 - GS1 GLN Executive Summary Page: https://www.gs1.org/docs/idkeys/GS1_GLN_Executive_Summary.pdf
 - GS1 GLN Decision Support Tool: <https://www.gs1.org/standards/id-keys/gln/gln-decision-support-tool>
 - GS1 GLN Allocation Rules Standard: <https://www.gs1.org/standards/gs1-gln-allocation-rules-standard/current-standard>
- Global Trade Item Number (GTIN) Resources
 - GS1 GTIN Executive Summary Page: https://www.gs1.org/docs/idkeys/GS1_GTIN_Executive_Summary.pdf
 - GS1 GTIN Decision Support Tool: <https://www.gs1.org/1/gtinrules/en/decision-support>
 - GS1 GTIN Management Standard: <https://ref.gs1.org/standards/gtin-management/>

3.2 Other services available

Global Registry Platform / Verified by GS1

To know what company assigned a given GS1 GTIN to a product, use Verified by GS1.

Searching the global GS1 Registry Platform through the Verified by GS1 service on GS1.org will return, at a minimum, information about the company, organisation, or person who assigned the GS1 GTIN and if available in the database, the corresponding product information for the GS1 GTIN. If the GS1 GTIN number queried is not a GS1 GTIN or is not found in the GS1 database, you will receive a message with a brief explanation.

The [Verified by GS1 service on gs1.org](https://www.gs1.org/standards/get-barcodes) is available for free to all users to use for 30 queries maximum per day. More advanced querying capabilities are accessible via your local GS1 Member Organisation: <https://www.gs1.org/standards/get-barcodes>.

GS1 Multinational Solution (MNS)

While the design of the Global Registry Platform/Verified by GS1 described above has worked well for most companies, it has been challenging for multinational companies with licenses from multiple MOs around the world. To address this challenge, GS1 created the Multinational Solution (MNS).

Here's how it works:

- The multinational company signs a legal agreement with an MO, known as their Primary MO, to manage the company's GTIN data.
- The Primary MO then works with the multinational company to jointly create a list – called the Global Brand Owner List (GBOL) – that contains all the licenses that the company owns.

- Once the GBOL is created, the Primary MO reaches out to all MOs with licenses on the list to confirm that the licenses listed are accurate and to see if there are other licenses that the MOs have issued that are not included. Typically, the company starts the list by including GTINs from products sold over the past six months to ensure that all active products on the market are included.
- When the GBOL is complete, GS1 then updates the GRP by allowing only the Primary MO to upload and manage the GTIN data of each product with a license on the list. Since the licensing MOs are no longer able to update the GRP records for those licenses, the MNS ensures that GTIN data is directly shared by only one source: the Primary MO.

It's important to note that currently, the MNS only includes the management of GTIN data by the Primary MO. Ownership and management of the licenses remain with the MOs that the multinational company purchased their GTIN licenses from.

GS1 Global Key Account Coordination (GKAC) – Program in Development (Future)

As globalisation continues to shape the business landscape, providing global account coordination will become increasingly important. Visibility of the global activity of multinational member companies will enable informed engagement to aid in identification of opportunities leveraging the existing investment in standards and increasing scale of those investments.

The goal of offering this new service is to provide visibility into global activity in a more efficient and effective way for multinational accounts by:

1. Providing a centralized source for Global Account Information, activity, and local contacts.
2. Providing a support model that streamlines depth of adoption for multinationals across countries and regions for GDSN, Global Data Model, Registries data load, Migration to 2D implementation plans, and adherence to customer needs.
3. Simplification of global identification licensing, especially for companies that have complex M&A landscapes.

This service is being planned to launch during the 2026 calendar year. If you are a multinational GS1 member company interested in this service, reach out to your Primary MO or the GS1 Global Office Retail Team.

3.2.1 Who to contact for help

- You can contact us in over 100 countries: <https://www.gs1.org/contact/overview>
- Or you can submit your inquiry via our GS1 Global Office Customer Service Portal: <https://support.gs1.org/support/home>