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Consumers Being Misled by Viral E-Mail About Barcodes, GS1 US Warns *Businesses at Risk of 'Unintentional Boycott' During Holiday Season*

LAWRENCEVILLE, N.J. (Nov. 26, 2008) – A viral e-mail spreading quickly across the United States is creating consumer confusion and potentially harming American businesses, according to [GS1 US](http://www.gs1us.org), a not-for-profit standards organization.

The e-mail erroneously states “the first 3 digits” of a product’s barcode always indicate the product’s country of origin, and encourages consumers to make their buying decisions based on these numbers.

GS1 US, as the administrator and sole source of Universal Product Code (U.P.C.) barcode prefixes in the United States, warns that consumers heeding this faulty advice are being misled and could unintentionally “boycott” businesses or products they would otherwise choose to support.

“Although the first few digits of a barcode – what we call a company prefix – can indicate the country in which a barcode was issued, it tells you nothing about where the product was made,” said Bob Noe, chief customer officer for GS1 US. “The claim is somewhat grounded in reality, but just enough to be dangerous, even if you’re reading it correctly, which is not a safe assumption.”

The viral e-mail claims that barcode prefixes on American-made products will start with a zero or one, but in fact they might begin with any digit for a number of reasons. A consumer following the advice of the viral email to read barcodes and “buy American” could inadvertently avoid buying a product as American as apple pie.

Barcodes act as “keys” to databases of information in computers, and, although the digits are designed to be read by humans, they are not formatted for use by consumers. For instance, because the first digit in a U.P.C. barcode format is separated from the others, a person reading the number for clues of its origin might ignore it and, again, make the wrong buying decision.

“As we head into the most important shopping season of the year for American businesses, we are concerned that some companies are going to lose sales as a result of this misguided e-mail,” said Noe.

A U.S. business can obtain a GS1 Company Prefix by joining GS1 US Partner Connections. This allows the business to create up to 100,000 unique and authentic U.P.C. barcode numbers.

More information is available from GS1 US at <http://barcodes.gs1us.org>.

About GS1 US®

GS1 US is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the adoption and implementation of standards-based, global-supply chain solutions. Its solutions, including business processes, XML standards, EDI transaction sets, and the barcode identification standards of the GS1 System are currently used by more than 1 million companies worldwide. www.GS1US.org.

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