

provide cross-references, include pictures of Christ for children, or help unbelievers understand the reality of God?

Even with Hänssler's decades of editorial experience, market research is key. Surprises, both positive and negative, still occur. For instance, the Hänssler Publishing House took on the task of producing the German translation of the *New Thompson Study Bible*. If the evaluation of this project had been properly conducted from the beginning, the work never would have started. The publication was late. Hänssler misjudged the time needed, but also under-estimated the demand. In the end, the results made all efforts worthwhile.

Caveats

To engage in Bible production, a company must value the Bible as God's Word. Its respect for the Bible means that it will demand high standards concerning the linguistic quality and theological soundness of its publications.

A company's integrity and good reputation are also very important. Bible publishers must be able to guarantee their existence in the long run. For Hänssler Publishing, this includes a profit orientation. The commercial aspects, however, are secondary to the Christian mission of the company. Size and turnover are important indicators, but these lose their value in the eyes of God. Hänssler Publishing believes that faithfulness to the task, the Christian purpose of the organization, is the key to its long-lasting blessings and success.❖

ISBN & Bar Coding for Bibles

Hany Alfy, computer manager for the Bible Society in Cairo, Egypt, provides cogent arguments for implementing this technology with the Scriptures.

Visit any supermarket anywhere and select a product: somewhere it will have a sticker with long parallel black bars and a thirteen-digit code. At the time it is purchased, the cashier will scan the sticker with a small device, and immediately know its price. How does this work? What happened? Is it useful technology for a Bible Society?

What are the numbers for?

When books or Bibles marked with bar-codes are purchased, there are at least two numbers involved. First is the ISBN number, which is a ten-digit code that stands for International Standard Book Number and uniquely identifies books and book-like products (such as audio cassettes, videos, CDs, software programs) published internationally. Because an ISBN number identifies a given title from a specific publisher for all time, it is not possible to reassign ISBN numbers when a book goes out of print.

The second number is a bar code—a thirteen-digit number. The bar code has the ISBN from the fourth digit to the thirteenth, preceded with three more digits (978

for books). If a publisher produces a series of books or periodicals, an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) is also necessary. Depending on the use of the product or where it is produced, a publisher might also want to obtain a Universal Product Code (UPC), a European Article Number (EAN) or a Standard Address Number (SAN).

Bar codes for Bible products

The Bible Society of Egypt publishes numerous Bibles and New Testaments. The staff of 25 people is involved in translation, editing, proofing, layout, design, printing, binding, advertising, warehousing, sales and distribution. With publications for children and for adults, and well over 500 different print, audio and video products, the ability to identify a unique product is critical. Two Bibles may feature the very same translation and the same content, but vary in other specifications (size, binding, interior type color, cover color, cover material, thumb-indexing, and so on).

For more efficient marketing to booksellers, libraries, universities, wholesalers and distributors, it is necessary to easily differentiate the

products. This requires a solid infrastructure to handle a unique code for each item. It is also helpful to designate one person to coordinate the effort.

The process we followed

First of all, The Bible Society had to obtain an ISBN prefix number by filling out the necessary application forms with the appropriate agency. Samples of the books also had to be submitted; therefore it was necessary to identify all the products requiring an ISBN number.

This process was best done by dividing Bible Society publications into two categories: the forthcoming titles and the backlist. With new titles, it is easy to make sure they include an ISBN number on the copyright page, and to copy this number on the lower portion of the back cover above the bar code. To manage the existing and old items already in stock, it was necessary to glue bar coded labels on their back cover. To do this, it is vital to ensure that the label stuck on the back cover exactly represents that title, not any other book. This was the most time-consuming aspect of the work.

To accomplish the conversion, the Society required a computerized inventory stock-control and an accounting system that could use bar codes. Many software programs can handle all the calculations required for a bar code system. Bar code fonts are also available for sale from the Internet—some are *Code 39*, *93*, *128*, *EAN13* and *Codabar*. For an organization with a budget of over U.S. \$2,000,000 a year, the conversion was an investment for the future. In Egypt, it only took ten business days to get ISBNs.

Because The Bible Society of Egypt not only publishes Bibles, but also operates a number of bookstores, the conversion involved converting store inventory tracking. Since its bookstores sell a variety of items beyond Bibles, in switching to this system the Society had to adopt a compatible numbering system for its other products (such as the EAN or UPC systems).

The mechanism

There are many different types of bar code scanners, devices which identify or “read” the bars and translate them into numbers and characters. Some are hand-held scanners, others are fixed on the cashier’s desk. Some use red lamps, other rely on laser technology.

Scanners can be programmed to meet a vendor’s needs. After reading a product code, the scanner transmits the resulting 13-digit number to a specific field in a vendor’s inventory system database. This bar code field—in turn—calls up the ISBN code for the book. And consequently it retrieves the information needed for selling this book such as the quantity available in stock, the selling price and a “default” quantity of one piece. This allows a sales clerk to complete the transaction. All this takes place in a millisecond!

What does an ISBN represent?

Every ISBN consists of ten digits. Whenever it is printed, the letters ISBN precede it. The 10-digit code consists of four parts of variable length, each part separated by a hyphen:

1. The country identifier (e.g. Egypt’s code is 977).
2. The publisher identifier, also called a prefix (The Bible Society of Egypt’s code is 230). A publisher may apply for a second prefix if needed.
3. The title identifier (a serial number given to each title).
4. The check digit (a single digit which validates the ISBN).

The position of the hyphens is determined by the publisher prefix range, which is established by each national agency in accordance with the industry’s needs. The knowledge of the prefix ranges for each country, or group of countries, is necessary to develop the hyphenation output program.

A change in price does not require a new ISBN. A reprint without a change of text or binding or color does not require a new ISBN; the original number must be retained. Substantial changes in

text or revisions each require a new ISBN.

The results

What advantage came from The Bible Society of Egypt’s implementation of the new system?

First, the system is error-free. The bar code scanner can either read the bars or not. It cannot read these bars wrong. In Egypt, the Bible Society has 140 employees but only 25 are directly involved in publishing. Given the number of people involved in distribution and sales, the ease and speed of the bar code system is a plus.

Second, maintaining an exact and accurate stock figure for each item, along with the appropriate bibliographic and historic profile, is much easier.

Third, The Bible Society of Egypt is the largest producer of Arabic Bible materials in the world. Because of this, it has substantial overseas sales. Because the ISBN and bar code system assigns a unique international code to each item, importers, wholesalers and book-sellers can easily place their orders by only mentioning the ISBN of the items they need. The system also facilitates Internet orders.

Sooner or later, industries move toward standardization. Publishers, and especially Bible publishers with the variety and complexity of their product lines, will not be able to cope with the future unless they implement new technologies.❖