

## **BAR CODING A LIBRARY: ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

Rebecca Landau, MLS

Bar coding a library is an intricate process that requires foresight and planning. In 2000-2001, I directed the bar coding of the 110,000 volume multilingual collection of the Tuttleman Library of Gratz College. At the AJL poster session I shared the knowledge that I gained with conference participants. This written presentation recreates questions and answers posed at the conference. All answers are from my direct experience.

Q: What are the reasons to bar code a library collection?

A: Two important reasons for bar coding a library are: a) Control of circulation and b) Inventory control.

Q: How do I begin to a bar code a library collection?

A: The first step in bar coding a collection is having an automated library system in place. Bar codes work with a library's automated system. You need to consult the vendor of your automated system to ensure that you order bar codes and scanners that work with your automated system. The vendors of scanners can also answer questions relating to bar codes and scanning equipment. I highly recommend speaking with other librarians who have been involved with a bar coding project. They can give you insight into the process.

Q: What personnel do you recommend to bar code a collection?

Each library must consider whether they want to proceed with bar coding in house or contract outside. There are commercial firms that do bar coding.

For in-house bar coding, decide who is responsible and capable of handling the various tasks involved in the project. You may want to consider using: a) Volunteers, b) Library staff only, c) A combination of volunteers and staff. Write formal procedures. Everyone doing the same task needs to follow the same procedures.

Q: Should the library's hours and services remain unchanged during the bar coding process?

A: This is a decision that each library needs to make individually. Choices to consider are: a) Open the library as usual, b) Close the library entirely, c) Shorten the hours of services, d) Provide services as usual, e) Cut back on some services. Whatever decision is made, it is important to notify readers of any changes in hours and services before starting the bar coding.

Q: What are the types of bar codes and how do they differ?

A: There are smart bar codes and dumb bar codes. Most bar code labels have a bar code number and the library's name printed on them. Smart bar codes have additional printed information on the bar code label. Usually this is the title of the work. Sometimes author and call number are

printed on the label. Smart bar codes cost more than dumb bar codes. Dumb bar codes do not have title information on the bar code label. Dumb bar codes can be re-assigned to any book. Smart bar code labels cannot be used for another book.

We used dumb bar codes at the Tuttleman Library. The automated system vendor assigned bar code numbers to the library's existing collection and provided a computer print out listing the dumb bar code numbers, call numbers, author, and title in shelf list order. We used this listing to mark off titles as we bar coded items. We found having this list was advantageous. I recommend asking for such a list. Had we chosen to use smart bar codes, our vendor would not have provided us with such a list.

Q: If smart bar codes are used in the initial bar coding of our library's existing collection, is there a reason to continue using smart bar codes?

A: Smart bar codes cost more than dumb bar codes. The smart bar code has printed information for the human eye. Once the initial bar coding is completed you most likely will rely on scanners. Scanners read only the bar code. It is unlikely that continuing to use smart bar codes serves any advantage. Unless you want to maintain a consistent look in your library and/or cost is not a factor, a switch to dumb bar codes is an appropriate cost-savings choice.

Q: Where do you recommend placing the bar code labels?

A: When deciding actual physical location of the bar code, take into account handling and inventory of items. Choices to consider are: a) Vertical or horizon placement of the bar code label, b) Front or back of an item, c) Inside or outside of an item, d) Top or bottom of an item.

Placing a bar code label on the inside may mean more wear and tear on the item during the circulation process. Placing a bar code on the outside means the bar code is exposed to the elements (e.g., dirt, mishandling, etc.)

Choose the best location and position of the bar code for each item type. Once a decision is made, keep the placement consistent.

a) If you have different types of materials in the collection (e.g., videos, CD-ROMs, cassettes, books, sheet music), decide what is the best bar code label placement on each item type. Placement may differ on each type of material.

b) If you have Roman and non-Roman language items of the same type, a decision needs to be made whether to place the bar code at the same place or vary the placement depending upon language. For example, at the Tuttleman Library we decided that all bar codes were to be placed on the left side of the book as it stands on the book shelf. On Hebrew language books the bar code is on the front of the book. On English language books the bar code is on the back. Our logic is that such placement facilitates inventory.

c) If self-checkout is planned, then proper placement of the bar code is crucial. For a self-checkout unit to work, the bar code must be placed in a certain position. Consult with the vendor

of the self-checkout unit.

Q: What are bar code label protectors and does one need to purchase them?

A: A label protector is a plasticized covering. It might be possible to buy a plastic coded label; however, we purchased plasticized label protectors. A label protector: a) Keeps the bar code clean and readable by the scanner, b) Protects the bar code from wear and tear, c) Adheres the bar code to the item.

Q: Should I bar code the small collection in my synagogue's library?

A: As stated above, two reasons for bar coding a collection are: a) Establishing an automated checkout system and b) Having inventory control of the collection. The answer to this question might be yes, if:

1) You are planning to have an automated circulation system. As opposed to a manual checkout system, most automated systems require personnel available to handle all circulation.

2) You are concerned with inventory control of the existing collection. Inventory control works best when an automated circulation system is also in place.

3) You are concerned with inventory control or a collection that has the potential for significant growth. It is easier to bar code materials as you enter them into a collection rather than having to go back and bar code an entire collection.

Other factors to consider are costs and personnel required to accomplish circulation and inventory control.

Q: What method do you recommend using to enter bar codes into automated catalog records?

A: Bar codes may be entered manually by typing the bar code number into the cataloging record or by scanning the numbers into the record. With manual typing of bar code numbers into catalog records there is a possibility of human error. Scanning the bar code number into the system is the better option. It is the recommended method.

For more information write Rebecca Landau, [ral@niedermayer.ca](mailto:ral@niedermayer.ca), or see <http://www.niedermayer.ca/~ral/>