

Home bar-code reader

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This was a nice idea in hindsight, and a few derivatives later arrived. Mostly the ideas have now been incorporated into RFID culture, and a few are implemented on mobile phones with bar-code recognition software.

Concept

Home bar code reader / Telephone interface

Problems

Various

BT opportunities

Shopping list and electronic shopping

Business Card Autodialler

Information gathering

Easy to use interface for many applications

IT awareness

Summary

A domestic hand held bar code reader such as that shown in figure 1 could be used for many purposes. Many are enhanced by communications capability. This note describes a few of the more obvious uses, but there must be many more.

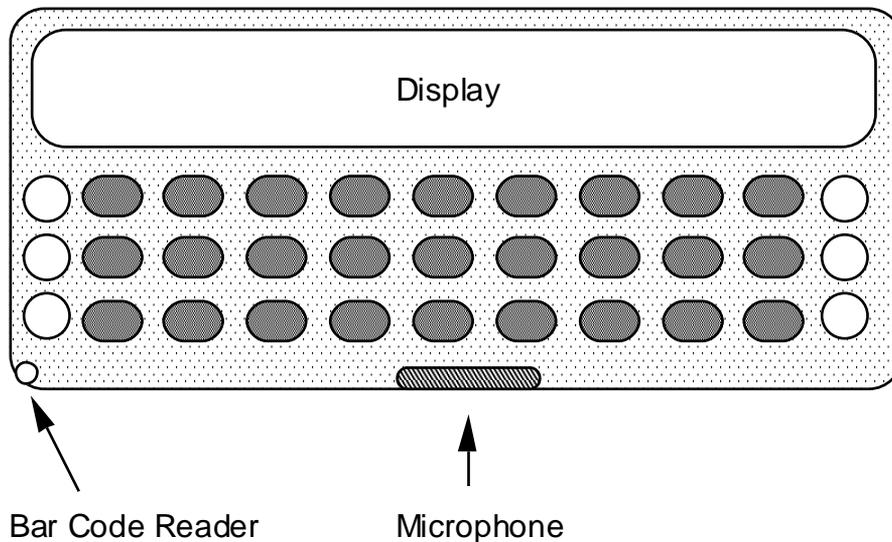


Figure 1

Electronic Shopping List

One of the most useful functions would be as an electronic shopping list. This device would be able to read barcodes off items or off paper so could be used in the kitchen or with a catalogue. Depending on price, units could allow text or voice annotation of entries, since the bar-code itself only contains a numeric identity, rather than a human friendly description. Readers on food cupboards are a (probably less useful or feasible) alternative.

When a consumer sees an item which he wants to purchase, he simply scans its barcode, eg., if I have just used a can of beans, I could scan its barcode to enter it onto next weeks list. Product adverts in magazines or catalogues could contain barcodes to allow users to add them to their lists. When the consumer goes to Sainsburys, the list could be transmitted to a terminal which would print off the shopping list in the order of appearance in the store to facilitate shopping (perhaps with adverts for various alternative or additional items). Till receipts could also contain bar codes for easy re-ordering.

Electronic shopping

If telephones were capable of receiving transmissions from these devices, various other possibilities emerge. The most obvious of these is electronic shopping. The consumer could transmit the shopping list to a supermarket over the phone, receive a quote and order the goods if the price is acceptable. This could be used to shop around too, especially if a home computer is linked in to find the best prices for the individual items.

Remote video Programming

Apart from shopping, other uses for bar codes with transmitters are possible. Domestic video recorder programmers with bar code readers are already abundant. These devices could be used over a suitable phone.

Phone autodialling

Automatic dialling of numbers encoded on business cards has been suggested elsewhere. See Kim Fisher for details.

Bar coded item ID and/or telephone numbers could be used in soliciting extra (pre-recorded) information from product suppliers as a result of reading a magazine advert.

Emergency Information

Bar codes on some potentially dangerous products could be used to encode the contact phone number for emergency information. If a child swallows a chemical, its parent could scan the code, (autodialling the encoded number) and be given pre-recorded information on first aid treatment and whether a doctor should be called.

Use as CD-ROM interface

This technology could enhance the use of CD-ROM to assist in finding information rapidly by use of bar codes printed in accompanying notes.

Design

Such a device could be a general purpose tool. It would need to be easy to use and very portable. It would gain from having alphanumeric and voice input as well as bar-codes. It would need to be able to transmit its information. Receivers could be added to various devices. Telephones with receivers would be useful (these could be used for other purposes not associated with bar codes too - most notably, communications from other domestic appliances). Since supermarkets could gain from this technology, they would be interested in providing receivers such as the shopping list printer.

Contacts

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