

Standard Address Numbers and Global Location Numbers: guidelines for assignment and use

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The book trade does not have a standard identifier for parties to an electronic exchange of data. Instead it uses two separate standards which identify geographical locations: the Standard Address Number (SAN), which is a US standard (ANSI/NISO Z39.43-1993) used in a number of English-speaking territories including the UK and North America; and the more modern GS1 Global Location Number (GLN), formerly and still sometimes known as the EAN location identifier. The GLN is recommended for use in EDI transactions and is a 13-digit number similar to the ISBN/GTIN13, though the SAN and other proprietary identifiers are also permissible.

Within the UK book trade – thanks to a special agreement between BIC and GS1 – the SAN and the GLN are interoperable. BIC's membership of GS1 entitles SAN users to specific prefixes which convert the seven digit SAN into a 13 digit GLN. **This arrangement is only available to book trade entities with no more than five locations. Organisations with more than five locations must obtain GLNs through independent membership of GS1.**

Allocation and maintenance of the two standards for the book trade are the responsibility of Book Industry Communication and managed as the Standard Address Numbering Agency by Nielsen Registration Services. Part of the service offered is the simultaneous assignment of both SAN and GLN to applicants.

It is important to note that, although a GLN can be created from a SAN, the opposite is only the case if the GLN has been assigned by the SAN Agency. GLNs are used throughout the supply chains of many industries and businesses which have no knowledge of SANs, which are unique to the book trade.

What is the number structure?

SANs are seven digit numbers, comprising a unique 'dumb' six digit number followed by a validating check digit.

GLNs, as used in the book trade, comprise a six digit book trade prefix (503067) followed by the six digit SAN, followed by a recalculated validating check digit (usually a different check digit from that of the SAN).

Thus:

SAN 005297-3
GLN 503067-005297-4

What is the difference between the SAN and the GLN?

In practical terms there is no difference. Both are used in EDI although the GLN is the recommended format, but the SAN is also used by Nielsen TeleOrdering and as a corporate identifier by the Booksellers Association and by Batch.co.uk; but for other forms of EDI within the UK book trade the SAN is converted to the 13 digit format (GLN). The SAN is commonly used in some cross-border transactions, notably with North American companies.

What are these identifiers used for?

The primary purpose of both the SAN and the GLN is to indicate in electronic communication a geographical location, for the practical purpose of ensuring that goods are delivered to the correct address. In some cases, they are used as a departmental identifier in large shops with a single geographical address but multiple departments, or for a department within a warehouse. By extension they have also come to be used in some contexts as a corporate - or account – identifier.

How does the SAN Agency operate?

The responsibilities of the Agency are limited to the assignment of SANs and their derived GLNs and to the maintenance of a look-up database of SAN allocation. It does not have any brief to disseminate information about new assignments, changes of location of individual shops, or to delete redundant SANs from the database, only to ensure uniqueness. Early assignments of SANs had severe deficiencies, which led to duplicate assignments of numbers around the world. Although this problem has now been fully resolved, it limits the ability to offer a definitive database of current addresses and locations, even if that were considered desirable.

It is also worth reminding users that in the past SANs and GLNs were issued by EDI networks and providers which are not necessarily consistent with the standard.

The SAN Agency is based at Nielsen Book, Midas House, 62 Goldsworth Road, Woking, GU21 6LQ, telephone 01483 712215, email san.agency@nielsen.com. Its web site at www.san.nielsenbook.co.uk provides information about the processes and costs of number assignment and a set of useful FAQs.

The Nielsen agency is one of three in the world. The others are operated by R. R. Bowker in the US and Thorpe Bowker in Australia. Bowker is also the registration authority for the SAN standard. The Nielsen agency is entitled to assign SANs to companies outside North America and Australia/New Zealand.

Changes to SAN/GLNs for physical locations

The SAN/GLN relates to a physical location for the delivery of book stock and is used in EDI as

a location identifier. If a bookshop moves to a new location, a new SAN must be obtained and the information held by the SAN Agency amended. If a bookshop changes ownership or its legal status, it is strongly recommended that a new SAN is obtained for the new entity. This is because, when buying or selling a business, there is a period of transition which involves movements of stock, returns, credits etc. and it is essential to be able to identify whether these belong to the old or the new entity/owners. The pre-existing SAN/GLN may then be used to differentiate between transactions conducted prior to and subsequent to the change of ownership.

Best practice

SANs are practical and flexible, but it is important that they are properly maintained by booksellers. When a SAN is acquired it is advisable to check that the information held on the SAN website at www.san.nielsenbook.co.uk is correct. It is essential that the new SAN is communicated to trading partners so that they set up the correct trading terms on their systems against this new SAN.

Distributors should at all costs avoid inventing temporary or dummy SANs in order to facilitate electronic trading. It is the responsibility of the bookshop to obtain a SAN and notify it to all trading partners. In the event that a distributor receives an order or a returns request for a SAN that they do not recognise they can look it up on the SAN Agency website or telephone the SAN Agency and ask for the contact details of the bookseller concerned.