

Recent Trends in Postal Addressing

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Editor

*Guide to Worldwide Postal-
Code and Address Formats*



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Postal addresses continue to change and evolve around the world with most, but not all, of the major changes occurring in the developing countries. Postal codes and new or expanded addressing systems have been introduced within the last two years in Africa, East Asia, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. The encouragement of address standards and development of building address systems by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Bank continues to further expand the countries interested in the expansion and standardization of their addresses.

It is important to note that the standardization of addresses does not mean that all addresses around the world are becoming more similar. Rather, it means that all addresses within a country adhere to a standard set by that country. The standard for any country will have multiple address types, such as those for post office boxes, urban residential apartments, and rural communities among others. Indeed, the trend is for more diversity in the format of addresses, as we will see below, as more communities are included in addressing schemes.

As these changes occur, it can be difficult for businesses to determine what constitutes a correct address. Staying aware of the trends and the details is important to both data quality and reaching current and prospective customers. International address hygiene services, mailing logistics companies, and consultants can assist in finding solutions when changes occur and keeping businesses up-to-date on the trends and developments.

The Trends

The two countervailing trends in addressing seem to be lengthier written addresses with more information included or addresses written in a significantly more abbreviated format. The more abbreviated formats are less common but may be copied as more countries search for the "best" format for their circumstances – and budgets. From the limited information available publicly, it appears that the more abbreviated formats are more costly to design and implement. However, if the developed countries with older addressing systems begin to redesign in an effort to take advantage of more modern advances in routing and sorting, these abbreviated and often more technical address systems may become more common.

Further, as more countries develop addressing standards, there are those who promote the implementation of building number and street addressing common in Western Europe and exported worldwide to its former colonies and those who champion alternative schemes to replace or to supplement that basic system. Some of these alternatives are mentioned below. Both building number and street addressing and alternatives to it can coexist in the same country.

The establishment of delivery to buildings – no matter what system of addressing is used – and introduction of postal codes often adds to the length of a written address, adding to the number of lines or the length of those lines or both. With street delivery of mail, the sometimes lengthy names of streets are needed rather than a single line with the post office box number. Areas of a city or more details on the specific village locale are sometimes required as part of the address to allow better sorting, instead of a simple delivery post office destination. Provinces may be added to the address format and postal codes may be placed on a separate line, often below the city or town.

Some Specifics

The countries of Africa have been particularly active in developing or expanding address systems and postal codes. South Africa has expanded addressing to communities that had no addresses. Tanzania, which introduced a new nationwide address system with a postal code, implemented mail delivery to residences and businesses that includes informal settlements. Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius Uganda and

others are discussing possible changes that would result in substantial changes to their current addressing. Cameroon is considering the introduction of a postal code.

South Korea has completed its multi-year project to assign and implement building number and street name addresses, referred to as road name addresses by South Korean sources, to replace the previous land-lot address system. This change affected every address in the country. Viet Nam will be reintroducing the use of its postal code for all addresses. The introduction of a new postal code has begun in Peru. A new address system in Ecuador is likely to follow the introduction of standardized addresses across Costa Rica. Montserrat will introduce a postal code in April and Trinidad and Tobago continues the expansion of its postal code system.

The rural and informal settlement addressing in South Africa introduced a completely different address format with a dwelling number and village name (i.e., 60401 Kwatsita Village) with the delivery post office on the line below. (In urban addresses, those lines would often be the building number and street name followed by the name of the city or town.) This new format is significant for permitting standardized address where there is no system of roads and may well be adopted by other countries. Tanzania is following a similar model for informal and rural settlements in their new address system.

In the more developed countries, addressing changes tend to allow for more finely defined addresses, sometimes referred to as more granularity in the address. This is the case in Norway with the introduction of the listing number (*Bolignummer*) to identify the individual residence where several homes have the same street address. Israel's addition of 2 digits to their postal code also allows for a more targeted address.

Ireland's planned postal code, scheduled for introduction in the first quarter of 2015, will be a unique development among international addresses. It will be the first postal code that will designate an individual address rather than a geographic area or post office. Whether this will mean that the address will eventually be abbreviated to simply the person or company and the postal code remains to be seen. Such abbreviated addresses are used in Saudi Arabia, where the building number, postal code and "additional number" designate an individual address. Saudi Post provides official address examples using solely those numbers without street, post office or city names.

The Consequences

For businesses with address databases, these trends mean more diversity in the addresses they will capture and store. More information in the written address require longer lines or more lines, depending on the countries being addressed, challenging the structure of corporate customer databases. It can also test staff knowledge and experience as changes continue to occur. With more countries expected to develop new or expanded address systems and postal codes, plan for these challenges to continue.

Fortunately for business planning, major changes to addresses take years to plan and to implement. Dissemination of information about the new addresses and adoption of their use often takes years as well. Addressing changes in developed countries are often adopted more quickly but can meet pockets of stubborn resistance. The official address in the United Kingdom no longer includes the county but some residents persist in adding the county to their address.

The change from land-lot to road name addresses in South Korea was mandated in late 2006, with the "old" addresses dropped from use at the end of 2013. . The new system required the official naming of roads throughout the country, the numbering of every building, and the installation of signs with the

road names and the building numbers, a vast undertaking. Companies outside of South Korea are facing problems with undeliverable mailing addresses.

Saudi Arabia's (relatively) new building addresses have not been well-received by residents, who have continued to use the post office box system that was previously the sole address option. South Africa's rural addressing system has been more readily adopted by the residents but is still largely unknown outside that region of the world and among postal professionals.

About the author

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