

Bar Code Readers Troubleshooting

Configuring Bar Code Readers to Work with XpertMart

There are dozens of formats for a bar code. Some of the best know are the UPC format(s) used in the United States and the EAN format(s) used in Europe. XpertMart uses the “Interleaved 2 of 5” format in the bar code labels it prints out.

While some bar code readers are already configured to read most if not all bar code formats, some readers are only configured to read a handful of formats. If this is case, you may need to configure the bar code reader for it to be compatible with XpertMart.

The bar code reader should come with a manufacturer’s manual that you can use to configure the device. These are the configuration settings the bar code scanner needs to be able to read the bar code labels XpertMart prints out:

- 1) The Interleaved 2 of 5 format must be enabled:
- 2) The minimum characters value needs to be set at 6;
- 3) The check character must be disabled.

If the bar code reader is configured to read Interleaved 2 of 5 bar codes but the minimum character is set to 4, the reader will cut off the last two digits of the XpertMart bar code. If the check character is enable, the bar code reader will believe the first or last digit to be a check character and will not “read” it along with the other five characters. You know you have this problem if you scan an XpertMart label and only five of the six digits appear.

If you’ve entered the above configuration settings repeatedly and the scanner still does not appear to work then you might try returning to the factory settings and then entering the configuration once again. If you’ve entered the same configuration setting multiple times, chances are the settings are getting jumbled.

Testing the Bar Code Reader

If the bar code reader is not working, there are several test you can run to identify the problem:

- Try scanning different bar codes. If the bar code reader is able to read some bar codes but not others, then the device needs to be configured to read the right formats (see above).
- Open up a text pad and scan the bar code label there. If a number appears, then the bar code scanner is working properly. (A bar code, after all, is nothing more than a number). If you cannot scan a bar code into the text pad, you can reasonably conclude that the problem is with the scanner and not with XpertMart software.

- If the bar code reads okay in the text pad but not in XpertMart, try a variety of different bar code labels. The problem may be that the item you are trying to scan does not exist in the database. You can also try a couple of previous XpertMart versions to see if the problem occurred during an upgrade. If you still cannot get XpertMart to read the bar code but are able to read the bar code in a text pad, file a Bug Report and email it to support@xpertmart.com.
- If you've tried different bar code formats and cannot read any of them in a text pad, try switching computers. The problem may be with the keyboard/scanner connection or some other problem such as a virus on the computer you are using. If the scanner does not work at either computer, there is a problem with the scanner itself. Contact the manufacturer of the scanner. At this point there is a high probability it is defective or has malfunctioned.
- If you have two scanners of the exact same model, repeat these tests with each scanner. If one scanner works but the other doesn't, then you can reasonably conclude that one scanner has malfunctioned and may need to be repaired or replaced. However, if neither scanner works, this is most likely a problem with the configuration setup (see above). Contact the manufacturer (or go online to find more extensive documentation) for more help on the configuration.

Why Some Bar Codes may be Hard to Read

The quality of a bar code label deteriorates over time. If a label is hard to read or cannot be read at all, check to make sure the ink hasn't faded over time. If a bar code label is exposed to harsh sunlight it may also fade and become unreadable.

Bar code labels need enough of a white margin around them (1/4" minimum) to be legible. This is especially true if they are against a white or black background. If you find bar code labels with little or no margin that are hard to read, you will need to redesign the format of the bar code to leave enough white space around it.

Sometimes the customer will print a large batch of bar code labels and not pay attention as the printer slowly gets off-center. If this is the case, part of the bar code may not have printed on the label and you will have trouble reading the bar code, or you may be reading the wrong number as the original bar code gets truncated. Inspect the bar code label closely to see if this is the case and remind the customer to always quality check any printing job every 100 labels or so.

Some customers may not own a proper bar code printer and try fashioning their own bar codes using regular Avery mailing labels and Microsoft Word, or a similar setup. If this is the case, we cannot be responsible if XpertMart and/or the POS peripherals cannot read these "homemade" bar codes.

One Last Tip

Always carry your own personal bar code reader that has been pre-configured to read XpertMart bar codes. This will allow you to run tests more quickly and identify if there is a problem with the bar code reader, the labels, the printer or the software. And, in a pinch, you can lend your bar code reader to the customer while you figure out what's wrong with theirs.