GS1 Bar Code Symbol
COLOUR GUIDE

BAR CODES CAN SCAN
- Blue on White
- Green on White
- Green on Yellow
- Green on Orange
- Green on Red
- Blue on Yellow
- Blue on Orange
- Black on Orange
- Black on Red

BAR CODES CANNOT SCAN
- Yellow on White
- Orange on White
- Red on White
- Light Brown on White
- Gold on White
- Red on Gold
- Black on Gold
- Black on Green
- Black on Blue
- Black on Dark Brown

Scanners read bar code by recognition of the contrast between light and dark areas of the symbol. Light colours (white, yellow and “warm” colours such as red and orange) are suitable for the background and light margin areas. Dark colours (black, blue and green) are suitable for the bars. This means that although black and white are obviously the safest contrasting colours, other colours can be equally effective and may complement the pack design.

A scanner “reads” the bar code symbol by means of a red light source, so what the scanners “sees” is quite different to what human eye sees. As such, although many colour combinations are clearly visible to the eye, some barcodes will scan and some barcodes will not.

Whatever colours are chosen, it is very important for manufacturers to discuss their bar coding programme with their printer. The printer is the best person to advise on suitable colours because he has the experience of how inks and other factors can affect print quality and, therefore, the quality of the printed bar code.