

The GO Line (pronounced “the geo line”)

A paper on the modern address format

By Alex Pigot

Addressing as we know it is has developed remarkably since Rowland Hill introduced “sender pays” posting in the late 1800s. The design of the address block originally followed a “most significant” to “least significant” format with the successive lines of the address being increasingly larger area designations, with the smallest area just below the addressee’s name and the largest area at the bottom of the address:

Mr P Pigot	addressee
20 Gilford Park	single building
Sandymount	100s of buildings
Dublin 4	1000s of buildings
Ireland	1,000,000s of buildings

In the 1950s and thereafter (and before the introduction of computers to postal systems in the 70s) the postcode was added to addressing systems in many industrialised countries.

For postal sorting reasons this code was entered at the bottom of the address, along with the town.

For example, here is one in the UK (courtesy of Royal Mail)

Miss S Pollard	Addressee
1 Chapel Hill	Single Building
Heswall	100s of buildings
BOURNEMOUTH	1000s of buildings
BH1 1AA	10s of buildings
United Kingdom	10,000,000s of buildings

And here is a US address (courtesy of the UPU)

MR JOHN DOE	Addressee
123 MAGNOLIA ST	Single Building
HEMPSTEAD NY 11550-1234	10s of buildings
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	10,000,000s of buildings

And here’s one in Germany (again courtesy of the UPU)

Liselotte Sommer	Addressee
Rhondorfer Str. 666 // Apartment 47	Single building
50939 KÖLN	10s of buildings
GERMANY	10,000,000s of buildings

And for postal sorting and delivery reasons the postcode now became the most important element in the address block representing the approximate location of the destination and also representing a manageable number of addresses – for sorting and delivery purposes.

As mapping became more ubiquitous in the late 20th century, geo-coordinates were added to the national address databases. Then in the early 21st century with the availability of accurate GPS, addressing databases began to be used more commonly by logistics companies, satnavs and for customer mapping and system planning.

This usage has grown over the last decade to such an extent that the time and cost involved in maintaining of address databases, and in looking them up to access the geo-coordinates of a postcode should be re-examined.

Perhaps there is another way of accessing those coordinates rather than searching a database for a postcode/house number match. Perhaps the address block should contain the coordinates?

There is another issue faced by postal address database controllers: neighbouring addresses which do not have house numbers (or even street names) and therefore are similar. These present a problem since they cannot be differentiated. For example:

Mr C Prescott
Cloon
Enniskerry
Co Wicklow
Ireland

And his neighbour

Mr A Pigot
Cloon
Enniskerry
Co Wicklow
Ireland

may live at the same house *in database terms* since their addresses are identical.

However the addition of a house name to the address block differentiates them as follows:

Mr C Prescott
Hazel Cottage
Cloon
Enniskerry
Co Wicklow
Ireland

And his neighbour

Mr A Pigot
Willow Cottage
Cloon
Enniskerry
Co Wicklow
Ireland

So, how can these two problems be solved? How can 20th Century postal technology be combined with what is possible in the 21st so that the 21st Century technology can be used in full while the systems, postal or otherwise, built around the 20th Century thinking do not have to be re-engineered?

The answer is as follows:

A “new” address element must be created – called the GO Line (pronounced “geo line”).

This line should appear near the top of the address below such other elements as are unique to an addressee, elements such as name, job title, company name, department, and house name. In short, anything above the first line of the standard address block. This latter (first line of the address block) is normally the number of the building and the street name, but can also include the apartment number.

In this way the GO Line neither disables nor causes issues with the 20th Century mechanical postal sorting systems currently being used by posts to sort mail. At the same time, this solution introduces into the address block the new location code systems which are coming to the fore. We see their employment most prominently in the product delivery services of logistics companies and in the delivery of services by utility companies.

So the new address and name line will appear as follows:

Mr A Pigot	addressee
Willow Cottage	single building
LC5QDDJ	GO Line (representing the geo coordinates of the single building)
Cloon	100s of buildings
Enniskerry	1000s of buildings
Co Wicklow	10,000s of buildings
Ireland	1,000,000s of buildings

(The above location code is a GO Code (www.gocode.ie) and can be found here www.gocode.ie/LC5QDDJ). And of course other location codes could be used. The important point is its placement in the address, which is above the first line of the standard address block.

And, critically, as we noted above, the addition of the unique location code in the GO Line serves the purpose of differentiating one address from another for address database controllers. So it can also serve as the primary index key for the record of the address in a database, because it is unique to that physical place. This is a very attractive characteristic for companies who maintain large customer and prospect address databases. ¹

¹ An index key is used in computer databases to enable the database maintenance system to search records quickly by only searching through a single field within each record. That field in each record contains a value unique to that record within the database, hence “index key”.

HOW THIS CAN HELP IN THE UPU'S "ADDRESSING THE WORLD - AN ADDRESS FOR EVERYONE" INITIATIVE

This innovative solution is obviously useful in industrialised countries where publicly accessible address databases already exist with each address record containing the geo-coordinates of that address. The addition of a GO Line to the address record ensures each record is unique and in addition incorporates the map location of the address in the address block.

But, the GO Line becomes even more useful, in fact critical, in areas where addressing is poor, that is, where there are no street names or house numbers.

Why does the GO Line become so useful?

There are possibly as many as 4 billion people on the planet who do not officially exist because they do not have a proper identity. And the reason they do not have a proper identity is because they do not have a postal address because they live in areas with no street names or numbers.

But, in fact, they do live somewhere. And that somewhere normally has a name. For example nearly 600,000 people live in a slum called Dharavi in the metropolis of Mumbai in India. [This is the location where the movie "Slumdog Millionaire" was made. And yes, it looks just like the scenes in the movie.]

Everyone there has the following basic address, the same as Ranjiv Gupta below:

Mr R Gupta	Nameline
Dharavi	100,000s of buildings
Mumbai	1,000,000s of buildings
India	100,000,000 of buildings

But, as noted above, Mr Gupta and hundreds of thousands of his neighbours "do not exist" on most official databases. People who live there find it very difficult to open a bank account, or get electricity delivered to their homes, or to get post delivered. They are excluded from these normal socio economic activities because they do not have a unique address. Think of all the forms and registrations and applications we complete in our lives which require an address in order to be considered completed.

But, with a GO Line added to an address like Ranjiv's, everyone can have a unique postal address which will look like this:

Mr Bill Gates	Nameline
Q5GM ENDGJ	GO Line (representing the geo coordinates of the single building)
Dharavi	100,000s of buildings
Mumbai	1,000,000s of buildings
India	100,000,000 of buildings

(The above location code, Q5GM ENDGJ, is a GO Code. Please visit www.gocode.in for an explanation. To find this very address go here: www.gocode.in/Q5GMENDGJ.)

When secure access to the online database is given to banks and the local electricity company this address (in combination with the name and mobile phone number of the resident) satisfies the “Know Your Customer” legal requirements for a complete and valid registration. Just add a GO Line to the address and the resident is given a bank account, served with an electricity account and otherwise is empowered to participate in society’s legal structures.

Furthermore, due to the logical, nested structure of some codes, when maps are erected within the slums, postal delivery personnel can find individual dwellings and deliver to each, rather than being forced to leave all post in a communally accessible area.

CONCLUSION

With the increasing requirement of logistic companies, emergency services and government planners to identify locations, particularly habitable ones, a common language to do so which is more humanely readable than a 2D barcode or less cumbersome than the 18 or more digits of a geo coordinate pair is obviously very useful.

Because of the inherent difficulties in the introduction and maintenance of a top down 20th century addressing system – a simple bottom up addressing system intuitively could solve the problem that 4 billion planetary citizens face in not having an address.

A representation of the geo-coordinates of a location is a simple, technologically-proven, future-proofed, humanly-communicable economic solution.

All countries, regardless of the state of sophistication of their address systems, would benefit profoundly from the adoption of the GO Line.

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This article was contributed by the author to the Global Address Data Association and has been edited by Charles Prescott, Executive Director.