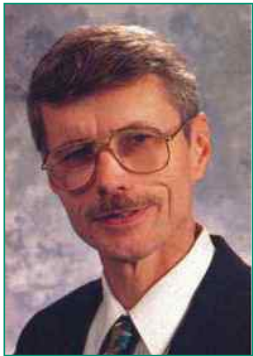


Editor's Note



ACCOUNT NUMBERS

As I move along through life, I find my patience evolving in two ways. Firstly, when it comes to people, and also to at least some of the things I cannot change, I find myself becoming more patient. If, for example, I find myself in a very slow line, I no longer get particularly fidgety—what's the point?

However, secondly, when it comes to silly, contrived, bureaucratic stuff, I'm getting less patient. Maybe it's because in at least some cases poor thinking by someone seems to be the root of the annoyance.

For instance, I find long account numbers annoying—petty as that may be. In my book, the number one villain is the credit card industry, with its decision to use 16-digit account numbers. A look at my local gas company bill reveals a 10-digit account number. My electric company uses a 13-digit account number. And my bank has changed from 9-digit account numbers to 12 digits.

To put those numbers in perspective, note that the Social Security Administration manages to keep track of nearly everybody in the entire country with 9-digit account numbers. To put it mildly, it seems unlikely that any company (even the credit card people) has anywhere remotely near as many accounts to keep track of as Social Security.

The easiest account number for me to remember is at United Parcel Service. UPS, which has a few customers to keep track of, uses a 6-character account number composed of a mixture of letters and numbers.

I have a theory about all this. Probably those with nice, compact account numbers, like Social Security and UPS, have set up their systems based on how large a number is needed (or likely will be needed in the foreseeable future) to look up anybody's account. Period.

On the other hand, the long account numbers you see seem like something designed by a committee. One can envision endless meetings to formulate those long numbers, meetings where various departments or such each speak up and demand that several digits be added to an account number just for their department, so that with a glance at the account number, they can tell a lot about what relates to their function.

That's all well and good for the benefit of the comparatively few who process those large account numbers. But is it fair to impose 16-digit numbers on all of us for the convenience of processing departments that don't want to have to punch in an account number in order to know some characteristic of the account holder?

To put it another way, a 16-digit account number has 10 million times the capacity of Social Security's 9-digit number. Not 10 million more numbers, but 10 million times as many numbers. Why?

Handwritten initials 'GW' in a stylized, cursive font.

Gary Weidner
garyw@adpub.com
800-525-7038

Industry Calendar 2009

Mar. 2–5 American Rental Association's The Rental Show, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, GA. For more information, visit www.the-rentalshow.com.

Mar. 28–29 Northeast Pressure Washing Seminar, Albany, NY. For more information, visit www.grassrootsevents.org.

Mar. 30–Apr. 2 WESTEC 2009 Exposition, Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME), Los Angeles Convention Center, Los Angeles, CA. For more information, visit www.sme.org.

May 19–21 2009 Appalachian Underground Corrosion Short Course (AUCSC), West Virginia University, Morgantown, W VA. For more information, visit www.aucsc.com.

Aug. 18–20 2009 American WJTA Conference and Expo, Marriott Houston Westchase Hotel, Houston, TX. For more information, visit www.wjta.org.

Oct. 6–9 ISSA/INTERCLEAN North America 2009, Chicago, IL. For more information, visit www.issa.com.

Oct. 8–10 2009 PWNA Convention/Fall Technical Seminar, Holiday Inn, Gurnee, IL. For more information, visit www.pwna.org.

Oct. 18–20 CETA PowerClean 2009 Trade Show and Convention, Silver Legacy Resort Casino, Reno, NV. For more information, visit www.ceta.org.

Oct. 27–30 DeckExpo 2009, side-by-side with the Remodeling Show, Indianapolis Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN. For more information, visit www.deckexpo.com.