



# Postcodes – Power in Numbers

Mohd Zaidi details how postcodes keep the Malaysian mail system flowing smoothly.

**T**hough the postal service has changed drastically since its conception in ancient times, the emergence of a growing world population has given rise to the need for increased use of new technology to process larger volumes of mail. As such, modern postal systems rely heavily on state-of-the-art technology to deliver mail efficiently, easily and safely.

Postal systems play a big role in our daily lives, yet most people know next to nothing about them. People only

see the end result of a mass network at play on a domestic and global scale. Vastly different postal systems worldwide cooperate together to form an international network, with air and sea-mail routes, making it the most underrated humanitarian service in this modern age. International mail cannot be delivered without the cooperation of several countries, and each country's postal service has its own unique aspects.

The history of Malaysia's postal services goes back to the early 1800s but it wasn't until after achieving

independence in 1957 that it became a member country of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) on 17 January 1958. Its participation in the UPU was a proactive move to stay abreast with international, social and economic development.

Today, the postal service in Malaysia continues to evolve to meet the growing demands and needs of changing consumer and marketplace behaviours.

Despite all the technological breakthroughs and various systems employed by the postal service, the postcode system is probably the most effective system initiated by the UPU. Germany was the first country to introduce a postal code system in 1941. The system was first introduced in Malaysia in 1974 based on a 4-digit system (e.g.: 14-02 Kuala Lumpur).

## Understanding Postcodes

A postcode is the fundamental, essential element of a modern address with numeric and/or alphanumeric characters. It is a series of numbers representing specific areas within a country. In Malaysia, postcodes are

now a series of five numbers. The five-digit system was introduced in October 1985 to replace the 4-digit system and are arranged in accordance with the National Mail Distribution system. The first two numbers identify the main mail centre or post office for a particular area and the last three numbers indicate the type of mail delivery used.

It is an erroneous assumption that postcodes are allocated according to districts or townships. In fact, these allocations, which are managed by Pos Malaysia, are determined by the distance between an area to the Delivery Office and the last Delivery Point.

The most obvious implementation of the postcode system is to facilitate the handling and sorting process of mail. In Malaysia, mail is sorted by postal code, before being allocated to specific postal delivery routes. This smoothens the progress of mail exchange within the country and abroad. Though the process is fully automated, there are some instances where it has to be done manually if the postcodes are illegible and the

machines are unable to interpret them accurately.

Postcodes are essential for streamlining organizations, improving quality of service and coping with rising mail volumes. They also reduce the risk of confusion between destinations with similar names.

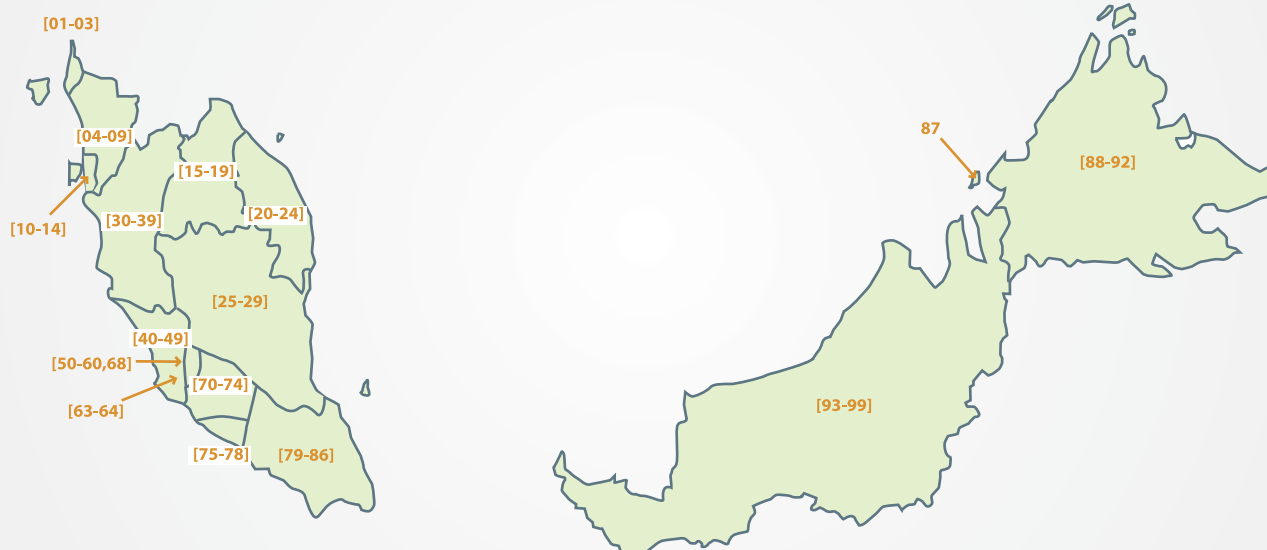
It is interesting to note, that this seemingly unimportant series of numbers are actually an asset and resource used by various industries for a multitude of reasons. It is a standard component of a modern information society.

There have been fears that the advent of e-commerce and widespread use of the Internet would sound the death-knell of traditional mail delivery. However, the fears have proven unfounded. Though the increasing growth of e-mail has proven to be a threat to social mail, business mail has still survived the onslaught. Moreover, physical mail delivery is a crucial part of the e-commerce process.

## Industry Utilisation

Thus, for the advertising and service industry, not only are postcodes useful for commercial mailers but to also

Map below shows the allocation of the first two digits of postcode.





## Lesson in Postal Delivery

**Ever wondered how the mail gets delivered?** Most people are oblivious to how much goes into getting their mail to them, quickly and safely. When a letter or a package is sent, it is taken to a post office where all of the mail has to be sorted in order to reach the correct destination. Today, much of this process is now handled with modern machinery. First, the mail is separated into piles of letters and packages, by class, and the stamps are cancelled. Next it is sorted into groups of mail heading to the same destination or direction.

Low class mail is sent by the cheapest mode of transportation, such as ground or sea. It normally sits around for long periods of time so that enough of it can be collected to ship in bulk loads. On the other hand, high class mail is delivered faster, possibly by airplane, and will not wait as long between stops.

Along its journey, each piece of mail can be checked for security hazards in a variety of ways. It could be as simple as a check for any odd-shaped packages, or perhaps it could pass through an X-Ray machine. Any item which poses a possible threat can be confiscated at the post office.

At the airport, bags of airmail are loaded on to commercial flights headed to the same destination as the mail. When the flight reaches another country, it becomes the sole responsibility of that country to ensure that the mail is delivered, and it is no longer in the hands of the country from which it was sent.

The majority of all mail will travel through several post offices before it reaches its final destination. For domestic mail, many countries use a postal code. These codes help to make the sorting process more mechanical and efficient.

When the mail reaches the last post office stop before its final destination, it is sorted by a mail carrier and then delivered during the daily routes. The next time you receive your mail, think of the countless hands that have probably handled it and numerous destinations it must have visited, especially if it is international mail... before reaching you.

### ▼ The structure of Malaysian postcodes: Postcode coding method

Main Mail Centre **43000** Type of delivery

### ▼ The last three digits indicate the different types of mail delivery:

xx000 to xx499	Beat Delivery Zone (Direct mail delivery made by the postman)
xx500 to xx699	Government Agency Delivery (Mail delivery to government offices and agencies in major cities nationwide)
xx700 to xx899	P.O. Box mail delivery
xx900 to xx989	P.O. Box mail delivery exceeding 500 letters a day
xx990 to xx999	Locked Bag Service delivery



drive new business opportunities and target specific areas to categorise potential customers. Postcodes are also a reliable and lasting frame of reference for location identification, essential for transportation, health and social services.

A system of postcodes has social, economic and environmental value.

It has tremendous potential for providing valuable and necessary data to policy-makers and citizens. For example, postcodes could be used to identify and spatially map the location of schools, housing, business premises, and for epidemiological research. They can assist in the formulation and analysis of

## Other Postcode Usages around the World

Country	Postcode Usage
USA	ZIP codes are used not only for tracking of mail but in gathering geographical statistics in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau has data that include the latitude and longitude of the centre-point of some ZIP codes (called ZIP Code Tabulation Areas or ZCTAs).
United Kingdom	Postcodes are also used to define pension benefits. It is thought that those living in more affluent and healthy areas will live longer and should therefore receive a lesser pension than those in less prosperous areas.
Ireland	A big advantage of a postcode system here would be for creating databases of local services. Imagine being able to figure out what public transport to take between two addresses just by keying the two numbers into a database. You can also look up an events database of shops or things happening within one or two place code districts of where you are.
Cayman Islands	The postal service is offering unique postcodes for purchase by the public. It is more suitable for those receiving a high volume of mail and is not sorted with all the other mail at the post office.
Germany	Users can enter their postcode into an online comparator to see the sort of prices their local companies are charging for electricity.
South Africa	Using GSM technology, companies that regularly need to redeploy their vehicles or check the journey progress of their mobile workforce, can do so by remotely identifying the locations of their mobile workforce. They can identify which vehicle is closest to a specific postcode so that jobs can be allocated to the nearest driver.

### Some interesting trivia on postcodes

- ZIP codes can take on a certain amount of cachet or become bywords: 90210, in Beverly Hills, California, probably the most famous example, appears in the titles of two Beverly Hills-centred television shows: Beverly Hills 90210 and Dr. 90210.
- The Shoe Department at Saks Fifth Avenue New York City was given a special ZIP code 10022-SHOE.
- ZIP code 12345 belongs to the world headquarters for General Electric in Schenectady, New York. Each year, the facility receives many letters from children to Santa Claus, addressed to "North Pole 12345". North Pole Zip Code. A group of employees has for several years volunteered their time to answer this mail.
- 43210 is the ZIP code of The Ohio State University Campus Station post office and all residential dorms on Campus.

cross-departmental service provision by the public sector. They can also facilitate the compilation of the small area data required by Government for developing and analysing economic, social and environment information. While postcodes are typically associated with address points, it should be equally possible to allocate a postcode to non-address points so as to realise their environmental and heritage value.

Politicians too can benefit from up-to-date data quality systems, using postcode information to target prospective voter support. The police on the other hand, can use them to identify potential trouble spots or troublemakers.

The postcode has evolved into a crucial tool for postal organization and consequently postal development. As Malaysia forges ahead to achieve Vision 2020, the postal services also follows

in its wake by taking the initiative to further improve the postcode system and its mailing operations for better efficiency. [my](#)

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