COUNTRY CODES & DOMAINS: A HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE FOR SARK'S CYBERSPACE
A SERIES OF GUEST ARTICLES BY MIKE LOCKE

Welcome to the first of a short series of articles which looks at how Sark can benefit from carving out its own corner of cyberspace and participating in the new digital economy. The internet is not going to go away and we need to look after our own interests in this new global arena.

To begin at the beginning, we'll start with international Country Codes, where they came from, what they do and how they are used. These international codes are now used by just about every organisation for a variety of tasks.

In the guise of Domains, they support the structure of the internet and make it possible for us all to find our way round it. How does a legislation get a Country Code and turn one into a usable Domain? And when one is allocated (or "delegated"), how do countries and territories protect their reputation and involve the community?

The last article will cover what the benefits to Sark will be. How do we control it and how can it help Sark take its place on the worldwide digital stage: "Sark – The Digital Island"?

1. Country Codes: history and their uses
2. How Domains make sense of the internet
3. From Code to Domain: how and who?
4. Building the reputation the Community wants for Sark.
5. Sark – the Digital Island: controlling and benefiting from a Domain.

If you have any questions about this article or, indeed, any of the other subjects we'll move onto, do please send them to us. We'll feature a selection in the rest of the series.

<u>So, Country Codes.</u>

What has this got to do with Sark? First, we need to ask the question "are we part of the UK?" or, indeed, any other country or jurisdiction. And the answer to that is no. Sark has a proudly independent history and, as we know, its own parliament & judicial system. Constitutionally, like its sister Channel Islands, it is one of the last remaining parts of the Duchy of Normandy. Her Majesty the Queen holds these islands as Duke (not Duchess) of Normandy. Hence the traditional toast "La Reine, notre Duc".

So while a possession of the Crown, we're not part of the UK or, come to that, Guernsey's legislature. There are a number of Crown possessions not part of the UK. These are the Crown Dependencies (the Bailiwicks and the Isle of Man) and the 40-odd British Overseas Territories.

For centuries, this didn't matter. Sark knew where it was, our friends knew where we were and interaction with the global community wasn't really necessary. Sark ran its own affairs and most worldwide organizations we know today hadn't come into existence, so there was no need for Sark to put its head over the parapet. As our slogan says: "A World Apart".

However, that has changed beyond all recognition. In short, these days, if you don't have a Country Code, you get treated as part of another country.

<u>What's a Country Code?</u>
In the early days, that depended on what organisation you were and what you were trying to do. Let's take a look at one of the earliest uses.

The Universal Postal Union is now a specialised agency of the United Nations but predates it by 7 decades. It was established by treaty after the International Postal Congress of 1874. Before that, post could only be sent between countries that had a postal treaty with each other. The one between the USA and France took from 1852 to 1874 to negotiate! Also, you'd have to put stamps from both countries on the envelope – plus those from any other country the letter had to pass through. Clearly, not a good way of organizing international communications!

The establishment of the UPU solved that with unified rates, allowing letters to be sent with just one set of stamps on the envelope and sharing the revenue between the countries.

In conjunction with the WADP, they even operate philately identification worldwide and identify illegal stamps issued by areas which don't have the rights to do so.

So in order to operate this new unified system, each member country had to be on the official list. Even today, if a country is not recognised by the UPU, mail must be routed through a third party. Currently, the UPU has 192 members (all British Overseas Territories are represented as a single member). If you don't have UPU recognition, you can't have post delivered directly and you can't issue legal stamps.

In some countries, telegraph and telephones came under the Post Office, as with UK, so there is also

another international body that covers telecoms: the International Telecommunication Union. Just about every cross-border interaction now has an international agreement covering it. International Statistics are collected under the UN's M49 Standard Country and Area Code list (and yes, thanks to Chief Pleas, Sark has a code on that: 680). Vehicle number plates are allowed to include country codes such as GB, GBJ and GBG (and now UK). Why not GBS? Some of the other organisations are given in the boxed list.

Where else are Country Codes used?

If you've even done anything on the internet, you'll notice menus and dropdowns with countries and destinations listed. And even if you haven't, the organisations you might want to make use of will be using systems that do. As we've seen above, that applies to post and phone but also applies to: HMRC Tax, VAT Reclaim, International Export/ Import, Origin of Products, Animal Movements and even Ebay!

Shipping address

Samoa
San Marino
São Tomé & Príncipe
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Serbia
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Sint Maarten
Slovakia
Slovenia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
South Georgia & South Sandwich Islands
South Korea
South Sudan
Spain
Sri Lanka

Country Codes are used everywhere. Are there different lists for different organisations? There used to be, but not now.

Rationalisation

As global interaction grew, it made little sense for organisations to use different codes. After all, there are only 676 (26 x 26) two-letter combinations so a lack of co-ordination can use up this limited resource. The UK is fortunate with having both UK and GB, France also has a similar dual listing but these are the (tightly-controlled) exceptions rather than the rule. How is this sorted out? A standard list is needed.

BSI and ISO

That's where the BSI and ISO come in. The British Standards Institute is our "National Standards Body" and operates under a Royal Charter for the Crown. It was the world's first national standards body and one of the founder members of the International Standards Organisation. ISO was formed after a meeting in London in 1946 and began operations the next year. ISO has a range of committees which co-ordinate with members such as BSI and have responsibility for overseeing international standards. This includes the ISO-3166 Country Code list which underpins just about all international interaction.

No Code, no Recognition

That, in a nutshell is why Country Codes in all their guises are important. That ISO list is the reference of all other lists used by ecommerce, search engines, national and international bodies.

If you're not on that list in your own right, the international community treats you as part of another territory. If you've tried to order anything from Ebay, you'll know this issue. But it impacts everything else as well from the trivial to the fundamentally important.

Hence the question at the start: is Sark part of the UK or is Sark, Sark (a World Apart)?

Sark has been working through an appointed committee of Chief Pleas with BSI to get Sark included (along with other CDs and BOTs) on this list. Now we have that recognition as CQ, CRQ and 680 (the same as the UN M49 number). That's a huge step for us. The next steps are to put this recognition to work.

Next week – and send us your questions.

In next week's article, we'll take a quick look at how these Country Codes are used to make sense of the internet, the sorts of Domains there are and how they help connect the internet together. And don't forget, if you have any questions, send them in, we'll do our best to come up with the answer!

LIST OF BODIES USING / INVOLVED WITH COUNTRY CODES AS MAINTAINED BY ISO:

British Standards Institute (BSI) and all other national standards bodies worldwide.
Foundation for Internet Development (FID)
IANA
ICANN
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
International Information Centre for Terminology (Infoterm)
International vehicle licence plates (Geneva and Vienna Conventions on Road Traffic)
International Securities Identification Numbering System (ISIN)
International Telecommunications Union (ITU)
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)
National Institute of Statistics and Economics (INSEE)
Office of the Director of Civil Aviation (DCA)
Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN)
United Nations (UN)
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
Universal Postal Union (UPU)
World Bank
World Customs Organization (WCO)
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)
World Trade Organization (WTO)

This list is a selection only; there are many more.