GS1 SmartSearch
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is GS1 SmartSearch?

GS1 SmartSearch is a GS1 standard that makes it easier to keep information about products visible across the web in search engines (and also in manufacturer and retailer website and social media)

2. What are the benefits of GS1 SmartSearch?

GS1 SmartSearch leads to increased sales through:

- More relevant search results
- More detailed and accurate product information displayed in search results

3. How does GS1 SmartSearch work?

GS1 SmartSearch offers a way for web developers to include standardised and structured product information in web pages so that it is usable by search engines.

By using structured data, companies help search engines display more relevant search results to consumers. This leads to more click-through to product pages and more sales.

4. How is GS1 SmartSearch compatible with GS1 GDSN and GS1 Source?

GS1 SmartSearch complements GDSN and GS1 Source. GS1 SmartSearch is a means to format product data in a more web-friendly way. Users of GS1 GDSN and GS1 Source could add the GS1 SmartSearch format to its existing set of product data output formats. GDSN services are a valuable 'one stop shop' for retailers retrieving product information easily from one place, especially when they sell products from hundreds or thousands of suppliers.

In the future these services could exchange data in a GS1 SmartSearch format between brands and retailers as part of their offerings. Services such as GDSN could output SmartSearch-formatted data for direct inclusion into the underlying code of webpages or store this format for retrieval from a variety of data consumers.

5. If all companies implement GS1 SmartSearch, will it lose its value?

No, its value will increase with greater adoption! This is because search engines will pay special attention to the vocabulary 'pattern' that GS1 SmartSearch presents to their indexing engines, much like they do with data formatted with the schema.org vocabulary today. As a result, product pages without GS1 SmartSearch are less likely to provide relevance to search engines and are less likely to appear in search results.

6. Do we expect search engines like Google to publically endorse GS1 SmartSearch? If they don't, is it a problem?

Google already has endorsed JSON-LD (JavaScript Object Notation – Linked Data) structured data as a method of allowing its indexing spiders to understand a web page better. GS1 SmartSearch is simply JSON structured data with an agreed schema vocabulary that describes products in detail. There is no need for Google to endorse GS1

SmartSearch for it to be effective. Furthermore, Google are endorsing the use of GTINs in data submitted to Google Shopping, so they regard the GTIN as an important product identifier.

7. Does Google currently recommend or support JSON-LD?

Yes, Google supports JSON-LD. In addition, Google has also implemented a Structured Data Testing Tool at https://developers.google.com/structured-data/testing-tool/ that allows you to test pages with GS1 SmartSearch in them. The data structure may be titled, by the test, as 'Unspecified Type', but the test will return "All Good".

8. What evidence is there to show that GS1 SmartSearch leads to more relevant search results?

Tests completed by GS1 UK have shown that products on a test web site score better in search ranking for relevant searches. However the word relevant is key here: When the search engine user put in several relevant key words into the search box (e.g. 'purple ballet shoes size 6'), GS1 SmartSearch-embedded pages did well. However vague searching with few words (e.g. 'purple shoes') the GS1 SmartSearch-embedded pages made little difference because a search-indexing spider can easily see the relevance of these words in the title or header of relevant HTML-only product pages.

9. What evidence is there to show that better search engine rankings lead to higher sales?

Analysis by Searchmetrics Etude in 2014 showed that:

- Over 80% of online purchases begin on Google
- First position in Google produced a >25% Click through rate
- Web pages using "rich snippets" (structured data) are better referenced

10. If two retailers (or a brand and a retailer) use GS1 SmartSearch to encode a webpage for the same product, how will a search engine decide which of the pages is more relevant?

How search engines decide the relevancy of web pages satisfying a search request is the 'secret sauce' that is never revealed. It is not valuable to try to second-guess how search engines work; it is best to recommend that everyone from brand to retailer publishes high-quality, information-rich pages about their products. GS1 SmartSearch is a tool to help them achieve that goal.

11. In Google search results, how does Google decide when to present "standard" search results and when to present rich snippets?

On their developers' website https://developers.google.com/structured-data/rich-snippets/products Google describe how to tag information on a product web page so that they can be sure what it is that they are indexing – and what they are presenting as rich snippets in search results. The GS1 team in the UK have noticed in their tests that the data in GS1 SmartSearch works for rich snippets too, as long as the names in the JSON-LD match the properties they list on the page link above. The good news is that these properties are in the GS1 SmartSearch vocabulary!

12. What's the difference between the schema.org vocabulary and the GS1 SmartSearch vocabulary?

Schema.org currently defines basic product and offer properties to use to provide semantic mark-up for a web page. However GS1 SmartSearch extends the schema.org vocabulary comprehensively so that more detailed properties of a product can be described for certain product types. This goes beyond the basic properties for a product (such as 'gtin13' and 'price') in schema.org

13. How important is the GTIN as a data attribute? Is it more important than other attributes (truly a key) or is it "just another attribute"?

Technically speaking, the GTIN is just another attribute in terms of the formatting of the JSON-LD structured data. However, search engines understand the value of the GTIN, as it allows them to connect to apps that scan barcodes and search for relevant results. In terms of being a 'key' (that is, a unique identifier for a product), the value of the GTIN becomes important to a search engine indexer, which can use its uniqueness to understand that it is seeing the exact same product on multiple websites.

14. There are websites that earn money on traffic and they prefer customers visiting their websites instead of getting the information from Google. They wouldn't like to use structured data because, if they do, Google will show it and customers will not need to visit their website. For these websites, whose goal is traffic, is structured data is useful?

There are many different online business models that have come into existence because of the way that the web works. However, at GS1 we must never sway from our focus of working on behalf of the consumer. For 40 years our standards have enabled all organisations in the supply chain to deliver improved efficiency, product choice, price and service to consumers, and GS1 SmartSearch is another tool that helps the consumer choose the right product with confidence. The positives of good quality, accurate and complete product data are the focus of the value proposition for GS1 SmartSearch.