

# Tracking Your Fasteners

by:

**Dennis R. Cowhey, CEO**  
**Computer Insights, Inc.**  
 108 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
 Bloomingdale, IL 60108 USA  
 +1 630 893 4007  
 dcowhey@ci-inc.com  
 www.ci-inc.com



## Part Numbers — A Tower of Babble

One truly unique aspect of the fastener industry is the number of part numbers that apply to each part. There are no universally used standards. There are standards to be sure, but none that have generated enough usage to be the common number. The grocery industry got it right when it created the UPC code. Grocers all agreed to use the UPC, and now it is the standard number for everything in the grocery store.

Not so in the fastener industry, where everyone has their own opinion about how the part numbering schemes should be constructed. Many people have part numbers that do not relate in any way to the characteristics of the part.

I served on a committee that was trying to come up with a standard part number for fasteners many years ago, but no one would agree to any version of the part numbering method. The group was finally disbanded after making absolutely no progress.

### Why So Many Part Numbers?

There are several good reasons and some not so good reasons for the variations in fastener part numbers. Many companies feel that they have figured out the ideal “nomenclature” part number system, for example the part number coding is in a sequence and format that tells an informed user the exact description of that part. The nomenclature part numbers tend to be long because there are so many attributes that must be described by the part number. Other companies would prefer that their competitors not know what part is represented by their part number, so they use meaningless numeric part numbers. Often these are made as short as possible for ease of data entry.

### NSN—MIL STD Numbers

National Stock Number (NSN), as it is known in the USA, is a 13-digit numeric code identifying all the standardized material items of supply as they have been recognized by all NATO countries including the **United States Department of Defense**. Based on the NATO Standardization Agreements, the NSN has come to be used in all treaty countries, where it is also known as a NATO Stock Number. However, many countries that use the NSN program are not members of NATO, for example Japan, Australia and New Zealand. There are over 13 million National Stock Numbers and all of these must have manufacturer cross-reference part numbers.

### DIN Numbers

**Deutsches Institut für Normung e.V. (DIN)**, the **German Institute for Standardization**, is the German national organization for standardization and is that country’s ISO member body.

### Custom Fasteners Get Drawing Numbers

Custom fasteners are often assigned completely meaningless numbers as far as the part number is concerned. They are often tied to a drawing or other manufacturing document.

### Many Opportunities for Mistakes

With all the part numbers that could be used, it is extremely important that a fastener distributor has a well-organized

**Dennis, R. Cowhey, CEO** – Started **Computer Insights** in 1981. He served for many years on the **Illinois CPA Society Computer Information Systems Committee**. He is a frequent author of articles for industry trade magazines. Before starting **Computer Insights**, he served as Central District Manager for a division of **Litton Industries** (now part of **Rockwell**), that offered inven-

system to get the part numbers right every time. This is after all a business where you can turn a US\$50.00 order into a US\$500.00 mistake. Make that mistake once too often and it could easily cost you a customer.

### Good Systems Ease the Burden

A good system that is designed for fastener companies can really simplify this situation. The system should be able to tie an unlimited number of alternate part numbers to the fastener distributor’s internal part number (no matter what the fastener distributor wants to use). The system should automatically use the correct part number in each case. If a PO is going out to a vendor, the vendor’s part number should be used. If a customer is ordering the part, the system should automatically know the part number or numbers that the customer wants to use. Some customers want to use more than one part number, for example their own for internal use and a UPC for consumer packaging, which is done for them by the fastener distributor. Sometimes the customer wants a specific PO number associated with each part as well.

### Examples

Here is an example of a part with many alternates as we would show it in **The BUSINESS EDGE 2.0**:

In addition to the fastener distributor’s part number and the UPC number, the system also maintains an unlimited number of alternate part numbers. These can be:

- Vendor part numbers.
- Multiple customer part numbers for the same product.
- NSN, DIN or Mil Spec Numbers.
- Catalog or other numbers that are not related to either a customer or vendor.

Alt #	Description	Cust or Vend	Alt ID #
1000 788789-21	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL		65-500-7547
1024X 7500CB	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	C 407245 Dura Automotive / Allsource	
12324	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	V 224 ABRASIVE ACCESSORIES, INC.	
3490394-234324-3423-00	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL AN-212112	C 1000 AA Manufacturing Co.	
401-316A	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	C 407246 Phezer Enterprises, Inc.	
5643905-4324	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	C 1148 C & C Metals	
62924012	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	C 407302 B	
6599	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	C 407351 sxi	200-1254-6546
6644889	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL		
903059	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	V 195 PENN ENGINEERING	
AC-CB0 187-24X0 750	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL		
AN 212112	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL		
BB-CB0 187-24X0 750	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL		
HA9123	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	C 407321 Haggerty Supplies, Inc.	
PB	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL		
PB-CB0 187-24X0 750	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL		
XC-4324-432432	3/16-24 X 3/4 CARRIAGE BOLT PLAIN STEEL	C 1000 AA Manufacturing Co.	

Love it or hate it, the multiple part number situation is here to stay. It is in every fastener distributor’s best interest to get it under control. Mistakes are just too costly.

Control systems to retailers. Prior to that, he was a Credit and Financial Analyst for National Credit Office division of **Dun & Bradstreet, Inc.** Cowhey received his education at **Chicago City College** and **DePaul University**. **Computer Insights** provides the fastener industry with **The BUSINESS EDGE 2.0** software for efficient tracking of fasteners.