

CERTIFICATION BODIES

Quick Start Guide

Practical steps to make certification data easier to find, verify and reuse with GS1



Executive summary

Certification schemes owners are increasingly being asked by marketplaces, retailers, brands, regulators and procurement system providers to make their certification information more usable in digital workflows like onboarding, listing controls, audits, reporting and product transparency initiatives.

In processes, certificates that are shared as PDFs, spreadsheets and email attachments can be tough to manage – slow to validate, hard to keep current and difficult to reuse correctly, especially as volumes grow.

Certification records need to be:

- Clear in scope
- Easy to access digitally
- Simple for others to verify and reuse correctly

This doesn't mean that the certification process itself must change. Rather, it requires making the certification record easier to use in digital channels, while keeping the certification body as the authoritative source of truth.

The four strategies to get started include:

1. Define the right identifier for what is being certified.
2. Publish a stable digital record.
3. Keep the status current.
4. Structure the key data so that it can be reused.



A good place to start is straightforward:

define the right identifier for what is certified, publish a stable digital record, keep status current and make the key data structured enough to be reused. GS1 can help you do all of this – without replacing your certification registry or redesigning your processes.



The need to make a change

Certification information is increasingly being used outside the certification process itself — in processes for marketplace onboarding, listing controls, audits, sustainability reporting and product transparency. When certification information is shared as a PDF, spreadsheet or email attachment, it can become difficult to scale. Verification is delayed, the same information is requested repeatedly in different formats, and status changes are hard to pass on consistently.

To be truly valuable, certification information must be efficiently found, verified and reused in digital processes and workflows. This guide addresses the strategies and steps to achieve this goal.

Your certification process stays the same.

You still:

- Define the certification criteria.
- Decide what is certified.
- Issue, renew, suspend or withdraw certifications.
- Remain the authoritative source of certification information.

What changes is how the certification data travels.

You will need to make it easier for others to:

- Know exactly what the certification applies to.
- Access the latest certification status digitally.
- Reuse that information without repeatedly requesting certification documents in different formats.

The four principles that make your data reusable

• Ensure the certification scope is precise.

Each certification record should clearly state what it applies to, using identifiers that downstream systems already recognise.

For product certifications, the identifier is the GS1 Global Trade Item Number® (GTIN®) that is used in trade and marketplaces to uniquely identify products. For site or organisation certifications, the identifier is the GS1 Global Location Number (GLN) that is used for legal entities and locations.

The goal is not to use GS1 identifiers for their own sake. It is to remove ambiguity about what is certified and give downstream systems something reliable to work with.

• Publish one authoritative record.

Your certification record should be digitally accessible, using a stable reference point such as a secure URL or controlled registry entry.

When the certification status changes, you can then update that one authoritative record.

• Structure key data in a standardised way.

While a human-readable page is useful for people, systems need key fields in a structured form so they can interpret status, scope, dates and programme details consistently. This can be done using a GS1-aligned certification data structure.

• Enable others to discover it.

Once the certification record is clearly identified and digitally accessible, brands, marketplaces, retailers, regulators and other users can use GS1-based discovery patterns to find the authoritative source.

Strategies to adopt for change

1. The first five steps

A practical step-by-step path includes:

1. Choose one certification programme.

Start with one scheme or programme rather than trying to convert everything at the same time.

2. Decide what the certification applies to.

Be explicit about what the certification is tied to product, sites / facilities or organisations. Then, decide which GS1 identification standard (e.g., GTIN, GLN) will be used for the scope.

3. Collect the identifier during certification.

In most cases, the applicant will already have the relevant identifier. Your job is to request it, collect it in a structured way and make sure it matches the certified scope.

This is often the hardest part operationally, so keep it simple. For many schemes, collecting the right product identifiers early enough in the process is more challenging than the technical publication model itself. In practice this usually means updating the certification application form to include an identifier field, and agreeing with applicants that providing a GTIN or GLN is a requirement of certification — not an option.

4. Publish a stable digital record.

Make sure the authoritative certification record is digitally accessible and stays unchanged over time. Start with a page of information for people and, where possible, a structured version of the same information for systems.

Not every scheme needs to start with an API. For many schemes, a stable page plus a structured file or dataset is a practical first step. For schemes with higher digital maturity, API-based access may be the most appropriate next step.

The goal is stability, structure and ease of update — not sophistication. Start simple and build from there.

5. Keep lifecycle status current.

Make sure the record is updated when a certification is issued, renewed, expired, suspended, withdrawn or when its scope has changed. If the record status changes, downstream users should be able to see the updated information through the same reference point.



2. The minimum data you need to publish — and what can wait

In the beginning, do not try to publish all data. If you already maintain certification records in a database or structured file, map your existing fields to a small, reusable set rather than redesigning everything.

An appropriate “minimum set” can be defined as enough to answer what is certified, under which programme and if it’s currently valid. It typically includes the:

- Product / site / organisation identifier in scope
- Certification body / scheme owner
- Certification programme or standard
- Certification status
- Issue date
- Expiry / end date
- Last updated date
- Stable digital reference to the authoritative record

Additional data can be added later.



3. What an effective pilot looks like

An effective first pilot is small and practical, and that is exactly what makes it useful.

You do not need to build a new platform, integrate separately with every marketplace or retailer, expose every possible data field or solve every future DPP scenario. The goal is to prove the pattern and surface the next design questions — not to solve the whole ecosystem in round one.

A typical pilot includes:

- One certification programme
- One or two participating brands
- One downstream verifier or use case
- Small set of certified products or sites

This combination is enough to test whether identifiers can be collected reliably, whether the authoritative record is easy to reach and whether downstream users can verify status without manual document exchange.

4. Where GS1 can help

GS1 can help certification schemes in these ways:

- **Scope and identifiers:** GS1 can recommend the most appropriate identifiers for what is being certified (e.g., product, site or organisation).
- **Data structure:** GS1 can provide a common way to structure certification information so it can be interpreted consistently across systems.
- **Discovery and reuse:** GS1 can help brands, marketplaces, retailers and regulators move from the product or organisation identity to the authoritative certification source without bespoke integrations.

The role of GS1 is not to replace your certification registry. The role of GS1 is to provide the shared infrastructure that makes your certification information easier to find, check and reuse.



Get started today

Contact your local GS1 Member Organisation. They can help you assess your readiness, identify a pilot partner and make sure your authoritative certification record is set up to be discovered and reused in the way this guide describes.



About GS1

GS1 is a neutral, not-for-profit organisation that develops and maintains global standards to enable organisations to identify, capture and share information efficiently and securely. GS1 standards are created by industry, for industry, through an open and consensus-based Global Standards Management Process.

GS1 operates through a network of 120 GS1 Member Organisations worldwide, working with businesses, regulators and other stakeholders across sectors and regions. GS1 standards are widely used to support supply chain operations, digital trade, regulatory compliance and consumer transparency. Many GS1 standards are also recognised as ISO standards.

To support evolving business, regulatory and sustainability requirements, GS1 works with industry to ensure its standards and data frameworks continue to enable trusted, interoperable data exchange across global value chains.

For more information, please contact your local **GS1 Member Organisation**.

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