

**NAME OF SYSTEM:**

**ZIP Code Data Retrieval**

**ORIGINATOR:**

**National Education Association  
(NEA)**

**1201 16th Street, N.W.,  
Washington, D.C. 20036**

**OBJECTIVE.** To evaluate and select a data retrieval system that will provide a fast and efficient method for looking up postal ZIP Codes so that they may be added to the mailing addresses of Association members. Also, to provide a simple, inexpensive method for updating data in the ZIP Code directory.

**BACKGROUND.** The National Education Association (NEA) represents the professional interests of about one million teachers in the United States. The advent of the ZIP Code and the requirement for bulk mailers to add geographical code elements to each mailing address created data retrieval problems for the NEA.

Their initial need was to determine the best method for retrieving ZIP Code information for inclusion on the NEA master mailing list. The basic method for accomplishing this task was the Post Office Department's bulky, 1,800 page National ZIP Code Directory. Its page format comprises five columns of alphabetically arranged listings of States, cities, towns, and streets, with ZIP Codes shown for each entry.

The manual Directory search routine consisted of finding the member's State, followed by an alphabetical rundown of the State's city or town, and finally the street address. The ZIP Code would then be noted on the member's master address card. To alleviate this tedious and time consuming method of finding and posting ZIP Codes for over a million members, the NEA study group recommended adoption of the ZIP Code Data Retrieval System employing microfilm strips.

**THE NEW METHOD.** Initially, the NEA converted the ZIP Code Directory to a magnetic tape format and arranged for a commercial firm to convert the magnetic tape information into 16-mm. microfilm through use of COM (computer output microfilm) equipment. This action was taken in conjunction with a program to mechanize the overall mailing list operation. The 16-mm. rolls of microfilm were photographed and developed, and the film was spliced into 12-inch strips, each containing 12 pages of ZIP Code information. Film strips were then mounted on plastic strip holders measuring about 14 inches long and indexed to reflect the proper geographical area. A visual index label located on the front of each plastic strip holder indicates the State to which the contained microfilm information applies. Color coding is added for ease of identification when a States's listings overlap into additional strip holders. Located on the back of each strip holder is a second and more precise index listing showing city, town, and street information, which is only visible when the holder is removed from the data file. The full ZIP Code inventory comprises 200 visible strip holders housed in a 200 slot "honeycomb" file container easily accessible to the searcher and viewing equipment.

A search of the ZIP Code data file aimed at finding the ZIP Code applicable to a known address would first involve selection of the State and particular city by noting the visual index information. The selected strip holder is then manually placed in a slotted keyway on the microstrip reader. The placement of the strip holder on the reader exposes the secondary index that lists more precise information concerning street identities and microfilm strip page numbers. With the page number determined, a mechanical pointer within the system is manually positioned next to the proper page number. This action causes the page image to show on the reader screen and the searcher then matches the known street address with its proper ZIP Code identity. The search task is completed when the searcher records the ZIP Code next to the rest of the address.

**REMARKS.**<sup>1</sup> This type system has been primarily used for storing and retrieving information and data contained in listings such as catalogs, directories, and inventory lists. The basic equipment is commercially marketed but is not compatible with other microform systems.

The one-time conversion of original listings to microstrip form can be a costly operation, but it results in a greatly improved

information updating and retrieval operation. In addition, there are frequently other reasons why it may be advantageous to convert such listings to machine-language format, and once this is accomplished, the microstrips can be produced at a relatively low cost through COM (computer output microfilm) equipment. In the case of ZIP Code information, the user can obtain and update the microstrips for a small monthly service charge.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Education Association found that the microfilm strip system provided its greatest benefits during the initial conversion of the mailing lists to include ZIP Code entries.

## ZIP CODE DATA RETRIEVAL

