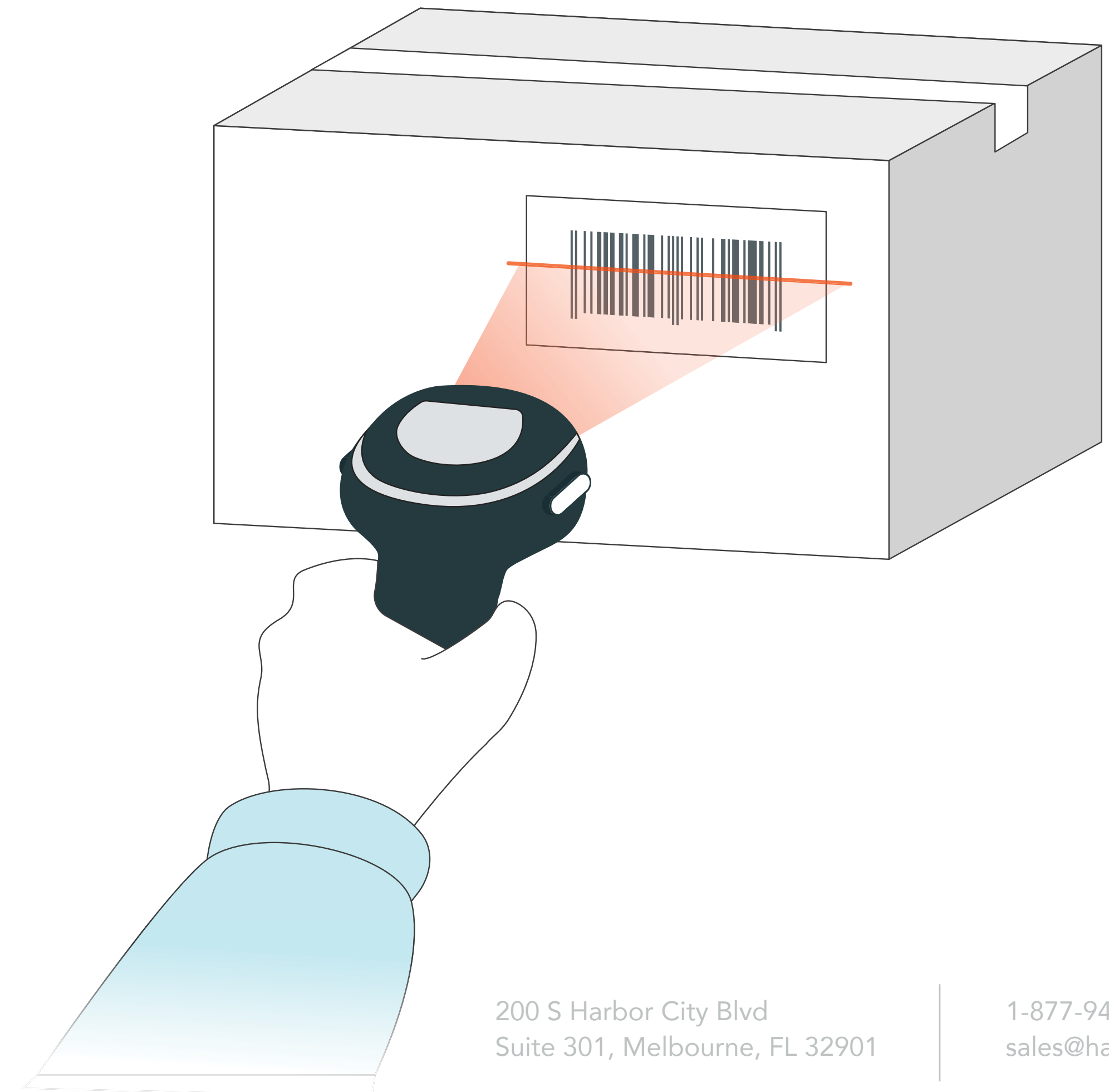# Best barcode barcode scanners for small inventory-centric businesses

It's been over 50 years since...

...the first scanning system was installed. In 1967, a Kroger store in Cincinnati started testing barcode scanners during checkout. Barcoding technologies have come a long way since then. Surprisingly, some small businesses are still a little slow to adopt this time-saving tool. If you set out to automate and streamline your inventory processes, barcoding your inventory is the **#1 thing to do.** We at HandiFox came up with a short-list of the best picks for barcode scanners to help small business owners navigate through an overwhelming number of options.

What can one barcode scan tell you?

To transition to automated barcode-enabled inventory management, you will need a barcode scanning system that can read and record the information encoded in a barcode. Software systems with such functionality give you the speed and accuracy to efficiently carry out backend business functions, like receiving, counting and selling products. They either use a mobile's device camera or external barcode scanning hardware to accomplish this. Here is what you can achieve by scanning a product's barcode

1

You can use barcode scanning as a way to **search for a specific product** on the item list in your inventory app. If scanning doesn't bring up this item on the screen, most likely it hasn't been checked into the system.

2

When receiving an order from a supplier, incoming products' barcodes are scanned to **check if they match the original order**. This creates an extra layer of verification before products enter your warehouse.

3

Product name, supplier name, sales description, purchase price, sales price are all encoded in a barcode. By scanning in a product's barcode, you can **auto-fill this item's product info and description** in your inventory management system (as long as the latter provides this sort of functionality).
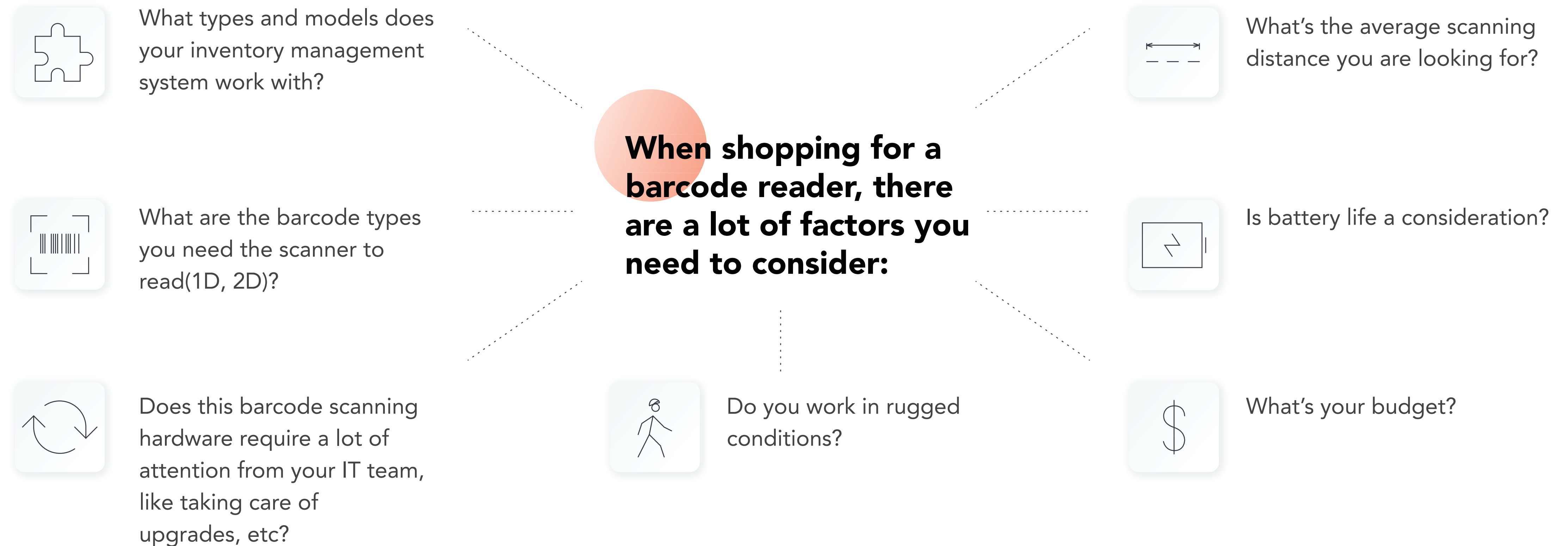
4

Before shipping an order to the customer, you can **verify its content through a pick/pack procedure** by scanning in the items' barcodes.

5

Scan in products' barcodes while doing a cycle count or physical inventory to **know how much is on hand** and whether any quantity adjustments need to be made.

Things to consider when choosing a barcode scanning system

What types and models does your inventory management system work with?

What are the barcode types you need the scanner to read(1D, 2D)?

Does this barcode scanning hardware require a lot of attention from your IT team, like taking care of upgrades, etc?

When shopping for a barcode reader, there are a lot of factors you need to consider:

Do you work in rugged conditions?

What's the average scanning distance you are looking for?

Is battery life a consideration?

What's your budget?

Best introductory/budget barcode scanners

For those who are just starting to integrate barcodes into their business and are on a tight budget, these could be the go-to models:

ZEBRA

socket.
The Mobile Connection

OPTICON

Zebra LS2208
(under $200)

has been Zebra's best-seller for years on end. It's a durable, easy-to-use **1D barcode scanner** with a decent scanning range and the ability to scan **high-density barcodes**. Keep in mind that it is corded, so if you need something more portable, you should consider wireless options.

Socket Mobile S700
(under $250)

is an exceptionally ergonomic, **Android**- and **iOS**-compatible Bluetooth wireless barcode scanner. It reads standard linear **1D barcodes**, letting you do quick inventory checks and entries on the go, in the warehouse or right in the field. The barcode scanner has a replaceable battery and can handle **up to 9 hours** of non-stop scanning.

Opticon 2006
($250)

is another viable portable option that allows **1D scanning** and can connect via Bluetooth to both **Android** and **iOS** devices. This model helps you integrate barcode scanning into your business without breaking the bank. It is ideally sized to carry around but definitely not rugged enough to withstand tough warehouse work conditions.

Best industrial barcode scanner

Zebra DS3600 series
($1000)

Zebra DS3600 series are **ultra-ruggedized 1D/2D barcodes scanners** with an **extended scanning range** from 3 to 70 ft., built for extreme conditions. These cordless Bluetooth models give you the freedom to move around while also holding the battery to allow **over 70,000 scans per charge**.

Best Bluetooth scanners

Bluetooth-enabled scanners are the obvious choice for those who have to do a lot of scanning on the go.

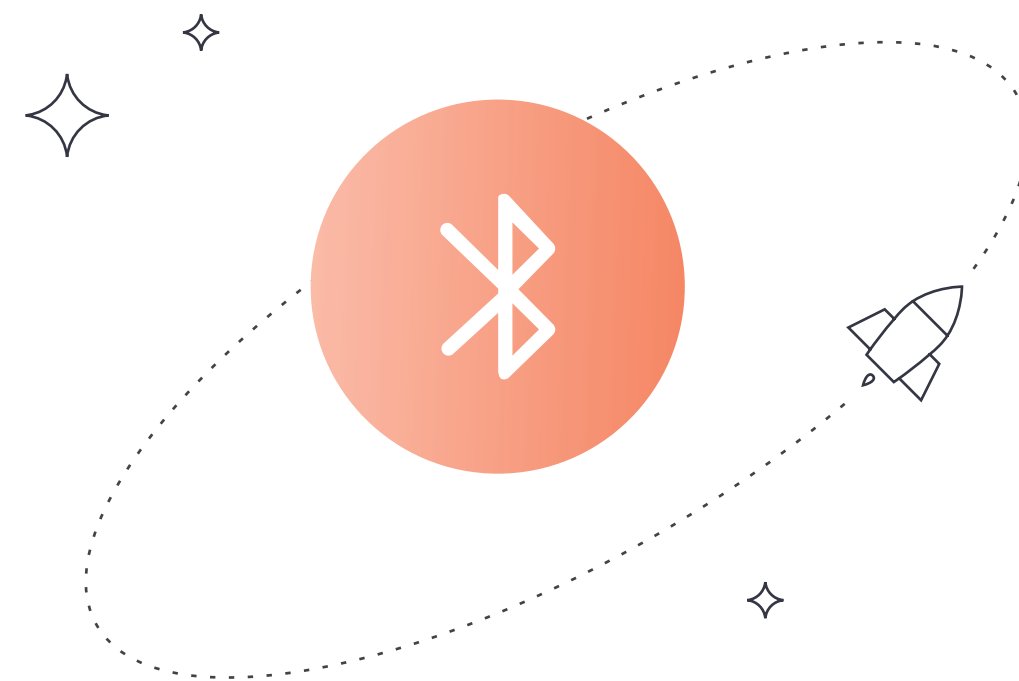### Zebra CS60 series
($500-800)

is an ideal solution for doing **1D barcode scanning** on the road, in the field, wherever you are and whenever you need it. It's a **portable, lightweight** scanning device that can be easily paired with a wide range of smartphones. It converts between corded and cordless operation and excels at reading challenging barcodes. This model works with **Android** and **iOS** devices.

Zebra DS3600 series
($1000)

The ultra-ruggedized Zebra DS3600 (see the overview on page 6) is a great bang for the buck, although it's more expensive than the pocketable CS60. This barcode scanner has a much **longer life-cycle** which makes it a worthwhile investment. The downside is it's compatible with **Android devices only**.

All-in-ones

A handheld mobile computer is a pricier but more practical option for those who don't want to hold a phone with the inventory app in one hand and a barcode scanner in the other to go about their daily warehouse tasks.

Phone-size models

Full-size models

ZEBRA

CIPHER LAB
Smarter

all
in
1

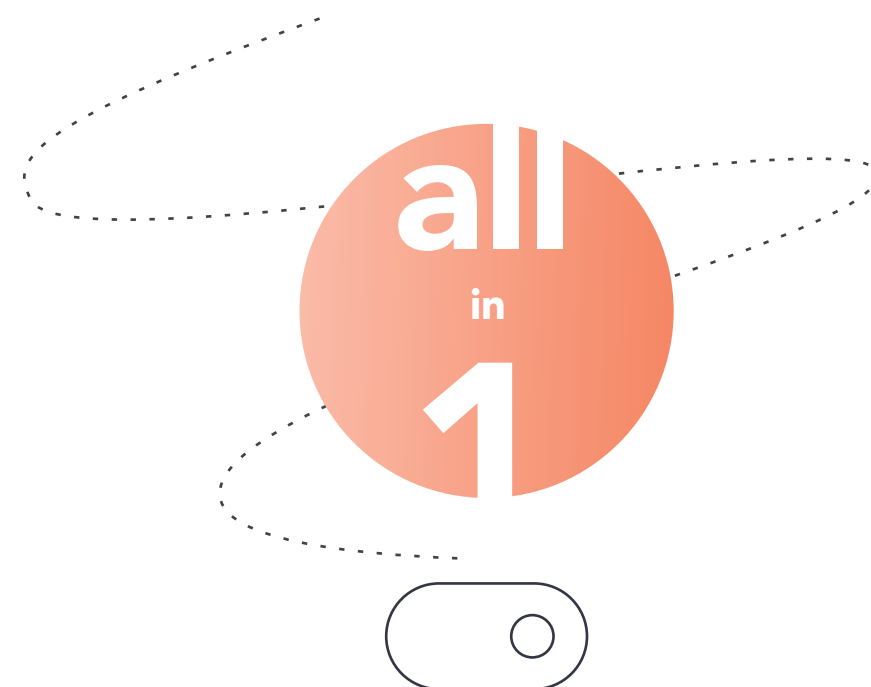### Zebra TC5x and TC7x series
(under $1800-2500)

Powered by Android, these mobile computers give you a seamless smartphone experience but operate reliably in **ultra-rugged** conditions. They can handle your business apps and **1D/2D barcode scanning**, saving you all the hassle of looking for compatible smartphones and barcode scanners.

Cipherlab RS35, RK95
($800-1500)

Cipherlab RS35 is a ruggedized **Android-based** handheld computer with **1D, 2D barcode scanning**, HF RFID and NFC capabilities. The Cipherlab RK95 model is another great option from Cipherlab which has both a touch screen and a physical keyboard. Having any one of those in your warehouse steps up your personnel's productivity and mobility, and reduces the learning process to a minimum.
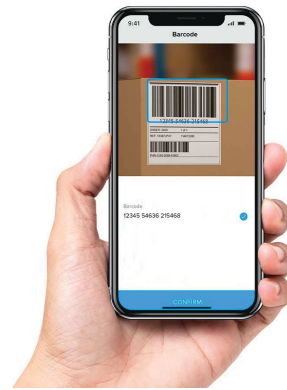
Best for Android

Handheld computers

Android phone + barcode scanner

Scanning with phone's camera

If you are an Android person, you could go with some of the above-mentioned all-in-one models (Cipherlab RS35, RK95 or Zebra TC5x, TC7x). In case you have Android phones, you could avoid overspending by purchasing any Bluetooth barcode scanner with the **SPP (Serial Port Profile)** connection. It's advisable to check with your software provider if the model has been tested and works with your inventory app. There is always an option of scanning with your phone's camera which is, of course, a lot slower.

Best for iOS

socket mobile

MFi-certified barcode scanners

When it comes to iOS devices, you should be looking for **MFi-certified** barcode scanners. Most options start at as little as $250. Socket's D740 or S740 are light, yet durable Bluetooth scanners that work great for 1D/2D barcode scanning on paper and screen. It must be said that not all MFi-certified models pair easily with iOS-based inventory apps. Before making the purchase, it's best that you reach out to your software vendor or a hardware provider to confirm compatibility.

Conclusion

Today's market of barcode reading solutions is huge, so this rundown is intended to help you navigate it and shortlist the most suitable models. But what you really should start off by is making sure your inventory management software is compatible with these. Otherwise, having a barcode scanner won't make a difference. It might be a good idea to get a bundle – inventory software and a barcode scanner to go with it. Interested to learn what your options are? Reach out to us →

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