Finding Your Missing Zeros in Excel

When opening or importing delimited files in Excel, you may notice that the leading zeros in data fields such as Zip™, Zip+4™, Line of Travel, or barcode are missing. This can happen with any field in the file starting with one or more zeros. For example, important data like unique customer numbers could also look odd. While Excel offers a simple way to format ZIP Codes™, other fields can be a bit trickier.

ZIP Codes for the northeast United States, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and other locations often start with a zero. To properly format ZIP Codes, Excel offers two straight-forward options under the number category of *Special.*

1. For a simple 5-digit ZIP Codes choose *Zip Code*, which is in the format of "00000".
2. For a 10-digit ZIP Codes, choose *Zip Code + 4*, which is in the format of "00000-0000".

What happens if your file has separate 5 digit ZIP Code and ZIP+4 fields? How do you get that leading zero back on the ZIP+4? Or what about a barcode field that may be 11-digits long (as in "00125999901")? The answer is hiding the number formatting category of *Custom.*

To fix these records:

1. Select the cells, rows, or columns that are missing those leading zeros.
2. Right-click and choose *Format Cells*
3. On the *Number* tab, select *Custom* at the bottom.
4. In the text box under the word "Type", enter in a string of zeros for each digit you want the field to have. For example, if you are formatting a ZIP+4 field, enter '0000'. If you are formatting that 11-digit barcode field, enter '00000000000'.
5. Click *OK*, and your cells, rows, or columns will have those leading zeros you've been missing.

It's important to note that formatting cells that already have the correct number of digits has no effect. In other words, it is safe to format the entire barcode field, even if only some of the records are missing that leading zero.