

PARCEL

— By Jerome Agnola —

Revolutionary changes are taking place in the preparation, rate calculation and shipping processes of today's mail and parcels, as technological advances continue and customer needs become more complex in the current economy.

As you know, mailing and shipping costs account for a large percentage of your overall operational expenses. A company spending just a few thousand dollars in postage every month is likely to spend two to three times that amount in additional express shipping charges. Add these charges together, and you could easily be looking at more than \$50,000 in mailing and shipping costs per year, without the company's management officially signing off on them.

One of our industry's more significant advances is its ability to design turnkey solutions that help companies of any size monitor their own operation while capturing detailed and useful data about mailing and shipping activity. These advances better serve customers and anticipate their needs, providing cost-saving conveniences and services designed to head off potential problems. This means your organization can easily maximize savings by integrating mail accounting and shipping software solutions into your business practice, where all cost-analysis and rate shopping is done automatically for you, leaving more time and money at your disposal.

For example, today's powerful, easy-to-use web-based applications are designed to enable mailing and shipping managers to view, report and follow their mail and parcel traffic... all from the convenience of a desktop PC. This translates into increased efficiency, improved productivity and real cost savings through better control of various mailing/shipping functions and the transformation of complicated tasks into simple ones. These online services can collect and store activity information, making important data available to customers through convenient reports. Moreover, activity data is typically maintained online for months, which facilitates easier access to monthly comparison data to help evaluate trends in mail volume and usage and provides a basis for more informed management of the mail center.

A Changing Industry Brings New Solutions

Consider the major changes that the USPS implemented over the last couple of years: Postal Service shape-based pricing (SBP) rules; new flat rates for Priority Mail; and bi-annual postage rate changes (January for competitive shipping services and May for mail items). Add to this all the changes imposed by your commercial carriers, such as rate increases and escalating accessory fees and fuel surcharges, and mail center managers and companies have a lot to balance when it comes to managing their outbound mail and parcel flow.



Software Solutions Are Driving our Industry

Today's mail accounting
and shipping software programs
save time and dollars

The availability of mailing and shipping software solutions now makes it easier than ever for organizations to efficiently track and reduce postage and shipping costs. Today's software allows companies to take a more proactive (vs. reactive) approach to their outbound mailing and shipping processes and associated costs. Informed businesses equipped with these solutions not only offset the new shipping cost increases but also work the system to their advantage with the touch of a button! Until now, mail and parcel accounting software solutions were used primarily to report how postage was spent and to charge back expenses to internal and external departments. Now, more and more companies rely on this type of software to analyze expenses and maximize savings by adjusting their outbound shipments. Postal expenditures by mail class usage, surcharges and department expenses are all monitored, and thus unnecessary costs are identified and eliminated. In addition, software can be programmed to alert users when the company's mailing and shipping budget for a specific department or account is about to be exceeded. Overall, more than ever, mailing and shipping software solutions are a vital tool for postage and shipping expense analysis, which in turn translates into budget optimization for your business.

Recent software solutions allow real-time access via your company's intranet to all mailing data generated from one or multiple mailing machines, at single or multiple locations across the country. Mailing and postage data can be easily exported in various standard formats, including CSV, XML and PDF, and then emailed to finance, accounting or any other recipient for either reporting or charge-back purposes. The end result is that clear and precise data can be subsequently analyzed to monitor potential savings areas, such as presort discounted postage rates.

Systems Management Eliminates Overspending

As communications and document streams continue to grow, more financial and human resources are tied up in the process of generating, distributing and validating documents and packages. This takes into consideration the entire mail and parcel communications spectrum, from document preparation, processing and metering to accounting and inbound/outbound tracking. Improved communications management becomes essential, and today's technology provides organizations with the ability to prepare and handle mail more efficiently, increase document and mail visibility significantly and have quicker access to critical postage account information.

Also, with the major parcel carriers increasing their costs and fees every year, it is more important than ever to ensure that your organization is not spending needlessly on overnight or other expensive air shipping services when an item can be delivered on time for a fraction of the price. Having a program that evaluates available shipping options can help eliminate unnecessary air and overnight premium rates and typically save you up to 20% on your shipping expenses.

Using a shipping software solution, it is also possible to guarantee data integrity and drastically reduce error entry, as there is no longer a need to manually consolidate shipping data

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from multiple software packages or to keep updating the same address book in multiple computers. What's more, shipping data access and visibility is increased throughout the organization and can easily be shared with customers or a third party.

The most advanced web-based desktop delivery solutions available today allow employees to easily create a "shipping request" document right from their desktop computer. The document is then printed on a standard office printer and attached to the letter or package that needs to be sent. When the package arrives in the mail center, the "shipping request" document is scanned to allow quick and accurate retrieval of all necessary shipping information, and the shipping tracking number is automatically emailed to both the sender and recipient.

Desktop delivery solutions ensure that all of the company's standard and mandatory shipping business rules are enforced throughout the organization, while still allowing freedom of choice where and when it is appropriate. Tracking and controlling shipping expenses has become a front-burner item because in today's economic climate, companies are watching every penny. Staying up-to-date on the latest requirements and regulations from the Postal Service and other carriers is only one piece of the puzzle. Time invested in examining the entire shipping operation will eventually pay off with cost savings and improved operational efficiency.

It is critical that industry leaders help customers recognize where improvements can be made throughout the entire document preparation and mail stream and put the right tools in their hands to effect these changes. More and more, the mailing and shipping center is being identified as a critical component of business and customer communication processes. Industry leaders and end users who understand the importance of investing in technology and more efficient processes have their eye on the end result: a return on investment resulting from satisfied customers. ■

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