

Three Ways to Improve Mail Center Efficiencies

In today's economic climate, businesses must analyze the processes of every department to find ways to cut costs and work as efficiently as possible. A review of your mailing processes can often reveal multiple opportunities for increased operational efficiency and savings. Many manual mail-related functions can be easily streamlined and automated resulting in increased productivity and reduced expenses.

And because sending and processing mail is an ongoing, monthly expense, any savings you can generate through improved efficiency will grow over time. We'll look at three of the most effective ways to leverage automation for maximum output.

1. Automated Folding and Inserting

When you have hundreds or thousands of pieces of mail to fold, stuff, seal and deliver, the time, cost and staffing involved to prepare the mail manually can be high. Manual folding and inserting can also generate a high rate of human error. The wrong communications messages can end up in the wrong envelopes, delivered to unintended recipients, causing a chain reaction of logistical and customer service problems.

With the help of today's technology and software, in one hour, one piece of high-volume equipment can fold, insert, and sort tens of thousands of pieces of mail—virtually error free. Most sorting options can also interpret multiple layers of mail file data, giving you the flexibility to select groups of names within your mail file for targeted messaging and inserting.

There are many companies that rent, lease, sell and operate quality equipment for automated, high-volume and low-mid volume folding, sorting and inserting. As you think about your next mailing, or yearly mailing costs, take some time to explore the automated options available to you. Often, the up-front cost of the equipment is outweighed by the long-term values of productivity, efficiency and accuracy.

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2. Barcoding

Another way to improve the efficiency and productivity of mail processing is to incorporate the use of barcoding. The United States Postal Service (USPS) can sort and deliver mail much faster and easier when there is a barcode printed on it. So, to encourage their use, the USPS offers substantial discounts for barcoded mail.

The only barcoding system that will qualify for USPS discounts is called the Intelligent Mail Barcode or IMB. By printing an IMB on your mail, you can:

- Receive per piece postal processing discounts
- Commingle and palletize mail for further discounts
- Deliver mail to customers and prospects faster

- Receive customer payments days earlier by printing an IMB on the payment form to show through the window of the return envelope
- Track mail through the entire delivery process down to the individual piece
- Analyze delivery and response times for valuable marketing insight
- Automatically receive USPS address change and correction data to keep your mail file current and accurate

The simple step of barcoding does much more than qualify you for postal discounts. It also creates new marketing and segmentation opportunities. If you're not using barcodes on your mail already, you're not leveraging a powerful tool that can transform mailings into high-powered, test-driven marketing campaigns.

3. Automated Inbound Mail Processing

Most of the time when we think of mailing costs, we think of the costs associated with outbound mail. These might include printing, folding, inserting and postage. However, there are also costs associated with the process of receiving and distributing incoming mail.

How many times has a package or an important piece of mail been delivered to your business, only to be lost internally due to mix-ups, manual logging errors or unreadable signatures?

There are software solutions that automatically validate the receipt of each piece of inbound mail and track it from the moment it arrives—through delivery confirmation. With this technology there are no questions—the who, when and where are captured and tracked electronically, so the status of a received item can be checked in real time.

Adopting the use of barcodes, folding and inserting technology and an automated inbound mail tracking solution are three excellent ways to cut costs, increase productivity and free up resources to focus on other important labor-intensive functions.

Source: "USPS Intelligent Mail® Barcode Overview." *Pitney Bowes*. 16 June 2010. http://www.pb.com/cgi-bin/pb.dll/jsp/Postalinfo.do?sitelet=RCEducation&catOID=-21164&editorial_id=ed_Intel_Mail_Barcode&lang=en&country=us