

Computer Corner

Play It Smart – Prepare for Intelligent Barcode Requirements



The United States Postal Service (USPS) announced that beginning May 2011, Intelligent Mail® (IM) barcodes will be required for mail to qualify for automation discounts. The Intelligent Mail barcode (formerly known as the 4-State Customer Barcode) is the next generation of USPS® barcode technology used to sort and track letters and flats. .

Before you panic ... the USPS National Customer Support Center Web site at <http://ribbs.usps.gov/> recently posted the following under Latest News: "Recognizing ongoing concerns about mailers' readiness for broader adoption of the Intelligent Mail® barcode, the USPS has decided that automation discounts for mail with POSTNET barcodes will continue to be offered beyond May 2011."

Is that clear? There is no need to panic! The USPS has again delayed the conversion date from Postnet to the new IM to an unknown date to be announced. Existing Postnet Barcode presorted mail and CASS mail certifications will continue to be accepted at the

discounted rates until the USPS announces otherwise. The USPS would be expected to provide a reasonable lead time to allow those not already converted to the new system the time to do so.

Kirby Chilton, Data Mail, Inc., Topeka, KS, provided this comment to me when I inquired about this matter: "Most of my clients are not clamoring to change to the new Intelligent Mail® Barcodes as they see no need or benefit to them of being able to track the delivery of individuals bills or other pieces of mail sent to their customers."

Lewis J McCollum, the USPS Mail piece Design Analyst for the Eastern Kansas Area, states he confirmed that the Postnet Barcodes would continue to be accepted at the discounts provided at the current rates beyond May 2011. However, he cautioned that it had NOT been announced for how long this extension would be honored. That said, I suggest it would be

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The POSTNET barcode used for many years enables the Postal Service to sort mail into delivery point (address) sequence. It is most often composed of a series of sixty-two half- and full-height bars that contain the Zip Code, Zip Code +4, and a two-digit delivery point. Most often, the last two digits of the street address or PO Box number comprise the delivery point. After that eleven-digit zip, the final scrap of data is a Checkdigit algorithm of: 10 minus (the digit-sum mod 10):



Example of Postnet Barcode

The USPS has commented that POSTNET is being retired, and is being replaced by the Intelligent Mail® Barcode (IM also known as OneCode Solution). The IM combines all previous Postal Service barcodes and marking into a single barcode. Prior to the extension of Postnet support, the USPS had stated that beginning in May 2011, Intelligent Mail® barcodes would be required for mail to qualify for automation discounts.

Intelligent Mail® barcode (IM barcode) is a 65-bar code that will be used and placed on mailing just as the Postnet Barcode was before. The IM contains the routing and delivery information in a Postnet Barcode but includes additional information containing a two-digit value that indicates the degree of pre-sorting a mail piece received (Barcode Identifier), a three-digit value representing both the class of the mail such as first-class, standard mail, or periodical and any services requested by the sender (Service Type Identifier), it includes the identification of the originator of the mail (Mailer ID), and a Sequence Number that can allow tracking of the location of an individual piece of mail (Individual Customers ID can be coded into part of it for tracking - warning the same exact Sequence number cannot be used within 45 days.)



Sample of an Intelligent Mail®

Business Customer Gateway Steps for Customers to Acquire a Mailer ID

1. Go to USPS.COM. The link to the Business Customer Gateway is in the lower right corner. This link will take you to the Login page.
2. A current user may "Sign In" with an existing Username and Password. New users should click "Sign Up."
3. On the "New User" "Sign Up" screen, create a Username and Password. Then click "Continue."
4. On the "Profile Account Type" screen, select "Business." ("Personal" will send you back to USPS.COM.) Then click "Continue."
5. Create your Business Profile. Red asterisks indicate required information. Then click "Continue."
6. Verify your Company Account Information on the Company Profile Summary. Then click "Edit" or "Continue."
7. Agree to the Privacy Act Statement. Then click "Continue."
8. On the Select a Business Service screen, select "Mailer ID." Then click "Continue."
9. New Users will have to go through the Business Service Administrator (BSA) process, click "I certify....", then click "yes".
10. On the "Business Service Administrator (Access Granted)" Page, click "Continue."
11. "Business Customer Gateway" page opens. Click "Sign Out" at the top of page.
12. Go to your email and open the email from USPS. Scroll down to and Click "Sign in and get started link".
13. At the Business Customer Gateway page, Login with user name and password.
14. On the Gateway page, click on Mailer ID under Design and Prepare.
15. On the "Welcome to the Mailer ID System" page, click "Request a MID".
16. At "Apply for MID" screen, use drop down arrow and select 9-digit MID, then select # of MIDs requested (1), then click "Request MIDs."
17. At the next screen, select "automatically generate this MID" and select "Full/Basic Service", then click "Request MIDs."
18. At the next screen, system issues a new MID. Record this number and sign out.

IM barcodes can be printed on documents (shown through a window envelope) or directly onto envelopes or other mail pieces in the same location as previously specified for Postnet Barcode placement.

How to respond

To continue to obtain First Class mailing discounts using the IM barcode will require the mailer to sign up with the USPS and obtain a MailerID. In addition, the mailer will need to determine if they want the Basic or Full Service IM option. The Basic option will have fewer requirements and receive the same discounts as previously obtained by using the Postnet Barcode. However, the current USPS service rates offer adopters of the IM Full-Service option an additional 3/10ths of one cent discount per mail piece. Additionally, the Full Service option provides access to more services such as the Mail Tracking and Start the Clock information on delivery times.

I suggest municipalities and RWDs visit with their local post offices to receive guidance on how to best meet mailing needs with the Intelligent Mail® options of the Postal Service. To find out how to contact them, go to http://pe.usps.com/mpdesign/mpdfr_mda_lookup.asp.

An account must be created to request a Mailer ID (MID), which mailers will use to identify their mail-pieces. Register and apply for a Mailer ID (MID) at the Business Customer Gateway access, which is used to submit electronic documentation: <https://gateway.usps.com/bcg/login.htm>

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Contact software/hardware providers to obtain updates or upgrades to ensure that your software, printer, operating system, etc., will support the printing of the entire IM barcode. Some entities may need to upgrade computer equipment, operating systems, install new fonts or software, or even obtain a new printer to be able to comply.

The USPS recommends learning about the suite of Intelligent Mail® barcodes: Intelligent Mail® barcode for letters, cards and flats, Intelligent Mail® Tray barcode, Intelligent Mail® Container barcode and Intelligent Mail® Package barcode.

Determine which OneCode Services you would like to use, i.e., return service, mail forwarding, address service correction, etc.

Submit a few barcodes for testing and approval; once the sample barcodes have been approved, you're ready to go. Help for the Intelligent Mail® compliance is available at 800-522-9085 (then select option 3, then option 6) Getting your Mailer ID can take less than thirty minutes if you do it correctly or a month if you get into trouble.

Merle Windler and his wife Linda are owners of Thoroughbred Systems, Inc., Topeka. The company specializes in utility billing for cities and rural districts, computer networking and associated training. Contact: merlewindler@yahoo.com



KRWA welcomes these new members from March 2010 to February 1, 2011

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- City of Copeland
- City of Jetmore
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- Labette RWD 8
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