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Making the Most of Mail

By Jeffrey Steele

To ensure their customers maintain a healthy return on investment on direct mail marketing campaigns, PSPs look to mailing methods that can maximize the discounts offered by the US Postal Service. From using Full Service Mail to embracing address hygiene and reaching minimums required for pre-sorted trays, these discounts can help make the PSP look good in the eyes of customers.

The opportunities to be had are best summarized by Vincent DeAngelis, vice president of postal relations with Milford, CT-based Neopost USA.

“The most important thing a mailer needs to know is that there are options available to gain discounts from the USPS,” he said.

“The money-saving options range from preparation of mail to the use of cutting-edge technology like integrating direct mail with technology. The two most important things a PSP can do are understand the discounts available and have a clear idea of what the mailer is trying to accomplish through a particular mailing.”

In the following pages, you’ll learn what PSPs need to know about the criteria and nuances that must be met to qualify for discounts, and the ways they can maximize postal discounts to help

meet their customers’ expectations of direct mail ROI.

1 The Top Eight Discounts More Finely Sorted Mail Trays

Many discounts are based on having reached the minimum number of pieces to build more finely-sorted mail trays, said

Kurt Ruppel, marketing services manager and postal expert at Chanhassen, MN-based IWCO Direct. “This is especially true for walk-sequence carrier-route discounts, such as High Density and High Density Plus,” he said. “For example, the minimum number of pieces needed per carrier route to qualify for High Density is 125. It may benefit a mailer to reach a little deeper into the pool of potential recipients to add a few names to routes that

are close to, but don’t meet, this threshold. The postage savings for the entire tray of mail will often compensate for adding a few names to the mailing list.”

2 The Importance of Address Hygiene

If the address is not accurate, and the mail piece is not going to arrive where intended, you’ve not only lost money on the postal rate, but you still pay for the response you’re intending to—but won’t—receive, said Kristen McKiernan, president of AccuZIP, based in Atascadero, CA. “To qualify for a bar coded automated rate, you have to run your list through a CASS-certified vendor,” she said. Ruppel agrees that to claim presort and automation discounts, mailers must follow good list hygiene practices to ensure addresses are complete, correct and current for their recipients, Ruppel said. “Be sure you, or your vendor, is performing CASS and NCOA processing at least quarterly,” he added.



3 Cost of Return Analysis

A cost-of-return analysis can determine if it's truly worth getting returned mail sent back to you, McKiernan said. "Put better address hygiene processes in place, such as Data Enhancement Services," she said. "This ties back to the importance of address hygiene on the front end. Our AccuZIP tools called Data Enhancement Services or DES can flag if a person is deceased or has moved. We can append the apartment if the apartment is missing, and update your address list before you send out bad addresses and have to absorb the cost of returned pieces."

4 Print an Intelligent Mail Barcode

Arthur Verwey, VP of Mobile, AL-based Xante, reports the Intelligent Mail Barcode describes the piece of mail by weight and dimension, and identifies the sender, recipient, ZIP code and its four-digit extension, and serial number of each piece, which must stay unique for 45 days after the mail piece is sent.

By using the Intelligent Mail Barcode, "that PSP has proof that he did his job and the mail piece went out," he said. "The customer can track the mail online. The post office is trying to do a good job of upgrading, and the Intelligent Mail Barcode is a big part of what they call Full Service Mail. You get an additional discount if you comply with all the terms of Full Service Mail."

5 Presorting

The minimum number required for first-class bulk mail is 150 pieces, said Gary Davidson, Xante product specialist. Standard mail requires a minimum of 200 pieces.

"If a PSP is doing jobs for customers like this, they may not have enough mail pieces to make it worthwhile to get certified for Full Service Mail. That makes it more likely they will be reliant on the print service provider. One

of the most important things the PSP can do is know how to sort that small mailing to get the best discount."

Xante's iQueue software is an option for providing customers with that bundling. "You enter the ZIP code of the bulk mail location where you're dropping your mail. And if you're doing a standard mail sort of about 150 if first class and 200 if standard, it looks through your entire list and finds any addresses that have the same first three digits of the ZIP code, and keeps them together through the mail stream," Davidson said.

"So all the sorting centers are bypassed, and it makes it more efficient for the post office to deliver. In turn they give you a discount on that piece. You're doing their work, entitling you to a discount."

6 Commingling Services

Print service providers should offer commingling services to take advantage of their full mail volume across customers, Ruppel said.

Commingling uses automated mail sorting to merge multiple smaller mail streams into common mail trays to create greater geographic density and take advantage of deeper presort discounts, he said.

7 Robust Postal Logistics

Print service providers should also offer robust postal logistics programs to enter mail as deeply as possible into the US Postal Service Network, Ruppel said.

"This not only takes advantage of significant postage discounts, it also drives better service performance and faster in-home delivery for the mail."

8 Get to Know Postal Software Vendor/USPS Account Manager

It pays to be familiar with these professionals. They can help assess your business needs and better leverage all the discounts, address hygiene, and software tools available, McKiernan said.

Adding Efficiencies

Beyond discounts, a number of other steps can help print service providers shine in the eyes of their clients, by driving efficiencies in how mail is handled.

1. Track the Mail Pieces

Track the mail pieces to ensure they are getting delivered on time, McKiernan said.

"When you print the Intelligent Mail Barcode, that piece is scanned by the post office as it travels through the mail stream. You can use a tool such as AccuZIP's mail tracking and reporting tool, ACCUTRACE, to see where the mail piece is at any given time as it travels through the mail stream."


2. Tie In a Digital Component

To track ROI to an actual piece and capture responses, tie in a digital component, McKiernan said.

A QR code or personalized URL lets you tie a digital response to the physical mail piece. A further outbound effort such as a phone call or an email can be triggered by that response. "The key at AccuZIP is that we believe the mail piece should drive digital, and not vice versa," she said. "We have a patented product called LIVING MAIL.

"It allows the mail piece to communicate with the mailer and the mail recipient bi-directionally through various triggers such as phone calls, emails, and text, as the mail piece travels through the mail system."

3. Know Upcoming Implementation Date for Rate Changes

It is important for print service providers to work off budgets, and with continual postal rate changes, it's difficult for them to budget for their mailing costs, McKiernan said. "So we have our AccuZIP Price Lock Guarantee, which guarantees that whatever price you purchase an AccuZIP product at, that price will never go up. It helps offset the difficulty of the rate changes. It's a constant PSPs can count on for their budget." 

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