



Seamless Acceptance and Undocumented Mail

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What to do when your bill comes due!

Seamless Acceptance is here. If you're a commercial mailer you will be required to use it (like it or not), particularly if you want to continue to get automation discounts. It's not all bad news by any means, as Seamless also helps you improve internal quality control processes, and/or take advantage of Mail Service Provider Seamless incentives.

The Postal Service has long been working on four key USPS initiatives to streamline the acceptance, induction, and verification of bulk mailings: Intelligent Mail Full-Service, Move Update, Electronic Induction (eInduction), and Seamless Acceptance. By leveraging the piece and container unique barcode information, the Postal Service is able to standardize and automate its mail acceptance and verification processes.

Mailers directly benefit in many ways. Rather than looking at Seamless Acceptance as punitive, savvy mailers are utilizing the additional visibility to manage their internal quality control processes, without duplication of effort. Seamless can shine a light on problems with quality control that could result in other issues if not fixed moving forward.

There is a scary element to all of this – if you have errors in the preparation of a mailing, you may be billed after the fact without a chance to correct them. If you have been using Full-Service Intelligent Mail, you're accustomed to your mailer's scorecard. There are generally opportunities to make up for the occasional "oops" mailing.

The biggest challenge for most mailers in adopting Seamless Acceptance practices is to simply change. In many cases, the "this-is-the-way-we've-always-done-it" mindset is a tough nut to crack with your mailing services teams. Local USPS knowledge of the requirements and programs is also sometimes a challenge. Often mailers need to educate all parties, in addition to implementing the necessary changes.

Our goal is not to teach you how to use Seamless Acceptance. We'll refer you the book on that next – it's a lot longer read than this one! We're here to help when you get an assessment – or at least offer some pointers.

Getting Started with Seamless Acceptance

Where should a mailer start? The common USPS/Industry reference for all things Seamless Acceptance is a USPS publication with a lofty title, "Publication 685 - Publication for Streamlined Mail Acceptance for Letters and Flats."

Pub 685, as it's affectionately known, is posted to the USPS information portal, PostalPro. Use this as your guide to requirements, thresholds, and references. All four initiatives, including Full Service, Move Update, eInduction, and Seamless Acceptance, are covered in this guide. Here, we focus on Seamless Acceptance.

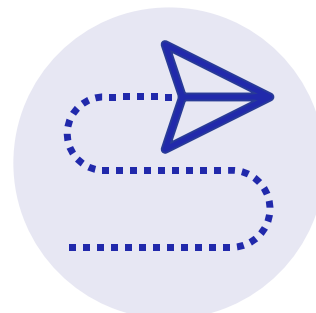
Seamless Acceptance leverages electronic documentation as well as Intelligent Mail barcode scan data. Scan data is gathered as the mail pieces run through USPS equipment, and from handheld scanning devices, and then associated with appropriate electronic documentation submitted by mailers. Seamless Acceptance verifications are aggregated and measured against thresholds. If things are good, or within the established thresholds, the mail can be considered paid for and validated. If things are over the threshold, however – additional postage can be collected by the USPS, sometimes long after the mailing has gone out. Postage Assessment after verification is a risk factor but, with the proper tools, that can be managed.



Scoring Undocumented Mail

A cause for concern with potential financial implications is what is known as "Undocumented Pieces." Seamless Acceptance requires all pieces with an IMb to be linked to any eDoc submitted within the previous 45 days. An undocumented error is logged when a barcode cannot be linked. While the USPS recognizes that mail is a manufacturing process, the tolerance for this validation is small, at 0.1%. This is a tight threshold.

To make matters more difficult, the Postal Service only holds onto eDocs for 45 days. If a piece of mail delivers more than 45 days after eDocs are submitted (it happened a lot in late 2020), the Postal Service considers it undocumented – as if you never paid postage on it. There are other reasons mailers end up with undocumented errors, often through no fault of their own. One of the most common causes of undocumented errors is the barcoded single pieces that are not in the eDoc.



Spoiled pieces that are recreated and not documented will not correspond to an eDoc (even though they were indeed paid for) and create an undocumented error. The way the assessment and dispute process is set up, mailers are guilty until proven innocent, and the burden of proving innocence lies squarely on the mailer. Mailers need to be prepared to dispute or validate any assessments, so they can flag penalties they don't deserve, and act accordingly on the ones they do.

Fighting the Bill

The best way to fight assessments is to do your own documentation before they happen. USPS Mailer Scorecard monitoring – daily – is highly recommended so you can react quickly. Mailpiece tracking should also be a key component of your Seamless strategy. A tracked mailpiece is a documented mailpiece! Mailers can control data retention and keep piece data long enough to dispute any 45 day+ assessments, utilizing indisputable Postal Service supplied data.

Even checking your Mailer Scorecard every day isn't always enough. The Postal Service recently said they would be manually checking undocumented pieces over 45 days in delivery a few days before invoices are sent.

Generally, the Postal Service does not give details of what was undocumented –just how many pieces were undocumented. Quick and easy access to detailed tracking data is imperative in disputing an assessment because there is a very limited time to do so. This also ties into the burden of the assessment data itself – mailers are provided with the offending Intelligent Mail Piece barcode, and they need to research what mail job it came from. This can be difficult without systems that allow you to associate an IMb to your internal job information. All investigation and validation starts with the association of the IMb to a specific mailing.

The process of disputing an assessment is covered in our old friend, Pub 685. Mailers have only 10 days to submit a request for an error dispute. USPS will respond with a request for additional documentation that proves payment for the mail pieces throwing an undocumented error. For example, say a mailer had pieces showing as undocumented that were mailed, and postage



paid, four months ago. Using tracking data, the mailer can associate pieces to a job and provide USPS with proof of postage payment, thus avoiding an assessment the mailer really should not have incurred in the first place.

SnailWorks provides tools to identify and present the required data.



Your Scorecard may be perfectly clean for months, and one bad mailing, a slip-up, or a dip in USPS service performance, and you are under the gun to pay additional postage. Many mailers have embraced Seamless Acceptance along with mail service provider assessments and quality control benefits, and have reaped the rewards. Improved efficiencies and processes offer new opportunities to leverage the data made available are just some of the rewards.

As if mail tracking wasn't already fabulous, along comes another benefit – the key ability to relate a single IMb to a mailing. Data retention, ease of access, and reporting accessibility contribute to the value of **tracking all mail pieces**, as an insurance policy of sorts. Seamless Acceptance challenges can be met and overcome by using the data that is already out there to achieve higher results.

Embrace the Good – Mitigate the Bad!

Seamless Acceptance allows mailers to streamline their mailing operations and maintain higher quality. Just be sure that you are ready to set the record straight when an issue arises. Make your Seamless seamless!



Looking for help with your Seamless Acceptance challenges?
Contact SnailWorks – we have tools to make it easy!

Additional Resources:



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<https://about.usps.com/publications/pub685.pdf>

<https://postalpro.usps.com/>