Mail Tracking for The Production Agency

Keeping an eye on your mail

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The US Mail remains essential to fundraisers, membership organizations, non-profits, retailers, political campaigns, advocacy groups, and marketing agencies. More than 66 billion pieces of marketing mail are sent out every year because direct mail remains the most targetable channel at every level, with the deepest penetration, reach, and response.

Of course, billions of mail pieces result in many millions of dollars in expense – primarily postage and production costs. With that kind of investment on the line, it's crucial that all stakeholders have insight into how their campaigns are progressing. The complex relationship between mail owners, marketing agencies, production agencies, and printer/mailers can make even a simple mailing complicated.
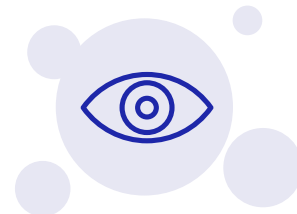
Production Agency Management 101

We will provide an overview of the unique characteristics of marketing mail, managed by production agencies, and the mechanics behind tracking USPS mail and why leveraging mail tracking should be a critical part of your direct mail strategy. We've included specific agency related applications for using mail tracking data, as well as introductions of some special USPS products and programs that production agencies can leverage on behalf of their clients.

Mail Tracking and Production Agencies

Mail tracking is all about retaining people's control over their mailings. By understanding the path that direct mail travels, from entry into the postal system to delivery, all parties involved can feel that sense of control. There are several individuals or organizations that may be party to a mailing:

One less worry! Know when each project is mailed and delivered, every time.

- The Mail Owner – the organization for whom the mailing is prepared. They are the party that will benefit from the response of the mailing. For example – a department store or nonprofit fundraiser
- The Marketing Agency – the outsourced party that creates a strategy and designs the mail pieces and plan. This may also be a Political Consultant in the world of political mail
- The Production Agency – the group that specifically procures the services required for a mailing – the printing, mail services, and list processing. These folks directly buy and oversee the mailing
- The Printer/Mail Service Provider – the producer and mailer for the project. Multiple printers may deliver components to a mail house, or it may all be printed in one location. This is the company that will give the mailing to the postal service and upload the relevant eDocs

Not every project will have all of these players. In many cases, the Mail Owner may contract directly with the Mail Service Provider (MSP), skipping the others entirely. In contrast, there may also be multiple agencies and multiple MSPs on larger projects. It can get complicated! Let's add one more player who can help keep it sorted out:

The Mail Tracking Provider

This last party is pretty important, especially for transparency. The tracking provider can let all parties know if and when the mail is being delivered, and in most cases plays an even larger role. The tracking provider helps ensure that all the right Mailer IDs (MIDs) are used, and that each player is using the correct Intelligent Mail barcodes (IMb). The mail tracker can also make sure the correct parties are seeing the tracking information appropriate for them – and only them.

Mail tracking data is provided through the USPS Informed Visibility® service. By including the specific data in the Intelligent Mail barcode (IMb) that is printed on virtually every piece of commercial mail, postal sorting equipment can send data on the location of the mail as it travels towards its destination. Mail tracking providers use this data from the Postal Service to create reports on the progress of the mailing. Informed Visibility can track more than just mail pieces. It also provides data on the location of pallets, trays, bundles, and even truckloads of mail. Tying all this data together provides great visibility into the travel of mail, and thus great benefit to all parties involved.

How Agencies Use Mail Tracking Data

There are a variety of critical applications agencies can gain from mail tracking:

Mail Delivery Reporting
- Coordinate other marketing channels
- Staff for inbound calls
- Identify and resolve delivery delays
- Provide piece of mind for clients
- Mail Induction Reporting (Measure performance across all vendors.)
- Know when the Postal Service inducted the mail
- Document that all vendors met their commitments
- Document for your clients that you met your commitments

Did it mail when you expected? Mail tracking can tell you.

Data Feeds
- Feed delivery data directly into client CRM systems
- Provide "trigger" files to coordinate email and other channels to mail delivery
- Send address correction, Informed Delivery, and other data files directly to the client

Inbound Response Tracking
- Know mailed response rates immediately
- Verify caging counts and resolve discrepancies
- Provide caging companies with anticipated load

How It Works

Creating a Tracking "Job"

- The mail service provider (MSP) prints IMb's on each mail piece as produced using values provided by the mail tracking provider
- The mail service provider (MSP) sends a file to the mail tracking provider detailing all mailing information for each record included in the mailing
- When submitting the mailing, the mail service provider sends an eDoc to the Postal Service detailing its contents. This data, along with the file sent to the mail tracking provider, will help tie all the pieces together throughout the delivery process

USPS Processing and Data Capture

- As the mail travels through the Postal Service, each barcode scan will create a record that USPS will feed to the mail tracking provider
- The USPS will use data in the eDoc to match mail pieces to their trays, bundles, and containers
- Data feeds go on around the clock

Processing Scan Data

- As scan data is received by the mail tracking provider it will be separated by client and job, and each scan will be interpreted to predict delivery or other reporting
- The mail tracking provider will create reports that can be accessed online at a job level, down to the individual piece level
- The tracking provider may also create scheduled reports and data feeds

Keep clients constantly informed on project status – automatically.

What Information Does the Mail Tracking Provider Provide?

In addition to managing tracking information from the USPS, the tracking provider also offers reporting on jobs that have been created and scheduled. These reports provide authorized people with general and detailed information on a scheduled job. Address Change Service (ACS ®) and Informed Delivery ® reporting may be included as well. These reports can be helpful tools in planning and coordinating efforts.

Agencies are able to use this information to make sure they have an overview of all their projects with a variety of mailing vendors, as well as multiple clients.

Some of the essential information available to view:
- **Job listings by client** – See all the active and past jobs for each client in one report
- **Job listings by vendor** – Have a quick overview of all jobs being handled by a particular vendor

The Agency Views – by Client/Vendor

Because agencies deal with a variety of players in executing direct mail campaigns, they have special relationships with each player.

Defining the players:
- **Agency** – the controlling production agency
- **End-User Client** – the mail owner – the agency's client
- **Vendor** – the mail service provider – creating barcodes and submitting eDocs to USPS

View all projects organized by client or by vendor in a single platform

Agencies are dealing with several end-users, each with their own requirements. Most agencies are dealing with several mail vendors as well. The view the agency chooses to share with their end-users and mail vendors is the decision of the agency and may vary client by client and vendor by vendor.

In virtually every case, the agency does not want one client seeing the tracking data from another client, or even the acknowledgement that there are other clients. Each client should be able to see their data, and theirs only. Agents may choose from a variety of options for end-user client access:

- Full online access to all their jobs – user ID and password provided to client.
- Limited access to their jobs – limited to reports selected by agency – user ID and password provided to client.
- Scheduled or on-demand reports pushed to client. No direct access to online reporting, but any available report can be automatically sent on a schedule you select.
- Direct data feeds may be set up as well, perhaps a feed to the end client's CRM.

Similarly, each vendor has their own access to the SnailWorks system. Vendors can create tracking jobs and view the jobs that they created. In most cases, they cannot see what other vendors are creating. The vendor may create the jobs entirely on their own or the agency may process the mailing data and provide the vendor with a file that already has the correct IMb.

Enhancing Your Mail

In addition to providing the necessary tools for maintaining control of your mail, the Postal Service offers affordable and exciting new services that production agencies find make a huge impact on the effectiveness of the direct mail campaigns they manage.

INFORMED DELIVERY® – FREE IMPRESSIONS AND POSTAGE DISCOUNTS

More than one in four households subscribe to Informed Delivery, the USPS service that delivers an email to users each morning showing them images of their incoming mail that day. Mailers have the option of replacing the grayscale image with a full-color digital ad and a link to their website. This service provides another opportunity to get an additional image of the mail piece and offer in front of consumers, while providing a link where prospects, donors and members can take action. The Postal Service places great importance on this program and considers it as the future of mail.

Each year, traditionally in the fall months, the Postal Service offers a special promotion offering a postage discount on all letters and flat mail with an associated Informed Delivery campaign. It is easy to create Informed Delivery campaigns that increase visibility, response, and postage savings. This promotion is a win-win situation all the way around!

How's response? Find out instantly with inbound tracking

REPLY MAIL

Reply mail is a favorite tool used in direct mail packages by marketers and includes a preprinted return envelope, allowing the recipient to easily mail in a contribution or response. It is not often feasible to digitally print these return envelopes with unique barcodes, but with some planning, tracking the number of reply mail pieces returned to the mail owner is easy.

Although you will not know specifically which prospect is responding, you can easily view the number of responses that were placed in the mail the previous day. Testing new and different messages on mailings is made simple by printing a different IMb on the reply envelope for each panel. The data will show which package is pulling in the largest number of responses. Marketing managers can then roll that package out for their next acquisition mailing.

THE USPS SHARE MAIL®

Service allows marketers to include postcards or letters in their mailings that recipients can "share" with others without affixing a stamp. Much like a Business Reply, this allows the mail owner to pay the postage on only the pieces actually "shared" without opening a postal permit. An ideal option for organizations with multiple "respond to" locations.

Choose the Right Partner:

SnailWorks Mail tracking and Informed Delivery are essential for all managing direct mail programs, however, it's not always easy to bring it all together. SnailWorks has tracked billions of pieces of mail. We have tracking solutions designed to work with anyone in the mail value chain – mail owners, production agencies, consultants, and print and mail providers. Every mail effort has unique requirements and can benefit from the intelligence mail tracking provides.

SnailWorks is the perfect partner, offering:

- World-class mail tracking
- Unmatched expertise in all phases of mail and mail tracking
- Account organization, including views that allow each party to see their data
- Affordable plans
- Informed Delivery supports with creating and tracking campaigns and helps clients save on costs with USPS discounts
- Unparalleled service, reporting, and proficiency

Additional Resources:
USPS Political Web Page
Informed Visibility® Mail Tracking & Reporting (IV®-MTR) Fact Sheet

PostalPro (usps.com) Informed Delivery
https://www.usps.com/business/informed-delivery.htm