

# MTAC Task Team # 8

## New Product Information Process

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The objective of this Task Team is to work with the USPS to create a standard process for the release of complete product information concurrent with the public announcement of the new product. The Task Team will help identify in detail the information needed, assist in developing a format for its publication and suggest venues for its circulation.

### Desired Results:

1. Enable mailing industry companies to recommend new postal products in a timely manner
2. Speed up the industry make ready process for new postal products
3. Eliminate confusion and inaccuracies in the marketplace
4. Reduce the number of questions USPS staff need to respond to
5. Provide an additional internal information/education tool for USPS staff

It is the role and responsibility of MTAC representatives to assist the Postal Service in hearing its customer's needs and spotlighting disconnects and partnering to come to resolution. The team recognizes that a critical aspect of communication in business partnership is maintaining an open dialogue. MTAC representatives and postal liaisons more generally, are accountable to the organizations that employ them to quickly quantify the impact of postal related business risks and promptly communicate with their respective leadership and in many cases they need the USPS to help them do that. With these goals in mind, the team worked specifically on the communication for new Postal products, services, incentives, and initiatives.

Our recommendations cover the desired results and fall into these categories:

1. Process to recommend new postal products/services/initiatives
2. Vehicles of Communication
3. Speed up the industry make ready process for new postal products
4. Format for Specifications
5. Provide an additional internal information/education tool for USPS staff

## **Process to Recommend New Postal Products/services/initiatives**

Each Postal Service product manager has a list of items that may be worked on. They are encouraging all ideas to come in. Many of the ideas may not be implemented that year, or dependent on current conditions, may not be implemented because they have limited resources.

They would like to have a template for people to fill out to help the Product Managers so that the ideas can be better understood and developed – for assistance in putting together the business case. They need as much information as possible without any proprietary information. The idea cannot benefit a specific company or have any Intellectual Property or require hiring of specific people or companies.

We would need to have better descriptions on the risk and implementation ratings. The USPS also would be doing the same ratings. Should these be separate ratings? Should there be some guidance on what items would be needed for implementation. They could give more suggestions on the various ideas.

We recommend:

1. The Postal Service should have an email address for submissions. This should be posted on RIBBS with the template that they need to gather the appropriate information.

2. If it is a USPS PS numbered form, then it should go on the USPS.com and have it part of the search engine.
3. Every idea should get a number (like a help desk ticket). There must be an acknowledgement letter to the submitter of the idea. The number also would then be on the acknowledgement letter for the mailers reference.
4. We would like a view of other suggestions that have been submitted. Prevents duplication and spurs new ideas. What about a "LIKE" (as done on Facebook and other social media) so more people can say they like the idea and the USPS would be about to obtain more information.
5. The submission system should be implementing quickly and then grow as needed. It would be a phased approach, but started soon. Recommend that initially there be a DMM Advisory, MailPro, etc. to get the new process out.

## **POSTAL SERVICE RESPONSE**

### **Short Term:**

Based upon the early recommendations of MTAC Task Team #8, the Postal Service is in the process of creating an "Innovations Submission" process for the submission of new product and service ideas.

An [innovations@usps.com](mailto:innovations@usps.com) email address will be utilized as the primary input method for submitting ideas to USPS.

Information regarding the process will be posted within the RIBBS site at usps.com, and a location will be identified on usps.com to host a webpage outlining the process, along with language limiting any potential USPS liabilities resulting from implementing a particular idea, in whole or in part.

The Postal Service will announce the Innovations Submission process after the system is fully integrated onto usps.com. The process will be open to all postal stakeholders, including MTAC members.

### **Long Term:**

Plans for an automated online process are being explored for the purpose of insuring each idea submitted to USPS includes critical pieces of information with detailed descriptions, along with tracking number functionality.

The ability to develop this process will be contingent upon the amount of online programming and maintenance required in order to bring this functionality to usps.com. Through this process, the Postal Service expects to receive a robust portfolio which will outline the overall potential of any specific idea.

## **Vehicles of communication**

We recommend that there be more interaction with social media channels as well, such as Linked In (there are multiple Postal/Mail groups), Twitter, and Facebook (USPS has a presence on Facebook already).

In addition, the normal methods may include such items as MTAC notifications, Federal Register Notices, Postal Bulletins, DMM Advisory, PCC announcements, NPF announcements. There would also be a given URL for the details (probably to RIBBS). Add a link on the main RIBBS page so it is easy to find.

The communication must be easy to use and find. Perhaps updates should be on a scheduled basis for the beginning timeframe (such as weekly for the first xx number of weeks). If the changes are not on a published schedule, an email should be sent to the group the day the new version is published. A change log should be maintained at the beginning of the program documentation.

There needs to be more coordination between the various messages. This is specific to when/how the changes and updates are announced. The USPS business managers are responsible for communication and the coordination of the specific information.

### **Industry Dialog**

We encourage discussions with the mailing industry regarding the fleshing out of the program and getting as many changes/clarifications to the program documentation as possible within a short time period after the initial announcement (perhaps one month maximum, but it would depend on the timeframe for the beginning and end – if any – of the program). We want to make it clear that these calls are for Q&A and clarification to the documentation, not changes to the requirements. I suspect that on occasion, there may be a change to the requirements, but that would not be the main purpose of this dialog.

We recommend the following process:

1. There would be a communication group (or any other name, but it does not really fit into a Task Team, User Group, or Work Group definition). This would be program specific at this time. Should there be a lot of new programs, this may transition to a standing group.
2. While the purpose of these communications is to answer questions about the program, it would also provide constructive criticism about each program, so that future programs might be improved.
3. This group would not have an industry co-chair but would be led only by the USPS business managers for that specific program.
4. Everyone would be invited to be part of the group (there may have to be a limit on the number but it would be a large number). People would be given an email address to respond and sign up for that program specific item. People could also be encouraged to send questions/concerns about the program to the email address prior to the group meeting.
5. The group would meet as often as possible within the short time period (several times a week, weekly, etc.).
6. The USPS could host a webinar to review the proposed program details, or use other methods to communicate the details. The dialog will be a Q&A so that the final specifications are more complete and reduce the number of questions USPS staff needs to respond to.
7. Where USPS is referenced in social media, until the USPS is prepared to respond to such comments themselves, we recommend an ad-hoc group of active MTAC members/representatives to be used as a resource. They would respond to the comment or inquiry to ensure that when there is an opportunity to educate or correct statements made in social media about the USPS that such opportunities are not lost. It is preferable not to passively allow misinformation to be perpetuated.

## **POSTAL SERVICE RESPONSE**

### **Social Media**

#### **Short Term:**

The Postal Service is actively engaged in communicating through social media channels, and has been since 2009.

The October 20, 2011 Postal Bulletin, (*Postal Bulletin 22322 (10-20-2011)*) revised the Administrative Support Manual (ASM), adding a new “Part 363” that outlines USPS policy concerning social media. The new policy defines “social media” as any form of online publishing or discussion, including but not limited to: blogs, wikis, YouTube, podcasts, social networking sites — such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn — Twitter/Microblogs and Web 2.0.

## **Long Term:**

With an official policy in place, the USPS now has a foundation upon which to expand its use of social media. In the months ahead, additional plans will be finalized for using social media in a variety of ways, including communicating with the mailing industry.

## **Mailing Industry Information Resources**

USPS is currently making determinations on ways to improve the user experience for accessing its many information resources for the mailing industry. One idea being pursued is to create a centralized communications hub where customers can quickly and easily access publications, subscribe to publications, and access links to the Federal Register and Postal Regulatory Commission. Items that might be included in the communications hub landing webpage would include links to: Postal Bulletin, MailPro, PCC Insider, and DMM Advisory.

USPS is also looking into the feasibility of programming the RIBBS website to include previous functionality that allowed mailers to subscribe to specific pages on RIBBS and receive automatic RSS feed notifications whenever pages were updated. This effort will be contingent upon available resources.

## **New Products, Services and Pricing Incentives**

USPS will consider incorporating mailing industry input as early in the developmental process as possible when appropriate given its legal, regulatory, and proprietary information constraints.

## **Speed up the industry make ready process for new postal products**

The team recognized the difficulty in working with various groups, both internal and external to the USPS during the time of initial development. There is no set timeline for the process.

Anything that affects prices – incentives or new products – must be reviewed by the PRC. There is no timeline for their response.

The sequence of actions includes:

1. Development of the idea prior to submitting to the PRC
2. PRC review time
3. PRC approval
4. Implementation dates

The team identified what are the barriers that prevent mailers from being ready to participate.

Impacts could include:

- Changes to software that mailers must receive from vendors and implement (not just updates to PostalOne!)
- Changes to mailpiece design
- Changes to mail preparation and/or acceptance
- Time and ability to prerequisites – especially historical volume, trending, etc.
- Specific reporting requirements

It is the recommendation of this task team that mailers, service providers, and vendors be provided information so that they can anticipate the **changes**; identify the issues, and present questions for dialog as quickly in the overall process as possible.

It is further recommended that the USPS use MTAC as the primary group for information gathering and feasibility discussions, as well as for preliminary feedback on mailer implementation issues.

## **Format for Specifications**

The team did not feel that the FAQ format was conducive to specification communication. Even if the FAQs were categorized, a mailer must find and read a question to determine if that is the information we are looking for. When updates/additions to questions are made at the end of the document, a mailer may not know to read and substitute the information. There is no way to see what has specifically been updated.

We developed a categorized grid that includes the subject, description, and issued/revision dates.

We are not wedded to the document (being in MSword, etc.) but really want something that is easy to use and reference – well organized and updates easy to see.

The grid format is presented in Appendix A.

The USPS provides robust mailer information as a normal function of communicating new products, services and pricing incentives. We acknowledge that while appropriate for some types of communication, FAQs are not always sufficient for communicating technical requirements.

The Postal Service will continue to announce new products, services and pricing incentives through detail-oriented communications formats published in vehicles such as DMM Advisory, Postal Bulletin, and postings in RIBBS, as well as notices in the Federal Register.

The USPS will also continue to provide communications to mailers for new products, services and pricing incentives in summary formats such as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), presentations, and official press releases.

The Postal Service is reviewing the grid presented in Appendix A, and will consider incorporating elements presented in the grid for future mailing industry announcements.

The team strongly recommends all the elements of the grid be part of any future USPS format. We recommend that if a specific element is not needed for that program, it be marked as "Not Applicable" rather than being eliminated.

## **Provide an additional internal information/education tool for USPS staff**

USPS provides its employees with comprehensive training resources and information access on all new product, service and pricing incentive programs. Specific processes and guidelines regarding the methods and timing for certain types of employee training are subject to negotiations through employee unions and available resources.

Key concerns:

- USPS and industry personnel do not always seem to be on the same page
- Absorbing information is difficult prior to the time that it's needed
- With the ever-accelerating pace and complexity of new information, it's increasingly hard to keep track of changes and/or locate information when it is needed.

Recommendations:

1) For communication of new rules and information, continue to use the Postal Bulletin as the consistent primary vehicle, taking steps to increase its effectiveness.

- Articles must be comprehensive and inclusive of the same information as is distributed to industry.
- Public webinars on the same subject should be recorded and available by links from the Postal Bulletin article.
- Links to any other available resources on the same subject should also be provided in the Postal Bulletin article.
- Past articles must be easily accessed by a promptly updated search engine (online index) that incorporates a wide array of key words to insure that the information can be found when needed. The index should be updated with each Postal Bulletin published – not just at the end of the year.
- Changes to information published in the Postal Bulletin should be documented in follow-up articles and highlighted in the index. Links to the new material should be added to the original material.

2) For training regarding complex issues and new verification processes, increase use of existing online training tool

- Tool should require progression through material and include quizzes on key steps/topics
- Affected employees should be required to complete the online course and obtain a passing grade
- Course material should be accessible to employees after course completion for review purposes

3) Issue reminders regarding previously communicated changes close to the date that the changes will take effect. Include links to resources on the subject.

# Appendix A

## USPS Promotion/Incentive/New Product

Subject	Description	Issued or Revision Dates
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### Promotion/Incentive/New Product Description

<b>Name</b>	Name of the Promotion/Incentive/New Product – including acronym if used	
<b>Description</b>	Description – high level, including examples if appropriate	
<b>Duration</b>	Begin and end dates, sign up dates	
<b>Participants</b>	Mail Owners and Mail Service Providers, etc.	
<b>USPS Application Requirements</b>	Whether or not the participant has to apply to participate	
<b>Class of Mail</b>	First-Class Mail, Standard Mail, Nonprofit, Periodicals, Bound Printed Matter, Library Mail, Media Mail, Parcel Post, Reply Mail	
<b>Processing Category (size and shape)</b>	Postcards, letters, flats, machinable parcels, other parcels	
<b>Volume Requirements</b>	Additional requirements; Previous history, new thresholds or "current regulations apply per class and processing category"	
<b>Prerequisite</b>	Additional requirements, if any	
<b>Other incentive programs</b>	May or may not be combined with other incentive programs	
<b>Postage Impact</b>	Price or percentage increase, discount, or rebate	
<b>Postage Frequency</b>	When the price/incentive/rebate is given (at time of mailing, rebate quarterly, etc.)	
<b>Postage Paid To</b>	This would describe how the postage is paid – to the Mail Owner, MSP, permit holder, special designator, etc.	
<b>Postage Payment Method</b>	Permit Imprint, Meter, Precanceled Stamps, Adhesive Stamps, Express Mail Corporate Account	
<b>Restrictions</b>	Any restrictions that might apply	

### Detailed Requirements for Implementing

<b>Technical Information</b>	Printing, barcodes, or any other requirements that are different than current regulations	
<b>Addressing</b>	Additional requirements that are different than current regulations	
<b>Barcodes: POSTNET, IMb</b>	Additional requirements that are different than current regulations	
<b>Mailpiece Design</b>	Additional requirements: Size requirements different than normal, copy or addressing placements, clear space. Include any design requirements/options for Reply Mail.	
<b>Presort/Sortation</b>	Additional requirements; or all levels of presort qualification	
<b>Special Documentation Requirements</b>	eDoc or paper documentation (including Postage Statement) Specific codes/fields for Mail.dat, Mail.xml, etc.	
<b>New Reports</b>	Additional requirements	
<b>Mail Preparation</b>	Changes to Mail preparation (handling units, containers, labeling, etc.)	

	that are not related to sort level changes Additional requirements for commingling, drop shipment, co-palletization, co-mail	
<b>Additional Specs</b>	Or additional specifications	
<b>Logistics</b>	Additional requirements for transportation and entry	
<b>Verification and Acceptance</b>	Additional requirements	
<b>Retention</b>	Additional requirements for retention of documentation, samples, etc.	

### Contact information

<b>Further Information</b>	Websites, email addresses, etc.	
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