

Streamlining the Relationship between Carriers and Shippers

As Vice President of Sales, Susan Plonkey was key in realigning staff to be more responsive to shippers' needs

By Shoshana Grove



"We're committed to helping our customers find the right postal products and services to help their business grow," says Plonkey. "Sales, Districts, Business Service Network: we're all working together for you."

WHEN Bob Bernstock became President of USPS Mailing and Shipping Services in June 2008, one of the first places he turned his attention to was the company's sales organization.

He envisioned a leaner sales force that would be better aligned with field operations resources and more responsive to customer needs. He knew this would be critical to keeping the Postal Service healthy during the current economic down-cycle while being poised to bring in new business as the economy recovered.

Bernstock tapped Susan Plonkey as his Vice President of Sales and tasked her with creating a new, more efficient and more integrated sales and service organization focused on fully serving the needs of commercial mailers and shippers, including small, mid-sized and large businesses. In addition to the domestic sales team, the new sales organization would combine the Business Service Network (BSN), the Customer Development group (Business Development Teams) and the analytical support provided by the Customer Relationship Management unit.

Plonkey is well-known to USPS customers and business partners. In her previous role as Vice President, Business Customer Relations, Plonkey was responsible for the Business Service Network, the Customer Development group working primarily with small and mid-sized mailers, as well as Customer and Industry Marketing, including the Mailers Technical Advisory Group, the Postal Customer Councils and the National Postal Forum. Her vast operations experience as a District Manager,

all of the mailing products that support today's businesses, including First-Class Mail, marketing mail, remittance, TransPromo, catalogs, periodicals, special services and Intelligent Mail.

Another recommendation was to better align the sales force with both the USPS field operations structure and the headquarter's business units that develop and manage products and services that customers use. These enhancements would make it easier for customers to conduct postal business and to resolve operational issues quickly and would also allow for more flexibility and speed to market in developing customized product solutions — especially important during a period of rapidly changing customer needs.

How did Plonkey respond to the feedback? "We are now re-aligning our sales organization so that it matches structurally with Operations by district and area," says Plonkey. "This helps not only with customer problem solving and ease of on-ramping customers, it also ensures that Sales and Operations and their

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**“Customers told us they wanted
‘one-stop shopping’ with the Postal Service,”
says Susan Plonkey, Vice President, Sales.**

**“By including Sales, Business Development Teams and
the Business Service Network, we created that one
central point of contact our customers asked for.”**

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Postmaster and Plant Manager gives her the in-depth knowledge of how the sales organization and postal operations needed to be aligned to support customer requirements.

Customers Asked for “One Stop Shop”

As a first step in re-engineering the sales force, Plonkey asked customers, employees and business partners how the USPS could do better. One common theme was that customers wanted a single point of contact at the Postal Service who would handle all of their business and service needs. They weren't interested in traditional sales briefings. These customers tend to be very savvy when it comes to mailing and shipping and only want to be briefed on what they need to know for their businesses.

Other customers were looking for USPS solutions specialists who could support their often complex mailing and shipping needs. These specialists would need to be experts in the complete array of product offerings, including customized shipping solutions and

attendant resources are aligned with a common purpose of growing and retaining revenue or helping customers with growing their mail base while the USPS responds to their customer support requests.”

More Feet on the Street

The new Sales organization will be flatter organizationally than before and will put over 1,500 sales and service people into the field across the country in support of business customers. The BSN will support even more customers than previously, focusing on not just the very largest companies but smaller and growing companies as well. The focus will be on providing account management support, world-class service and increased value to all existing postal customers.

The entire sales force is focused on increasing revenue through acquisition of new customers and new revenue streams with the support of an Operations Integration group that will provide technical expertise to on-ramp new customers

and implement customer solutions. Three other Headquarters groups will support the overall success of the organization. Sales Operations and Planning will provide training and communications across the teams. Sales Strategy will be the liaison between Sales and other USPS Business Units, and finally, the Business Customer Intelligence group will provide data and analytics.

Formerly, business customers were served by three separate organizations. Account Managers in Sales were assigned to the largest customers, the Customer Development group worked with small to medium-sized customers, and the BSN provided service support — primarily to the largest USPS mailers, shippers and business partners.

Combining these three organizations into one will mean improved efficiency and better service to existing customers, a closer alignment with USPS Operations in support of customer solutions and a more fruitful and innovative partnership between sales and USPS business units in the development of new product and service offerings.

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“There will be **more sales people on the street** and increased emphasis on the **value the Postal Service can bring** to small and medium-sized customers. Sales and postal districts have been aligned so customers have an **entire postal team** ready to help them with their mailing and shipping needs.” —Bob Bernstock
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The United States Postal Service is an **industry leader** in environmental responsibility, with more than **36,000 alternate-fuel enabled vehicles** and nearly **70 bicycle routes** across the country. Vice President of Sales Susan Plonkey takes that commitment to heart, cycling to work on most days.

Some additional benefits will be a reduction of administrative costs and more “feet on the street” for the customers. The new organization will be comprised of one, customer-facing sales force supported by technical resources and a channel for leveraging business alliances in support of new revenue.

Single Point of Contact

Plonkey has committed the USPS team to providing world-class service with less sales management and more sales people. The primary contact in each postal district will be the BSN, which will serve as a critical link between customers and postal operations. Through the BSN, customers will have access to an entire network of knowledgeable professionals who collaborate with experts in each of the various functional departments of the Postal Service to provide solutions. This will ensure that no question, comment or concern is overlooked and that response is timely.

New customers interested in doing business with the Postal Service will be supported by a team of specialists who will be able to execute complex customized solutions, negotiated pricing and contracts. There will also be a Business Alliances group structured along account management lines to support business partners and mail service providers. This new team will develop refined strategies for selling with and through the business partners for the benefit of the end customer.

The new sales organization will protect USPS ability to provide affordable, universal mail service; provide a superior customer experience through the integration of sales and service resources; reduce complexity and unnecessary costs; minimize non-revenue generating activities; and make the USPS organization easy for customers to navigate. ■

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