

SHIP RIGHT

with Elizabeth Lombard



Optimizing Shipping Operations with Manifest Mailing Systems

Most shippers are aware of the benefits of multi-carrier shipping systems. However, many shippers may not be as familiar with the benefits of implementing a shipping solution with USPS manifest mailing capabilities. In the transport or logistics industry, a manifest is a detailed packing list. USPS manifesting is an automated system that allows a mailer or shipper to document postage and fees for all pieces in a mailing, including international mail, paid based on weight and postage amount. This documentation must meet USPS standards including format, accuracy, timeliness and proper postage payment. The mailing will be presented to the Business Mail Entry Unit, or it will be picked up by the Postal Service at the mailer's facility and transported back to the Business Mail Entry Unit if it's determined to be mutually beneficial to the customer and the USPS.

Itemized Versus Batch Processing

There are two types of USPS manifest mailing systems: itemized and batch. With batch processing, each piece has a unique identification number printed as a key line on the piece with other postage rate information. Since the total postage for a group of pieces is noted as a single line item, batch processing produces a more abbreviated manifest than itemized processing. Applications for batch processing might include large commercial or discount mailings of letter-size or flat-size pieces.

A manifesting solution, especially one integrated as part of a multi-carrier system, can help parcel shippers rate shop among

express and ground carriers and various USPS classes of mail. Manifest solutions essentially expedite the selection of the best rates, whether it's the lowest cost, the quickest delivery or both.

Typically, when a mailer uses a Permit Imprint to evidence postage, 200 pieces or 50 pounds of mail are minimally required, and all of the mailpieces must be the same weight, size and class. While a USPS manifest mailing system uses a Permit Imprint to evidence postage, the system enables shippers to prepare all parcels in one continuous mail stream, mixing non-identical weight, rate and class of mail. This is ideal for commercial and discount mailings when the mailpiece weights vary. It is also beneficial for the shipper that prefers to use a Permit Imprint rather than a postage meter but cannot meet the 200-piece or 50-pound minimum normally required.

Another benefit of using a manifest mailing system is that with the Permit Imprint, a shipper can charge handling and shipping fees for the delivery of goods, and the recipient won't be able to discern the postage costs from the handling fees. Take that one step further: Instead of being a cost center or line item under operating expenses, a shipping center could be a profit or revenue-generating center.

Getting Started

To begin incorporating a manifest mailing system into your shipping strategy, you'll need to file an application with the Postal Service. Next, you'll need to install a computer system in-house or acquire a solution from a vendor. You will also need to develop and maintain quality control procedures that ensure the integrity of that system. The system and your quality control measures will be evaluated by the Postal Service. Ensure that modifications can be made, as pricing and regulations change.

As you look for opportunities to enhance efficiencies and reduce expenditures, consider a manifest mailing system. With multiple benefits, the system can be ideal for moderate to high-volume shippers sending mixed weight, mixed processing category (shape) and mixed-class packages. ■

Itemize It

With itemized processing, the shipper or system assigns a unique identification number to the piece. The ID number is printed on each piece and is usually generated as part of the shipping label. The unique postage for each mailpiece is listed on the manifest. Itemized processing is ideal for: retail-price mailings; mailings in which it is not easy to identify a specific batch of mail during processing; and applications in which the shipper is processing USPS and express and ground carrier packages in one streamlined process.

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