



Designing Machinable & Automation Letters

BACKGROUND

The USPS has made a number of announcements relative to the design of machinable letters, most recently in the May/June 2009 MailPro publication. It stated that all First-Class Mail® and Standard Mail® machinable letters (not just booklets and self-mailers) must have the same physical characteristics as automation letters, except that they do not have a qualifying barcode.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Even though the new sealing/tabbing requirements for letter-size booklets do not go into effect until this fall (September 8, 2009), *the regulation relative to the physical characteristics of all machinable letters applies NOW.*

Letter-size mailpieces that do not comply with the standards will be considered nonmachinable and assessed at higher postage prices:

- First-Class Mail - 20¢ nonmachinable surcharge
- Standard Mail - nonmachinable letter prices (Note, the nonmachinable ADC letter-size mailpieces increased 6.5 percent with the May 11, 2009 price change!)

For example, if you were accustomed in the past to preparing and qualifying for First-Class Mail letter-size automation prices, such as an AADC price of \$0.360, or the nonautomation (presorted) price of \$0.414, but now your mailpieces no longer meet the required physical characteristics, your postage would increase as much as 70 percent!

PHYSICAL STANDARDS FOR MACHINABLE AND AUTOMATION LETTERS

Consider the following standards as you design your letter-size mailpieces (and for more detailed information, please refer to the Domestic Mail Manual, section 201 Commercial Letters and Cards - Physical Standards):

<u>Dimensions</u>	Minimum	Maximum
Length	5 inches	11 ½ inches
Height	3 ½ inches	6-1/8 inches
<u>Thickness</u>	Minimum	0.007" if no more than 4 ¼ " high and 6" long 0.009" if more than 4 ¼ " high or 6" long, or both
	Maximum	¼ inch

Shape

Letter-size mailpieces must be rectangular, however card-type mailpieces made of cardstock may have finished corners that do not exceed a radius of 0.125 inch.

Aspect Ratio

The aspect ratio is the result of the mailpiece length divided by its height and must be 1.3 to 2.5 inclusively. For example, the aspect ratio of a 6 x 9 envelope ($9 \div 6$) is 1.5. An envelope measuring 5 inches by 5 inches has an aspect ratio of 1 ($5 \div 5$) and is considered nonmachinable and thus subject to higher postage.

Weight

The maximum weight for presorted First-Class Mail and Standard Mail machinable letters is 3.3 ounces, and 3.5 ounces for automation letters. Note, "heavy letter mail" (letter-size mail weighing more than 3 ounces), if

barcoded, must have a barcode in the address block and be prepared in a sealed envelope and may neither contain stiff enclosures nor be prepared as a self-mailer or booklet.

Enclosed Reply Cards and Envelopes

All letter-size reply cards and envelopes enclosed in automation mailing and addressed for return to a domestic delivery address must meet the applicable standards for automation-compatible letter-size mail. Note, your signature on the postage statement certifies that this standard has been met!

Nonmachinable characteristics

- Exterior surface that is not made of paper
- Weight more than 3.3 ounces (up to 3.5 ounces) unless it is barcoded and eligible for and claims First-Class Mail® or Standard Mail® automation letter prices or Standard Mail Carrier Route letter prices
- Polywrapped, polybagged, or shrink-wrapped
- Clasps, strings, buttons, or similar closure devices
- Protrusions that might impede or damage the mail or mail processing equipment
- Staples or saddle stitching, with the exception of booklet-type mailpieces to join the bound edge (spine)
- Rigid items (e.g., pens, pencils, keys, bottle caps) not only are nonmachinable, but also nonmailable when enclosed in an unpadding envelope!
- Odd-shaped items such as coins that are NOT firmly affixed to and wrapped within the contents of the mailpiece and envelope to streamline the shape of the mailpiece for automated processing
- A mailpiece that does not bend easily when subjected to a transport belt tension of 40 pounds around an 11-inch-diameter drum. Tip! Letter-size mailpieces containing a single disc, i.e., CD or DVD, and meeting the standards defined in the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM®) section 201.3.3 may qualify for automation pricing!
- Booklets and folded self-mailers not tabbed/sealed according to DMM standards in 201.3. (Reminder – the tabbing/sealing requirements for letter-size booklets change in September 2009! For more information, go to <http://pe.usps.com/FederalRegisterNotices.asp>)

SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Re-evaluate your mailpieces to ensure machinability and automation-compatibility. Meet with a Mail Design Analyst or your business mail entry clerk if you are unsure of your mailpiece(s) design. For mailpieces that have been identified as nonmachinable and cannot be altered to meet the regulations, be certain that you prepare your mailing and associated postage statements accordingly. Otherwise, you may have a delay when you enter your mailing at the Business Mail Entry Unit.
2. Proactively meet with the various departments within your business or organization that create mailpieces. Educate key individuals on the design standards, including the impact for nonmachinable mail which includes higher postage and perhaps slower delivery!
3. Use a Pitney Bowes tabber or intelligent inserter to create machinable/automation-compatible self-mailers and envelopes.
4. Implement addressing software such as the Pitney Bowes SmartMailer™ solution or AddressRight® Pro to standardize the addresses and accurately sort the mail for maximum postal discounts! Be certain to incorporate a Move Update option such as the Pitney Bowes VeriMove™ solution which is a cost-effective, pre-mailing/proactive National Change of Address solution!
5. Moving forward, through education and a partnership with your Pitney Bowes consultant, you can make a positive difference within your business or organization by recommending design strategies and solutions that will maximize postal incentives and improve deliverability!
6. Please participate in the Pitney Bowes User Forum at <http://forums.pb.com/ptnb/> . You can post questions, share success stories and much more!

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