

## The New Standard

Aligning Standard Mail production to the needs of today's marketers

By Jim Perkins

**D**irect marketing has never been more sophisticated than it is today. In the past 10 years, we've seen advances in technology and business practices running the gamut from multichannel, geo-targeting and digital integration, to social media, PURLs, and mobile. Marketers today do not only have to plan campaigns — they need to orchestrate them, coordinating various elements and components to create customer experiences that break through the clutter and motivate prospects to act.

Standard Mail remains an important part of the marketing mix, but only to the point where it can fit with and enhance a well-coordinated multichannel campaign. Fortunately, innovations and new technologies in presort and mail logistics have created an environment where you can help deliver:

- ▶ Consistent, reliable delivery dates;
- ▶ Faster rollouts;
- ▶ Lower, fixed pricing; and
- ▶ Greater accuracy, integrity and tracking.

These “new standards” for Standard Mail can make mail a more attractive option for direct marketers, simplify workflows, improve response rates, and enhance the value you provide to your clients.

**Well-orchestrated campaigns.** Standard Mail has

a reputation for uncertainty. Often, marketers will hear that delivery will occur anywhere between “three days and three weeks.” However, with the right approach to Standard Mail, you can achieve more precise delivery windows — often within a one- or two-day range (i.e., delivered in seven to eight days). These consistent, reliable in-home dates are critical for four big reasons:

1. Marketers can time mail delivery to arrive at the right time, which is especially important for those who are promoting a sale or special event.
2. They can more easily integrate multichannel follow-up programs, such as emails, texts, and phone calls, to coincide with mail delivery.
3. Call centers can forecast volumes and staff accordingly — avoiding situations where prospects are put on hold.
4. Managers can view in-progress result tracking with greater confidence, without the uncertainty often experienced with inconsistent Standard Mail delivery.

**Speed to market.** When you are handling your own mail, it pays to send out an entire campaign on the same day — that way you can maximize postal discounts. However, when you work with a pre-sort service provider, you can get mail out sooner,



staggering your drops over time without losing any density discounts.

**Budget consistency.** Marketers and business owners need the ability to forecast expenses. When postage costs vary depending on how much volume you are sending out on any given day, it makes it difficult to plan in advance. With the right presort service, you can negotiate a fixed-cost price for postage that is likely less than what you are paying today.

**Real-time metrics.** Marketers rely on reports and metrics more than ever — not only to analyze the results of campaigns — but also to make real-time decisions while the campaign is in progress. While web, call center, and social media efforts have always been easy to track, now mailers can provide the same level of visibility if they have the right tools, barcodes, and systems in place.

#### Stepping Up to the New Standard with Postal Optimization

Postal optimization refers to any coordinated, strategic approach intended to optimize workshare discounts while maintaining the marketing impact of a given direct mail campaign.

Two of these tactics you can handle in-house are data hygiene and format selection.

- ▶ Incorporating routine data hygiene tasks into Standard Mail practices will help ensure that your mailing lists are accurate, uniform, and maintained over time as customers come and go. Simple functions such as de-duping, move updates, and address validation can decrease production and mailing costs, while data cleansing processes can improve match rates when adding additional information to customer data files.
- ▶ For the most cost-effective Standard Mail, size and format matter. You need to work within USPS guidelines, as mailpieces smaller than 5" x 6" or longer than 15" are subject to increased costs. With a little upfront knowledge, marketers can design pieces to meet these dimensions, even converting flat-sized mail pieces to letter-size mail, which easily cuts costs — without diminishing the creative impact of a piece. During the campaign development stage, it's also important to be certain that the end product is machinable, avoiding mail formats that are too thick or too rigid to run on USPS processors

For the heavy lifting — and significant improvements in making Standard Mail work as part of an integrated multichannel marketing campaign — you may need to bring in third-party specialists.

- ▶ Commingling mail is the cornerstone of any Standard Mail enhancement strategy. This process combines mailings from multiple companies, sorting different sized letters (whether postmarked with a stamp, permit or meter indicia) to create a single mailstream. Most mailers understand that this increased volume helps ensure that more mail will qualify for 3- and 5-digit presort rates, which could save you one to two cents per piece depending on the size and density of a particular mailing. However, commingling has become more important given today's complex contact strategies, because commingling can also help your mail qualify for destination-rate discounts. The ability to induct mail at a Network Distribution Center (NDC) or Sectional Center Facility (SCF) not only offers greater savings, it provides you with the control and reliability you need to know when mail will reach its intended recipient.
- ▶ While most presort services offer commingled mail, look for organizations that also specialize in advanced mail logistics, which involves identifying the most cost-efficient way to induct mail at the point closest to its final destination. Often, this will involve a combination of strategies, including consolidation and a net work of independent trucking operations, which work together to maximize discounts and marketing impact.

#### Where a Presort Service Can Add the Most Value

Whether you are orchestrating a major multichannel campaign launch or creating an ongoing stream of customer outreach, you need to be on top of all of the details, especially when budgets are tight and expectations are high. While Standard Mail obviously offers cost benefits, mailers remain leery simply due to misperceptions over timing and visibility into the mail.

In many cases, Standard Mail is inducted at a local Post Office and must then work its way through several gates within the USPS processing system. Delivery dates may vary greatly, as your mail must work its way through the "queue" at each stop along the way, from the local Post Office to the

local SCF to the local NDC across to the destination NDC, then the destination SCF, until it reaches the mail recipient's Post Office, and eventually someone's home.

A best-in-class presort service, however, can help ensure that your mail by-passes these stops—inducting mail directly at the destination SCF.

The combination of commingling and logistics can decrease the time it takes for your mail to reach its intended recipient, but more importantly, you can expect your mail to arrive in consistent, predictable timeframes. By adding reliability to the attributes of Standard Mail, marketers can time delivery based on key events, orchestrate multichannel marketing programs, and staff their call centers with confidence.

However, such precision does not come without the right infrastructure. Best-in-class presort operations have made significant investments in hardware, software and personnel to build a network that provides for the reliability, savings and integrity today's marketers demand. Often, these firms maintain dedicated transportation departments that:

- ▶ Manage multiple operating centers across the country;
- ▶ Work with large national and regional consolidation partners;
- ▶ Deliver directly to national and regional consolidation centers; and
- ▶ Self-deliver to local SCFs.

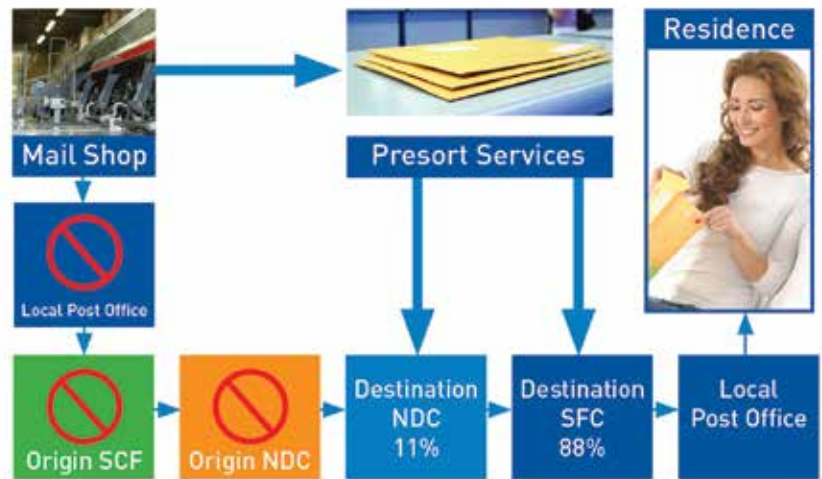
In many cases, such robust, diverse networks can induct as much as 82-87% of mail at the destination SCF, bypassing many USPS stops along the way.

With the right partner, you can also offer greater visibility into the mailstream. The Intelligent Mail barcode and tracking software makes it easy to monitor mail, allowing for better coordination throughout your organization — especially important for multichannel campaigns. You can anticipate response and improve your ability to measure ROI.

A few national presort suppliers take service and quality to the next level through investment and management of logistics. Look for presort service providers with a large transportation fleet, a strong safety record and tight security procedures, plus a

network of distribution hubs for presort and induction.

## Presort Services Decreases Delivery Times



Top-quality logistics operations should include 24/7 access to service and support, as well as incident tracking and geo-location tracking. So, if the truck carrying your mail has a flat tire in Sheboygan, the presort supplier can locate a nearby, available vehicle to offload your mail from the stricken vehicle and keep the mail moving on its way. As technology continues to evolve, large national service providers have the bandwidth to stay on top of the latest tools, including software that can track weather patterns across the nation or traffic accidents — even road construction — which means that trucks can be quickly re-routed to avoid any possible delays.

### Improved Predictability through Technology and Logistics

Marketers have so many sophisticated tools available to create effective communications it can often be challenging to determine the optimum marketing mix. Thanks to innovations and new technologies in presort services and mail logistics, Standard Mail can now take its rightful place among the other sophisticated — often digital — tools in a multichannel marketing campaign. With improved visibility into the mailstream, and a better ability to predict in-home dates, Standard Mail can complement digital marketing efforts. Businesses working in tandem with a professional presort services provider can rely on Standard Mail for greater accuracy, integrity, and tracking — along with lower, fixed pricing and predictable delivery dates. It's a winning combination for a complex marketing environment.

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