

Corporate and University Incoming Mail Processing

The processing of incoming mail actually involves the handling of several distinct mail types with their own peculiarities. The three primary mail types involved in incoming are:

- White mail, such as postcards, letters and flats
- Accountable mail such as FedEx, UPS or USPS Express Mail
- Interoffice mail that employs re-useable envelopes

While the processing of incoming mail can occur in many different locations, and within many different types of organizations, the great majority of the high-volume opportunities (>10,000 items per day) occur in corporate headquarters or campuses, government agencies and academic institutions. The processing of incoming mail is normally delegated to the organization's mailroom, which is also typically responsible for:

- Collecting outgoing mail
- Applying postage to outgoing mail
- Delivering outgoing mail to the USPS or presort service
- Printing of addresses on bulk/mass mailings
- Mail piece creation
- Copying, printing and/or binding services

Due to the time required to manage these activities, the sortation of incoming mail sometimes becomes a lower priority, causing delivery delays, lost items and complaints from internal customers. The workflow in a typical, non-automated mailroom includes:

1. Incoming mail is received from the Post Office in tubs
2. Items are segregated by type, such as First, Standard, accountable and interoffice
3. Segregated items are rough sorted into carrier routes or some other grouping
4. Rough sorted items are fine sorted to the individual mail stop either by the carrier or by other personnel who have memorized the recipients on the route
5. Items are delivered by carriers with outgoing mail picked up as the delivery progresses
6. Outgoing mail is returned to the mailroom where postage is applied if needed and the items forwarded to a presort house or Post Office.
7. After returning from their first run, carriers assist in the fine sort
8. Carriers perform their second delivery run, again picking up any outgoing mail
9. Items without an identifiable recipient are looked-up in a directory or are opened by designated personnel to determine the recipient for the next day's delivery.

ID Mail's Dispatcher for White Mail Processing Issues

The manual sortation processing of white mail has a number of shortcomings, including the amount of labor required to sort the mail within a relatively narrow delivery window, which is typically 6 – 8 hours. As an example, to process 10,000 daily items in 8 hours, five full-time sorting personnel are typically required due to the two-pass sortation method used. Additional personnel are also required to deliver the mail and pickup the outgoing items. Absent sorters are an additional issue to overcome, with substitute sorters creating mis-sorts because they do not have the route memorized. Substitute personnel also require more time to perform the sortation, which can lead to delivery delays.



The amount of mail whose destination must be manually determined is an additional time-consuming task. This “mystery mail” typically requires the full-time efforts of at least one individual to perform a lookup using either additional lookup sources or additional information gathered by opening the item. A person assigned to “mystery mail” can typically determine the whereabouts of up to 500 recipients per day.

Because it can read and sort mail at more than 10 times the rate of a human, the ID Mail Dispatcher applies itself directly to the labor cost issue within the mailroom. With its ability to feed, code, print and sort letter, flats, Tyvek and polywrapped items, the Dispatcher allows the majority of incoming mail to be processed automatically, which reduces the labor expense. In addition to the labor savings, the schedule and delivery issues caused by absenteeism are reduced because the Dispatcher will be available when needed and isn't faced with memorization issues. The addition of INTER.ware software also helps to reduce the amount of hand sortation labor for interoffice mail processing (see Interoffice below).

The address hygiene for incoming white mail is typically not as good as for outgoing business mail because it includes a substantial portion of bulk mail. Bulk mail leads to a variety of readability issues such as poorly applied print, addresses that cross other print and addresses with incomplete or missing address elements. In addition, handprint addresses must also be processed. All of these challenges help create the on-going "mystery" mail issue. To fully meet the challenge of this mail, the Dispatcher provides two valuable options, the Secondary Recognition System (SRS) and Local Video Encoding (LVE). Both SRS and LVE limit the number of items that must be hand processed, which enhances the usefulness of the Dispatcher by allowing more mail to be automated. SRS and LVE can be employed with the same Dispatcher system, or each can be used separately.

Employing the SRS as an option to the Dispatcher significantly enhances the ability to recognize and code a variety of hard-to-read items, such as handprint, touching characters, non-standard fonts and poor print quality. By processing each image with multiple orientations and OCR packages, the SRS maximizes the amount of automated mail. And with its ability to process by priority of the individual mail piece, the SRS helps ensure that high-value items are processed first. The SRS provides flexibility for a variety of situations, regardless of the mail-type being processed, and can be deployed in real-time reading and coding, as well as off-line data gathering situations.

LVE allows the customer to lookup and code the pieces unreadable by either the Dispatcher or the SRS, such as items with missing address elements or with overlapping characters. LVE complements the use of SRS by providing an additional method to automate the maximum number of incoming items. The Dispatcher presents the full mail piece image to the LVE workstation, which allows the operator to manually key the characters seen on the screen. When sufficient characters are keyed, the appropriate coding result is displayed, the operator accepts the result and the next image is displayed. With its ability to automate the lookup based on operator input, the Dispatcher's LVE system significantly reduces the number of "mystery" mail items. Although the use of LVE (and SRS when used in an off-line configuration) requires the unread mail items to be re-passed on the Dispatcher, the process is still faster than hand-sorting. An experienced LVE operator can typically code 1,000 pieces per hour, roughly 2x the speed of a trained hand-sorter.

To process white mail on the Dispatcher, it should first be segregated from the newspapers, catalogs, journals and other non-machinable items. In most instances the automatable portion of the mail (postcards, letters and flats) is delivered by the USPS in separate tubs from the other mail, which helps expedite its processing on the Dispatcher.

The large image captured with the Dispatcher's 8 inch Field of View camera allows the address block locator and OCR software to find the recipient information on cluttered or busy envelopes. The address block image can be captured without regard to its orientation, which eliminates camera adjustments and helps speed processing. Once the address is located, the interpreted information is presented to the ID Mail INC.ware lookup engine for matching against the customer's internal database. After INC.ware determines a match, the mail piece is passed to the Dispatcher's printer where human-readable text is applied. This text is typically the mail stop or some other identifier of the recipient's physical location. With this physical identifier the route person can confirm the piece is being delivered to the correct location. The Dispatcher also offers a labeler

option to provide a clear area on which to print the human readable information. This option is especially useful when dealing with “busy” envelope faces that lack a clear zone for printing.

Accountable Mail Processing Issues

When an accountable mail piece (e.g. FedEx, UPS or Express Mail) enters the mailroom, it is first logged in as received. The recipient’s mail stop is then looked up in the organization’s directory and delivery is attempted, perhaps after a phone call to assure that the recipient is available. When delivered, a signature is obtained as proof of delivery.

There are a number of issues related to this manual process of logging and tracking accountable mail:

- Misplaced or lost items could have considerable financial consequences
- Lengthened delivery times caused by misplaced items or by a protracted lookup can deadlines and contractual obligations to be missed
- Recipients unaware that the mailroom has a package for them may not be available to receive it
- The courier’s tracking number may not have been captured during log-in, which makes it difficult for a person expecting a package to check on its status
- Tracking mailroom efficiency is difficult because the date/time of receipt and date/time of delivery may not be recorded

Because accountable mail typically represents time-sensitive and/or valuable documents, problems related to accountable mail processing receive considerable attention in most organizations. To overcome these issues, mailrooms should consider the purchase of ID Mail’s MailTrak system to log and track accountable mail pieces. MailTrak will eliminate or reduce many of the problems experienced with manual tracking of accountable mail, including:

- Reduces labor for the login process by automating the recipient lookup
- Eliminates time-consuming phone or mailbox notifications with automated emailing capability
- Minimizes questions about delivery with its electronic signature capture
- Reduces research time with its lookup of archived records
- Reduces incidents of “lost” packages by requiring a prescribed, automated methodology
- Electronically stores package information for archiving

MailTrak eliminates many of the issues associated with accountable mail by providing an automated lookup that reduces required labor; log-in and proof of delivery to eliminate lost or mis-placed items; and, a straightforward record keeping method to reduce future lookups within archived records.

Interoffice Mail Processing Issues

Although email has reduced the amount of interoffice mail, it still represents a substantial portion of many locations' total volume. The interoffice envelopes have traditionally made interoffice mail difficult to automate because the lines used for addressing make it difficult for the OCR software to determine the correct address characters. In addition, handprint used on the envelopes is difficult to recognize. However, technical advances in reading and character interpretation have improved the ability to code and sort interoffice mail.

For mailrooms with a sizable percentage of interoffice mail, ID Mail's INTER.ware system provides an attractive alternative to hand sorting interoffice envelopes. To use the INTER.ware system, the interoffice envelopes are first converted to a format that is readable on the Dispatcher. This conversion is inexpensive and easy to accomplish. The INTER.ware system includes a small, clear plastic sleeve with a peel-off adhesive coating on one side. The plastic sleeve is attached to the front of the envelope and a pre-printed form is placed inside. The form (see figure below) is pre-printed with light gray lines for guidance in addressing. The intended recipient's mail stop is included by writing individual characters between the stubby, upright lines to the right of the recipient's handwritten name. Once placed on the Dispatcher, the hand printed mail stop is interpreted and looked-up, and then the item is sorted to the appropriate bin. Any items not read automatically can be sent to LVE for coding. When INTER.ware is employed, much of the manual labor associated with interoffice mail is eliminated, and its delivery is improved.

ID Mail Interoffice Mail	Tracking ID: 75311012
<i>Jerry Fenerty</i>	A 1 3 5 6
<i>Teff Craigie</i>	B B 2 0 5 2
<i>T Mangiaopra</i>	OPS 1 1 2

INTER.ware Form