



USPS Delivers

MAKING YOUR DIRECT MAIL POSTAL READY





HOW TO SAVE TIME AND MONEY SENDING YOUR DIRECT MAILPIECE

When you're creating a direct mailpiece, you have many options to consider—your message, your design, your mailing list, for instance.

Above all, make sure you don't neglect one all-important element: Working with the United States Postal Service (USPS).

USPS can be a valuable partner in helping you determine the most cost-effective way to create and send your message, so that it arrives in the right mailboxes at the right time.

Consulting with your local Business Mail Entry Unit (**BMEU**) office at the beginning of the process can help ensure that you don't create a piece that will be costly to mail—or not mailable at all.

The following overview will help guide you as you make decisions about the size and shape of your mailpiece, what service makes sense for you, and how you can save time and money on your mailing.

WHAT CLASS OF SERVICE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

USPS divides mail into “classes,” each with different features, levels, postage prices, and presort requirements. For direct mail postcards, letters, and flats, you will probably be using either commercial First-Class Mail® or USPS Marketing Mail™ service.

SAVING MONEY WITH COMMERCIAL MAIL

Commercial mail refers to larger quantities of mail prepared for mailing at reduced postage. It can be used for First-Class Mail service as well as USPS Marketing Mail service and other classes of mail.

USPS offers lower prices for commercial First-Class Mail and USPS Marketing Mail mailings because you do some of the work that otherwise would have to be done by the Postal Service. For example, you can sort your mail by ZIP Code™ and, for an additional discount, you may also take your mailing to a destination postal facility.

In order to mail at commercial prices, you need to:

- ★ Get a mailing permit and pay an annual mailing fee for each class of mail you'll use.
- ★ Pay postage using precanceled stamps, postage evidencing system indicia, or a permit imprint.
- ★ Ensure that your addresses are accurate.
- ★ Presort your mailpieces by ZIP Code.
- ★ Take your mail to the Post Office™ where you hold your mailing permit.

If your business does just one or two mailings a year and you want to use commercial mail, it may be worth seeking the services of a presort vendor or mailing house. Why? Because commercial mail is an investment: An investment of time and in learning how to sort and prepare your mail.



FIRST-CLASS MAIL® SERVICE

First-Class Mail service is faster than USPS Marketing Mail service, so it's a good choice if you need to reach customers quickly.

You can save money on First-Class Mail service, if you're sending at least 500 pieces.

The maximum weight for a First-Class Mail mailpiece is 13 ounces (3.5 ounces for letters).

First-Class Mail prices include forwarding and return services.

USPS MARKETING MAIL™ SERVICE *(formerly Standard Mail® service)*

A USPS Marketing Mail mailing must meet a minimum quantity of 200 pieces or 50 pounds of mail.

The maximum weight for a USPS Marketing Mail mailpiece is 16 ounces. USPS Marketing Mail mailpieces won't be forwarded or returned unless you request it with an **ancillary service endorsement**. (See below for possible endorsements.) Forwarding and return services may cost extra.

Discounted **nonprofit prices** are available for USPS Marketing Mail mailpieces; however, they require specific authorization.



PICK THE RIGHT SIZE AND SHAPE FOR YOUR MAILER

The size and shape of your mailpiece affect the cost to mail it. Direct mail will generally fall into one of three size-based categories: Letters, postcards, or flats.

LETTERS

Generally, if you're using a standard No. 10 envelope for your letter, you'll have no problem with your piece being in the letter-size mail category. However, if you decide to create a mailpiece with its own special envelope or if you are designing a piece that will be folded to letter-size mail, be sure to keep in mind the requirements for the letter category.

To qualify for mailing at the price for letters, a piece must be:

- ★ Rectangular.
- ★ No more than 11.5 inches long x 6.125 inches wide x 0.25 inches thick.
- ★ At least 5 inches long x 3.5 inches wide x 0.007 inches thick.

FLATS

If your piece is larger than letter-size mail, it's probably considered a flat. The Postal Service uses the word "flat" to refer to large envelopes, newsletters, and magazines. Flats must be:

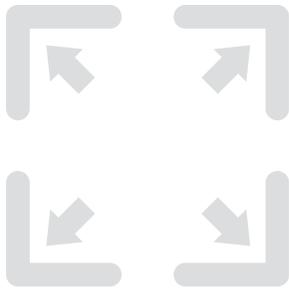
- ★ More than 11.5 inches long, 6.125 inches wide, or 0.25 inches thick.
- ★ Not more than 15 inches long, 12 inches wide, nor 0.75 inches thick.

The maximum size for a flat provides plenty of room to put lots of material in the envelope. But keep in mind that weight usually affects price—the higher the weight, the higher the postage.

POSTCARDS

First-Class Mail® postcards are an inexpensive way to get an immediate message to customers. When they arrive in the mail, there's the message—no envelope to open! To qualify for mailing at the First-Class Mail postcard price, your mailpiece must be:

- ★ Rectangular.
- ★ No more than 6 inches long x 4.25 inches wide x 0.016 inches thick.
- ★ At least 5 inches long x 3.5 inches wide x 0.007 inches thick.



MAILPIECE SHAPE

You want your mailpiece to look unique to catch your customers' attention, but design it with care. An odd-shaped mailpiece may not only cost more to design and print, it could also be subject to a higher mailing price or even be nonmailable.

Speaking of odd shapes, don't mail bulky, odd-shaped things like pens or bottle caps in regular letter-size envelopes. You'll pay more in postage, and the items are more likely to poke through the envelope, fall out, and be lost.

WHAT NOT TO MAIL: PROHIBITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS

Some items cannot legally be sent through the mail. For example, fraudulent information, obscene materials, and explosives are prohibited. Other items are mailable but only in limited quantities with special packaging.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you comply with U.S. Postal Service requirements and that you don't mail anything that can injure postal employees, postal equipment, or customers' mail. For more information, consult the "What Is Mailable?" section of **Business Mail 101**.

ADDRESS YOUR MAIL CORRECTLY

The accuracy of the address affects the speed and handling of your mail. To help ensure that your mail is delivered right the first time, use the following format. Uppercase letters are preferred.

Name or attention line MR J BROWN PRES
Company name ANY CORP
Delivery address 4321 MAPLE ST
City, state, ZIP Code OAKTON MD 12345-6789



OTHER TIPS TO REMEMBER:

- ★ **Punctuation**, with the exception of the hyphen in the ZIP+4 Code, may be omitted.
- ★ **Print a return address** in the upper left corner of the front of the mailpiece.
- ★ Use a Post Office Box™ or street address, **but not both**.
- ★ **If the address has a directional**, e.g., NW for northwest, **be sure to use it**.

TIP: USPS Mailpiece Design Analysts (MDAs) have specialized mailpiece design expertise and can assist with technical mailpiece design questions. Get in touch with the MDA Customer Help Desk at mda@usps.gov.

CHECKING YOUR ADDRESS LIST BEFORE YOU MAIL

To claim commercial First-Class Mail® and USPS Marketing Mail™ prices, you must have checked the accuracy of your addresses.

The Postal Service offers many ways to check the accuracy of your list. Your local Post Office™ or BMEU can help you choose the best option for cleaning up your mailing list. Here are some of the options:

- ★ Use **usps.com**® to check the ZIP Code™ accuracy of your list.
- ★ Process your address list through **CASS™ certified software**. CASS stands for Coding Accuracy Support System. It means that your addresses have been checked for accuracy against the Postal Service's database using an approved system.
- ★ Use the **USPS® Address List Correction Service**. You can submit a printout of your list to the Postal Service, which will mark any changes. There is a fee for this service, which is available through the Address Management System Office found at <https://postalpro.usps.com/address-quality>.
- ★ **The National Change of Address (NCOA^{Link}®)** service makes change-of-address information for moves available to mailers.
- ★ Use the **Address Information System (AIS) Viewer** application to retrieve, view, and print accurate and current ZIP Code information for all 50 states.



DID YOU KNOW?

- ★ **17% of Americans change addresses annually.**★
- ★ **45 million people move each year.**★
- ★ **Approximately one out of every six families moves each year.**★

1. "Checking the Accuracy of Your Address List," Postal Explorer, usps.com. (<https://pe.usps.com/businessmail101?ViewName=CheckTheAddresses>)

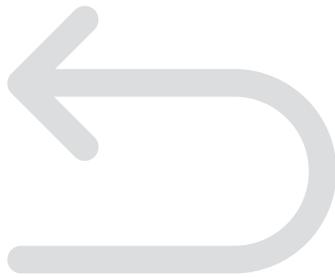
ADDRESSING SERVICES

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, your mailpieces can't be delivered to the addresses you've used. For instance, your potential customer may have moved or the building may be vacant.

By using special addressing services called "ancillary service endorsements," you can give the Postal Service specific instructions on how to handle your mail if it can't be delivered as addressed.

Depending on the purpose of your mailing, you may want those pieces forwarded to customers who have moved, or you may want a corrected address returned to you.

For more details, consult **Quick Service Guide 507—Ancillary Service Endorsements**.



First-Class Mail® pieces are forwarded to the new address free of charge and, if undeliverable, returned to you at no additional cost. You can use an ancillary service endorsement to change how the Postal Service treats your First-Class Mail pieces.

Undeliverable USPS Marketing Mail™ pieces that don't have an endorsement are disposed of by the Postal Service. This is a good reason to make sure that your address list is correct and current.

WAYS TO PAY YOUR POSTAGE



The Postal Service provides three different ways for you to pay for commercial mail postage.

YOUR MAILING PERMIT

You need a mailing permit for commercial mailings, whether you're using precanceled stamps, postage evidencing systems indicia, or permit imprint. Please note that there is a permit fee and an annual fee for these types of mailing.

PRECANCELED STAMPS

With precanceled stamps, you get the personalized look of single-piece mail without the price. Precanceled stamps are available for the following classes of mail: Presorted First-Class Mail[®], presorted First-Class Mail postcards, regular USPS Marketing Mail[™] service, and nonprofit USPS Marketing Mail service.

Precanceled stamps are recommended for relatively low-volume bulk mailings if you or someone at your business puts a stamp on each mailpiece. You can also have the stamps applied by machine by a private mail service provider.

You can buy precanceled stamps in large quantities at the retail window of the Post Office[™] where you hold your mailing permit.

Mailpieces with precanceled stamps must be brought to the Post Office where you hold your permit. They can't be dropped in a collection box or given to a carrier.

POSTAGE EVIDENCING SYSTEMS (POSTAGE METER OR PC POSTAGE[®])

Postage evidencing systems include postage meters and PC Postage[®] products. They let you print postage indicia directly onto your mailpieces or onto a meter tape or labels that you then apply to your mailpiece.

What is the difference between a postage meter and PC Postage products? Postage meters are devices that can print one or more denominations of postage onto a mailpiece or meter tape. You can lease them from designated manufacturers. PC Postage is USPS-approved third-party vendor software that mailers can use to pay for and print their postage using a computer, printer, and Internet connection. Both are convenient ways to pay for postage and track your postage costs.

If you already have a postage meter or a PC Postage account, using them to send direct mail advertising could be a smart choice. Although you can use the same postage meter for all of your mail, you must apply for a permit to use the meter for commercial mailings. Also, there are special markings required for commercial mailings that can be applied with your meter stamp. That saves you an extra step.

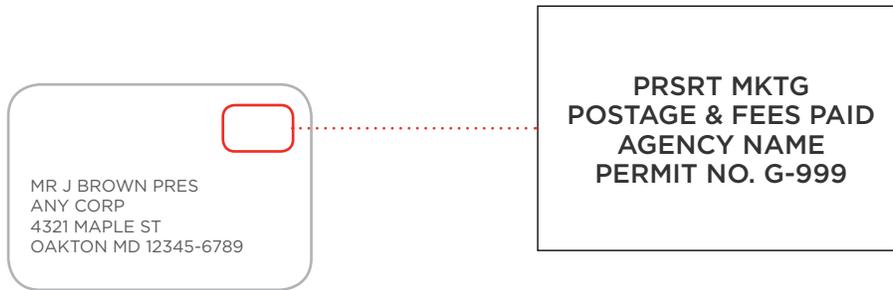
With both a postage meter and PC Postage, you pay for postage in advance and replenish your account as your balance runs out.



PERMIT IMPRINT

Permit imprint is the most popular and convenient way to pay for high-volume mailings. Instead of using precanceled stamps or a postage meter, you print postage information in the upper right corner of the mailpiece. This postage block is called an “indicia.”

You print the indicia when you print the rest of your mailpiece. If you already have a mailpiece printed without the permit imprint, you can use a rubber stamp.



To use permit imprint, you set up a postage account (called an “advance deposit account”) at your local BMEU where you’ll be depositing your mail. When you bring your mailing to the BMEU, the total postage is deducted from your account. It’s like having a checking account at the Post Office™.

AT YOUR LOCAL BUSINESS MAIL ENTRY UNIT (BMEU) OFFICE

SAVING MONEY WITH AUTOMATION PRICES

You can receive even greater discounts if your commercial mailing meets automation requirements. To qualify, your mailpieces must be 100% barcoded using an Intelligent Mail® barcode (IMb®) encoded with the correct delivery point routing code and prepared for the Postal Service’s high-speed mail processing equipment.

A mail service provider or printer can help you prepare your mail to qualify for these special prices. Contact your local BMEU to discuss whether automation is right for your mailing.

MAKING IT EASY FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS TO RESPOND

If you want to encourage potential customers to reply to your direct mail, Business Reply Mail® (BRM) or Courtesy Reply Mail™ (CRM) services may be good options.

With BRM, you give customers a postage-free way to respond to you. It’s a little like sending them a self-addressed stamped envelope except that you don’t pay the postage unless they actually use it.

You will need to purchase an annual permit to use BRM. You will pay postage on the mail your customers return, plus a per-piece charge for each BRM piece returned to you.

When designing a BRM mailpiece or label, you must consult with your local Post Office™ and have your proofs approved by the USPS before printing, because the piece must conform to a specific format. For more information on BRM templates, click [here](#).

CRM is another way to make it easier for potential customers to respond to you, but in this case, you are not paying their postage. CRM consists of preaddressed postcards or envelopes provided to customers, who apply the postage themselves. CRM helps facilitate a faster response and more accurate delivery of responses. CRM templates are also available on the Postal Explorer website.

WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

Hopefully, this overview answered many of your questions about preparing a direct mailpiece that will reach your potential customers as cost-effectively as possible. For more information and resources, click here: [Business Mail 101](#).