

# POSTAL NEWS

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## **1. SWAZILAND: Humanitarian post offices**

MBABANE, 15 July 2008 (IRIN) - The traditional core business of the post office - sending letters, selling stamps - seems a bit of an anachronism in the era of electronic mail and cellphones, but new uses are being found for an institution with branches in some of the remotest parts of Swaziland.

Post offices have long been important in facilitating financial transactions, from paying public utility bills to sending and receiving money orders. A pilot programme has taken that one step further - testing the postal service's ability to assist in dispensing humanitarian relief.

The idea was to explore the use of cash transfers in humanitarian crises, with those in need accessing monthly stipends through the nearest postal facility. The trial, launched in November last year, sought to take advantage of the unique community role of Swaziland's post offices, which serve as general meeting points in the rural areas, and the number of outlets, which surpasses the banking system's.

"It was a cash plus food pilot project that lasted six months, but the beneficiaries were happy and we are recommending continuation of the programme to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare," said Clara Dube, programme officer for the UN Children's agency, UNICEF, which partnered the development organisation, Save the Children, and the Swazi government in the initiative.

The beneficiaries were orphans and vulnerable children, whose stipends were paid out to their guardians or the heads of child-run households. Special identity documents were issued by the Ministry of Justice to allow the 7,650 households in the scheme to access the money - R30 (US\$4) a month for each child, and an additional R45 (\$6) per household for non-food items.

At the beginning of the project a lumpsum transfer of R470 (\$63) was made to each household to help with agricultural inputs at the start of the planting season; at the end of the initiative in April, a final R350 (\$47) was provided to support post-harvest income generating projects.

Swaziland has the world's highest HIV prevalence rate, and according to UNICEF, 200,000 Swazi children will have been orphaned by the pandemic in the next two years. The small mountain kingdom has also faced several consecutive seasons of drought-related food shortages; in 2007, close to half the population of 950,000 was receiving some form of food aid.

Some problems

The cash transfer pilot scheme was "emergency drought relief targeted at central and southern portions of the country", said Nathi Vilakati, programmes coordinator for Save the Children in Swaziland. Beneficiaries were given the option of receiving payments through a commercial bank, and some did.

"The initial idea was to set up an account for each child caregiver and issue him or her a data card, like an ATM [automatic teller machine] card. At the post office the clerk would swipe the card, read the balance on the account and issue the monthly allotment, which would be automatically put into the account by government."

Although a hitch developed with the availability of data cards, and postal clerks laboriously had to write out withdrawal slips, the concept behind the pilot was deemed sound, said Vilakati.

"To get to a bank, rural residents might have to travel long distances and incur travel expenses at a time when bus fares are rising, but a post office is usually in their community," noted Elizabeth Kgololo, communications officer for Save the Children.

But Swaziland's postal service has its limitations, underlined by the experience of pensioners trying to cash their cheques at post offices - as opposed to local government offices - when this became an option in 2006.

More on cash transfers

GLOBAL: Trying to put more in the food basket

ZAMBIA: Cash transfers more beneficial for the poor

AFRICA: Safety nets help to climate-proof the poor

GLOBAL: An Ethiopian solution to costly food aid

"The intention was good, but the post office didn't have the capacity at the time to handle the work. There were long queues; the elderly were made to wait for hours because payments had not arrived. Many were sent back home and had to come again and again," said Kgololo.

There was also a security problem. "The times when the elderly could pick up their benefit payments were published in the newspapers and broadcast on the radio. Criminals knew when the money would be given out, and they were there to wait for the older people," she said. As a result, pensioners were given the choice of using a commercial bank.

But the cash transfer pilot in Swaziland has proved "important both to guide future emergency responses, especially in a time of rising food prices, and also for the

establishment of predictable - and potentially long-term - social transfer systems for vulnerable families," said a Save the Children assessment.

"Often, the challenge for aid agencies is to manage the distribution of the cash safely, appropriately and cost-effectively. The challenge for post offices is how they can offer this service commercially, considering the opportunities for attracting new long-term clients, while also recognising the humanitarian objectives that are driving NGOs, some UN agencies and government donors in emergency situations," said Save the Children.

As letter-writing falls away, postal services are increasingly facing redemption or irrelevancy depending on their ability to attract and retain customers.

Swaziland's Minister of Communications, Thandi Shongwe, told IRIN: "We can't just wish away post offices, even though technology seems to have taken over most communications systems. We need to infuse them with new ideas."

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## **2. Mountain Media® Integrates with the Endicia® Internet Postage Solution**

Merchants now have instant access to USPS shipping with this complete solution for integrated order fulfillment.

Saratoga Springs, NY (PRWEB) July 15, 2008 -- Mountain Media® announced today the release of an integration component to their successful Mountain Commerce shopping cart software that will allow customers to easily process U.S. Postal Service® (USPS) order shipping and fulfillment through the Endicia® Internet Postage solution. Online merchants supported by Mountain Media's ecommerce solution are now able to price, purchase and print USPS postage labels directly from their shopping cart management interface.

Endicia offers discounted Delivery and Signature Confirmation™, low-cost insurance, and the option to print labels that hide the amount of postage paid. Additionally, Mountain Commerce's shipping solution allows merchants to easily repackage shipments and override the shipping weight and dimensions of packages that were automatically generated at checkout. This greatly increases the efficiency of the fulfillment process for merchants that ship via the USPS.

Endicia is very excited to be working with Mountain Media to deliver our cutting-edge Internet Postage 'Label Server' solution to their user base. We look forward to a long-term relationship that will give customers access to the savings and benefits of Endicia's Internet Postage solution, while streamlining their shipping and fulfillment process

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long-term relationship that will give customers access to the savings and benefits of Endicia's Internet Postage solution, while streamlining their shipping and fulfillment process," said Amine Khechfe, GM, Endicia - A Newell Rubbermaid Company.

"Mountain Media's integration with Endicia's Internet Postage software will offer significant time and cost savings to many of our ecommerce merchants who ship via the U.S. Postal Service", said James Curley, CEO for Mountain Media. "We refused to take any shortcuts when it came to developing this integrated solution. Mountain Media merchants can push shipping data (including batch data) directly from the order fulfillment interface of Mountain Commerce to the Endicia Internet Postage solution with a single mouse-click, making this one of the tightest shopping cart integrations available. We're excited to have Endicia as a partner and we plan to include additional integrated components in the future in our ongoing effort to help merchants build and maintain successful ecommerce businesses."

Mountain Media creates comprehensive ecommerce solutions by providing robust ecommerce software, custom graphic design, Search Engine Marketing (SEM), hosting, gateway and merchant account services.

The company's proprietary software, Mountain Commerce, as seen on CBS 6 News and in Practical eCommerce magazine's "Notable Shopping Carts", is the result of a decade of effort by a development team obsessed with usability, improved search engine placement, flexibility and creating industry leading feature sets. In May of 2008, the company was granted CISP certification by VISA® as a Level 1 PCI DSS compliant provider.

Endicia has over 25 years of postal industry experience. As the leading provider of Internet Postage, Endicia has enabled customers to print over \$2 billion of postage while saving them over \$65 million in fees and providing reliability, efficiency, and customer service that is second to none. Endicia's PC and Mac applications allow users to print pre-paid postage and shipping labels for all mail classes, domestic and international. Endicia's solutions include stand-alone desktop shipping tools, database integration, web services, customizable API's and integration into over 60 third-party applications.

For more information about Mountain Media products and services, please visit [www.mountainmedia.com](http://www.mountainmedia.com) or call 877-583-0300.

#### ABOUT MOUNTAIN MEDIA

Mountain Media was founded in 1998 to heed the growing commercial demand for effective website design and development allowing small to mid-tier businesses to proliferate their message and expand into new market segments. Since then, the company has set focus on, and become a premium provider of customizable eCommerce products and services. In May of 2008, the company achieved Level 1 PCI DSS certification

Privately held and headquartered in Saratoga Springs, NY, the company's proprietary eCommerce management platform, known as "Mountain Commerce" was named to Practical eCommerce magazine's list of notable shopping cart solutions in late 2007. The Mountain Commerce suite enables online merchants to receive top search-engine

visibility while providing powerful up-selling and cross-selling features, effective order management and fulfillment, pricing and promotions handling, payment processing and catalog management, all on a secure and reliable platform. Additionally, the company offers a full compliment of commercial Web services such as Search Engine Marketing, Graphic Design and Web Hosting.

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