

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Delivering Letters to Your Inbox

By CIARA O'ROURKE

Published: July 12, 2009

PARIS — The Swiss national postal service has started redirecting some mail from the letter box to the inbox.

A program introduced by the Swiss Post in June allows subscribers to receive scans of their unopened envelopes by e-mail message and then to decide which they want opened and scanned in their entirety, to be read online.

Subscribers can also ask to have the contents archived, send unopened letters to another address or have them shredded and recycled.

The success of the program, called Swiss Post Box, will depend on how widely digital mail is accepted, said Mark Levitt, a former analyst at International Data Corp. in Washington.

“Even people who warmly embraced digital tools stopped short of giving up on paper,” he said. “In fact, the electronic age has generated even greater demand for printers, paper and ink because people have even more information that they feel the need to print out on paper to read.”

The program uses technology provided by Earth Class Mail, a company based in Seattle that has tens of thousands of individual subscribers worldwide, mostly in Britain, the United States, Canada and Mexico. Clients in those countries have mail sent to one of more than two dozen designated addresses for processing.

This is the first time that Earth Class Mail has licensed its technology with a postal service.

The Earth Class Mail chief executive, Ron Weiner, said that the company was in discussions with other national postal services in Europe and Asia about similar partnerships. He would not elaborate.

Basic service for Swiss Post Box starts at €14, or \$20, a month. In North America, clients pay between \$10 and \$60 a month for Earth Class Mail's service, depending on how much mail they want scanned.

Michael Laprade, who has used Earth Class Mail for two years, said he had few items forwarded to him besides the occasional check and had sensitive items like credit card statements shredded.

"There are very few things you get that you actually have to have in your hand," said Mr. Laprade, who lives primarily in California but spends the winter in France.

Earth Class Mail says that its users recycle 90 percent of their mail. By comparison, the U.S. Postal Service reported that 40 percent of the mail it processed was recycled.

For now, the Swiss Post Box service is available in several cities in Switzerland and in Frankfurt. The postal service intends to add services in France, Italy and Austria.

At a later stage, Swiss Post expects to offer the service in all locations where Swiss Post International has a presence: Belgium, Denmark, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Britain and the United States.

But Mr. Weiner said Swiss Post Box would meet more rigorous standards for data handling than required by the European Union. Nevertheless, some experts say, digitized mail could be easier to abuse by a rogue employee.

Mr. Weiner said that Earth Class Mail had not had any security breaches, either by employees or by hackers, since its introduction. He said operational employees did not have access to mail that had been opened and scanned and that the digital images were encrypted.

"Our security is extremely robust," he said. "There's a huge amount of infrastructure."

Mr. Weiner said he hoped to create a database so that subscribers could eventually send mail electronically to others who have signed up for the program.

"That's really the holy grail," he said.

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2. Russian Postal Service Looks At Changes Needed To Weather Recession

12 July 2009 by Franz Groter - © Hellmail.co.uk

This month has been busy for the Russians after a series of presentations and discussions on the future of Russian postal services in the context of a global recession and how new technology, as part of its modernisation programme, would transform the service.

On the 1st July, the IX International Forum “Pochtovaya Troika (2009) opened with an exhibition of advanced postal technology in St. Petersburg at the A.S. Popov Central Communications Museum. Igor Shchegolev, Minister of Telecoms and Mass Communications of the RF, Eduard Dayan, the Universal Postal Union Director General, Valeriy Bugayenko, the Federal Communications Agency Director and Alexander Kiselev, the FSUE Russian Post Director General took part in the opening ceremony and made a tour of the exhibition stands.

The exhibition included products from over 20 Russian and foreign companies specializing in technological solutions for the postal service, among them such companies as Siemens AG, the Bank of Moscow, Volvo, Eltag Datamat, Publishing and Trade Center “Marka” et al.

In the opening address, Mr. Igor Shchegolev, Minister of Telecoms and Mass Communications of the RF noted that the Russian Post had to improve quality of service and shared his views about the expected results of implementing the program of modernisation of the federal postal operator.

The Minister emphasised that the post service represented a vital social link and in conditions of financial instability a lot depended on its soundness and energy. The recession was aggravating the postal industry’s problems, much of which had been accumulated for decades and the post should work harder than ever to resolve them.

“Further development of the facility is impossible without dramatic modernization of the postal service’s infrastructure - bringing this quality up to the world standards. The expansion of the range of services, first and foremost of postal-banking services, is of vital importance”, - Mr. Shchegolev emphasized.

Mr. Shchegolev specified the priorities in modernization of the post. Among those he mentioned the automation of operations and streamlining of the logistics chain which would guarantee “acceptance, processing and delivery of mail items with high quality and at affordable price”, improvement in the system of delivery of periodicals with reference to the industry’s program entitled “The Upgrade in the Periodical Subscription System in 2009 – 2011”), upgrade of the information and technology infrastructure which would primarily ensure the provision of the delivery service and payment of pensions and allowances and implementation of modern financial services, and finally, the further quality-focused development of the post office network and implementation of mobile and rapidly installed post offices.

Mr. Edouard Dayan, the Director General of the International Bureau of the Universal Postal Union and Mr. Alexander Kiselev, FSUE Russian Post’s Director General, signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding'. The agreement provides the facilities to set up the Regional Technology Center which is meant to provide operational and technical support to postal operators of the East European and North Asia countries while developing the international postal-financial services using the international financial system of the Universal Postal Union.

Currently, there is only one Regional Technology Center of Support to postal-financial UPU services. located in Montevideo, Uruguay, serving the Latin America region.

Russia has justly been selected as the center of development of postal-financial services in Eastern Europe and North Asia since it is the leader within the international financial system of the UPU. 60 to 70 percent of the global postal money order traffic falls on the Russian Federation. Russia processes about 200,000 international transactions on a monthly basis and has an extensive experience in developing the international electronic money orders. The Russian Post exchanges electronic money orders within the UPU system with the majority of CIS countries and also with China and France.

Mr. E. Dayan, the UPU Director General said: "Today we concentrate on expanding the range of our services and making our global electronic system accessible to everyone. Today's signing of the Memorandum with the Russian Post is a major step in this direction."

Alexander Kiselev, Director General of the Russian Post, shared his vision on the current economic situation and on the prospects for development of the federal postal operator under new conditions with the Forum participants.

He noted that the recession had affected a number of strategic facilities in the Russian Federation, the Russian Post being one of them. The social burden on those facilities represents an extra constraint for development whose effect could be recouped owing to the governmental support.

"Intensifying the balanced investment activities as a proactive position would allow for the basis of the future successful functioning of the Russian Post. While the further service diversification, use of the positive experience of colleagues from abroad, promotion of cooperation with financial institutions, optimization of expenses and business processes will allow the post to be a winner following the current recession" he said.

One of the most vital issues of the discussion was the expansion of Universal Postal Union's projects on financial and postal services improvement and modernisation. These projects are to be implemented by UPU by 2012 and are intended to reduce the difference between developed economies and developing countries, to bring the postal industry up to a principally new level.

The Forum came to the end with the address of Alexander Kiselev, Director General of the Russian Post:

"Productive conclusions will be drawn from the speakers addresses, we will carry out an analysis which would allow to find the most optimal solutions of the problems the Post is facing amid the economic instability. Finally, it will allow postal operators to overcome the crisis successfully and to continue steady development" he said.

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3. Union Gap Post Office may be closed

by Erin Snelgrove
Yakima Herald-Republic

JOSEPH TREVINO/El Sol de Yakima

The Union Gap post office is being considered for closure by postal officials.

UNION GAP -- The U.S. Postal Service may close several of its branches in Washington by year's end, including one in Union Gap.

"We've been experiencing some very significant financial problems and are operating at a very significant deficit," said Ernie Swanson, a corporate communications specialist in Seattle. "We're looking at all sorts of ways to cut costs."

The Union Gap Post Office at 3514 Main St. is the only one in Yakima County being considered for closure -- at least for the initial round of cuts mandated by headquarters, Swanson said. Five other post offices have been identified in Spokane, Tacoma and Seattle.

Before any office is closed, Swanson said the Postal Service will commission a study to analyze the condition of the buildings, the number of daily retail transactions and the volume of mail that goes through the facility each day. The Postal Service will also review whether the level of business has changed over time.

"On the surface, it appears we could close the (Union Gap facility) and not have a significant impact on the community," Swanson said. "We're at the very early stages of this."

He said the Postal Service is trying to find ways to serve the public without making any significant or negative changes in service. If the Union Gap office does close, its employees would be transferred to other facilities.

It was not immediately known how many postal employees work in Union Gap. Calls to the local postmaster were not returned Friday.

Last year, the Postal Service lost \$2.8 billion nationally, and this year, it could lose \$5 to \$6 billion, Swanson said.

As more people rely on e-mail to communicate with friends and family and on the Internet to pay their bills, mail volume has steadily decreased. It is anticipated to decline by 12 percent to 15 percent this year.

The national recession also has had an effect on the volume of mail and packages, Swanson said.

The postal service study will take a few months to complete. Letters and surveys about the potential closure will be mailed this summer, and a town hall meeting may be scheduled in Union Gap and other communities, Swanson said.

Besides the closures, the Postal Service has enforced other cost-saving measures since 2008. They include readjusting carrier routes, removing collection boxes and reducing the number of times mail is collected at the boxes.

Through April, the Postal Service has also reduced its work hours by 50 million nationwide. Much of this was done by leaving vacant positions unfilled, Swanson said.

He noted that other Pasco and Seattle-area offices may close as part of separate cost-saving initiative.

"We're trying to do all this without changing services to our customers. That's one of our foremost considerations," Swanson said.

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July 10, 2009

4. Postal 'service?'

How come when postal rates go up it seems the service goes down? I've seen several times at the 87th and Monrovia location people standing in line back to the front door while one clerk is taking care of them.

Other clerks are doing different duties instead of waiting on the people. A stamp costs 44 cents if you can find someone to sell it to you.

John Phillips

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