

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Save, don't kill, the U.S. Postal Service

The Post editorial board's casual discussion of privatizing the United States Postal Service may seem pennywise, but it is pound foolish. It would be a grave error to break up a service that instead should be remade.

There is no question that the USPS is struggling, as are so many conveyors of information, in these early days of the digital era. But we should follow the lead of other countries, particularly Switzerland, which have positioned their postal services as 21st century hybrids that continue to provide basic services on Main Street -- including regular delivery of snail mail -- while competing with significant success on an information superhighway that will still require reliable, steady and civically-oriented public services.

The USPS is a remarkable national asset which continues to deliver needed services that cannot and will not be delivered by the private sector. The network of 32,741 post offices, which extends to every corner of the country, and the staff of 656,000 skilled postal workers are the backbone of Main Streets in urban neighborhoods and small towns. These workers are the human beings who deliver a soldier's letter home to his mom, who a lost child runs to when he wanders around one corner too many, who check in on an elderly man who might not have any other human contact that day, who deliver medicines to the aged and infirm. No, the USPS is not a social service agency. But it does provide a social and economic service to communities across this country.

It is, as well, a vital communications infrastructure that each day delivers 660 million pieces of mail to as many as 142 million locations. And, while much of what is delivered is ridiculously subsidized "junk mail," there is a lot of mail that matters. Indeed, our civic and democratic life is still intricately linked to the USPS.

In an era in which an ever-increasing number of Americans vote by mail, either as part of a specific state initiative or via absentee ballots, and when magazines of opinion that are delivered by our postal workers provide much of the content that makes the Internet an essential tool of our democratic discourse, it is not just

economically unwise to speak casually about privatizing the USPS before we have considered the consequences. It is a fool's mission.

And there is much more that the USPS can do to stay competitive. SwissPost, for example, is positioning itself as a global media and technology enterprise that embraces the Internet and has entered into partnerships with Switzerland's largest publishers, banks and high-tech companies. Innovation, not privatization, should be the first course for postal service reformers.

By Katrina vanden Heuvel | March 15, 2010; 11:33 AM ET

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* MARCH 16, 2010

2. Check Rates for Shipping

By JONNELLE MARTE

Planning to ship a package? You can compare rates at ShipGooder.com, a Web site that compiles prices from FedEx, DHL, the U.S. Postal Service and local messenger and delivery services.

Enter the weight of the package you want to ship, along with the "To" and "From" ZIP Codes or city names. Then, results are listed in a chart by price and shipping time: same day, next day, two days, three days and ground delivery.

Postal Service rates include Priority Mail and flat-rate boxes. FedEx options include rates from AdShip, which offers a discount for including an advertisement on the shipping label. (Currently, UPS rates aren't included in the comparison, except for some corporate customers.)

One recent comparison example: A two-day delivery of a five-pound package from New York to Miami would cost \$4.95 using the Postal Service's flat-rate box, \$14.95 through Priority Mail, \$25.61 via AdShip/FedEx and \$33.49 with regular FedEx.

ShipGooder.com also offers a courier directory, where you can search by ZIP Code, state or major cities in the U.S and Canada. A "rate search" button for each listing launches a sample search for local delivery of a 10-pound package.

Each rate is displayed next to a link for the Web site of the respective shipping company, where you can buy labels and make delivery arrangements.

Write to Jonnelle Marte at jonnelle.marte@wsj.com

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3. Census letter is waste

L.W. Shoaf
Lexington

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Editor: I got a letter the other day from the 2010 Census Bureau. I suspect most or all of you did also. When I opened the letter, I expected it to be the actual Census form. Instead, it was just a letter, stating that I would receive another mailing next week, with the census form in it.

So North Carolina has a population of about 9 million. The whole USA has a population of about 305 million. If you conservatively account four people to a household, that's 2.25 million letters mailed in N.C. and 76.25 million letters mailed in the USA. I don't know what bulk postal rates are, but if it's a quarter of the normal letter rate, say 10 cents, the cost gets pretty big: \$225,000 for NC and \$7.6 million for the USA - just in postage - paid for by the government (our tax dollars) for a redundant, pointless letter.

So here our country is, in the middle of the worst financial mess in 30 years, and waste like this goes on. Is it any wonder we're in the hole?

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4. Entrepreneur's Journal: Done Right, Mailers Can Get Results

Posted Mar 14th 2010 5:40PM by Tom TaulliTom Taulli RSS Feed
Filed under: Competitive Strategy, Marketing and Advertising, Small Business
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In my columns, I usually focus on new technologies that can help boost your business. But sometimes the old-fashioned approaches can still work quite well.

Yes, this includes mailers.

OK, it's true that people still throw away much of their mail (and, it even looks like the U.S. Postal Service will cut back on its deliveries). But if a mailer is done right, you can get a nice return on your investment.

Take a look at the case of Joan & Ed's Deli. In business for more than 30 years, the restaurant had built a list of 2,000 frequent customers and wanted to provide them gift certificates. By using a mailer, there was an impressive return of over 800% and the response rate was 11%.

"Until recently," said Mindy Sanderson, who is the marketing manager for Joan & Ed's Deli, "we almost ended our mailer program. The reason was that the response rate was low."

So what changed? Sanderson used a third-party provider: VistaPrint (VPRT).

With its online tools, she was able to easily design a professional mailer. Next, VistaPrint managed the mailing, using discounted rates.

"It can be time-consuming when putting together a mailer," Sanderson said. "But VistaPrint made things very easy. Just handling duplicate names and bad addresses was a big help."

Sanderson realized that she needed to design a mailer that would catch the attention of the person picking up the mail. To this end, she used strong colors and a clear message. "Using words like 'discount' and 'money off' can be effective," Sanderson said.

It's also important to give the mailer a personal touch. So, Sanderson put a picture of the husband-and-wife team of Joan & Ed's Deli on the mailer. "Having your logo on the mailer can also be helpful," she said.

So far, Sanderson has plans to have two mailers per year. Although, she wants to eventually expand things by using email offers and perhaps even social media. But, there is little doubt that traditional media can still make a difference.

Tom Taulli advises on business tax preparation and is also the author of a variety of books, including *The Complete M&A Handbook*. His website is at Taulli.com.

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5. Whistleblowers need protection

Fri, 19 Mar 2010

Columnists :: Citizen Nades - By R. Nadeswaran (Every Monday & Wednesday)
THE Royal Mail – the privatised entity which oversees the delivery of letters and parcels across the United Kingdom has set high standards for itself and its services. With the postal regulator, Postcomm, often breathing down its neck if services are not up to par, the company had to ensure standards are up to expectations. Basic delivery times had to be met and the company took steps to keep tabs on its efficiency. It enlisted an independent research firm which among others, got volunteers to send

letters to designated addresses in various parts of the country to "test" the efficiency of the system.

However, managers at the Royal Mail depot had learnt how to identify letters and parcels sent out by the volunteers who sent mail to each other. By intercepting the "test" letters, postal workers were able to hijack the performance assessment by making sure they were prioritised and delivered bang on time, giving an artificially high figure for the number of letters and parcels arriving on time. This in turn gave good "report cards" for their bosses and the rigged figures triggered huge bonuses for them. But this scheme came to an abrupt end when a whistleblower reported the ruse.

Across the Causeway, the Competition Commission of Singapore (CCS) has accused 14 electrical and building works companies of colluding to rig bids in order to land contracts. Investigations revealed that one of the parties would request one or more of the other cartel members to assist in providing a cover bid to increase the applicant's chances of winning the bid for providing electrical or building works for a particular project. The applicant would prepare the quotation for the supporter. There were also instances where the applicant would inform the supporter his quotation price so that the supporter would quote higher. CCS has uncovered such bids placed by these parties for numerous projects. But in a first, one of the companies involved will not be penalised as it blew the whistle on the others.

On the home front, Dr Selvaa Vathany Pillai blew the whistle on the goings-on at the Orang Asli Hospital in Gombak, which among others alleged of mismanagement resulting in poor health care. Instead of addressing the issues that were raised, the doctor got her marching orders – transferred to another hospital in Kedah. Why the transfer? Officially it's based on "needs for service in Kedah" but don't we know better?

While we must applaud the Port Klang Authority to be first the government agency to introduce such a policy and afford protection for the whistleblower, elsewhere, he or she becomes the victim. But what about other agencies which claim they are waiting for legislation to implement the policy?

A whistleblower is a person who raises a concern about a dangerous or illegal act or practice that he or she becomes aware of through his or her work. For example, one could come across health and safety risks, potential environmental problems, fraud or corruption. Often, he or she does not have a personal interest in the outcome of any investigation into the concern, but is simply trying to alert others, and is therefore said to be acting in the interests of the public.

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the system or the department. However, they may not express concerns because they feel that speaking up could put them into trouble. They may fear harassment or victimisation. Whistleblowing encourages and enables employees to raise serious concerns within the system rather than overlooking a problem or "blowing the whistle" outside.

The government has categorically stated that it is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In this way, we can expect

employees, and others who have serious concerns about any aspect of the government to come forward and voice those concerns. The government has acknowledged that the country is losing RM28 billion annually through "leakages". There must be perhaps thousands, if not hundreds who are aware of how the money is being siphoned. Why are they not speaking up? There's no protection for them because they could end up in the streets if they are found out. They should be protected and the way to go is by enacting legislation.

We have been talking about it for ages and government officials have been travelling the globe "studying" various models. We have spent enough time discussing the options and time has come for affirmative action.

R. Nadeswaran is heartened to know that three senior government officials were in New York recently to look at the whistleblowers' policy in the US. He is editor (special and investigative reporting at theSun and can be reached at: citizen-nades@thesundaily.com

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