

POSTAL NEWS

No. 79/2011

**Formulated by UNI-Japan Post in cooperation with UNI-Apro,
ASPEK Indonesia and SPPI**

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1. Turn Email Over to the U.S. Postal Service

If the USPS controlled the email system, there would be less fraud and more address and format standardization.

By John C. Dvorak

This idea first appeared in the 1980s when most people were doing email on CompuServe, MCI Mail and AT&T, along with a very few Arpanet users. Within a few short years, AOL became the dominant player, and finally the Web came along. Before you knew it, everyone was using email.

The USPS had early opportunities to jump in and probably take over the scene, which became chaotic over time and is now a mess. In fact, many people have abandoned email because of spam and other problems.

The biggest problem with email is fraud. Hardly a week goes by that I don't get some message telling me that my password needs fixing at some bank I never heard of. I assume that someone spams the entire country with this message, and a few of the actual customers of the small bank get the fake memo and stupidly follow its instructions. This should be a case for the FBI, but there is zero evidence that any law enforcement agency is doing much about this scheme or any number of other schemes. I would guess that there are hundreds of thousands of these things.

Some time back, I began collecting Nigerian scam letters, and I still follow the progress of the concept. The letters are sent to everyone in the known universe. They tell you that you somehow won, inherited, or were gifted millions of dollars by some long lost relative, an eccentric banker, or a dead widow who appreciated what you did in life.

If you don't get one like that, then you get one that is purportedly from a famous exile who is trying to flee the country with ill-gotten goods and wants you to help. For being so kind to help, you'll get a few million dollars as a fee. There is often a lot of creativity in these notes, and it has been documented that a lot of people have been fleeced in one way or another.

They get your money by insisting you pay some insurance costs or pay some bogus fees or whatever, and then when they get your confidential banking information, they drain your account.

If the USPS had oversight over all email in one way or another, these illegal schemes could be considered mail fraud and something might be done about them, since the requirements for prosecution are less stringent than what the FBI might need.

The USPS has always gotten a bad rap, but still provides one of the best physical mail systems in the world. For 44 cents, you can send an ounce of mail cross country to be hand delivered. I mean, just think about that process.

I think the opportunity for the USPS peaked when Hotmail appeared on the scene as a free email service. The Post Office should have cloned the idea as many others did. Or it could have partnered with Hotmail or perhaps Yahoo.

In the process, we all could have obtained standardized email addressing and formatting. Right now, there is no standard for email. You can kind of deconstruct some addresses, but if someone is using a weird nickname, then you'll never figure it out.

For corporate email, you might find 20 variations. These include firstnamelastname@, firstinitiallastname@, lastname@, firstname@, firstname.lastname@, lastnamefirstinitial@, etc.

At one point, before the Internet took over the place, the various features of X.400 and X.500 were being established within corporations to standardize many aspects of electronic messages, but this suddenly failed during the dotcom era.

I do not think it is too late for the USPS to introduce a spam-free email system for the public at large. Although, horrible stories about government intrusions have made the public paranoid, so the time might not be right. Over the years, though, the USPS has done a better job of not opening your mail than snoops within a corporation.

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2. Issa: Postal Service needs solutions other than a taxpayer-funded bailout

posted at 2:00 pm on June 24, 2011 by Tina Korbe

I like snail mail as much as the next person — actually, full disclosure, I prefer old-fashioned mail to virtually any other mode of communication, social media included — so I'm troubled at the \$8.5 billion loss the Postal Service faced last year and the \$8.3 billion and \$8.5 billion projected losses the Service is expected to sustain this year and next.

So is Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Oversight Committee. The Congressman today introduced a bill to reform the Postal Service and save taxpayer dollars. The Daily Caller reports:

The legislation does several things. It creates the Postal Service Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority, "which will have a broad

mandate to restructure the Postal Service and reduce costs in order to bring the institution back to fiscal solvency when the Postal Service goes into default to the Federal government. The Authority will be disbanded once USPS meets several benchmarks that ensure financial health.”

It would also create the Commission on Postal Reorganization, whose purpose would be to make recommendations to Congress on closures or consolidations with the goal of reducing USPS costs by \$2 billion a year. ...

[S]ome regulations would be removed to make it easier for the Postal Service to do things like close postal facilities that are not profitable.

Benefits and salaries for Postal Service employees would be cut, putting them more on the level of what private sector employees receive for similar jobs. Oversight estimates that such measures will save \$700 million dollars in the 2010 fiscal year, which ends in September.

Oversight estimates that the reforms will save the Postal Service \$6 billion dollars a year when all of them have been enacted.

Issa says these reforms will enable the Postal Service to function “more like a business” — always a sound plan. But a Postal Service statement said much of the bill will actually make it more difficult for the USPS to effect cost-saving changes. According to the statement, the bill provides for an additional \$10 billion in borrowing from the Federal Treasury and also creates additional layers of bureaucracy that will “slow [the USPS]’ progress at streamlining ... operations.”

On its face, the USPS statement is right: The Postal Service doesn’t need to borrow more money and bureaucracy is certainly the enemy of efficiency. But it’s difficult to see the connection between the statement and the actual bill. One provision of the bill in particular makes complete sense to me: The USPS absolutely should have the freedom to close non-profitable post offices. The details of Postal Service reform might still have to be teased out and tweaked, but this bill is a step in the right direction. As always, Issa’s vigilance in the service of taxpayers is much appreciated.

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