

BUSINESS MAILERS REVIEW

Monitoring the Postal Service, Private Carriers and Suppliers

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What A Few More Pennies Buy

The price of First Class Mail Forever stamps will increase from 47 cents to 49 cents. The price of Forever stamps last increased in 2014. The new prices become effective

Jan. 22. Stamp prices have consistently stayed with the average annual rate of inflation since the Postal Service was formed in 1971.

New prices represent a price increase in Priority Mail by 3.9% and an average increase of 3.3% in Priority Mail

Retail prices. "The average Shipping Services price change is 3.9 percent, which results in an average shipping price of less than \$5 per shipment across all shipping products," wrote the USPS in a press release announcing the proposal for new pricing for Shipping Services products.

Last year the Postal Service revised prices

for its Shipping Services for 2016, by raising shipping rates for Priority Mail by over 8%. The new price update for 2017, however, has no Shipping Services price increases for First-Class Package International Service, Priority Mail Express International, or Priority Mail International.

The new Mailing Services postage rate for the Priority Mail Flat Rate Box and Priority Mail Flat Rate Envelope will have small increases. (See chart.)

New prices for all Shipping Services products (as well as other services) are on the USPS website (<http://pe.usps.com/>) and the Postal Regulatory Commission website. See as well the Pitney Bowes postal rates website. <http://www.pitneybowes.com/content/pb/us/en/postal-information/rate-change-info.html>.

Products	Current	New
Small flat-rate box	\$ 6.80	\$ 7.15
Medium flat-rate box	13.45	13.6
Large flat-rate box	18.75	18.85
Large APO/FPO flat-rate box	16.75	17.35
Regular flat-rate envelope	6.45	6.65
Legal flat-rate envelope	6.45	6.95
Padded flat-rate envelope	6.8	7.2

APWU Picks Out the Staples

The plan to replace a post office clerk in many towns with a lower-wage, nonunion Staples employee ended Jan. 5 when USPS management informed the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) that the "approved shipper" program in Staples Office Supply stores will cease by the end of February 2017.

The announcement will end the union-initiated boycott of Staples. The "pilot" program offered several postal services at postal counters inside about eighty stores in California, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania starting back in 2014. Operations later expanded to about 500 of Staples' more than 1200 locations. The boycott proved effective, particularly after members of two teachers' unions—the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association—stopped buying school supplies at Staples.

The APWU also filed an unfair labor practices complaint, which the National Labor Relations Board

sustained. The APWU charged the Postal Service with failure to bargain over the contracting-out of union jobs. According to *The Washington Post*, cancelling of the Staples program resulted from a National Labor Relations Board order issued on Jan. 5. "The board adopted an administrative law judge's ruling from November. It 'requires the Postal Service to discontinue its retail relationship with Staples,' said Darlene Casey, a Postal Service spokeswoman. 'The Postal Service intends to comply with that order.' USPS could have appealed, but decided not to fight." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2017/01/05/usps-to-halt-retail-sales-at-staples-stores-after-union-complaints/>.

The initiative caused the release of some internal USPS documents that confirmed workers' concerns that the Staples pilot was only one step in a plan to further reduce workers' more financially attractive positions with the Postal Service. It appeared the agency was pursuing plans that

(Continued on Page 3)

Short Takes

Fortune reported on Jan. 12 that email has officially stepped out of the shadow of its ancestor—the U.S. Postal Service:

“Who’s the U.S. leader in distributing messages? A small company in Michigan, Alpha Mail Inc., has the cleverest name, but in terms of actual volume, we need to look at the latest numbers for email king MailChimp, versus the U.S. Postal Service. The contest isn’t even close anymore.”

“By MailChimp’s tally, its customers sent out 242 billion emails last year. That exceeds the Postal Service’s latest annual count for handling physical mail by 57%, or 88 billion pieces. What’s more, the Postal Service requires 493,381 career employees and another 131,732 temporary workers to get its job done. MailChimp’s systems are so automated that the Atlanta-based company gets by with slightly more than 500 employees, total.

* * *

“Over the past year, the volume of email sent by Mailchimp’s systems has climbed more than 20%. By contrast, the Postal Service’s volume ebbed about 0.5% in 2015 (the most recent publicly reported year) from a year earlier, and is down nearly 28% from the levels of 2006.” <http://www.forbes.com/sites/georgeanders/2017/01/12/mailchimp-vs-postal-service-a-new-alpha-mail-is-born/#5543b58a518d>.

* * *

Monkey see, monkey do. Email is not the same as the U.S. Mail. Online email services cannot deliver packages. According to *MassLive.com*: “The volume of packages sent through the U.S. Postal Service grew 14 percent last year and 12 percent the year before . . .”

“According to a news release, the postal service delivered 750 million packages this holiday season—a 12 percent increase in volume compared to the previous year. The postal service is the nation’s largest e-commerce deliverer, it said in a recent news release.” http://www.masslive.com/business-news/index.ssf/2017/01/springfield_post_office_expands_to_meet.html.

* * *

Federal News Radio’s website has audio of a new (December 2016) interview with Mark Dimondstein, president, American Postal Workers Union. As the site indicates: “Both the U.S. Postal Service and its labor

unions have been pleading with Congress for several years, hoping for a reform bill that would help return USPS to financial health. It hasn’t happened yet, but the start of a new Congress in January brings another chance for lawmakers to try. Mark Dimondstein, president of the American Postal Workers Union, which represents about 200-thousand postal employees [recently sat for an interview]. We recorded a wide-ranging interview earlier this week about the union’s priorities on Federal Drive with Tom Temin.” Listen at <http://federalnewsradio.com/federal-drive/2016/12/mark-dimondstein-new-direction-for-usps-in-new-administration/>.

* * *

Summer Gould, President of Eye/Comm, recently wrote: “Marketers continue to use direct mail in 2016 because it still leads in ROI. However, traditional direct mail marketing has changed dramatically. InfoTrends did a study on direct mail that found the following statistics: 66% of direct mail is opened, 82% of direct mail is read for a minute or more, 56% of consumers who responded to direct mail went online or visited the physical store, 62% of consumers who responded to direct mail in the past three months made a purchase, and over 84% reported that personalization made them more likely to open a direct mail piece.” <http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/01/10/five-ways-to-spice-up-your-direct-mail-marketing-in-2017/#6bead90769b6>.

* * *

Recall holiday goodwill as the returns come in for refunds or replacements by reading about how the nation’s truckers worked to spread holiday cheer in 2016. Trucking Moves America Forward, the industry-wide education and image movement, recently issued a press release on the charitable acts of trucking companies and truck drivers. One of many stories involves American Trucking Associations, who delivered and helped distribute more than 3500 wreaths to veterans’ graves in Arlington National Cemetery as part of Wreaths Across America. ATA’s Share the Road truck hauled the wreaths from Maine to Arlington, making stops along the way to participate in dozens of ceremonial events honoring America’s fallen heroes. ATA staff also donated preferred gift cards to Doorways for Women and Families, a local nonprofit targeting homelessness and domestic violence.

APWU Picks Out the Staples... (cont. from page 1)

might one day prepare for privatization of the business.

In addition to the boycott, the APWU drew attention to a now abandoned plan to merge Staples with Office Depot. At the conclusion of that effort, the Federal Trade Commission objected to the deal on grounds that the merger would impair competition in the B2B office supplies sector.

The APWU petitioned the USPS Office of Inspector General to investigate charges that Staples

undermined the USPS brand, among other injuries to the agency. As the *Post* reports: “APWU argued the Staples plan ‘would diminish the USPS brand by having mail processed in unsecured locations by workers who had little or no training’ in postal operations.”

“I never doubted that if we stayed the course, stuck together and kept the activist pressure on, we would win this fight,” said APWU President Mark Dimondstein in a statement.

Getting into the High-Flying Act

The Postal Service hopes to get into the drone delivery business. According to *ANewDomain.net*, “The United States Postal Service is looking to get into the drone delivery business. As part of its strategy to

challenge Amazon, the USPS is asking contractors to build a combination delivery truck and drone launcher by 2017.” <http://anewdomain.net/mailman-won-usps-plans-delivery-truck-drone-launcher/>.

Knowledge Driving New Fleet

Federal Times reports the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General is looking for a supplier experienced in handling large fleet operations and maintenance. For the right price, a firm fixed-price contract will be awarded for a study benchmarking best practices to support technologies and performance measures benefiting the Postal Service’s 214,933 delivery, transport and administrative vehicles.

The supplier will use fleet data and vehicle and inventory management programs to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of Postal Service systems in place to deliver safe, dependable and economical vehicle performance.

According to the article: “The contract holder will identify internal and external resources to support objectives, brief the Postal Service OIG on methodologies for completing the task order, document the current state and potential cost-saving opportunities of maintenance facilities, and deliver reports on whether management practices and performance measures are aligned with industry standards for current operations and can achieve best practices for the future.” Additional information can be found at *FedBizOpps.gov*. <http://www.federaltimes.com/articles/postal-service-releases-rfp-for-benchmarking-fleet-maintenance>.

Delivering Meals and Mail

The Architect’s Newspaper reports that students from the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts and the Brown School at the Washington University in St. Louis recently won the UrbanSOS: Fair Share Competition. The competition, led by AECOM and the Van Alen Institute, asked entrants to design for the sharing economy while addressing critical urban issues.

The students’ winning submission called for development of a program to be called “First Class Meal.” The students proposed that underutilized United States Postal Service (USPS) post offices be converted “into a resource for storing and redistributing surplus food. The proposal calls for a pairing of mobile technology with the distribution network of the USPS.”

“We want to connect underutilized capacity within the postal system—building space, trucks and human capital resources—with the desire for increased reach and food storage capacity within food banks and agen-

cies,” architecture and urban design master’s candidate Anu Samarakkiva explained in a press release. The project “has the potential to reinvigorate the USPS and more strongly define its role as a community resource while strengthening the existing network of community food providers.”

Students used the Market Station Post office in downtown Los Angeles to take advantage of locally sustainable food sources. The plan matched nonprofits, who lack storage space and distribution capabilities, with post offices facing closure or consolidation in the near future.

The proposal succeeded in a field of eighty teams from thirty-one countries. The Washington University team received a \$7,500 prize along with up to \$25,000 in cash and in-kind staff support for implementing the proposal. <https://archpaper.com/2017/01/urbansos-competition-winners/>.

Drones' Death Star

Amazon has a plan to protect its drones once they start delivering packages. In 2014, Amazon filed for a patent approved Dec. 20, 2016, for a tool that could prevent jamming or hacking of drones by providing a backup communications interface that could be used if the primary system is compromised.

As a second line of defense, the primary and backup comms systems could take control of the drone, a “mesh network” of multiple unmanned autonomous vehicles (UAVs) could help assess the situation, and they can assist the hacked drone to safety.

By relaying data between multiple drones with an array of sensors like directional antennas and optical detectors, Amazon also expects to identify concerns like a UAV leaving its charted course or one cruising at

altitudes above or below that course.

The network would dispatch a secondary UAV to observe and permit pilots to transmit new instructions to the UAV.

NextGov.com wrote: “In the event a drone is hit and starts to fall from the sky, it may ‘deploy a protective device such as an airbag, foam, parachute, bumper and so forth,’ which will absorb the impact, according to the patent. It could also begin ‘autorotation of one or more rotors’ to take the blow out of a crash landing.” http://www.nextgov.com/cybersecurity/2016/12/amazon-has-plan-defend-drones-hackers-and-bow-and-arrow-wielding-troublemakers/134219/?oref=nextgov_cybersecurity.

All the PRC News

The Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) released its Annual Report to the President and Congress providing an account of the activities undertaken by the PRC during 2016 on Jan. 11. Under the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 (PAEA), the PRC is required to address in its report information concerning the operations of the PRC, including the extent to which regulations are achieving the rate setting objectives of the PAEA. The law also requires the PRC to include an estimate of the costs incurred by the Postal Service to provide certain services that the Postal Service would not otherwise have provided except for the requirements of the law.

The report details the many accomplishments of the PRC of the past year. Chairman Robert Taub said, “We will build upon the agency’s strong foundation of accomplishments for even further milestones in staff achievement, the timeliness and quality of work products, and the efficiency and effectiveness of agency operations.” As this Annual Report is the first one issued to the new Congress and Administration, Chairman Taub also noted that “the Commission looks forward to a productive dialogue on how to ensure a vital and efficient universal mail system for years to come.”

Upcoming Agenda

The most critical task to be completed this year is to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the current system for regulating rates and classes for Market Dominant products. The PAEA mandates this important review and requires the PRC to determine whether the Postal Service is achieving the law’s objectives. If the PRC finds that the objectives are not being met, it has the authority to either propose rules that modify the system or adopt an alternative system to achieve the objectives.

Recognizing the effect the outcome of the review may have on the Postal Service’s stressed financial condition, the PRC has set an aggressive agenda to complete its review without compromising the integrity of the process or the outcome. Chairman Taub states the PRC will work diligently to complete this task along with its other responsibilities of reviewing and approving Postal Service rates, adjudicating formal and informal complaints, examining proposals for new products and services, and ensuring the Postal Service complies with title 39 of the United States Code.

Recent Accomplishments

The PRC published four major reports in FY 2016:

- The Annual Report to the President and Congress (Annual Report) described the PRC’s accomplishments and activities as the regulator of the Postal Service.
- The Annual Compliance Determination (ACD) reviewed the Postal Service’s compliance with pricing and service standards. See further discussion below.
- The Analysis of Postal Service Financial Results and 10-K Statement for Fiscal Year 2015 provided an in-depth analysis of the Postal Service’s financial condition.
- The Review of Postal Service FY 2015 Performance Report and FY 2016 Performance Plan evaluated whether the Postal Service met its performance goals as required under 39 U.S.C. § 3653(d). On May 4, 2016, the PRC issued its Analysis of the Postal Service’s FY 2015 Annual Performance Report and FY 2016 Performance Plan. The PRC provided an in-depth analysis of the Postal Service’s four perfor-

mance goals: Deliver High-Quality Services, Provide Excellent Customer Experiences, Ensure a Safe Workplace and Engaged Workforce, and Sustain Controllable Income. It found that the FY 2015 Annual Performance Report and FY 2016 Performance Plan complied with most statutory requirements. Also, the PRC found that in FY 2015, the Postal Service partially met the Sustain Controllable Income performance goal, but did not meet the other three goals.

- In early FY 2017, the PRC also issued the Section 701 Report Analysis of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006, recommending to the President and Congress legislation and other ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the United States postal laws. This report was mandated by the statute, and discuss how well the PAEA is operating and make recommendations for legislation or other measures necessary to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Nation's postal laws. The PRC's report stressed the need to address the volatile financial condition of the Postal Service.

The PRC also over several rate and classification cases in FY 2016, including:

- Approving the Postal Service's planned removal of the exigent surcharge, including:

The PRC issued several orders approving classification changes. It:

- Approving material Mail Classification Schedule (MCS) changes related to Priority Mail International Flat Rate Envelopes and Small Flat Rate Boxes.

The PRC considered issues related to service performance measurement and reporting in two key dockets. It:

- Hosted two off-the-record technical conferences to discuss the Postal Service's statistical design plan for internal service performance measurement. This case remains open pending the Postal Service's filing of more information.
- Issued a final order enhancing the reporting requirement of service performance measurement data that requires the Postal Service to regularly provide descriptions of current methodologies used to verify accuracy, reliability, and representativeness of data for each measurement system.

The PRC conducted several rulemakings related to rate and costing issues:

- Currently pending before the PRC are proposed rules for regulating mail preparation changes that affect the price cap.
- The PRC also considered sixteen petitions proposing to change various accepted analytical principles. Proposals were submitted by the United Parcel Service, Inc., the

Postal Service, and other interested parties.

The PRC considered several postal rate adjustment and MCS requests by the Postal Service for domestic and international Competitive products.

The PRC approved 281 Negotiated Service Agreements (NSAs) for Competitive products (186 domestic, 95 international).

PRC proceedings included the following:

- Denied a Postal Service request to add Round-Trip Mailer to the Competitive product list.
- Dismissed a complaint by the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) alleging that the Postal Service failed to adhere to the service standards established as a result of the Mail Processing Network Rationalization initiative. APWU filed a petition for review before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia which was recently denied.
- Issued an order resolving issues on remand concerning a Postal Service request to remove Return Receipt for Merchandise Service from the list of Special Services in the MCS.

Other PRC activities included, but were not limited to:

- Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and the U.S. House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.
- The development of the Commission's five-year Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2017-2022.

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan outlines the agency's vision to promote a robust universal mail system through objective, accurate, and timely regulatory analyses and decisions. Over the next five years, the PRC will focus its activities on the following four strategic goals:

Goal 1: Deliver accurate and objective analyses and decisions to ensure transparency and accountability of the Postal Service.

Goal 2: Actively engage with Congress and stakeholders in support of a dynamic postal system.

Goal 3: Provide an optimal internal infrastructure to support management of priorities, workload, and emerging requirements.

Goal 4: Recruit, develop, and retain a diverse, high-performing workforce.

FY 2016 ACD

On Mar. 28, 2016, the PRC issued the FY 2015 ACD and made several principal findings and directives.

First, when reviewing Market Dominant products for compliance with statutory pricing policies, the

PRC found that twenty-four workshare discounts did not comply with 39 U.S.C. § 3622(e), which prohibits workshare discounts from exceeding avoided costs except under specific circumstances. The PRC directed the Postal Service to either align workshare discounts with avoided costs during the next Market Dominant price adjustment or specify an applicable statutory exception.

Second, the PRC found that for the Periodicals class, the Postal Service failed to meaningfully address the FY 2014 ACD directives to report on the cost and contribution impact of worksharing incentives offered for 5-Digit and Carrier Route presortation and progress in improving pricing efficiency. The PRC directed the Postal Service to provide further information within 120 days after the FY 2015 ACD was issued.

Third, the PRC identified seven Market Dominant products that did not generate sufficient revenues to cover their attributable costs: Periodicals In-County, Periodicals Outside County, Standard Mail Flats, Standard Parcels, Media Mail/Library Mail, Inbound Letter Post, and Stamp Fulfillment Services. The PRC directed the Postal Service to take appropriate action for some products.

Fourth, the PRC found that six Competitive products did not cover their attributable costs as required by 39 U.S.C. § 3633(a)(2). The PRC directed the Postal Service to take corrective action for each product found out of compliance. Such corrective action was directed to the specific circumstances surrounding the non-compliance and included amending or terminating contracts, reporting on the status of contracts or negotiations, and identifying obstacles to exiting or renegotiating international agreements.

Fifth, the PRC found that most products failed to meet their service performance targets for FY 2015. It also found that the Postal Service's plans to improve service performance results were inadequate to address service performance issues. The PRC directed the Postal Service to file additional service performance information within 120 days after the FY 2015 ACD was issued.

Sixth, the PRC discussed the recent dramatic decline of service performance for First-Class Mail Single-Piece Letters/Postcards with a 3-5-Day service standard. As a result, the PRC determined that First-Class Mail Single-Piece Letters/Postcards were not in compliance. It directed the Postal Service to improve service for this product in FY 2016 and provide a detailed, comprehensive plan for improving

service performance. It required the Postal Service to explain in the FY 2016 ACR specific efforts to improve service performance for this product. It directed the Postal Service to provide certain information disaggregated by district level and service standard.

Seventh, the PRC discussed the Postal Service's long term difficulties processing and delivering flats in a timely and cost effective manner. It found that due to the lack of comprehensive data, the Postal Service cannot measure the impact or success of initiatives designed to improve flats cost and service issues. Consequently, the PRC directed the Postal Service to submit a report on flats issues and provide further information regarding options for improving cost and service efficiency. This report was required to quantify the main drivers of significant and ongoing service failures and cost shortfalls and include a plan to address each of the main drivers.

PRC Commissioners

The PRC is composed of five commissioners, each of whom is appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, for a term of six years. A commissioner may continue to serve after the expiration of his or her term until a successor is confirmed, except that a commissioner may not continue to serve for more than one year after the date on which his or her term would have otherwise expired. Not more than three of the commissioners may be adherents of the same political party.

Current commissioners include:

- Mr. Taub, who was designated Chairman upon his reappointment as a commissioner on Dec. 12, 2016, for a second term, following his nomination by President Barack Obama and confirmation by the United States Senate. At the time of his designation and reappointment, he had been serving as acting chairman since Dec. 4, 2014.
- Ms. Nancy Langley was reappointed as a commissioner on December 10, 2014. She now serves as the PRC's Vice Chairman. Her term expires Nov. 22, 2018. She was first appointed as a commissioner on June 6, 2008; that term expired on Nov. 22, 2013. She also served as the PRC's vice chairman from October 2008 to October 2009, January to December 2012, and January to December 2016.
- Mr. Mark Acton was appointed as a commissioner on Aug. 3, 2006; his term expired on Oct. 14, 2016. He served as PRC vice chairman from 2007 to 2008, 2011 to 2012, and 2014 to 2015, and as special assistant to

former Postal Rate Commission Chairman George Omas.

- Mr. Tony Hammond was reappointed as a commissioner on Dec. 10, 2014, and has been elected to three separate terms as vice chairman during his tenure. His

term expires Oct. 14, 2018.

- At this time there is one vacancy on the PRC.

Review the full Annual Report at <http://www.prc.gov/docs/98/98653/2016%20Annual%20Report%20Final.pdf>.

eInduction Rulemaking Comments Sought

On Jan. 9, the Postal Service published a proposed rule in the Federal Register for the electronic induction (eInduction(R)) option. In it, the Postal Service proposes to revise Mailing Standards of the United States Postal Service, Domestic Mail Manual (DMM(R)) to add an option to streamline the processing of drop shipments and expedited plant load mailings.

The Electronic Induction (eInduction) option is a process that streamlines the preparation and induction (how and where the mail physically enters the Postal Service mailstream) of drop shipments and expedited plant load mailings. eInduction links scans of Intelligent Mail container barcodes (IMcb) to the electronic documentation (eDoc) information, allowing the Postal Service to verify that postage was paid prior to accepting a mailer shipped container. eInduction eliminates the need for paper PS Forms 8125, 8125-CD, and 8017, and manual reconciliation at the entry facility. Correct postage

payment is verified both at the entry facility and during post-induction processing in PostalOne!.

Mailers who would like to use the eInduction option must meet eligibility requirements and request authorization by contacting the Facility Access Shipping Tracking, (FAST)(R) Helpdesk. Business Mailer Support will provide final authorization. Additional information, including information regarding verification and associated assessments, is provided in Publication 6850, Publication for Streamlined Mail Acceptance for Letters and Flats, available at <https://postalpro.usps.com>.

The proposed rule is published in volume 82 of the *Federal Register*, page 2293.

Mail or deliver written comments to the manager, Product Classification, U.S. Postal Service, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW., Room 4446, Washington, DC 20260-5015. If sending comments by email, include the name and address of the commenter and send to ProductClassification@usps.gov, with a subject line of "eInduction Option." Faxed comments are not accepted.

A Few Bad Apples

The spate of reports of mail related crimes continues:

In Macomb, Mich., a USPS carrier is accused of stealing more than \$69,000 in checks from the mail, according to a federal criminal complaint. That was “688 pieces of mail, 99 checks valued at about \$69,496 and 15 debit/credit/gift cards over the last few months.” According to local news reports, “The investigation began in November when Macomb County Sheriff’s responded to a call that a construction worker discovered mail in a portable toilet. According to the complaint, [the carrier] was responsible for the delivery of the mail to the toilet. Also, the complaint states that USPS management had received a large number of complaints of theft and non-delivery of mail on [the carrier]’s routes.” <http://www.wxyz.com/news/postal-carrier-accused-of-stealing-69000-from-cards-in-macomb-towship>.

Last week, a New York City postal worker was accused of stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash and gifts from the mail, including a child’s

letter to Santa. “According to the criminal complaint, [the worker] admitted that she stole roughly \$1,200 every week in cash, gift cards, and lottery tickets over the past four years, while working at the city’s main processing center on West 34th Street. [Her] alleged scam came to an abrupt halt when the postal inspector tracked purchases made with a stolen Amazon gift card to her home in Jamaica, Queens.” The same report states that: “In 2015, USPS agents arrested 493 employees on charges of mail theft.” <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2017/01/11/post-office-stealing/>.

In a West Bridgewater, Mass. Neighborhood, numerous residents had their mailboxes broken into by someone searching for money and other valuables. Residents reported their mailboxes were left open with some mail strewn on the ground. Police believe the thefts were made by the same person or persons and they advised residents to collect mail before the evening hours as many mailboxes were broken into after dark. <http://www.wcvb.com/article/usps-investigates-mailbox-thefts-in-west-bridgewater/8589714>.

Briefs

Shippo, an API platform for shipping, announced last week that it is the first to launch USPS ePostage for general access. Through USPS' new ePostage program, Shippo enables any business to access USPS shipping services online. This is the first license of this type issued since 1999, marking an important step for USPS and Shippo as they drive innovation in shipping for ecommerce businesses, marketplaces and platforms globally.

Shippo works with more than 10,000 businesses including fast-growing, venture-backed companies such as Mercari, Weebly, GoDaddy, Dia&Co and GOAT to help them solve shipping challenges and optimize their operations. The partnership represents a major growth opportunity for USPS as they take advantage of Shippo's technology to onboard more businesses directly to USPS with a fast and efficient method. Currently, established marketplaces such as Amazon and Etsy rely on ePostage for members of their own communities. <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/shippo-introduces-general-access-usps-140000126.html>.

POLITICO reported in its Jan. 3 newsletter that the 2016 presidential election changed the placement of political ads. “[A] new analysis from Borrell Associates, which found that last year’s national statewide and local elections generated a combined \$9.8 billion in ad spend, a 4.6 percent increase over 2012’s \$9.4 billion total. While broadcast TV once again had the biggest piece of the pie by far—with \$4.4 billion, down from \$5.5 billion in 2012—its share dropped to 44.7 percent from 57.9 percent four years ago, while digital media spending increased nearly eightfold, from a 1.7 percent share in 2012 (\$159.2 million) to 14.4 percent in 2016 (\$1.4 billion). The numbers for newspapers told a familiar

story: \$658.3 million/6.7 percent, down from \$680.7 million/7.2 percent in 2012. During the 2008 election season, newspapers commanded 24.7 percent of the political ad spend.”

Drones usually get attention for their potential service in delivering packages to residences and some businesses. Drones also offer newspapers a new tool for conveying in a few seconds of video or a few snapshots, the size and scope of devastation following catastrophes (man- or nature-made). New Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules on piloting of drones have paved the skies for newsgathering.

There’s now a name for the drone’s contribution to journalism—dronalism. As discussed by Allen Etzler in *News Media Alliance*, Matthew Waite, founder of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Drone Journalism Lab “recently held a drone journalism bootcamp on campus involving dozens of journalists from metro daily newspapers, weekly newspapers and community radio stations.”

Not everyone can succeed at dronalism. “Because the [FAA] test isn’t something you can just bop on down to your local airport and take, I think that’s going to make it a specialty, at least for a while,” Waite said. “Not everyone in a newsroom is cut out to pilot a flying robot around, same as some people aren’t cut out to be data journalists or the old photographer versus writer divide.”

Waite knows incorporating drones into day-to-day journalism will take some time, and will involve an adjustment period.” Waite says: “But I see the real future of drones as data journalism tools, used to map things and visualize environments. And that field is wide open right now.” <https://www.newsmediaalliance.org/technology-use-drones-journalism/>.

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Cheryl Kettler, Editor 773-580-4165

Kathy Thorne, Publisher 301-528-7777

Website: www.businessmailersreview.com

Editorial email: support@pnmsi.com

Editorial address: PO Box 335

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