4 Benefits of USPS' Intelligent Mail Indicia (IMI)

By Paul Johnson, President CMS – Complete Mailing Solutions

Did you know that once you download postage onto your meter it becomes the property of the USPS? The Postal Service is dedicated to helping you get the most out of your postage meter.

To improve customer service, ensure mail flow is more efficient and cost-effective as well as data secure, the USPS is now requiring the use of the next generation mailing indicia – the Intelligent Mail Indicia (IMI) – as new mailing systems are introduced into the marketplace.

The Old Standard

Since 2000, the USPS utilized an Information Based Indicia (IBI) on metered mail. The Information4-Based Indicia is a 2-dimensional barcode plus human-readable information. The barcode data contains information such as the amount of postage, origin zip code, destination,mail class, weight, and confirmation/tracking numbers:

Hasler
09/06/2006
US POSTAGE

First class mail
Express
$00.00º

ZIP 95070
011D11600000 Old IBI indicia

While this was state-of-the-art in its day, IBI technology is no longer adequate. One of its weaknesses is that when a mail machine user enters a specific postage amount, the Service Class is removed, which hampers the USPS from efficiently managing the movement of mail.

In addition, postage meters were required to connect with the USPS servers to download usage information every 90 days. This made it difficult for the USPS to effectively manage mail flow and identify mailing trends in a timely or effective manner.

The New Standard

The next generation of metered technology was introduced into the marketplace in 2015 – the **Intelligent Mail Indicia** (IMI). However, it has not been required to date, but will be with all new mailing equipment developed. The IMI indicia:

1. Captures significantly more data – in addition to information captured with the IBI indicia, the new IMI indicia also includes the type of mailing system and mail service used.
2. Gives the Post Office more real-time data on which to manage their logistics, identify mailing trends and optimize the movement of mail through the system.
3. Ensures correct postage is used – Service Classes are required when using the IMI indicia.

NEOPOST
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
$000.48 º
04/04/2016 ZIP 06460
043M31205006
US POSTAGE
New IMI Indicia

The USPS now **requires** that all new mailing systems meet the IMI standards as they are introduced into the market.

IMI Benefits & Best Practices

Did You Know?

Mail machine users get a 10% discount on First-Class postage vs. using stamps.

1.Accurate Postage

Mailing system users have experienced mail or packages that are returned for insufficient postage.   Conversely, they have placed too much postage for the service class used. With the new IMI, a Service Class is required for all mail and postage will automatically be calculated. No more manual entry of incorrect postage amounts, ensuring the correct postage is used.

Best Practice: Utilizing IMI technology will save money and help avoid mail being returned. This will ensure important mail (e.g., invoices, statements, etc.) reaches its destination in a timely manner, which improves cash-flow and customer satisfaction.

Did You Know?

24/7 connectivity, ensures Rate Changes are automatically downloaded. & you always use the correct postage!

2. More Current Information

Mailing systems using Intelligent Mail Indicia are mandated by the USPS to connect to the manufacturer's servers every 72 hours (vs. every 90 days for the old IBI). This ensures that the USPS receives frequent postage use information on which to manage mail flow. It also ensures that equipment is automatically kept up to date with rate changes and other software improvements. If a connection is not made every 72 hours, the meter will be locked out.

Best Practice: Your meter must have a constant Internet connection via a dedicated LAN line to avoid meter lockouts.

Did You Know?

PIN & Dept. Codes keep unauthorized people from using your postage meter.

3. <u>Enhanced Security</u>

The new IMI indicia meets the standards of the Federal Information Processing for data encryption. This ensures that information is transmitted securely to and from the postage meter. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has announced that IBI technology no longer meets its standard of security.

Best practice: Use Pin #'s and department codes to keep unauthorized people from using your postage meter and to better track who is using postage in your company.

4. <u>Faster, Consistent Connectivity</u>

Some mailers still use dedicated phone lines for their postage meters. These Dial-up connections cannot be used with the IMI due to the amount of data being transmitted and the speed of transmission. Only dedicated LAN connections can be used, eliminating the need to check to see if the meter is hooked up to an internet connection as well as the expense of a dedicated phone line.

Best practice: URIs, along with their respective IP addresses, should be added as exceptions (whitelisted) if firewall rules currently block any sites of unknown origin.

Did You Know?

FP and Pitney Bowes say their machines are IMI compliant but are not using it.

Neopost is the first to launch a mail machine using the new IMI indicia. Their new iX-3 is the first mailing system enabled with IMI, with additional models being introduced in early 2020. Take a look at this easy-to-use option that makes IMI enhancements available to small businesses. It will optimize your postage and mailing-related expenditures.