

**Do You Know Where Your Mail Is?
International Registered Return Receipt Department.**

What is the best way, short of express mail at \$30 and up per piece, to send mail overseas and be reasonably sure of its arrival? An experiment we ran from the International Department last year shows that it is probably NOT Registered Return Receipt Requested (RR). You know, the green cards that go out glued to the letters, and, supposedly, come back to you signed by the addressee and stamped by the delivering postal system. If the cards don't come back, the piece is supposed to come back, or be traceable. By the way, if these letters at \$9.50 apiece don't get there, why do you think your less expensive mail is getting there?

Look at the results of our mailing:

Number Sent	Signed card	Unsigned card	Nixies	Disappeared
36	7+1	15	4	9
100%	22%	42%	11%	25%

On May 17, 2002 we dispatched 36 RR letters to member companies in 24 countries around the world, developing and developed countries both. Total postage was \$342. The package included a membership renewal offer and a fax-back form to renew and/or tell us about what services they sought. Simultaneously, we sent 44 first class airmail letters to other companies in the same countries. We had done a telephone address check the week before mailing. We have no way of confirming how many of the first class letters were delivered, but it was at least 6 (14%), since we received faxes from that number of members.

Delivery results for the RR's? Well, it's hard to say. We got real, true, confirmed receipt cards, signed by the recipients and stamped by the delivering posts for only 7 (19%) of our letters. In addition, we got a fax from one addressee, although no card. So we're counting him confirmed, and a confirmed delivery rate of 22%. OK, 22% confirmed delivery at \$9.50 each against 14%-confirmed delivery at \$0.76 each. Hmmm. And we were being generous with one of those RR's, even though we didn't get what we paid for-signed confirmation by postal card.

You see, for first class all I pay for is delivery. Or at least presumed delivery. With RR I pay for a tracking system that is supposed to guarantee me delivery or a nixie, and in the case of delivery a proof of delivery which is (1) signed by the addressee, and (2) stamped by the receiving post. Moreover, I am paying for the promise of a productive search to find my piece if I don't get confirmation or a nixie. I am paying about \$8.70 per piece for these services.

Given what I paid for, did I get value for my money? We got 15 (42%) cards back unsigned and unstamped by the receiving post, but bearing the USPS inbound bar code for our address. But, there was no indication on the cards that the letters ever got past the foreign country's inbound sort facility. (In fact, no indication they ever got out of

the US, but let's give the USPS the benefit of the doubt on that issue.) Did the letters get there, like we paid for? Or, did the receiving station, or the intermediate sort facility, or the letter carrier, just tear off the green card and send it back, discarding our letter? We don't know. We received no faxes, or (alas) renewals, from those addressees. In short, on 42% of our letters, we got no better, reliable confirmation of delivery for \$9.50 than we'd get for \$0.75. On these 15 letters, I've paid an extra \$8.75, or \$131.25, for something I didn't get.

What about the letters whose cards did not return? I also paid for them to be traceable. We persevered on these 9 (25%) disappeared letters and filed the form required to request a search for each of our articles.¹ Of these, we received confirmation of: (1) delivery of one to France (but no card ever came); (2) confirmation that the receiving post had no record of our letter in 2 cases (Argentina and China, but no nixies ever came), and; (3) no response whatsoever on our letters of enquiry for letters to Brazil, France, Israel, and Trinidad. In short, 8 (22%) of our letters at \$9.50 each had disappeared without a trace. That is to say, we paid \$76 and did not get what we paid for, delivery or a nixie, confirmed in either case.

No valid confirmation on 24 pieces – we've been cheated out of \$131.25. No effective tracing system, we've been cheated out of \$76.

Or, put another way, on 24 of 36 pieces, I have received no verifiable proof of performance by the international postal system of the promise it made to me for \$9.50 per piece (36 mailed less 7 proved delivered, 4 nixies, one confirmed delivered by trace). I've been cheated out of the difference between \$9.50 and \$0.75, or \$210 on my total postage paid of \$342. I've been cheated out of 2/3rds of what I paid.

On this record, if the postal systems were selling a consumer product, or providing a consumer service, they'd be the subject of intense governmental investigation and Federal Trade Commission action, or action by the equivalent consumer protection body in other countries. This is absolutely outrageous.

Let us be clear. Bulk mailers are not being hurt by the failure of this product. (But given the treatment of this class of mail, you have to wonder what percentage of your bulk mail makes it past the primary sort, or the regional sort, or to the doorstep.) But businesses use this service for critical messages that aren't over-night critical. Families use this service for important documents the way business uses the *very* expensive express mail. It is the unknowing retail customer, business or consumer, who is getting cheated by this system. How many immigrants in the US are sending postal money orders back to their homes by this means? How much of their money is being lost, or delayed in delivery to support their families?

And let us also be clear that this is only partially the fault of the USPS. They are in an international system that has no enforcement mechanism. If the postal system of

¹ . This form is in triplicate, self-carboning paper, and the system has not seen fit to turn it into a digital form.

another country is not competent or willing to administer the RR system, to get a signature, or to return the card, or to respond to the enquiry letter of the USPS) the USPS has no authority to make them change.

But, the USPS could demand stronger administrative efforts in other countries. It could be sitting down periodically with these countries and telling them where the system is failing, and demanding they improve systems and assure the system will deliver value. And the USPS could be reporting back to the mailing public on its success.

But (and here is what we suspect is the real issue), we are VERY suspicious of the promotion by ALL postal systems of Express mail. Express mail products are very, very expensive. Our mailing would have cost on average almost \$60 MORE per piece than RR. But for \$60 I would get, but only in some countries, true electronic track and trace through bar codes. The green card system of RR was supposed to be the non-digital/non-electronic equivalent of that, bar codable in many cases, by the way. Why have the postal systems *all together* managed to make a \$9.50 product NOT work, but are spending massive amounts of money and time and talent to make a \$70 product work? Sure seems like a good question for a regulator or a legislator to examine. Or for the private sector to raise at the Universal Postal Union.

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