



Taking the “Snail” Out of “Snail Mail”: Getting It There – and Faster



If you were asked to think about how technology has improved written communications, most likely e-mail would be the first thing that comes to mind. “Regular” mail is not going away anytime soon, however, so it only makes sense that the United States Postal Service (USPS) would also make use of technology to improve the speed and accuracy of delivering correspondence.

The post office uses optical character recognition (OCR) and barcode technology to automate mail sorting. In order to take advantage of this technology, the sender must prepare an “automation readable mailpiece,” defined as “one that contains an accurate, correctly formatted, complete address or ZIP+4 POSTNET barcode and is readable on an

OCR and/or a barcode sorter (BCS).”

What does that all mean? Below, Point explores some key aspects of a true automation readable mailpiece.

Location

Every element of the mailpiece has a designated location on the envelope, with the address required to appear in the “OCR read area.” This location, specified in *Publication 25: Designing Letter and Reply Mail*, varies depending on the dimensions and type of the mailpiece.

If you use window envelopes, there are also rules as to where the address needs to appear within the window. When using an address by itself, you need to give at least 1/8” clearance on each side. With a POSTNET barcode (appearing above the address), there must be at least 1/8” clearance on the left and right sides of the address and a 1/4” below the address, above the barcode, and between the address and barcode.

Text Formatting

For best results with OCR, the text that appears in the address should be “clean.” The USPS offers the following recommendations for formatting text:

- Use dark text on a white (preferred) or very light colored background to ensure high contrast.

- Select a sans serif font, such as Helvetica or Arial.
- Set the font size to 10-12 points.
- Left align all text.
- Use all uppercase letters.
- Do not use bold or italics.

Abbreviations

The USPS permits the use of abbreviations in the delivery address and, in the case of the street suffix (road, avenue, drive, etc.) and the state, prefers them. Address lines cannot exceed 40 characters each, so abbreviations are sometimes necessary.

Accepted abbreviations are listed in *Publication 28: Postal Addressing Standards*. Abbreviations are provided for street suffixes, states/possessions, geographic directionals, units (apartment, room, suite, etc.), and common words in business/firm/organization names.

Though a period after the abbreviation is allowed, it is not preferred. The USPS encourages omission of all punctuation from the delivery address, with the exception of the hyphen in the ZIP+4 code.

Miscellaneous Standards

Here are a few more important standards not covered by the above categories:

- Address lines should contain no more than eight (8) words each.
- “Dual addresses” (such as a street address *and* a post office box number) should be avoided. Post office boxes, when used, eliminate the need for a street address.
- Do not “overload” the address. One or two addressee lines with a single delivery address line meets postal standards. Anything in excess does not.

For More Information...

While this article covers much of the basics of proper addressing, it should not be considered a complete guide. Get more information from these USPS web pages:

Basic Standards for All Mail Services: Addressing
<http://pe.usps.com/text/qsg300/Q602.htm>

A Customer's Guide to Mailing: Addressing Your Mail
<http://pe.usps.com/text/dmm100/addressing.htm>

Publication 25: Designing Letter and Reply Mail
<http://pe.usps.gov/text/Pub25/Pub25.htm>

Publication 28: Postal Addressing Standards
<http://pe.usps.gov/text/pub28/welcome.htm>



Calendar of Events

Date(s)	Event	Location
Nov. 9	MAAO Annual Meeting	Lake Pearl Luciano's 299 Creek Street Wrentham, MA
Dec. 13	MCTA Holiday Meeting	Holy Cross College 1 College Street Worcester, MA

Common Flag Errors and How to Fix Them

With so many flags available in Point's collection software, it is little wonder that their intended purpose is sometimes a point of confusion. Lately, we have been seeing some flag errors involving the "R" flag. Here's how to fix them.

Flag Error #1: Applying the "R" flag to mark motor vehicle accounts at the Registry of Motor Vehicles.

Explanation: The "R" does stand for "Registry," but not "of Motor Vehicles." This code is used during the tax title process to print an Instrument of Taking and file it with the Registry of Deeds. To mark an account at the Registry of Motor Vehicles, the "MK" flag should be used instead.

Fix: The deputy collector will have to recode the items at the time of their posting. Inform the deputy collector which items need correcting.

Flag Error #2: Changing the penalty amount associated with the "R" flag from "0.00" (the default) to "20.00".

Explanation: Since motor vehicles accounts are supposed to be penalized \$20.00 when marked at the Registry, those who were using the "R" flag for marking may have also changed the associated penalty amount. However, the Instrument of Taking has no preset penalty and the "R" flag is simply used as a marker to generate that document. Changing the penalty amount meant that anyone using the "R" flag properly in the system would inadvertently charge \$20.00 for Instruments of Taking.

Fix: Reset the "R" flag to 0.00.

The following table describes each flag code in the system and specifies their intended commitment types.

Flag	Description	Commitments	Flag	Description	Commitments
A	Advertised	RE	NW	Notice Warrant	RE, Excise, PP
BC	Bad Check	All	O	Outstanding	RE
BK	Bankruptcy	RE	P	Penalty	Utility
CD	Cert Dissolve	RE	R	Registry Deeds	RE
CL	Chapter Land	RE	RC	Return Check	All
D	Demand	RE, Excise, PP	RD	Redeemed	RE
DD	DPW Demand	Utility	RM	Return Mail	All
DF	Deferral	RE	SW	Service Warrant	Excise
I	Interest	RE, Excise, PP	T	Tax Title	RE
L	Litigation	All	TP	Tax Possession	RE
LL	Lien List	RE, Utility	TV	Title 5	RE
MK	Mark	Excise	W	Warrant	All
ML	CML	RE	Z	Zero Adjust	Excise



A couple issues ago, we discussed how to import payments made through the Online Payment Exchange option and update the receivables system. This month, we will explain how to export payments to update the online payment provider.

Q: I have the Online Payment Exchange option. How do I update my online payment provider as to what bills are still outstanding?

A: You will need to export the billing information for the payment period (quarter or half) being billed. This information will export from the Point system as a text file. Use the instructions below to create the export file:

1. Select **PAYMENT POSTING** from the main menu.
2. Select **REPORTS**.
The "PRIMARY REPORT OPTIONS" menu appears.
3. Select **RE PP DISTRICT BILLING**.
4. Select **ON LINE PAYMENT EXPORT**.
5. Enter the levy tax year.
A menu appears, listing the commitment types available for the year you entered.
6. Select the commitment type.
7. Select the appropriate number for the payment period.
8. Enter the through deposit date, or press **Enter** and the date will default to the due date specified for that payment number in the Interest Base File.
9. Enter **Y** for yes to export the billing information.
The path (directory) and name of the export file appear.
10. Make note of the file's path and name.