

POSTAL NEWS

No. 18/2008

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

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1. At your (postal) service

An ATM look-alike at the Harrisburg Pike post office is an APC. The Automated Postal Center does a lot more than the vending machines it replaces.

Sunday News

Published: Feb 17, 2008

By JEANNETTE SCOTT, Staff

Your favorite postage stamp vending machine may be going the way of the telephone booth, as the U.S. Postal Service phases out the aging dispensers.

Parts for the machines first placed in post office lobbies more than two decades ago are scarce, making repairs difficult or even impossible.

"In short, the vending machines often cost more to maintain than the value they provide to our customers," said Ray Daiutolo Sr., a regional spokesman for the Postal Service.

It's not just the machines themselves, but their use that is becoming obsolete.

Today's customers take advantage of more convenient options. They buy stamps at supermarkets, ATMs and contract postal locations. They order them by phone, or from their neighborhood letter carrier. A few mouse clicks at www.usps.com, and customers can buy stamps, ship a package, or create and send a postcard. Or, customers can use an "Automated Postal Center."

APCs are vending machines for the cashless generation. They accept only debit and credit cards, and offer more than a mere book of stamps.

In November 2004, the Lancaster post office on Harrisburg Pike became the first, and remains the only, post office in the county to install an APC. The vending machines were removed Dec. 15. Vending machines are still available at nine post offices in the county.

Forget waiting in line, package in hand. You can weigh, label, post and ship a package at the APC. You can order return-receipt service, use Express and Priority Mail, track a package, and calculate international postage for letters. And, of course, buy stamps.

Just about the only services it doesn't provide are for parcels being shipped internationally or at Media Mail Rate (a slower, but less costly option used for parcels containing specific items such as books, videotapes, and compact discs). It offers only one choice of first-class letter stamp, presently the Liberty Bell "Forever."

APCs require a minimum transaction of \$1. Smaller purchases, such as one stamp, are rounded up to one dollar and change is dispensed in the form of more stamps. There is no surcharge for using the machine.

Since 2004, 2,500 APCs have been installed at high-traffic post offices nationally. By 2007, they surpassed \$1 billion in revenue with 190 million transactions, according to the U.S. Postal Service Web site. Lancaster's machine averages \$19,000 in sales per month, said Lancaster Postmaster Lou DiPerna.

Officials from the Lancaster branch say their machine is second in the region and 18th nationally for revenue.

The APC runs well under the pressure, says postal worker Marty Wertz, who acts as a host to help customers use the machine. "In the past three months we had maybe two jams. And they were fixed in five minutes," he said.

The vending machines broke down as often as twice a day, and getting them running again was a more difficult process, he said.

Postmaster DiPerna says having Wertz in the lobby is a big factor in this APC's ranking. Wertz is on the floor from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. every day except Wednesdays and Sundays to acquaint customers with the machine. Beginning March 1, hosts will be available from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

The self-service kiosks resemble an ATM, causing some people to overlook them. Wertz keeps an eye out for customers scanning the lobby for vending machines. He also questions people waiting in the window line. "I say, 'Anybody using a debit or credit card?' Then, boom! They love me!"

Wertz tells people, "It's just like tapping MAC."

Nathan Ginter, of Lancaster, used the APC Friday to return broken computer equipment by mail. He said, "It's pretty much idiot-proof. If you just read what's on the screen and push the buttons, you are going to be all right."

Instructions appear in English and Spanish.

Ginter first noticed the machine a few years ago, while waiting in a long line at the counter. "I haven't been back to the window since," he said.

Customers haven't clamored for the old machines, DiPerna said. "Everybody is into plastic today. Nobody gives you cash," he said. "A lot of people don't even come to our lobbies that much anymore."

Bob and Gretchen Maser, of West Lampeter Township, discovered the APC Friday. Mr. Maser had never noticed it before. "I couldn't find my machine for the stamps," he said. "At first, (the APC) sort of blended in, like an advertisement," he said. He arrived cash-in-hand, but didn't mind having to use his debit card instead, with guidance from Wertz.

Mrs. Maser said, "I've been waiting for that a long time. I didn't even know it was already here."

Wertz says most people are thrilled when they discover the 21st-century machine. "I've been hugged. People have tried to tip me," he said. "It's been a long time coming."

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2. Make Forever Your Stamp

By SHELLY BANJO

February 17, 2008

The cost of first-class postage is going up a penny in May, and that means you may need to buy some one-cent stamps to augment remaining 41-cent stamps.

But here's another idea: Start using "Forever" stamps instead of the usual fare.

The U.S. Postal Service created the Forever stamp in April 2007 as a way for consumers to lock in the price of a first-class stamp no matter how much, or how often, the price increases. Postal rates will generally go up yearly in the month of May.

At any time, you can buy Forever stamps for the same price as regular first-class stamps, meaning 41 cents between now and May 12, when rates rise. They're good indefinitely, even after postal rates go up -- avoiding the penny-stamp hassles and eliminating the risk of getting your letters returned for insufficient postage.

The Postal Service says it will have five billion Forever stamps in stock to meet increased demand before the May 12 price change.

Prices for other mailing services, such as postcards, large envelopes and packages, will see raises between one and five cents in May. Price increases for shipping services including Express Mail and Priority Mail will be announced in the coming months.

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3. Posts to now reach you by evening

17 Feb 2008

BANGALORE: The Karnataka postal circle has hit upon a novel initiative — Sanje speed anche (evening delivery of Speed Post) — by which posted items will be delivered between 3.30 pm and 7 pm from Monday.

The scheme will cover 84 post offices in Bangalore.

Postmen will pick up Speed Post and other postal articles (except registered articles and money orders) from the doorstep while on duty. Postmen will be provided with receipt books for booking of Speed Post articles.

Interested customers can call any of the post offices for free pick-up of Speed Post articles.

The postmen will also sell special stamp packs of Rs 12 and Rs 25. Postmen have been selling stamps and stationery to customers.

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4. Newgistics Acquires Cornerstone, Unveils First Postal-Based Solution for Forward and Returns Shippin

Newgistics Inc. Monday, 18 February 2008, the only provider of a postal-based, intelligent logistics solution for forward and returns shipping, today announced the acquisition of Cornerstone Shipping Services, the leader in small package shipping solutions. The combination of Newgistics and Cornerstone now provides direct retailers and marketers with the industry's first Intelligent Logistics Management (ILM) solution, a highly customized forward and reverse logistics offering. Key capabilities to Newgistics' ILM solution include unparalleled visibility, individualized reporting for streamlined inventory management, and a unique Web-based technology for easily tracking the return and delivery process.

To meet growing consumer demand for a convenient shipping process, retailers are demanding an alternative to traditional, expensive parcel carriers that offer rigid,

inflexible solutions. A recent survey commissioned by Newgistics and conducted by Harris Interactive found that an overwhelming majority (68 percent) of respondents said the ability to easily track and access details about their purchase is very important or important when deciding whether to shop with an online or catalog retailer.(1)

"With this acquisition, Newgistics is delivering the first and only centralized, USPS-based solution that combines our proven technology for managing the returns process with Cornerstone's leading parcel shipping," said Bill Razzouk, CEO of Newgistics. "We are committed to providing our customers with a customizable logistics solution to ensure they can meet the unique needs of their consumers. We are excited about the company's momentum and look forward to extending our success into the forward shipping market."

As a result of the acquisition, Newgistics is appointing logistics veteran and Cornerstone co-founder and former CEO David Plemons vice president of business solutions. Prior to Cornerstone, Plemons was with United Parcel Service (UPS), where he was recognized for his success in business development, leadership and for meeting a number of key performance goals.

"Newgistics is truly an innovator in the reverse logistics space and I look forward to leveraging my experience to offer direct retailers and marketers a comprehensive, 'one stop shop' for all their forward and reverse shipping," said Plemons. "I am thrilled to join Newgistics at such an exciting time."

This announcement comes on the heels of Newgistics' recent acquisition of Logistics Management Inc (LMI), which extended the company's offering to include transportation management capabilities for Less-than-Truckload (LTL) and Truckload shipping. As a result of organic growth and the additions of LMI and Cornerstone, Newgistics has increased net revenues to well over \$100 million annually.

Cornerstone Shipping Solutions will now be known as Newgistics, Inc.

About Newgistics, Inc.

Newgistics (www.newgistics.com) provides direct marketers and retailers with the only postal-based, intelligent logistics solution for forward and returns shipping focused on residential pickup and delivery. Newgistics' flagship solution, SmartLabel®, features a dynamic barcode integrated with customer data at the point-of-sale that allows the shipper to populate their CRM systems with their customers' information once the barcode is scanned in the Newgistics process. Newgistics lowers handling and overhead costs, maximizes operational control and drives greater customer satisfaction. Newgistics provides a competitive alternative to the traditional, expensive parcel carriers and drives customer loyalty and increases profitability for leading retailers like Neiman Marcus and Abercrombie & Fitch.

About Cornerstone Shipping Solutions

Cornerstone Shipping Solutions is a business solutions provider in the field of parcel consolidation that provides small package shipping solutions through the use of zone skipping, in an information-rich environment. We work with the United States Postal Service and various transportation companies, to deliver consumers products in a personalized delivery process.

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5. POSTAL STRIKE SHOWED HOW VITAL IT IS TO FIRMS

11:40 - 15 February 2008

Simon Rous, chairman and head of commercial at solicitor Ashfords in Exeter, considers why businesses cannot afford to ignore their IT facilities

Ensuring effective methods of communicating with clients during recent postal strikes reminded me again of the importance of IT in today's business environment.

The industrial action meant alternative methods needed to be established to ensure documents and correspondence were sent and received in accordance with client requirements.

We have seen IT playing an ever-increasing role within our business over the past few years, with many of our clients requiring all our dealings with them to be conducted electronically wherever that was possible.

Embracing the power of IT effectively, as we have found, involves many levels of consideration.

IT systems, like the law, are rapidly changing and evolving. It is unlikely that the IT system of today, without continuous updates and modifications, will be adequate to cope with the challenges facing businesses in the future.

With many our clients operating at the top of their field, the need to have cutting edge IT facilities is often a necessity rather than a luxury.

All businesses need to ensure they get the cost benefit ratio of IT investments right. An unwise investment in IT can be a very costly mistake.

The increasing complexity of IT has also changed the way in which IT facilities can be managed.

Ashfords has a dedicated IT team providing 24-hour support and service to our team of solicitors throughout all our offices. Such a comprehensive level of support continues to

justify its existence when we are able to give an appropriate and timely response to our clients' needs.

Employee training must also be considered as an integral part of any IT investment. IT systems are a classic example of only being as good as the people who use them.

We run regular in-house IT training to ensure our employees are able to use our IT facilities to their full extent.

As the introduction to the market of new technologies - such as voice recognition - occurs at an ever increasing pace, I conclude that we will continue to keep IT central to our operations and plans. So, if and when there is another postal strike, we will be ready.

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