

Implementing the Intelligent Mail® Barcode

In the current competitive environment in the document solutions business, adding intelligence to products has become the key to success. The latest step to confirm that view is the introduction of USPS Intelligent Mail® barcode. This recent development compels organizations with mailing operations to answer three questions:

- What's in it for us?
- Do we need to adopt it?
- If so, how?

Let Us Give You the Punch Line at the Very Beginning

Crawford Technologies Inc. has launched new capabilities to enable customers to quickly and cost effectively implement the new USPS Intelligent Mail® barcode in order to retain their eligibility for postage discounts beyond the year 2008 and to take advantage of the new USPS OneCode services enabled by it.

What are the Benefits of the Intelligent Mail Barcode?

According to the USPS [Rapid Information Bulletin Board System](#), "The Intelligent Mail® barcode (formerly known as the 4-State Customer Barcode) is the next generation of USPS® barcode technology used to sort and track letters and flats. The Intelligent Mail barcode combines the data of the existing POSTNET™ and PLANET Code® barcodes, as well as other data, into a single barcode."

The Intelligent Mail barcode uses four different types of vertical bars. In the illustration below, the three initial bars are Descenders, the next one is an Ascender, followed by two Trackers and one Full bar. The 4-state encoding gives the Intelligent Mail® barcode a much greater data capacity than the sum total of POSTNET and PLANET codes.



Both the PLANET and the POSTNET barcode only use full size and half size bars of the type illustrated below.



The images below, derived from the USPS [Rapid Information Bulletin Board System](#), illustrate the advantages of the Intelligent Mail barcode. The single line of the Intelligent Mail barcode on the left replaces five lines of the POSTNET and PLANET codes and the endorsement and keyline data in the old label on the right.



Single line Intelligent Mail Barcode



Five line POSTNET/PLANET barcodes

Adding intelligence to a mail piece brings the following benefits:

- Improved address quality and reduced costs of returns
- Cleaner address look and feel by collapsing 4-5 lines of information into a single barcode
- Better personalized targeting which in turn increases the response rate
- Improved ability to track business mail which delivers enhanced tracking of the effectiveness of marketing campaigns

The Intelligent Mail barcode delivers the ability to add much more intelligence in a smaller amount of retail marketing space and also leaves more space for human readable messages.

High volume mailers then gain significant benefits from implementing the new Intelligent Mail barcode in addition to retaining their eligibility for postal automation discounts beyond 2008, including:

- Recovering valuable mailing real estate by using a single code vs. using both POSTNET and PLANET codes
- Increased data capacity within the bar code allowing identification of up to 1 billion unique mailing pieces in one mail run
- Positioning themselves for participation in the USPS OneCode ACS and OneCode Confirm service programs.

What's the Timeline?

In 2006, USPS introduced the Intelligent Mail[®] barcode to replace the older POSTNET[®] and PLANET[™] codes. At the end of 2008 the POSTNET[®] and PLANET[™] codes will cease to command postage discounts and services. All mailers will need to convert their applications by then in order to maximize postal discounts in America.

What's the Best Way to Adopt the Intelligent Mail Barcode?

The Traditional Approach

Meeting the above mentioned deadline will be an expensive and daunting task, if organizations mailing large numbers of print applications use the traditional approach of modifying the source code for each application program. This tactic is time consuming and will also take the development resource focus from new revenue generating product and services projects. Unless a different approach is taken, many organizations will not make this timeline even if they have already started to plan, fund, resource and execute on this very large and costly initiative.



CrawfordTech Approach

Taking the approach of making the modifications at the print stream level with CrawfordTech's document re-engineering tool, PRO Document Enhancer, enables this mandatory initiative in a shorter time frame with less use of costly and scarce resources.

[PRO Document Enhancer](#) allows the creation of common routines that operate at the print stream level to remove existing PLANET™ and/or POSTNET® barcodes and replace them with the new Intelligent Mail® barcode, without the need to know any of the print file technical constructs. This approach enables the use of contract resources or vendor professional services, as they do not need to be familiar with your various internal applications and tools to be productive.

Additional Benefits of Using PRO Document Enhancer

Users can also apply the PRO Document Enhancer to achieve other significant benefits, including:

- Greater postage savings by increasing the volume density through co-mingling a number of external files from a postal sortation application, all of them in the same print format, into a single job file large enough to ensure maximum postal discounts
- Increased mail processing productivity through adding automated inserter codes, such as 2D barcodes and OMR marks
- Increased mail processing integrity through adding human readable marks, unique mail piece IDs and automated re-printing of damaged documents

Many organizations are taking the approach of separating the business document creation from the mail preparation of the documents, so that business analysts and programmers do not have to get involved when changes are needed to the print streams for mail optimization purposes. This allows organizations to focus staff on what they do best. This approach can allow mail room organizations to make optimal use of their equipment and people, by applying the appropriate changes themselves when they are needed.

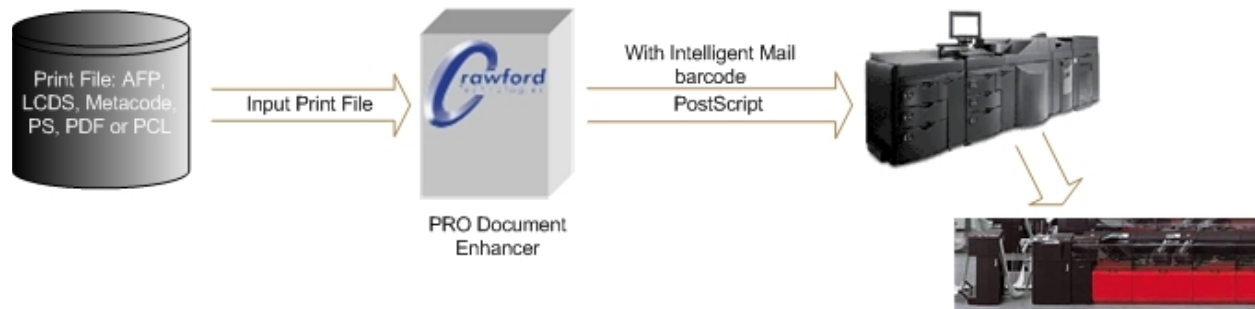
CrawfordTech's PRO Document Enhancer can run as a standalone system to perform all of these value-added functions in one pass and output the results in the same print stream format (e.g. AFP in to AFP out).

PRO Document Enhancer can also run with any CrawfordTech [PRO Transform](#) product to perform all the needed value-added functions and simultaneously to convert to a different print stream format (e.g. PDF in to Metacode out) – again in a single production pass. PRO transforms can convert print streams from any to any of the following print stream formats: AFP, Xerox LCDS and Metacode, PostScript, PDF and PCL.

PRO Document Enhancer is available on all major platforms, including Windows, Linux, AIX, Solaris, HP-UX and z/OS, allowing the users to install the software where they need it.

How does this work?

To remove the old postal information and add the new Intelligent Mail® barcode without changing the application program that creates the mail documents, an organization needs to install the appropriate version of PRO Document Enhancer and configure it. Then, on a regular basis, print files need to be intercepted and routed to PRO Document Enhancer prior to printing. The process for routing the file will vary, depending on the operating systems platforms being used. PRO Document Enhancer will then remove the old postal information and add the Intelligent Mail® barcode. When this is complete, the updated print files can be sent to the printer for normal printing and post-processing.



Mailing production stages from print file to insertion

Pro Document Enhancer Setup

With PRO Document Enhancer, the user sets up rules to be applied when the print stream is processed. For example, to remove the old postal information, rules are set up to suppress the old lines of postal information text, based on position, content and/or font usage. In order to add the Intelligent Mail® barcode, the rules are set up to use the delivery point information, as well as the mailer-specific and mail-piece specific information, some of which is extracted from the print file, some is calculated during processing, while some is passed to the program when it starts up. In this way, the mailer can take full advantage of the capabilities of the Intelligent Mail® barcode.

When implementing the Intelligent Mail® barcode, each mail piece must have a unique identifier for the USPS, which cannot be reused for a certain period of time. If the mailer has multiple applications that generate mail pieces, then there are challenges in ensuring that all of the application programs are coordinated. PRO Document Enhancer can be easily used to assign the unique mail piece identifiers and it can provide an audit log of the mail piece identifiers and the addressees they are assigned to, including information such as client number, account number, policy number or invoice number. This log can be fed back into tracking and customer service systems to provide an integrated mailing solution.

Summary

CrawfordTech offers organizations needing to adopt the Intelligent Mail® barcode a cost effective solution that manipulates the documents without opening the source code and allows the users with minimal understanding of the print data stream languages to make all the changes needed. Even organizations that have already started on this project and are reprogramming their mail print applications or plan to, might well wish to talk to us. We can save them considerable amounts of money and time and help them to release their programmers for revenue creating projects.



White Paper – Implementing the Intelligent Mail barcode



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