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1 Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this publication is to describe the use of Share Mail (previously referred to as Alternate Postage) on First-Class Mail single-piece letters or postcards bearing an Intelligent Mail barcode (IMb).

Product Description

Share Mail provides a mechanism for businesses and organizations to use the mail to share information not only with their customers but to have those customers send the mailpieces to other parties — without their having to affix a stamp. These mailpieces (letters or postcards) can flow between any two parties — for example, they can flow from a franchise to its franchisees, from a business to its customers, and from a business’s customers to other people (such as those customers’ family, friends, neighbors — anyone that they think might be interested in the information). Those who forward the message to others do not need to pay postage — that’s paid by the Share Mail account holder (hereafter referred to as just “account holder”) who first produced and distributed the mailpieces. Recipients of Share Mail letters and postcards may forward the pieces to others by depositing them into the mailstream in the same ways as other domestic single-piece First-Class Mail. [Exhibit 1](#) illustrates how a business can distribute Share Mail pieces to its customers, who in turn can share them with family and friends through the mail — without having to affix a stamp.

Exhibit 1
How a Business Uses Share Mail



Examples of Share Mail

Here are some examples of how businesses and organizations can use Share Mail:

1. A bakery, florist, golf club, or any local business provides promotional Share Mail cards to its customers so that they can share them by mail with their friends and family, who can claim the offer provided on the card.
2. A cruise line or vacation resort provides its guests with Share Mail postcards offering greetings as well as promotions such as discount bookings — and the guests can mail these greetings without stamps!
3. A retailer shipping products encloses Share Mail thank-you cards in its shipments of gift purchases so that recipient can thank the people who sent the gifts.
4. An online retailer encloses Share Mail postcards in its fulfillment shipment so that the purchaser can mail a referral to a friend to take advantage of a promotional offer.

Before an account holder may distribute Share Mail First-Class Mail single-piece letters or postcards with an IMb, the Postal Service must approve their production. Each such letter or postcard must carry approved indicia in the upper-right corner in lieu of affixed postage.

How It Works

Share Mail relies on IMb technology to identify and count each approved mailpiece as it moves through the postal system. During First-Class Mail processing, the “FIM E” mark (described in Section 3), the IMb, and the indicia combine to identify the account holder’s Share Mail letters or postcards for payment purposes.

Share Mail letters or postcards are considered to be “Recorded as Scanned” after they are mailed, when the Postal Service processing equipment first captures the IMb information that identifies the piece as a Share Mail letter or postcard. Once the Postal Service scans and records the Share Mail pieces, the Postal Service invoices the account holder and deducts the funds for postage from the account holder’s Centralized Account Processing System (CAPS) account.

The mailpieces receive First-Class Mail handling procedures, and they receive processing and delivery according to single-piece First-Class Mail standards. Account holders can mail Share Mail letters and postcards only to addresses within the United States and to APO/FPO/DPO locations.

2 Share Mail Account Holder Requirements

Who Can Apply

Individuals and companies who wish to distribute Share Mail pieces must register for this service. Each individual or company must meet the prerequisites described below before enrolling in the Share Mail Program. Additionally, a Mail Service Provider (MSP) may register on behalf of one of its customers. In either scenario, the party enrolled in the program and holding the CAPS account is liable for the payment for the mailpieces that are entered into the mailstream.

Application and Authorization Process

There are several steps in the process of becoming an account holder and distributing mailpieces. [Exhibit 2](#) illustrates these steps, which are also described in the text following Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2
Application and Authorization Process

STEP 1



STEP 2



Step 1: Prerequisites

An account holder who would like to participate must have the following *before* enrollment:

1. An account on the USPS Business Customer Gateway — an account holder can create and access an account at <https://gateway.usps.com>.
2. A USPS CAPS account.
3. A valid Business Reply Mail or Postage Due permit linked to the CAPS account.
4. The ability to print on each mailpiece either a static IMb (a barcode that does not vary by mailpiece) or a unique IMb (a barcode that does vary by mailpiece).

Step 2: Enrollment and Mailpiece Authorization Requirements

Overview

The account holder must complete the enrollment and mail authorization process *before* printing the pieces to be distributed — please note that this process can take up to 7 business days.

Enrollment

Participants and/or Mail Service Providers (MSPs) can fill out a registration form on the Business Customer Gateway through the Share Mail link within the Mailing Services section.

Once registration is complete, the Postal Service assigns the account holder a six-digit or nine-digit mailer ID — the account holder may use this ID only on Share Mail letters or postcards.

Mailpiece Authorization

Before printing pieces, the account holder must complete the following steps (see Section 3 for further details about mailpiece design):

1. Complete the enrollment process into the Share Mail Program through the Business Customer Gateway.
2. Submit to the Program Office a high-quality electronic image of its mailpiece design for review and approval according to mailpiece specifications for Share Mail. The provided image must contain either defined outer edges or crop marks.

Note: The Postal Service *highly recommends* that account holders *do not* print the proposed mailpieces *until after* they have received approval for the mailpiece design.

3. Receive email notification of mailpiece design approval from the Program Office to begin printing and distribution.

3 Distribution and Mailing Requirements

Volume Requirements

The Postal Service developed the Share Mail Program for commercial account holders to distribute pieces to their clients. However, there is no minimum volume requirement for production and distribution.

Mailpiece Design Requirements

The maximum weight for a Share Mail letter is 1 ounce, including its envelope.

Share Mail letters or postcards must meet the First-Class Mail eligibility, machinability, and other specifications of the Mail Classification Schedule and *Mailing Standards of the United States Postal Service, Domestic Mail Manual (DMM®)*. Addresses on mailpieces may be handwritten or pre-addressed, and they must be to destinations within the United States or to APO/FPO/DPO locations.

Before the account holder can distribute the mailpieces, the address side of Share Mail letters and postcards must comply with all applicable Postal Service specifications, including design specifications. The address side must contain the following elements:

1. *Intelligent Mail barcode*: The Postal Service uses the account holder-generated IMb to track and count Share Mail letters and postcards for payment and reporting purposes as the mailpieces travel through the mailstream, using the following features:
 - a. *Mailer ID*: The account holder-generated IMb must include a unique Mailer ID (MID) supplied by the Postal Service to identify the account holder and the mail shape. The account holder can use the MID assigned for Share Mail only on Share Mail letters or postcards. The Postal Service assigns one MID for letters and a different MID for postcards. The account holder is allowed to use the same MID regardless of whether the mailpiece has a static or unique IMb.

Note: An account holder (including an MSP) must be enrolled in the program in order to be assigned a six-digit or nine-digit MID. The account holder must receive the MID before submitting the mailpiece sample design for review.

Distribution and Mailing Requirements

- b. *Service Type Identifiers:* Each type of IMb (unique or static) is distinguished by a Service Type Identifier (STID), which the Postal Service uses to identify, differentiate, and properly account for Share Mail pieces. The STIDs for the Share Mail product offering are 733 for mailpieces with unique IMBs, and 734 for mailpieces with static IMBs.
2. *Facing Identification Mark:* The Postal Services requires a special Facing Identification Mark — FIM E — for Share Mail letters and postcards. The Postal Services uses FIM E to orient the mailer's Share Mail letter or postcard for processing. The account holder may not use FIM E for any mailings other than Share Mail.
3. *Indicia:* The indicia must appear in the upper right corner of the address side of the Share Mail letter or postcard.

See [Exhibit 3](#) for further information on mailpiece specifications.

Exhibit 3
Share Mail Layout Guidelines

SHARE MAIL™ LAYOUT GUIDELINES

ENVELOPE DIMENSIONS

Length: 5" – 11½" **Height:** 3½" – 6½"

Thickness: .009" – .25"

Weight: Combined envelope + insert ≤ one ounce

Aspect Ratio: 1.3 – 2.5 (*Length divided by height*)

Shape: Rectangular (No square envelopes)

Paper Weight: 40 lb. book-grade paper minimum

Paper: Non-glossy only. White paper is preferred; pastels acceptable. No dark colors; no reverse printing

ADDITIONAL STANDARDS

Wraps & Closures: No poly wrapping, poly bagging, or shrink wrapping; no clasps, strings, buttons, or similar closure devices or protrusions that damage the mail or mail processing equipment.

Enclosed Items: Rigid odd-shaped items (e.g. pens, keys, etc.) are prohibited. Odd-shaped items (e.g. coins, tokens, etc.) are **only** permitted if firmly affixed to and wrapped within the contents of the mailpiece. Reasonably flexible items (e.g. gift cards, credit cards, etc.) are permitted.

Flexibility Standards: The contents must bend easily when subjected to a transport belt tension of 40 lbs. around an 11"-diameter drum.

POSTCARD DIMENSIONS

Length: 5" – 6" **Height:** 3½" – 4¼"

Thickness: .009" – .016"

Aspect Ratio: 1.3 – 2.5 (*Length divided by height*)

Paper: Non-glossy paper

ADDITIONAL STANDARDS

- The address side of the card **must be divided** into a right portion and a left portion, with or without a vertical grayscale rule. The left portion is the message area.
- The right portion contains the delivery address, postage and USPS markings or endorsements. This portion must be at least 2.13" wide measured from the right edge.
- If lines are used on the right side of the card to identify where the address should be written, they should be in a grayscale.
- ID tag clearance:** On the non-addressed side of mailpiece, leave a clear zone measuring 14 mm high x 118 mm wide from the lower left corner of the mailpiece.

1 Facing Identification Mark (FIM)

Use **FIM E** for customized services

FIM Bars: 0.03" w (±0.008") x 0.625" h (±1/8"); positioned 2" from right edge of mailpiece and no more than 0.125" from top edge of mailpiece.

FIM Clear Zone: 1.25" w x 0.625" h; positioned 1.75" from right edge of mailpiece and flush with top edge. No printing allowed within zone other than FIM mark.

2 Indicia

Wording:

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
[COMPANY NAME]
IMB-POSTAGE

Font: Arial Bold, ALL CAPS
Size: 6 or 8 pt

SUBMISSION PROCESS

You must provide a sample mailpiece to the Share Mail email address: sharemail@usps.gov

The provided sample must be:

- A high quality pdf file
- Must appear exactly as it will be printed
- Must contain either defined outer edges or crop marks.
- Must print to 8.5" x 11" paper for review

The program office will review to ensure:

- FIM pattern is properly formatted and positioned
- Indicia is properly formatted
- IMb is present, properly formatted and meets Postal readability standards
- MID/STID combination is correct within IMb

Allow at least one week for review. Written approval must be obtained prior to print and distribution of the mailpieces.

Black ink
Required for IMb, FIM and Indicia

3 IMb

Position IMb above address block

2.67" ≤ Length ≤ 3.25"

0.125" ≤ Height ≤ 0.165"

IMb Clearances from Edge of Mailpiece:
TOP: Min. 1.75" | BOTTOM: Max. 4"
RIGHT EDGE: 0.75" | LEFT EDGE: 0.5"

Address Clearance: Leave at least 0.028" between top address line and bottom of IMb; and at least 0.125" on each side.

Barcode Clearance Zone: 4.75" x 0.625"

Reference Quick Service Guide 602
<http://pe.usps.com/text/qsg300/Q602.htm#1009536>

SAMPLE MAILPIECE: 6" X 4" **ASPECT RATIO: 1.5** (*Length divided by height*)

IMb Parameters			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
For details on how to create an IMb: https://ribbs.usps.gov/index.cfm?page=intelligentmail	Barcode ID:	Service Type ID:	Mailer ID:		Serial Number:		Routing ZIP Number:																										
	00	Static: 734 Unique: 733	9 digits assigned by Share Mail Program Office <small>*Mailer IDs assigned before 1/1/17 have 6 digits</small>		6 digit static value OR 6 digit unique value		NULL																										

Mailpiece Authorization Process

The account holder must submit a mailpiece design by email to the Program Office for review and approval *before* printing the mailpieces. The submitted design must depict both sides of the mailpiece. The provided image must be a high-quality electronic image, and the design must appear exactly as it will be printed and must contain either defined outer edges or crop marks.

An account holder who would like to use multiple mailpiece designs or make changes to approved designs must individually submit an electronic image for each design.

Note: If the only change to an already approved design is the preprinted address, no review is required.

When submitting a sample for consideration, the account holder must include the required mailing elements for review and approval:

1. FIM E.
2. The indicia.
3. A unique or static IMb.

The account holder must submit all mailpiece sample designs for review to the Program Office by email at sharemail@usps.gov. The Program Office responds to all inquiries within 48 hours after receipt of the sample. The entire review and approval process may take up to 7 business days.

Mailpiece Approval Notification

The Postal Service notifies the account holder by email either that it has approved the electronic image design for distribution, or that modifications are necessary.

4 Postage Payment

Pricing

The amount due for each unit for which payment is required to be made is based on the prevailing rate for a 1-ounce Share Mail letter or postcard (the Unit Price). Current prices appear in Notice 123, *Price List*, which is available at <http://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/Notice123.htm>. The account holder must pay the Postal Service the prevailing Share Mail price for each static or unique IMb letter or postcard at the time the mailpiece is scanned (as opposed to distributed).

The account holder must distinguish between 1-ounce letters and postcards by the use of separate MIDs. The Postal Service may sample the address side of mailpieces to ensure that the account holder is using the correct MIDs. The account holder is liable for the prevailing postage price based on the mailpiece size regardless of which MID is used.

Accounting and Payment

Periodically, the Program Office electronically notifies the account holder of the number of units recorded as scanned.

The account holder makes payment through a CAPS account. The Postal Service debits the account holder's account after mail processing equipment scans Share Mail pieces in the mailstream.

The account holder must maintain sufficient funds available for ACH transfer through the CAPS Account to cover the amounts due. The Program Office notifies account holders of upcoming CAPS account withdrawals 5 business days before the withdrawal date. The Postal Service plans to add an automated withdrawal feature in future program enhancements.

5 Account Termination or Cancellation

Share Mail Account Holder Cancellation

An account holder must affirmatively notify the Program Office by email of its intent to end its participation in the Share Mail Program.

After an account holder ends its participation in the program, it must keep and preserve accurate and complete records on all transactions relating to Share Mail pieces for at least 2 years after participation has ended. The Postal Service has the right once per year to examine, upon 30-days' notice by email and during the account holder's normal business hours, all such records that the Postal Service deems reasonably appropriate to verify accuracy and completeness. All information examined by the Postal Service during and in connection with such an audit is deemed to be Confidential Information.

USPS Cancellation of Share Mail Account Holder Authorization

If the Postal Service discovers a Share Mail error in the preparation or distribution of the mailpieces, the Postal Service notifies the account holder or authorized agent of the error by email. If the account holder does not correct the error within 20 business days, the Postal Service revokes the account holder's Share Mail authorization. Before receiving reauthorization, the account holder must correct the error and must ensure that all future Share Mail pieces meet appropriate specifications. The Postal Service may, in its sole discretion, revoke a Share Mail authorization because of format errors or misuse.

Additionally, if the account holder fails to maintain a CAPS account, the Postal Service may cancel an account holder's authorization to distribute Share Mail pieces. Failure to properly maintain either a Debit or Trust CAPS account (according to the corresponding account requirements) may also result in revocation of the account holder's authorization.

The Postal Service may cancel an account holder's authorization to distribute Share Mail pieces without cause by notifying the account holder by email. If the Postal Service cancels the authorization under this section, the account holder may not mail or distribute any Share Mail pieces. The account holder is also liable for postage on all pieces that are distributed after the cancellation, if the pieces are subsequently mailed.

Requirement to Maintain CAPS Account

The account holder must maintain its CAPS account until no recorded scans have been received for a 12-month period.

If the account holder cancels its account, or if the Postal Service closes the account due to nonpayment, the Postal Service starts processing an Accounts Receivable with the account holder regarding any amounts due to the Postal Service, also including collections through the U.S. Treasury.

6 Warranty

To participate in the Share Mail Program, the account holder agrees to comply with the following:

- a. That to the best of its knowledge, the mailpieces and any associated marketing materials do not infringe upon any statutory or common law copyright, trade dress, trademark, trade name, service mark, or patent.
- b. That the mailpieces and any associated marketing materials do not contain any matter libelous or otherwise in contravention of the rights of any third party.
- c. That the mailpieces and any associated marketing materials contain no matter that violates any federal, state, or local law, statute, or regulation, or is any other way unlawful, including but not limited to Federal Trade Commission guidelines and regulations concerning false or deceptive advertising.

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