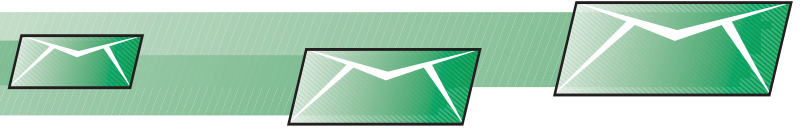


MAIL MATTERS

A PUBLICATION OF JLS MAILING SERVICES

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The Mystery of MERLIN Revealed *by Al Silverstein*

Whenever MERLIN is mentioned the image that sticks in my mind is the scene in the classic movie "The Wizard of Oz", when the curtain is pulled back and the Wizard is exposed as a mere human manipulating levers that in turn create a noisy image of something frightening. MERLIN, which stands for **Mail Evaluation Readability Lookup INSTRUMENT**, was created to do the work that humans used to do in a manner that was inconsistent at best. Because postal employees were (and are) human, mail that was accepted in one place might be rejected in another. As a result, the USPS' Mail Acceptance received well-deserved criticism brought on by the inconsistent application of regulations. It must be noted that the attempt to standardize mail acceptance started with MERLIN's predecessor, **ABE**, **Automation Barcode Evaluator**, which was a Model T compared to the MERLIN muscle car.

In a nutshell, the purpose of MERLIN is to protect postal revenue. Why should automation discounts be given to mailers that do not adhere to the rules governing mail make up, physical characteristics, and quality of the address? MERLIN acts as the impartial judge that evaluates the mail based on measured test results. But wait...here comes the human factor again. Because humans, of course, are the ones operating the machines, delays in the comprehensive training of such a large work force are still resulting in inconsistencies. The good news is that the Postal Service is attempting to fix this problem with more training. And, since JLS has a MERLIN machine on premises, we have been able to monitor progress and are seeing positive results.

Passing MERLIN or, if you prefer, not failing MERLIN, is the combined responsibility of the customer and the professional

mailer. Both have very distinct responsibilities when it comes to designing, printing, and processing mail pieces. Let's look at some of the things that MERLIN evaluates. I said some, because it actually evaluates 40+ different mail elements for quality standards. The Domestic Mail Manual, which is second only to IRS regulations for complexity and ease of reading, describes these tests, some of which I've listed for you here:

- Mail piece characteristics (height, length, aspect ratio, thickness)
- Presort/mail makeup
- Endorsements and rate markings
- Weight/piece count
- POSTNET barcode readability
- Tray label accuracy
- Meter identification and date
- Address/barcode accuracy
- Carrier routes
- Walk sequence accuracy
- Line of travel
- Combined mailings

Clearly there's a lot here to be concerned about. However, don't be discouraged, because if you pay attention to some simple rules you'll pass with flying colors. The first rule, of course, is to contact us whenever you're thinking of generating a mailing. Our sales and account management staff know what questions to ask and what advice to give. Furthermore, if there is a gray area, we can help resolve any issues surrounding it. It might be

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JLS Increases Its FASTforward® Capabilities

In the last issue of the JLS newsletter, we explained the Postal Service's push on move update requirements and the various methods of compliance. With the Postal Service's increased vigilance in monitoring those requirements and applying penalties to those customers that do not comply, JLS has taken considerable steps to assure that all of our clients' mail meets those rigorous standards.

We have recently increased our FASTforward® capabilities. In so doing, we can process even more mail through

the FASTforward system. This process assures our clients better deliverability, fewer potential penalties, and continued qualification at lower postage rates.

We at JLS are very pleased to expand this service to our clients in order to bring their eligible mail into compliance. If you would like a copy of the last newsletter outlining the choices for compliance, please contact your Account Manager or Sales Representative, or you can find it and other past issues on our website at jlsms.com. ✉

Did You Know?

The standard #10 window envelope doesn't work well when sent through FASTforward®, because the window material encroaches into the barcode area reserved for FASTforward. But there's good news...JLS can provide printed envelopes that do meet FASTforward standards, and at no increase in cost over what you are paying now. Want to know more? Contact your Account Executive or Account Manager!

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as simple as running a test piece through our in-house MERLIN. After all, what better predictor of problems than the actual machine that would analyze the mail?

The most important rules customers have to adhere to are the mail piece characteristics, which include: height, length, aspect ratio, type of stock (including color), address area, tap test clearance, and clear zones. Again, we have the expertise as well as some aids, such as templates, that can help.

I want to share with you a recent conversation I had with a prospective client concerning MERLIN. He commented to me that Merlin failures were the mailing company's problem, not his; that as long as he did what he was supposed to, anything that went wrong would be the professional mailing company's responsibility, including penalties. But what about the resulting delivery delay? If there's a problem, there's a good chance the mail will not get delivered when expected. For example, if the tray tags are improperly affixed, Boston mail could end up in Boise. If the barcodes are incorrect, mail will be

wrongly routed and delayed in delivery. If counts and makeup are wrong, the mail won't be accepted at all until corrected or full postage rate is paid. That could mean a delay of one or more days. Therefore, a MERLIN failure, no matter whose ultimate responsibility it is, impacts the sender. So, make sure that you not only do your part in properly preparing your mail, but also that your mailing services partner does as well.

As a professional mailer, we shoulder plenty of responsibility to make sure your mail is properly managed and produced. We have certified software for stand-alone mailings and MLOC sorting machines for co-mingling. We make sure there are no incorrectly appended barcodes that could nullify discounts.

As the only MPTQM (The Postal Service's ISO 2000) facility in New England, we are committed to the quality standards certified by the USPS. We view it as recognition by the Postal Service of our standing in the mailing community. We are quite proud of our acceptance stats and will be happy to share them with you.

If you haven't seen a MERLIN or would like to talk about it, please contact your account manager or sales representative. If you're not yet a JLS client but would like more information, call me at (508) 313-1002, or Jim Clark at (508) 313-1001. We'll be glad to pull back the curtain and show you MERLIN. ✉

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**MPTQM
Certified**



FYI: Acronym of the Day

UAA: You may think this acronym sounds like a squelched cowboy yelp from a defeated presidential candidate, but it actually stands for “undeliverable as addressed” mail, which costs the USPS \$1.5 billion each year. Come to think of it, that yelping sound might be coming from the USPS Board of Governors.



Doing Our Best: Jay Garee of the Boy Scouts of America presented JLS' owner, Jim Clark, with an award recognizing JLS' outstanding work in printing a full color brochure used for recruitment in the Boston area.

USPS Takes on A New “Dimension”

In August of last year, the Post Office launched Customized *MarketMail*[™] (CMM) as a brand new mail classification, guaranteed to get your attention among the clutter of other catalogs, bills, and flyers. How? These new mail pieces don't have to conform to the strict “rectangular” rules that “flat” mail must adhere to.

Krispy Kreme, the donut retailer and the first to try CMM, sent out a mailer in the shape of a box of dozen donuts along with a coupon. It worked. The campaign got an 11% response rate, which is excellent.

In addition to driving traffic to local bricks-and-mortar locations or websites, CMM also could be used effectively to launch a new product or service, announce an important event, or build brand awareness, if targeted to your best customers or well-qualified prospects. Interested? Here are some of the particulars you'll need to know:

- Minimum number of pieces: 200
- Maximum weight: 3.3 ounces
- No return or forwarding services available
- Minimum and maximum size requirements are the same as letters and flats -- between 3.5" and 12" high; between 5" and 15" long; between .007" and .75" thick
- No restrictions on uniformity of thickness (die cut shapes and perforations permitted)
- No pointed or sharp edges
- Material: any sturdy, flexible material, such as paper, plastic, cardboard, rubber, foam, that retains or regains its original shape after removal from the mailbox
- Other attachments (magnets, samples, etc.) allowed
- Postage: 57.4 cents for Regular; 46 cents for Non-Profit
- DDU delivery only (drop ship to destination PO at an additional cost of 10 cents)

Due to the high cost and the local delivery requirement, CMM seems best suited for local or national organizations that are selling high-ticket items or promoting repeat business...After all, once you've had a Krispy Kreme, who could resist going back for more? 