Address Quality Best Practices –
One Size Does Not Fit All

One size does not fit all - a phrase that is especially true within the mailing industry. When it comes to address quality best practices, the focus shouldn't be just on the purpose of mail, but instead, address quality for the purpose of your entire business.

It's time to ask yourself, how do best practices around addressing come into play when you're thinking about all your business operations associated with an address?

Every business is different. You have different requirements, which means you are not mailing the same items and not working under the same requirements. In many cases, there are industry-specific regulations around the different types of mailings you do. For example, in both the financial and healthcare industries, there are regulations associated with the use of non-physical addresses. There are situations where you as a mailer or business are required to obtain the address where a person actually resides instead of an address where they just receive their mail.

This can be tricky for any number of reasons. For example, a single individual may have one address where they reside, a second address where they receive mail, and a third address where they receive packages. In instances such as this, address quality is imperative to the impact addresses will have on your business.

When you hear people talking about address quality, there are typically the "three C's" for mailing. However, we like to use the "six C's" for businesses.

Six C's for Business

1. **Complete** - address contains all necessary elements
2. **Correct** - address is valid and deliverable
3. **Current** - address reflects the current address where the intended recipient resides
4. **Current** - address is the most current version
5. **Correct** - address is the correct one to be used for the intended business purpose
6. **Compliant** - address complies with postal, business, and industry regulations

By following the "six C's," you're taking the necessary steps to ensure the quality of your address database. This will help reduce the number of returned mailpieces and the costs associated with them, including production, mailing, and redelivery.

Identify Your Goals

- Am I looking to provide information to my clients?
- Am I trying to help with transparency and awareness? If so, keep clients involved in what's happening.
- Am I trying to sell something or promote an offer?
- What's my return-on-investment for this mailing?
- How am I getting my response rates?
- How can I get as many response rates as possible?
- How do I maximize my revenue flow?
- How do I ensure customers get their bills in a timely manner to promote early or on-time payment? And how do I get that value back?

When preparing a mailing, it's important to consider what your goals are for that particular campaign. Try asking some of the following questions.

When you identify your purpose and need for the address information, you're able to tailor your address hygiene approach.

In-home service, delivery, and shipping options should also be taken into consideration. If the address on file is a P.O. Box™, then you have to ship through the USPS® specifically. However, if you are shipping to an actual home address, you have the option to use other carriers. Also, if a signature is required, you will need to have a physical address and not just a P.O. Box™ Street Address (PBSA) or P.O. Box. There are cases where someone using a PBSA can allow the USPS to accept packages on their behalf. If that is the case, then the signature obtained for a specific delivery is that of a third-party and not the actual signature of the person for which it is intended.

Best Practices

First things first - you have to know what you need. The reason for best practices, and the reason its plural, is that there is no one best practice. Best practices are dependent on your operation, which is why you need to establish what it is you are doing and what you are planning to use the information for.

Database Design

First, you need to consider your database design. For example, the number and types of addresses you will have to support. Is it all just going to be USPS domestic or are you also going to include international addresses? You also must consider what you plan to do with the information once you have it and create your design accordingly.

Data Entry

One of the biggest things that can be overlooked by companies is data entry. The point of data entry is your best opportunity to identify addresses that are deficient or have unusual characteristics. During this stage, you also have the opportunity to suppress deficient addresses or alter them to improve delivery and boost overall delivery rates. If something seems off and you're asking for additional information at the time of data entry, you have the connection with the actual person providing the data. If you ask for additional information after the fact, then it is far more difficult to make any corrections, which can become costly.

Maintenance

Address quality is not one and done - it is something that requires ongoing maintenance. Addresses are changing all of the time, and we're not just talking about people moving. Renumbering and addresses reassigned between zip codes are also ever-changing. Whether you are using the addresses or not, you'll want to maintain accurate databases because, after a certain timeframe, it may not even be possible through standard tools to catch up on any changes.

It's important to remember that people are moving all the time. If you're sending out First-Class Mail® and have the wrong address, the USPS will forward that mail. However, if you are sending marketing and promotional materials, all of the time, money, and effort put into creating and sending them will ultimately end up in the trash.

Tools and Services

If you utilize the tools and services that are available to you through the U.S. Postal Service® and GrayHair Software, then you can get informative feedback that can help you make sound business decisions moving forward.

Some tools and services available to you through the USPS include ACS™, CASS™, CMRA, PBSA, NCOA™Link®, and more. With GrayHair, you have access to proprietary databases, mail tracking, data visualizations, and IMb™ assignments, to name a few.

With these tools and services, you'll be able to uncover:

- Did the mailpieces get delivered?
- Were the mailpieces forwarded?
- Was the mailing on time?

Once you have the proper tools at your disposal and gather all of your information, what's the next step? It's simple - you can use the information you gather to impact how you use those specific addresses in the future.

By implementing these best practices, you can avoid sending mailings to the incorrect address, ultimately eliminating waste, staying compliant, and increasing the overall health of your mailing campaigns and business.

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