

Informed Visibility: What It Is, What It Provides, and Why You Should Use It

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During Postmaster General Megan J. Brennan's keynote address at this year's National Postal Forum (NPF), she spoke about digital's potential and the Postal Service's commitment to innovation. One example of this commitment to innovation is Informed Visibility (IV), and it's important that mailers fully understand the benefits this offering provides to mailers and the industry.

What Is IV?

Informed Visibility is a repository that provides the Postal Service and industry users with end-to-end visibility — from acceptance to delivery — of letters and flat mail pieces as these items move through the Postal Service network. It was originally envisioned as a single source for mail tracking information for industry mailers.

IV is the product of three legacy postal platforms:

- Confirm/IMb Tracing, which gave visibility into letters and flats and provided raw data, either via a download or through an FTP push subscription.
- Mail.XML messaging, which gave visibility for trays and containers and provided push, pull, or data download. This platform had latency issues and was recently retired.
- A Bundle Visibility Pilot, which paved the way to IV.

Essentially, IV was built because the Postal Service needed an event-driven, near real-time internal service performance measurement for mail to replace the existing reporter system. This changed measurement from a sampling view to a census view. IV was also built to manage and improve Postal Service operations. The previous IMb Tracing system was at the end of its life and the Postal Service, along with industry, wanted to improve the latency of data, such as container and handling unit data.

Closing the Visibility Gap

Today's IV helps to fill in visibility gaps by providing insight into the mail stream — insight that was not previously available at the detail that is collected today. This additional insight is done through two primary ways: assumed and logical delivery events.

For example, with assumed events, when a mail aggregate (like a container) receives a scan, IV creates assumed events for all nested handling units, bundles, and pieces.

Meanwhile, for logical events, IV could use GPS tracking information (geolocation) from carriers' handheld scanners to create logical delivery events that provide insight into when mail is delivered. This is done without the need for a physical scan, making it a game changer for coordinating omnichannel campaigns.

Internally, IV provides the Postal Service workforce with critical operational insight into service performance measurement, mail inventory and predictive workload, and dynamic route optimization.

Externally, the Informed Visibility Mail Tracking & Reporting (IV-MTR) is available to the mailing industry for free as a web application and, recently, as an API. IV-MTR enables mailers to receive powerful, data-driven, near real-time information about the location of their mail.

Previously, to get broad spectrum insight into mail, industry mailers had to collect information from several systems. For example, piece and bundle visibility information came from the legacy IMb Tracing application, and container and tray visibility information came through Mail.XML. Today, about a year and a half after its launch, IV provides mailers with end-to-end visibility as pieces, containers, handling units, and bundles travel through the mail stream, all from a single system.

Every day, IV processes massive amounts of data — much more data than the other Postal Service systems that provide real-time visibility. For example, there are 1.2 billion product tracking and reporting (such as for parcels) transactions per day. In comparison, there are 200 billion Informed Visibility transactions per day.

What IV Provides

IV provides multiple file formats ranging from legacy PKG (only for bundles and pieces) to JSON. Users can choose from a variety of delivery methods, such as having data pushed through a secure FTP or a web service.

IV-MTR provides data in near real time; users can decide at what frequency to receive IV mail tracking data, whether that's hourly, daily, weekly, or monthly.

In addition, IV provides Mailer Quality Data (MQD) and Enterprise Payment System (EPS) Data. In the future, you will be able to access additional data, such as post-campaign data, as well.

There is a powerful data delegation model built in to allow flexible provisioning of data to multiple parties. If you are a mail service provider, the Postal Service's Data Delegation Request form makes it easy to delegate the mail tracking visibility data to you. Your mail service provider can help you with this.

Why You Should Use IV

There are three reasons why you should consider using IV. First, IV is increasing the value of mail and enabling mailers to better plan their mailing campaigns, staffing, and product inventory. Second, IV connects customers to their data and delivers access to mailing information, whether they're on a computer or on a mobile device. Finally, IV creates multi-channel marketing opportunities that enable mailers to engage with customers in near-real time, creating event-driven, transformative mail moments where the digital experience and the physical world are connected in powerful new ways.

Functionality, such as MQD enhancements, was recently added, giving mailers complete visibility into all of the errors on the Mailer Scorecard to allow corrective action, improving the quality of mail and reducing costs.

Future functionality enhancements planned for IV will provide mailers with even more information to improve their operations. Some examples are package visibility, enhanced tracking of Certified Mail for Letters and Flats, Informed Delivery post-campaign data, ACS and secure destruction data, Informed Delivery data, and intelligence into mail disruptions events (such as weather) with an operational status indicator.

As you can see, Informed Visibility does more than the Postal Service's legacy systems that you might be familiar with. IV is a central repository and data broker for a variety of high-volume Postal Service data — not just scan events. It's time to see what IV can do for you because in today's omni-channel world, usage is a must.

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About GrayHair Software

GrayHair is the trusted partner and provider of mail tracking and address hygiene services to the largest mailers in the country. Our solutions deliver insights and decision-ready business intelligence that enable our clients to define the best mailing practices, enhance customer engagement, increase response rates, and decrease costs per acquisition. With GrayHair, mailers gain the guidance and confidence of 200+ years of collective postal experience and an ally with an understanding of the postal industry's nuances. GrayHair is the advantage for marketing agencies, mail service providers, and mailers in the finance, insurance, retail, non-profit, and utilities industries. For more information, visit GrayHairSoftware.com.