A New Era of Mail Visibility

How mail tracking boosts the value of direct mail

SNAIL**WORKS**
COORDINATED DIRECT MARKETING PLATFORM

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Introduction

Direct mail has long been – and remains – an essential marketing channel. It is highly targetable, creates an excellent brand impression, and is much more likely to gain the undivided attention of your prospects. Direct mail works!

Still, there are challenges to working with this channel. Delivery times can be unpredictable, and the ability to coordinate with other marketing channels as well as knowing when to expect response are common challenges.

In 2017, the Postal Service launched a new service that provides detailed insight into the delivery of direct mail. Called Informed Visibility®, this new service represents a big step forward in knowing that your campaign is in the mail, and knowing when it is delivered, down to the piece level.

There are even capabilities to accurately predict delivery and when replies have been sent back – while they are still in the mail stream.

It's All in the Barcode

Virtually all commercial mail today travels with a USPS barcode known as the Intelligent Mail barcode (IMb) which you will see printed above or below the address on most mail pieces. Each of these barcodes is a unique "license plate" for the mail piece that identifies the sender, the destination, and requests a variety of postal services, such as tracking information and address change information. The IMb has been at the heart of mail tracking services since 2006.

Every time a piece of mail passes through a sorter within the postal system, it is scanned, and the mailer can have a record of that scan sent to them electronically. Service providers can use those scan events to create reports that let mailers know when their mail is being delivered. These kinds of services have been available since before 2000, using the IMb or an earlier version, the PLANET code.

Now, with the new Informed Visibility service, that same IMb is also used to link each mail piece to the tray, bundle, or pallet the piece was sent with, in a process called "nesting." So in addition to just knowing when mail pieces have been delivered, mailers can now follow mailings from acceptance at the Postal Service loading dock right to the letter carrier walking up to the house. This nesting process also allows flat-size mail, a traditional blind spot for mail tracking, to become as effective as letter tracking.

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The Benefits of Enhanced Mail Visibility

It's difficult to quantify all of the benefits of visibility into the mail stream, but these are the most apparent:

- Confirmation that all mail was submitted on time
- Coordination of other marketing channels
- Anticipate, and prepare for, response
- Measure inbound mail the moment it enters the mail stream
- Proof of mailing for due diligence requirements
- Identify and resolve delivery issues while the mail is still traveling
- Peace of mind

Confirmation of Mailing

The way things are mailed has changed and continues to change as the Postal Service automates its procedures, and mail service providers employ alternative mailing techniques, such as comingling. The days of having a clerk at the post office weigh your mailing, take a sampling, and confirm that all of the mail is there are gone. Today your mail may be submitted at dozens of sites across the country, or seamlessly accepted at the local post office with no formal verification. This makes the Postal Service more efficient, and saves mailers money. The Postal Service still provides proof of mailing in the form of Informed Visibility. They also provide the raw data of every piece of mail scanned.

By processing that data in the right manner, you can see if and when every piece of mail was inducted by the Postal Service.
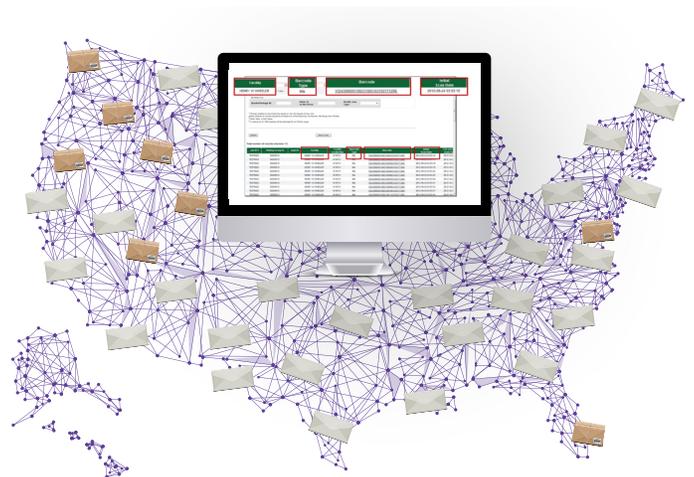
Coordination of Other Marketing Channels

As effective as direct mail is, it can still be more effective when coordinated with other channels. Reaching your clients by multiple channels has been proven to lift response. Visibility of your mail allows you to coordinate those channels perfectly.

Many marketers trigger email campaigns or outbound telemarketing perfectly synchronized with the mail. This provides another view of your offer, and another path for response. Today, even web display advertising can be coordinated through **IP targeting**. Knowing when the mail is delivered is essential – Informed Visibility provides that marketing intelligence.

New features of Informed Visibility allow much better prediction of delivery so you can get other channels out ahead of your mail to build anticipation.

Anticipate – and Prepare For – Response

Of course, the objective of direct marketing is to generate response. Knowing exactly what mail is being delivered when allows you to prepare for and manage that response. Bring in more call attendants, boost store staffing – or don't – depending on when the mail is delivering. Some retailers move inventory or expand their local radio and TV advertising when the mail is delayed.

When you watch your mail travel, you won't be caught by surprise when the message delivers earlier or later than expected.

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Measure Inbound Mail as Soon as it Enters the Mail

If you use the mail for fundraising or renewals, inbound mail and tracking are keys to success.   Informed Visibility also provides for tracking inbound mail, so you can see what mail is headed to you as soon as it is collected and cancelled by the USPS.

For fundraisers, this is the fastest way possible to measure response, before it even comes in the door.   No need to wait for your caging provider to send reports, find out in real time how your test packages are performing in relation to your control.

For renewals, you can avoid sending unneeded additional notices when you know they have already renewed.

If you're watching payments come in, you can avoid taking negative action against valued customers – you know when the check is in the mail.

Prove Mailing to Meet Due Diligence Requirements

Sending cancellation notices? Absentee ballots? There are times when you need to prove that your mail has been given to the Postal Service. Informed Visibility gives you the piece level detail you need to prove mailing. Many states accept this as the preferred standard of proof of mailing.

Identify and Resolve Delivery Issues
While the Mail is Still Traveling

Your sale starts in three days and the mail hasn't delivered yet in Cleveland. Your mail to Atlanta has taken too long to deliver.

These are the kinds of problems Informed Visibility can help resolve.

Informed Visibility tracks not just the mail pieces, but the containers and trays they travel in. In many cases you can locate your missing mail, and have it pushed and delivered, armed with Informed Visibility tracking data. Similarly, when discussing service issues with the Postal Service, it makes the conversation much more productive when you and the USPS can discuss the path your mail traveled.

Peace of Mind

Can there be a better benefit than peace of mind? Direct mail is a significant investment.   Informed Visibility helps you protect that investment by helping you watch the mail travel through the Postal Service and reach your prospective customer.   You know you are getting all of the service you invested in.

The Mechanics of Mail Visibility

So, Informed Visibility is powerful, and clearly adds value to your direct mail. Still, putting all of that data to work for you is not easy. You're going to need some help. The challenge is that the Postal Service only provides raw data of the scans and scan events and all of that data requires some, well, cooking. Interpreting and sharing that data falls to third-party providers, like SnailWorks with our Visibility+™ service. These providers generally work with mail service providers and printers to assign the correct barcode values. Even the largest mailers are hesitant to take this task on without assistance. It's not a wheel anyone is looking to reinvent.

Views Into Your Mail
Informed Visibility data makes possible countless ways to view your mail delivery. Some of the most popular views:

View by Map - Take in the whole country at a glance in a "heat-map" view of mail delivery. Mouse over or click on a state to see detailed delivery information for that state.

View by Date, State, or Zip Code.

See how many pieces of mail were delivered every day, and break that data down further by state, postal area, zip code, or even your own territories. Drill down to individual mail pieces with a few clicks of the mouse.
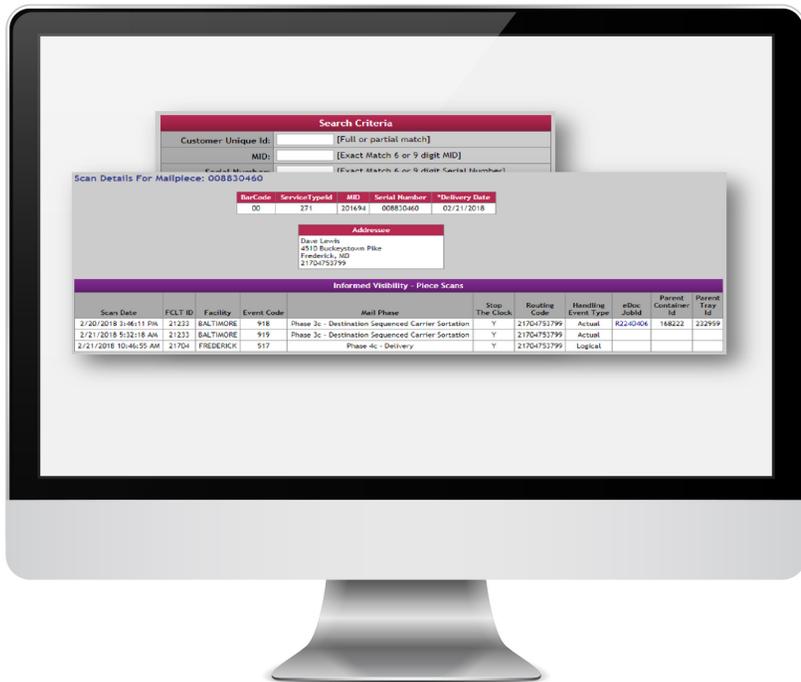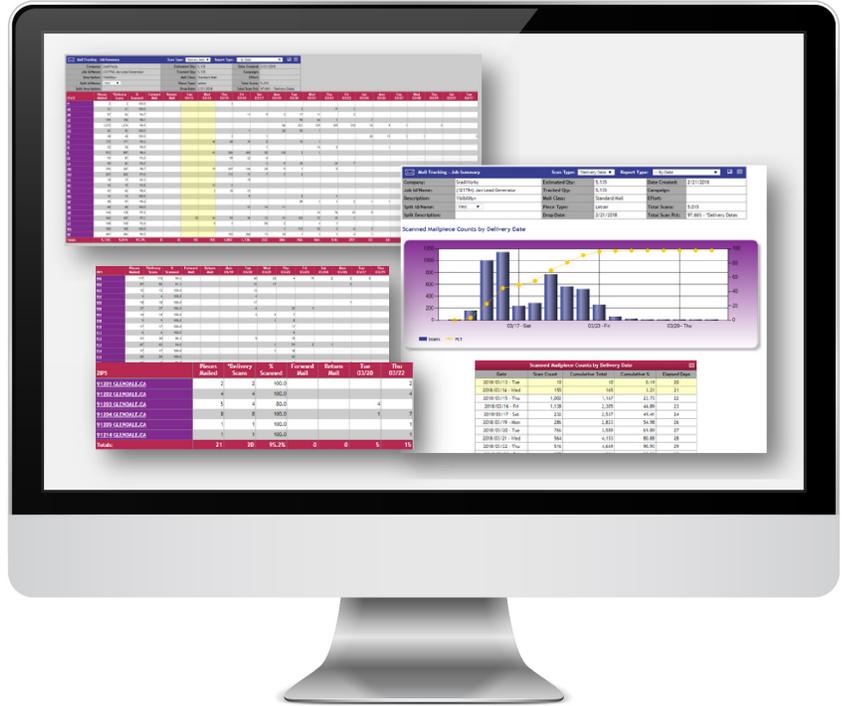
Search for Single Mail Pieces.

Want to know if the boss' mail piece got delivered? Look up individual pieces by name, address, account number and more.

Getting Started

Want to add visibility into your mail?

Tell your mail or print service provider to add SnailWork's Visibility+™ mail tracking powered by Informed Visibility® to your next project, or contact us at SnailWorks – www.SnailWorks.com.

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