

SME Direct Mail Solution - #RFI-SMEDM-03302010

RFI Questions and USPS Responses

Q 1: How does the USPS envision this new initiative to differ from what is currently offered from Amazing Mail and Click2Mail?

R 1: No such assessments have been made. The purpose of this RFI is to get information for market research and planning purposes. The USPS' goal is to provide access to a full portfolio of nationwide services and solutions that continue to add value to the mail process and reach as many customers as possible.

Q 2: What has the USPS learned from those endeavors?

R 2: The Postal Service considers the information requested to be proprietary and confidential.

Q 3: Will the USPS look to increase the number of partners, and if so, how many additional partners will be chosen?

R 3: See Response 1.

Q 4: Section 1.4 mentions a "revenue share arrangements" - does the current contract with Amazing Mail and Click 2 Mail have a revenue share agreement? If so, what is the basis for the revenue share - postage, Production mark-up?

R 4: This information is considered proprietary and confidential. As referenced in section 1.4 of the RFI, we are seeking industry input on potential business models and revenue share arrangements.

Q 5: How many orders a day does the USPS link to AmazingMail and Click2Mail generate?

R 5: This information is considered proprietary and confidential.

Q 6: Is the USPS allowed to develop competing products and services that are already being provided by companies in the private sector, when such competition potentially could bring economic harm to some of the USPS's own best customers?

R 6: The Postal Service believes that it has the authority to promote and increase the use of direct mail by small and medium sized enterprises, to the benefit the overall mailing industry. The Postal Service's goal is to provide services that continue to add value to the mail process and reach as many customers as possible with solutions that can be offered nationwide.

Q 7: In response to the statement: "Allowing the user to create a direct mail order and navigate other elements on the site without the need of having a login account." Why does the USPS feel this requirement is a necessity?

R 7: Based on USPS research, customers have indicated that the creation of mail is a cumbersome and extensive process. Our goal is to make the creation of mail as user friendly and easy to use as possible before log-in is required.

Q 8: Ref. Sec. 1.2 - Can we be provided with a copy of this research/assessment, or at a minimum the associated executive summaries

R 8: This information is considered proprietary and confidential.

Q 9: Ref. Sec. 1.4 - Can you please describe what the types of structures that the USPS is exploring and /or its preferred relationship model?

R 9: As referenced in section 1.4 of the RFI, we are seeking industry input on relationship model arrangements.

Q 10: Ref. Sec. 3.1- How does the USPS plan to use the RFI information that is provided from the respondents if it does not intend to award a contract?

R 10: At this point, the RFI is a request for information and is for market research and planning purposes only.

Q 11: Ref. Sec. 3.1 - How will the confidentiality of respondent information be preserved, especially proprietary information that may be submitted?

R 11: Please reference 3.6 of the RFI.

Q 12: Is USPS seeking a single vendor response to the RFI, or would multi-vendor or consortium responses be entertained?

R 12: The USPS, through the SME RFI process, is seeking to understand industry capabilities and will consider single vendor and multi-vendor responses.

Q 13: We currently have many customers performing all of the functions described in the RFI, could there be a fit with our existing customers to offer USPS services?

R 13: Please reply to the RFI to assist us in determining your company's capabilities.

Q 14: We currently provide the functionality listed in the RFI along with additional functionality needed by SME's such as the facility to provide local ad placement etc. Could you see the system evolving into a one stop application for the SME's beyond functionality listed in the RFI?

R 14: Please see Response 13.

Q 15: Will the offerings include promotional items?

R 15: Please define 'promotional items'.

Q 16: Will the offering require warehouse of product or shell materials? Or will this be an entirely on demand printing offering?

R 16: The Postal Service envisions that this will be an on-demand printing offering, but will assess all options.

Q 17: Which type of print output is required? Offset litho, digital?

R 17: At this time we are exploring all options on printing, personalization based on market needs and respondent's capabilities.

Q 18: What are personalization requirements? Name/address? Personalized text? Variable Data Print/4 color digital?

R 18: See response 17.

Q 19: What is the minimum and maximum quantity of mailers the USPS anticipating per order (high low and average)?

R 19: The Postal Service does not have a minimum or maximum number of mailing pieces per order at this time; we are seeking best practices on this issue.

Q 20: Does the USPS have any known or anticipated legal issues that must be overcome to offer such a service?

R 20: The purpose of this RFI is to get industry input for market research and planning purposes only. See also response 6.

Q 21: Have you ever attempted such an offering in the past and what were any issues you would like addressed in this RFI?

R 21: While mailing online solutions have previously been offered by Postal Service, the purpose of this RFI is to solicit industry input on current capabilities and best practices.

Q 22: Following RFI submissions, what are the next steps and timing for this program?

R 22: At this point, the RFI is a request for information and is for market research and planning purposes only. The next steps include a review of the RFI responses and an evaluation of the Postal Service's options.

Q 23: Will service be permitted outside of the US? If Canada, for example, will the same custom rules apply?

R 23: The service will only apply to the U.S. (Are you looking for FULL US including territories or Continental US?).

Q 24: What languages will be required?

R 24: Based on demand, languages other than English will be considered in future phases.

Q 25: Will custom or user uploaded creative be allowed?

R 25: Yes, our intent is to enable customers to upload their creative in addition to providing pre-set templates.

Q 26: Will there be a requirement to force compliance with 'do not mail' lists?

R 26: No such assessments have been made. The purpose of this RFI is to get information for market research and planning purposes only.

Q 27: How will taxes be calculated? Should we assume a nexus in every state for every customer?

R 27: The tax implications will depend on how the service is ultimately structured, and the types of transactions that occur. Each participant will be expected to rely upon its own experts to determine its particular tax obligations.

Q 28: Will USPS desire the potential vendor to provide complete support via telephone, web, chat and email?

R 28: Section 2.1 outlines our desire in this area. We are seeking industry input on these support mechanisms and best practices.

Q 29: Will USPS require unique indicia per customer account or offer various types of postage? Ex non profit, bulk, first class.

R 29: The USPS does not foresee unique indicia for each customer; however, certain classes of mail will continue to require specific indicia.

Q 30: Does the USPS wish to have this solution fully branded as a USPS property (white label)? Or would USPS simply showcase a partners 'landing page", branded with the award winners corporate branding. If USPS branded, who will be responsible for the creative direction and production of creative elements, artwork, etc.

R 30: The Postal Service is exploring all options in this area.

Q 31: Does the USPS have a budget allocated for development and implementation fees related to the creation of this solution?

R 31: Per Section 2.1 the Postal Service is exploring various relationship models and divisions of responsibility. Your response to this question will be vital in understanding options and industry perspective. We do not have a set budget at this time.

Q 32: Is the functionality described required to be 100% available at time of launch (M6) or is a staggered phased launch of some features acceptable? If so, what would the priority or specific features for initial launch and phase 2 look like?

R 32: Yes, the Postal Service's intent is to launch a fully functional solution as described in the RFI.

Q 33: What is the USPS plan to market the desired service? How much marketing support will the USPS put behind this initiative? Is USPS expecting the vendor to incorporate marketing support in their RFP response?

R 33: The Postal Service is assessing all options, and is considering an aggressive campaign to promote the value of direct mail which may include vendor support based on responses received.

Q 34: Will there be a need to support multiple languages?

R 34: See Response 24.

Q 35: Who will be responsible for marketing this opportunity to the SME's, USPS or the supplier? How will the expense for marketing be handled?

R 35: See Response 33.

Q 36: Assumption is all images online for use are pre-approved stock images and end-user assumes liability for uploading of any non-licensed and inappropriate imagery.

R 36: These issues cannot be determined until decisions are made regarding the business model and structure, based on responses received. At a minimum, the Postal Service anticipates structuring the offering so that it will not be responsible/liable for any uploaded non-licensed and inappropriate imagery.

Q 37: Is there a target number of "industry segments" desired?

R 37: The Postal Service has not defined specific industry segments and is seeking industry input on this topic.

Q 38: In 2.2.8 Creative Design and Format: 8. Providing aggregate geo-located data on recent orders (e.g. to enable users to avoid duplicating graphics from other campaigns in their target markets): is there a specific function or feature that this should be modeled after? For example, is this a feature that shows a map with which template/graphics were used in a specific region?

R 38: Our intent is to provide the end-users with the capability to determine the creative templates which have been heavily used in a given target market/industry. We are interested in learning more about best practices to deliver this information within the solution.

Q 39: Are there any other requirements or vision for this feature (i.e. how else would this feature be used)?

R 39: See Response 38

Q 40: Can USPS provide any details of the marketing plan to SME's for this opportunity?

R 40: See Response 33.

Q 41: Item 2.2.4, Not providing the user to ability to download direct mail templates and other artwork available in the solution. There seems to be a typo in this sentence, can this be clarified

R 41: This should read – "Providing the user the ability to download direct mail templates and other artwork available in the solution'.

Q 42: Education/Needs Assessment – Section 2.1 Does the educational content have to include 3rd party materials beyond materials from the selected vendor?

R 42: The Postal Service will consider all options. It anticipates allowing educational content relevant to the solution from multiple sources.

Q 43: Creative Design – Section 2.2 Regarding point #4, this bullet states a requirement to "not provide the ability to download templates or artwork". This appears to conflict later with section 2.5 bullet 2 which requires the ability to deliver a partially open interface for graphics delivery so that local / retail print providers may fulfill an order. Which of these should take precedence?

Bullet 2 refers to blank template customization. How much customization is required i.e. Logos, photos, copy, formatting, etc. "Reference 2.2 point 4 - refers to restricting customer use of the templates to the online solution only when customers print using the online solution.

R 43: Reference 2.5 point 2. We are exploring technical capabilities for printers which will allow them to have access to the solution and enable them to fulfill on the order. Our goal is to provide an online solution that offers full customization (i.e. logos, photos, copy, formatting, etc.)"

Q 44: Third Party List Services – Section 2.3 Bullet three refers to Storing customer lists. What is the requirement for the length of time for storing customer lists? What will the lists be used for i.e. Suppression processing only, customer management, future remarketing?

R 44: Archiving capabilities will be based on best practices in the industry. Stored lists use will vary based on customer need and can include repeat campaign use, customer acquisition, etc.

Q 45: Payment & Pricing – Section 2.4 Who takes payment? How does USPS expect to be paid by order, monthly revenue allocations, etc? Is USPS willing to commit to volumes?

R 45: Please refer to Section 1.4 where we are seeking industry input on relationship options, etc. At this point the Postal Service is assessing market place capabilities and no volume determinations have been made at this time.

Q 46: Printing – Section 2.5 Bullet one requests clarity on the use of regional printing centers versus centralized printing centers. Is there a preference? Bullet 4 states the requirement for 3-5 day turnaround on print orders. Does the ability for the local print provider negate the requirement for turnaround as that provider's SLA could not be managed?

R 46: Sec.2.5 point 4 refers to orders placed within the online solution only.

Q 47: Delivery – Section 2.6 They requested clear cut off time notifications to meet order delivery deadlines. How will the requirements on cutoff be provided to the vendor? How often do these change?

R 47: Section 2.6. 3 the cut-off date will be determined by the vendor based on its capability to meet the delivery option selected by the customer.

Q 48: Partnership Considerations – Section 3.1.1 On the request to comment on the USPS Strategy and Approach there is a bullet requesting comment on Potential Partnership Arrangement and Structure. Can you clarify this point?

R 48: See Response 9.

Q 49: Customer Data ; How long do we need to retain customer data? Who owns/maintains customer data? Who owns/maintains transaction & credit card data? Does USPS have any data security requirements?

R 49: As referenced in Section 1.4, we are assessing market capabilities based on responses; however, the Postal Service will have data security requirements to protect customer information.

Q 50: Who has editorial control over site content?

R 50: Please refer to Section 1.4 where we are seeking industry input on relationship options, etc. Whatever the exact form of the relationship, the Postal Service will have at least minimum standards regarding site content.

Q 51: A number of references to saving data. Does the USPS have specific requirements on how long customer data should be saved?

R 51: See Response 44.

Q 52: What reporting or administrative access is required by USPS?

R 52: The Postal Service anticipates extensive reporting needs and may require administrative access.

Q 53: Is there a requirement for the site to be completely private labeled by the USPS?

R 53: See Response 30.

Q 54: USPS, through existing partner relationships, appears to have some capability to do some or most of what is requested in this RFI. Is this new initiative striving to do something different? In what ways might this initiative differ from current capabilities?

R 54: See Response 1.

Q 55: If the determination of the RFI is to offer a new solution, what will happen with the existing DM partner relationships?

R 55: See Response 2.

Q 56: What kinds of volume levels in terms of size and number of orders has USPS experienced with current online DM providers, and how does USPS expect this new solution to change from these levels?

R 56: See Response 5.

Q 57: In Section 1.3 USPS states that they are looking for "Interested organizations with the capability...to develop; host; and market." Has the USPS contemplated hosting this as their branded solution through the USPS website or are they strictly looking to serve as the referring/endorsing party?

R 57: The Postal Service is assessing the option of having vendors develop, host and market the online solution, as well as the possibility of integrating all or a portion of a vendor's capabilities within the USPS website.

Q 58: In Section 1.4 USPS states that they'll supply "a marketing channel (including cost effective direct mail and USPS.com) and sales lead generation..." In the first portion of this statement, will USPS be providing discounted postage above and beyond what is available through standard USPS discounting for presort and geo-density volumes, and if so is this solely for the purpose of marketing the proposed partnership?

R 58: At this time the Postal Service does not intend to offer any pricing outside of our published rates.

Q 59. Q: Non-profit seems to be excluded. Would the USPS support the use of valid non-profit users submitting mail via this system? If so, would that mail be accepted along with other direct mail when printed at multiple production sites and delivered to multiple induction points? Would G10 be required for use by USPS employees who want to use the system or send samples?

R 59: Yes, non-profits will not be excluded from using this solution. G10 use has not been yet been determined as a part of this solution. Any G10 use would at a minimum adhere to G10 use guidelines.

Q 60: For the latter portion of "sales lead generation," what type of lead generation will USPS be using? Will it be limited to simple offerings on the website, or will there be a concentrated campaign or sales effort developed to promote this new service?

R 60: See Response 33.

Q 61: Of the existing DM providers on the USPS site, what has and hasn't worked with this relationship?

R 61: See Response 2.

Q 62: In Section 2.5 - What is the interest in regional production facilities? Is this for redundancy purposes or to ensure a faster delivery (i.e. – production) time?

R 62: Primarily for faster production of the pieces and induction into the mailstream.

Q 63: While the focus of this marketing initiative is for direct mail, is USPS interested in platforms offering non-DM channels such as email, SMS, etc?

R 63: At this time the SME RFI is strictly focused on direct mail.

Q 64: In Section 2.2 - Are letters expected to be printed and inserted into envelopes, or in a tri-fold w/tab seal format?

R 64: The Postal Service is open to obtaining input through this RFI on all formats that may be utilized by small businesses.

Q 65: Has USPS attempted to create a direct marketing portal solution for small business in the past? If so, what were the results?

R 65: See Response 21

Q 66: Will USPS consider a 5-10 year licensing model so the solution provider building this solution can leverage the strong USPS brand and the solution provider's investment?

R 66: See Response 9

Q 67: Does USPS perceive this solution as a potential conflict of interest by proposing a marketing services solution that is currently provided by hundreds of businesses nationwide today?

R 67: See Response 6.

Q 68: Does this end-to-end solution include email and SMS messaging as part of the campaign deployment and response data provided back to each small business?

R 68: See Response 63.

Q 69: Has USPS established a budget for developing a SME Direct Mail Solution? If so, how much is budgeted for this project?

R 69: See Response 31.

Q 70: What is the anticipated date of release for the SME Direct Mail Solution?

R 70: This has not been determined at this time; however, depending on the viability of a potential offering the Postal Service would like to be able to launch a service in early calendar 2011.

Q 71: Is the solution provider(s) expected to aggregate the partners for this solution, or is the USPS proposing to serve as the agent/integrator?

R 71: The Postal Service is considering all business models; its preference at this time is not to serve as agent/integrator.

Q 72: What is the pilot or rollout methodology in use by the USPS for any similar large-scale initiatives?

R 72: The Postal Service strives to use best practices to develop and implement products and services.

Q 73: What are the data security components of the USPS around this solution (SAS 70, etc.)?

R 73: The SME RFI is for exploratory purposes; therefore, data security requirements have not been determined at this time.

Q 74: Has USPS considered establishing a cooperative business model for this initiative that would create common certified USPS standards around direct mail and marketing support for small businesses, yet allowing that service provider to market and sell each small business on its own merits (knowing that consistent standards are in place)?

R 74: The Postal Service is exploring all business models that will help retain and grow the direct mail industry.

Q 75: Is USPS prepared to invest in a partner relationship to expand a regional footprint of production facilities to a national scale, or is the nationwide footprint a minimum requirement?

R 75: The Postal Service's preference at this time is to have a nationwide footprint to grow the direct mail industry; however, other recommendations for other printing configurations that could still meet the needs of the geographically dispersed small businesses are welcome.

Q 76: Is USPS preparing to provide professional service support to help small businesses market more effectively using direct mail, or is this an ASP self-service solution?

R 76: The Postal Service anticipates providing educational content to support small and medium sized businesses in using direct mail effectively; however, the particular forms of support to be provided will be assessed following receipt of industry input.

Q 77: Does USPS want the service provider to also provide current list management capabilities for small businesses for retention marketing purposes in addition to lead generation/acquisition efforts?

R 77: Yes.

Q 78: From an SLA standpoint, how much redundant capacity in production and server/system capacity would be required?

R 78: This has not been determined. Any insight into your current capacity, scalability, and backup capabilities would be helpful.

Q 79: Who is providing the SME business objectives?

R 79: Business objectives will be provided once all market research is completed and all options are explored. The "who" will be a combination of the USPS and selected private parties.

Q 80: What do you mean by "wizards"?

R 80: The term "wizards" refers to standardized computing tools used to help customers complete a task or activity in a self-guided, step-by-step manner that is assisted by the application.

Q 81: Providing users the ability to upload, de-dupe, cleanse and store their own lists. Specifically what do they mean by "cleanse" here?

R 81: Cleanse means: CASS Certified™ Address Matching Software with LACSLINK; Address Element Correction I & II (AEC I & II); National Change of Address Link (NCOALINK™); and, ACS™/ OneCodeACS™.

Q 82: What is the difference here than the “cleanse” mentioned above?

R 82: There is no difference.

Q 83: Providing check-out services – including ability to store credit card information, billing address, on-screen and email order confirmation. Is this a requirement to hold credit card information?

R 83: The Postal Service’s SME RFI is for exploratory purposes only and no determinations have been made regarding this issue at this time. We welcome industry input.

Q 84: Ability to incorporate regional printing centers across the country rather than one centralized printing facility. Are we also allowed to find/recommend other regional printing facilities or is there a list of printers that USPS is going to recommend?

R 84: See Response 75.

Q 85: Providing 3-5 day turn-around on print orders. Comment: We cannot commit to a other print vendor we do not control.

R 85: See Response 46.

Q 86: Please elaborate as best as possible on the ROI analysis expectations.

R 86: The Postal Service is looking at vendors who have the capability to develop a ROI estimator as outlined in Section 2.7.

Q 87: What database would be available from the USPS to serve as one of the list providers? For example, would “movers/change of address databases be available for users”?

R 87: The Postal Service will not provide mailing lists. This capability must be provided by 3rd Party vendors. The Postal Service is obligated to protect the confidentiality of customer information. Any vendor will be required to abide by minimum privacy standards as well.

Q 88: Is it feasible for the USPS to create a unique postal rate for these users which deviates from published automation rates?

R 88: See Response 58.

Q 89: Who does the USPS consider the competition will be in this business?

R 89: See Response 6.

Q 90: Section 2.2.4 this sentence is confusing, can it be more clearly stated? Are you looking for an application of the DM template that can be downloaded or is the preference to not be able to download the DM template?

R 90: Reference 2.2 point 4 - refers to restricting customer use of the templates to the online solution only when customers print using the online solution.

Q 91: Section 3.1.1 please define the critical success criteria you are asking for submittals to comment on. Or are you looking for submissions to help define the success parameters? Yes

Are there any guidelines for the length of the submittal for the RFI, is there a page count maximum?

R 91: No

Q 92: When are answers due back and will you send all submitted questions/answers to all submitting companies?

R 92: Yes, answers to all questions relating to the SME RFI will be posted on fbo.gov

Q 93: Can the USPS identify how they define "Small Businesses?" The RFP references the Small Business Association which classifies small businesses as under 500 employees but the USPS may include additional ranges that may also contribute to this definition.

R 93: The Postal Service is currently conducting research to better define "small business." We concur with the SBA's general definition of small to medium size businesses.

Q 94: Would the USPS want the winner of the RFI (or RFP) to propose the best companies or industries to target?

R 94: See Response 37.

Q 95: The RFI asks that we provide functionality for USPS to measure industry segment level usage based on measuring the number of clicks for templates for a specific industry (pg 8). Will the USPS permit a copy of a recent Google Analytics report provided for a different USPS campaign to be included as an example of our capabilities?

R 95: Yes.

Q 96: The RFI states on page 8, pt. 6, "Profiling capabilities - ability for user to upload best customer list or best customer profile and have a list of similar prospects generated." Can the USPS provide insight on how "similar" will be defined? Is it SIC, company size, or a combination of factors?

R 96: At this point the Postal Service believes it will be a combination of factors (SIC, company size, etc.) and are looking for responders to provide best practices surrounding this capability.

Q 97: Would the USPS permit the leverage of names currently stored on our existing USPS databases in order to reduce costs?

R 97: Clarification is needed on this question.

Q 98: In the event that the USPS work with multiple partners to execute this program, will USPS centrally manage the multiple partner relationships? Or, is USPS looking for one partner to serve as the lead and sub-manage the multiple participants.

R 98: See Response 71.

Q 99: Would the USPS be open to content partnerships from 3rd parties such as creative agencies or other companies who offer services in this space in addition to what we would offer as original work as it applies to template creation?

R 99: Yes.

Q 100: Would the USPS allow templates which use variable data for personalization in the content of the template? (e.g. "Happy Birthday <FirstName>")

R 100: See Response 17.

Q 101: One of the bullet points in 2.2 specifically calls out to 'not allow' the downloading of template or graphic content from the site. Many SMEs may feel more comfortable composing their mailing document off-line in products like Word or InDesign or others. The bullet implies using the templates on the USPS site as a starting point would not be allowed. Is this correct? Would it be allowed to offer a sub-set of templates to users who wanted to develop content offline but wanted a good starting point?

R 101: Yes, at this time, the intent of the online solution is to create or select preloaded templates within the solution and not enable downloading of templates to be used within other design software solutions.

Q 102: Would the USPS allow other payment services, by way of example, PayPal, to pay for these services? Would ACH (electronic check) payment be accepted? Would pre-purchasing of credits be acceptable as an alternative for those that wanted it?

R 102: USPS is exploring all payment options.