Automatic

18 Point Postal Automation Design Checklist

by Automatic-Mail.com

Postal automation is a very good thing. Depending on the size of your mailing, it could save you hundreds or thousands of dollars. However, using it incorrectly or improperly can cost you severely –– in terms of money… and precious time!

Remember that automation doesn't think or reason. You need to do the thinking for it… anticipating how automation could misinterpret your intentions.

In other words, you need a postal automation game plan because one little miss… such as copy inadvertently sliding down into the postal service's "no-fly zone…" and you'd be in deep trouble. Or when there's not enough contrast between the addressing information and the background… you'd pay the penalty… and lose your ability to save money.

While there certainly are more than 18 automation design and addressing considerations when you're creating automation-compatible mail, this list –– along with the accompanying design template –– will at least get you started.

Because instructions for preparing mail often seem confusing and contradictory, the best way to know if your proposed letters, flyers, or mailers are compatible to the maximum degree is to become familiar with the following guidelines… and check with a professional direct mail company.

That simple step… that professional review of your mail design plan… can make or break you. So here goes:

1. Letters or Cards must be a minimum of 3.5" H x 5" W and a maximum of 6.125" H x 11.5" W.

2. Thickness is based on the size of the mail with the minimum being 0.009" thick and the maximum being ¼" thick for letters. For postcards, the minimum thickness is 0.007" and the maximum thickness is 0.016".

3. Pieces must have an appropriate aspect ratio. The aspect ratio is the length of the mail piece (edge parallel to the address block) divided by the height. This number must fall between 1.3 and 2.5.

4. No enclosures such as keys, pens, or large clasps that could jam machinery. Postal automation doesn't like staples either… either in the contents, but definitely not through it.

5. Postal automation is sensitive to certain high-gloss papers. If you want to venture into ultra high-gloss papers, give us a call.

6. No handwritten addresses for automation. Your only option is typing or computer generated.

7. Folded mailers and booklets must be tabbed appropriately for automation. The placement and number of tabs depends on size and fold position. Simple design changes can save hundreds of dollars in tabbing costs.

8. Watch the orientation of the address block on letters and cards. The address should be parallel with the longest edge of the piece.

9. The text of all address lines should be flush left. Nothing centered… and no fancy formatting.

10. The lower right hand corner of the envelope or mailer…an area 5/8" H X 4.75" W…should be clear. This is called the barcode "clear zone" or "no-fly zone."

Postal automation relies on MERLIN (Mail Evaluation Readability Lookup Instrument) — a mechanized address reader that attempts to standardize the *acceptance* or *rejection* of address barcodes and backgrounds.

Incorrect mail piece design, specific background colors, certain glossy stocks, poor quality addressing… or the wrong minimum stock weight can create **non-readable barcodes,** thereby eliminating *any* and *all* postal automation discounts.

When there is a problem, you could pay up to 42% more in postage than you should. Mail that should deploy at 19 cents can cost you 27 cents.

Right or wrong, the USPS can reject the lower rate on the spot. If you want to argue your case, you face a long appeals process.

11. A rectangular area 1-1/4" x 4" is recommended for the address block. Consider making this area larger to be on the safe side. This address space needs to be at least 5/8" from the bottom and ½" from either edge. It is recommended to keep this in the bottom 2-3/4" of the envelope or mailer.

12. The bottom line of the address must be the City/State/ZIP. In other words, there should be no text ("Attn: So-and-so" or a suite number) below the City/State/ZIP line.

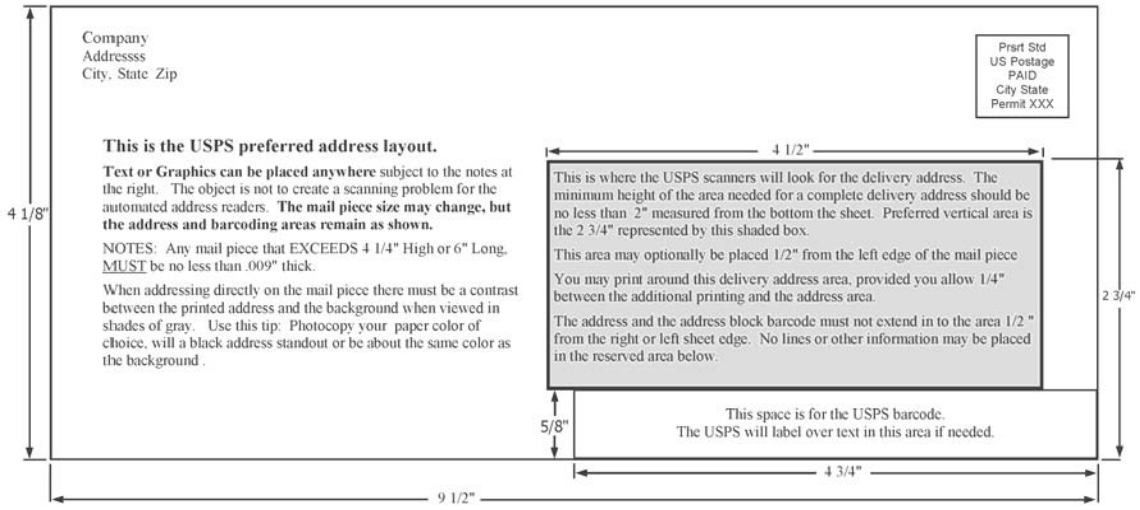
13. The delivery address line must be immediately above the city/state/ZIP line. In the case of 2 address lines (street address vs. PO Box) the line closest to City/State/ZIP would be the one used for delivery.

14. You must use a 9-digit barcode assigned. (This is done in postal processing.)

15. For window envelopes, the entire address must remain visible by 1/8" in the window… even when the envelope is jogged in any direction.

Use This Handy Design Template

There are dozens of postal templates. But here's the one that you'll find most helpful as you plan your direct mail design. Simply put, stay out of the no-fly zones on the right; teaser or sell copy goes on the left. In all cases, stay clear of the 5/8" at the bottom!



16. There must be a **high contrast** between the address and the background. In other words, avoid printing the address on colored paper or background photos. (Consider using white labels or a white addressing block.)

17. The area of the envelope below the return address and to the left of the delivery address area may be used, but you must allow 1/4" between it and the delivery address lines. The same holds true for the area above the delivery address as well.

18. All enclosed reply cards or envelopes must meet all automation letter requirements, plus contain the correct Facing Identification Mark (FIM) A, B, or C, the correct Zip+4, and a complete deliver point barcode for the return address.

Remember, no two situations are alike. And an 18-point checklist can't replace years of experience. So feel free to call for additional information about postal automation and designing for automation compatibility.

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About Automatic Mail Service, Inc.

Your 360° Direct Marketing Success

We drive sales! Since 1971, Automatic Mail has served its customers with A+ service:

- Ensuring your success
- Freeing you to focus on your business
- Making your marketing efforts more effective and your direct dollars go further

Automatic Automated Marketing integrates your direct print marketing and lead generation with your Website, email marketing, and a master customer data management system. Increases response, ROI, your bottom line.

Keeping up with your clients' needs is overwhelming. Managing your sales pipeline is a challenge.

Automatic Automated Marketing delivers sophisticated, easy-to-use marketing integration tools.

- Improve ROI of direct mail
- Track who is doing what with your print mail, emails, Website.
- Accurately target print, broadcast, online messages.
- Nurture leads and deliver the information they want.
- Cross–sell & up–sell more effectively.
- Manage your clients and your prospects easily, successfully.

Automatic Automated Marketing delivers sales ready leads plus the tools to manage them throughout the entire customer lifecycle.

Feedback

If you have any feedback or any questions, please email or call Automatic. No matter is too small.

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