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Ride-Along Survey

(Plant and Delivery Survey Results Summary)

USPS-LR-J-101

Ride-Along *Plant* Survey Results Summary

The *Operational Requirements* group forwarded the following informal survey to each area on May 30, 2001, and they were asked that the questions be forwarded to processing and distribution centers and facilities within their area. Based on the replies, it appears that at least 100 offices supplied information representing 10 areas. Each area was asked to compile the information and summarize the results. Below each question is a compilation of the responses for all of the areas, including specific valuable comments.

1. Have you witnessed a significant quantity of Periodicals with Ride-Alongs in your Plant? Please describe the pieces you see most frequently both by type of ride along (e.g. CDs) and by how they are prepared with the host piece (e.g., polywrapped, etc.).

Six of the areas indicated that the amount witnessed was not significant, however, the most common Ride-Alongs (RAs), when witnessed, were polywrapped Periodicals containing a CD. Two areas indicated that they are witnessing Ride-Alongs (RAs) more frequently, with CDs also the most common. The remaining respondents indicated that they had not witnessed significant quantities of RAs.

2. Are these pieces processed any differently from similar Periodicals without Ride-Alongs?

Five areas indicated that there was no significant difference in the way these pieces were processed as a result of the RA. Two areas indicated that it was common that pieces with RAs were moved to the FSM 1000 due to processing difficulty on the other types of flats sorting equipment. One area responded that, as long as the polywrap (w/ RA) is tight around the piece, they could continue to process these flats on the AFSM 100s.

3. Do these pieces in any way negatively impact your AFSM 100 operation? If yes, please describe the Ride-Along pieces that do so and explain specifically how they impact the operation.

Three areas indicated that the RAs did not negatively impact the AFSM 100 operation. Three areas responded that CD RAs with loose polywrap (too much selvage) were the cause of processing problems on the AFSM 100s. Two areas responded that it was simply the polywrap associated with many RAs that was the real problem. Two areas also indicated that if the CD was not affixed to the host piece, they had a tendency to move around and tear through the polywrap, becoming detached. Finally, one area mentioned that the polywrap tended to stick together (or melt), which caused jams on the AFSM 100s.

4. Do these pieces in any way negatively impact your FSM 881 operation? If yes, please describe in the Ride-Along pieces that do so and explain specifically how they impact the operation.

Three areas indicated that these pieces did not impact the FSM 881 operation. Three areas indicated that RAs with loose polywrap (too much selvage) caused jams on the 881s. Four areas commented that RA pieces, in general, caused jams on the 881. One area mentioned that RA pieces were typically moved off the 881s and over to the FSM 1000s due to excessive jams. Finally, one area indicated that if an RA caused the piece to be too stiff, the piece would have had trouble navigating the end turn on the FSM 881.

5. Do these pieces in any way negatively impact your manual flats operation? If yes, please describe the Ride-Along pieces that do so and explain specifically how they impact the operation.

Six areas indicated that RAs did not cause any problems with manual operations. Two areas indicated that RAs, that were not uniform-in-thickness, caused unbalanced stacks in the manual cases. Two areas commented that RAs that became separated from their host piece have resulted in additional mail in manual operations, in general.

6. Do these pieces in any way negatively impact your flats bundle distribution operation (e.g. SPBS)? For example, do the Ride-Along pieces result in unstable or insecure bundles? Please explain.

Six areas responded that RAs did not adversely impact the SPBS operation. Four areas indicated that bundle integrity was sometimes compromised as a result of flats with RAs that were not uniform-in-thickness, creating unstable bundles.

7. Since the majority of Ride-Along enclosures are CDs, how would you compare the effects of CDs as Ride-Alongs versus CDs as separate pieces (in the form of manual letters, flats or small parcels)?

Nine areas responded that they preferred having the CDs enclosed as an RA opposed to a separate piece. Indications are that CDs specifically, when a separate piece, are either processed on FSM 1000s or in manual operations. One area indicated mixed responses to this question from their plants.

8. Have you experienced Ride-Along pieces coming detached from the host piece? If yes, please explain the situation and extent of the problem.

Five areas indicated that instances of RAs becoming detached were infrequent. Three areas responded that this was really not a problem. One area commented that when the polywrap was of poor quality and the RA was not attached to the host piece, the RA was much more likely to become detached. Finally, one area commented that thicker, heavier RAs that were not affixed were more likely to tear through the polywrap.

9. The requirements were written to ensure that the machinability of the host flat mailpiece was maintained. Have mailpiece characteristics changed to the extent that machinability has been affected? Please provide specifics (uniform thickness, shape, polywrap, etc.).

Six areas indicated that, generally speaking, the machinability of the host piece was maintained. Three areas responded that the address/barcode readability was compromised due to the polywrap (with address label attached to piece, underneath the polywrap) and/or an RA that was not affixed, which could obstruct the address. One area commented that polywrap with a seam down the middle of the piece resulted in greater instances of tears and RA detachment.

10. Any additional comments?

Below is a list of other relevant comments in no specific order:

- **The problems associated RAs (detachment, jams, etc.) were more a result of poor polywrap than the RA itself.**
- **Suggest requiring the RA to be placed on the back of the magazine to prevent address obstruction (*note: this is a current requirement*).**
- **Two areas suggested requiring polywrap that tightly fits the Periodical (minimal selvage) to reduce operational difficulties.**
- **Suggest the mailers insert the RA inside the publication.**

- Two areas suggested that mailers be required to affix the RA to the Periodical inside the polywrap.

Conclusion:

Though a vast majority of sites have witnessed RA Periodicals, they would not be characterized as prevalent at this point. A majority of RAs is compact disks (CDs) enclosed in polywrap. For the most part, the machinability of the Periodicals are not greatly affected by the RAs, but loose polywrap (significant selvage) can cause problems on the AFSM 100, and the polywrapped pieces, in general, cause frequent jams on the FSM 881s. There are no significant issues with RAs in terms of their impact on SPBS and manual operations. Though a number of instances of RAs becoming detached from the host piece have been identified, these instances would not be characterized as significant. A vast majority of plants prefer the attachments (particularly CDs) as RAs opposed to separate pieces (more cost effective).

Ride-Along *Delivery* Survey Results Summary

The *Operational Requirements* group forwarded the following informal survey to each area on May 30, 2001, and it was asked that the questions be forwarded to at least four delivery offices per district for response. Based on the replies, it appears that approximately 300 office supplied information representing all eleven areas. Each area was asked to compile the information and summarize the results. Below each question is a compilation of the all of the area responses, including specific valuable comments.

1. Have you witnessed a significant quantity of Periodicals with Ride-Alongs in your delivery unit? Please describe the pieces you see most frequently both by type of ride along (e.g. CDs) and by how they are prepared with the host piece (e.g., poly-wrapped, etc.).

A vast majority of the areas described the quantity of RAs witnessed as not significant, with most examples being CDs enclosed in polywrap. One area indicated that some of the RAs witnessed had been enclosed within the publication or affixed to the cover.

2. Are these pieces handled any differently from similar Periodicals without Ride-Alongs in the office? On the street?

Eight areas responded that, based simply on the fact that an RA was attached, those pieces were not handled differently from other Periodicals. They attempted to case these flats in with the rest of the flat mail. Three areas took this opportunity to comment that, on the street, CD RAs often would not fit in apartment-style mailboxes and had to be treated as parcels.

3. Have you experienced Ride-Along pieces coming detached from the host pieces? Please explain the situation and the extent of the problem.

Eight areas indicated that there had been few instances of the pieces becoming detached, and two commented that the RAs received protection from the host piece and, as a result, arrived in better shape. Two areas indicated that when they became detached, it is difficult to match RAs back with their host Periodicals.

4. Do these pieces in any way negatively impact the carrier casing operation? If yes, please describe the Ride-Along pieces that do so and explain specifically how they impact the operation.

Six areas responded that RAs did not have a significant negative impact on the carrier casing operation. Three areas commented that RAs, when thick, resulted in carriers' case slots filling up too fast. Five areas commented that stiff RAs (e.g. CDs) caused problems for rural carriers since the pieces cannot be rolled and must then be treated as a parcel. If a Periodical cannot be folded, it can be counted as a parcel during rural mail counts, and rural carriers are compensated at a higher rate for parcels. Four areas added that Periodicals with RAs sometimes caught on case dividers or other previously cased flats, slowing down the carrier casing operation. One area commented that loose RAs forced carriers to "tap" the pieces to properly orient the RA to facilitate carrier casing.

5. Do these pieces in any way negatively impact street delivery, particularly the placement of these flats in small PO Boxes, apartment-style mailboxes, or other small receptacles? If yes, please describe the Ride-Along pieces that do so and explain specifically how they impact the street delivery. Please also describe any alternative methods you have employed to address the situation.

Ten areas responded that Periodicals with stiff RAs (e.g. CDs) often did not fit in apartment-style mailboxes and required the carrier to leave a notice (PS Form 3849) similar to a parcel. Seven areas indicated that a similar situation existed with small PO Boxes, where a notice had to be left in the box in lieu of the piece, and customers had been annoyed that they had to wait in line to pick-up their Periodicals. One area, however, noted that with CDs, in particular, there were difficulties with these pieces fitting into apartment-style mailboxes and small PO Boxes even when they were separate pieces, so the situation was made no worse with CDs as RAs.

6. Since the majority of Ride-Along enclosures are CDs, how would you compare the effects of CDs as Ride-Alongs versus CDs as separate pieces (in the form of manual letters, flats or small parcels)?

Nine areas responded that the pieces as RAs were preferred and more efficient than if mailed as separate pieces. Three commented that the host piece lent protection to the RAs.

7. Any additional comments?

Below is a list of other relevant comments in no specific order:

- **RAs are better from a cost perspective than if mailed as two separate pieces.**
- **If separate pieces, significant costs are added to the office and street because of increased processing and delivery time.**
- **Five areas commented that Periodicals with RAs caused problems when cased in 5- or 6-shelf cases (most rural routes use 6-shelf cases) due to the inflexible nature of the pieces.**
- **Detached RAs add workload to the undeliverable Standard Mail and recycle operations.**
- **When the RAs have sharp edges, they have a tendency to tear through the polywrap and become detached.**
- **When the polywrap containing the RA has too much selvage, the RA moves around adding difficulty to delivery.**
- **There is a grievance in Step 4 in Arizona to decide if Periodicals with stiff RAs are to be classified as flats or parcels.**
- **The RAs add confusion in terms of the proper treatment in the forwarding operations.**
- **Standard Mail pieces as RAs add value because they are forwarded along with the host piece opposed to being discarded.**

Conclusion:

Although the vast majority of sites have witnessed RA Periodicals, they would not be characterized as prevalent at this point. The most common RA is a CD. Occasionally, Periodicals with RAs cause problems in the carrier casing operation (e.g. catching, clogging slot), but it would not be characterized as serious. Issues of a more significant nature are when the stiff RA results in the piece not being able to fit in apartment-style mailboxes and small PO Boxes, and instances where these pieces are treated and counted as parcels on rural routes. The vast majority of delivery units prefer attached RAs (particularly CDs), as opposed to separate pieces (more cost effective).