

Postal Rate and Fee Changes, 2001)

Docket No. 2001-1

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OCA-LR-J-4
NOTES OF THREE FOCUS GROUPS
HELD BY
THE OFFICE OF THE CONSUMER ADVOCATE
DECEMBER 4, 2001
1. Session 1 (A.M.)
2. Session 2 (P.M.)
3. JANUARY 24, 2002

March 6, 2002

OCA-LR-J-4
Notes of Three Focus Group Sessions

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Consumer Advocate (OCA) determined that there would be benefit in conducting round-table discussions with consumers about their experiences with the Postal Service. OCA wished to be neutral in these group discussions and not steer the discussion in a particular direction, certainly not in a direction that would cast the Postal Service in an unfavorable light.

On December 4, 2001, OCA held two focus groups at the Postal Rate Commission headquarters. There were thirteen participants in each session. The participants in the morning sessions included a diverse group of consumers from the Washington, D.C. area, including trade association, government, consumer, and public affairs professionals. The afternoon session, also held on December 4, had a similar composition.

On Thursday January 24, 2002, a third focus group was held at the office of Suited for Change, an organization whose aim is to prepare unemployed, economically disadvantaged women to enter the labor force. There were thirteen participants in this session. Although Suited for Change is a women's organization, three men from a vocational training program also participated.

There are multiple sets of notes for each focus group and a general summary for both sessions on December 4, 2001, drafted by the focus group leader. Several individuals took notes during the sessions so as to preserve as much of the discussion as possible.

OUTLINE/AGENDA FOR DECEMBER 4 FOCUS GROUPS

OUTLINE/AGENDA FOR OCA FOCUS GROUPS

DECEMBER 4, 2001

9:30-11:30 A.M.

1:30-3:30 P.M.

9:20 – 9:40 Participants arrive. Invited to experience using the Electronic Delivery Confirmation service provided by the USPS. Also, they will have an opportunity to enjoy refreshments.

9:40 – 9:45 Welcome and thanks for attending focus group
SD

- Everyone is a customer of the Postal Service.
- Each of you was selected, because you will offer a unique perspective on the Postal Service's Customer Service.
- This is the first time the PRC has invited consumers in to discuss their views about USPS customer service. We are very interested in your candid views about customer service.
- KK will facilitate today's session

9:45 – 9:50 Discuss ground rules

- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Everyone's opinion is important.
- Everyone will have an opportunity to participate.
- Only one person talks at a time.
- In the interest of time limit comments to less than a minute.
- The session will be broken down into three sections:
 - a.) Introductions with each participant sharing one story about an experience with the Postal Service
 - b.) Discussion of current issues
 - c.) The USPS five years from now
 - d.) Services you would like to see the Postal Service offer

9:50 – 10:05 Introductions

10:05 – 10:30 Current issues: Introduce topics from invitation letter

10:30 – 10:50 USPS five years from now: Planet Code increased competition, electronic mail

10:50 – 11:00 Participants suggestions for new services

11:00 – 11:10 Any final views participants would like to share

11:15 – 11:20 Thanks and wrap-ups; SD

DECEMBER 4, 2001 FOCUS GROUPS

A.M. SESSION

MORNING FOCUS GROUP: NOTES 1

Morning Focus Group, December 4, 2001: Notes 1

Experience with the Post Office: Individuals first commented on one or two memorable experiences at with the Postal Service. Comments are not identified by individual:

- Individual applied for a passport. No problem.
- Individual goes to a community post office rather than a larger post office because the people are nicer and there is no rush.
- Individual prefers a rural/community post office. Cited favorable experiences and interactions with people
- Individual observed that Post Office personnel are over crowded and stressed-out at one major facility; in comparison, another facility in a less urban area has nice people and no stress
- Individual insured a package, was never able to collect on the insurance when package was not delivered. Individual was an African American of modest circumstances. Felt that Post Office did not give appropriate attention, required excessive documentation, and did not provide information up front.
- Individual expressed that they had had a positive experience.
- Individual noted that Postal Service is far ahead of South American postal services. However, there is a language barrier in some offices of the Postal Service. He liked the cheap rates, high quality service.
- Another individual recounted exceptionally favorable experience some years ago with the Royal Post in Great Britain. Questioned whether he would have obtained similar service from the U.S. Postal Service
- Individual prefers a rural post office, local community. Had trouble working with on-line phone address change; however, found local office helpful. Concerned somewhat about safety of mail. Likes the Postal Service, but doesn't use it very much
- Individual mailed a \$250 gift certificate, uninsured, by priority mail; it arrived after 12 days, over a distance of 120 miles. Previously, had problem with the Post Office not forwarding mail correctly; took one year to resolve.
- Individual sends letters to Denmark; letters seem to take a bit longer to arrive than expected. Mail is delivered in the early morning in Denmark.
- Individual affixed incorrect postage on a package to be sent abroad and left it for letter carrier. Package was mailed by the carrier with correct postage, and she subsequently paid the carrier. Individual concluded that letter carrier offered exceptional service.
- Individual sees the post office as a community. Wants a personal relationship.
- Individual is a diversity consultant. He likes the people who are friendly at the post office.

Priority Mail

- Postal Service does not make delivery date clear; delayed. Individual not sure that priority mail is any faster. The give the impression it will be there, but this is not clearly explained.
- If the price of priority mail increases, individual will cut back on its use.
- Priority mail needs to have fewer choices and insurance included. There are long lines, and it is not clear what type of mail service to use.
- You pay extra for priority--and worry. Fed Ex and UPS are more apt to handle problems quickly.
- Priority mail has good packaging, but it should be priority.

Insurance: This is a service that costs extra. Why can't the Post Office track the package?

- Another individual thought that priority mail was insured.
- Can purchase delivery confirmation, but delivery confirmation frequently does not show up on the screen; rather, customer gets "In the system" response.
- If delivery is important, the individual will not waste money on the Postal Service. Use UPS/FedEx--they track the package. If the package has to get there, the cost differential is less important. Individual didn't get their money back.
- Waiting "forever". Problems with collecting on the insurance.
- A different individual was quite pleased with the insurance.
- Insurance terms are unclear to some, particularly in terms of necessary documentation to collect.
- Insurance is used by some people because the package is perceived to get better care. There is concern about packages being stolen when delivered.
- Insurance form is difficult to use, and Postal Service personnel have a bureaucratic mentality.
- People would like better tracking. Also, notification that a package has been delivered via email. Also, let people know that a package is at their house.

Service

- The Postal Service has volume problems. Employees are dedicated, but not on a system wide basis.
- Takes so long to track a money order.
- Usually can't talk to anyone on the phone. In comparison FED Ex/UPS can track.
- Calling the Postal Service on the phone is very inconvenient, and some people have trouble going to the post office and don't have computers.
- One individual would like longer hours for offices being open.
- Planet Code: Concern that individuals might pay a lot more than business. Also, concern that planet code tracking might not be as good as private sector. If it is not as good as the private sector, then don't implement it.

- Would like to see joint ventures with UPS and FedEx.
- Would like to block "junk" mail.
- Some people are worried about the safety of the mail.
- Some people don't like the changing stamps--commemoratives cost a lot of money to print.

Express Mail

FedEx will pick it up. With First Class and Express available, don't need priority. FedEx is good service. Express mail is competitive and good packaging

DECEMBER 4, 2001 FOCUS GROUPS

A.M. SESSION

MORNING FOCUS GROUP: NOTES 2

Morning Focus Group, December 4, 2001: Notes 2

General Comments about the Postal Service

- Postal Clerks at community post offices are nicer than Postal Clerks in urban Post Offices. Possibly because the community Postal Clerks aren't as stressed out.
- Post Office in Fredricksberg, Virginia friendly and flexible.
- Consumer uses Falls Church, Virginia Post Office because it is friendlier than the crowded Potomac, Maryland Post Office closer to her home.
- Postal Carrier left a package delivery notice for consumer. Went to Post Office to collect package and it was missing. Filed Insurance Claim and has yet to receive a response.
- Concerned about people who are unauthorized signing for mail.
- Problems with on-line change of address. When a call was made to the 1800# would not provide local Post Office phone number. Finally, after a long wait on the phone and discussion with a supervisor the Postal Clerk received authorization to provide consumer with the phone number of her Post Office.
- Sent Priority Mail item from Washington, DC to Delaware, which took 12 days. Consumer felt that Priority Mail had been misrepresented to her.
- Consumer was living away from main residence during the week. The Post Office would only hold mail for 30 days. So the Postal Clerk suggested a PO Box, which never received mail. The consumer cancelled the box and mail was returned to senders without a forwarding address. It took the consumer a year to resolve the mess with creditors, etc.
- International mail takes awhile to reach its destination from the United States.
- During the DC Post Office closure bulk mail customers were having problems paying for postage. Sent to a Maryland Post Office that couldn't cash DC check, so account wasn't credited. A DC Postal Clerk was sent to Maryland to pick up checks and then credit them to customer's account. In the meantime, a second check had to be drawn, so the business could proceed with mailing. No clear procedures were prepared for assisting businesses during the DC Anthrax problem.
- Bethesda, Maryland Post Office is an important part of the community. Consumer works at home office, is not interested in on-line Postal Services.

POSTAL CONSUMER ISSUES:

Priority Mail:

- Priority Mail seems to have a "Don't tell the customer that 2-3 day arrival isn't guaranteed" policy.
- Postal Clerks give "impression" that it will arrive in 2-3 days
- There is no distinction between Priority Mail and First Class
- Consumers use Priority Mail because of the packaging it provides. It is sometimes just easier to use the Priority Mail packaging than purchase other packaging.
- If price of Priority Mail is increased, might use other services that guarantee delivery
- First Class often arrives before Priority Mail.
- Must get something for the extra money besides "pretty packages."

- One consumer pays extra to send Priority Mail so she won't have to worry
- Confusing semantics between First Class and Priority Mail, which service is giving preference?
- Consumers under the illusion that more attention is paid to Priority than First Class mail.
- Postal Service should treat Priority Mail like a "Priority."

Express Mail

- FedEx works better than Express Mail.
- No need for Priority Mail because of Express Mail
- Express Mail is less expensive than competitors
- FedEx has better guarantee on arrival time

Insurance

- What are the extra costs of insurance
- Fewer choices to make if insurance was included with parcel purchases
- Insurance receipt needs to clarify procedures
- Better service if could call to check on claim
- Works only if sending something that can be replaced (Postal Clerks need to inform customers that item must dollar value to be insured).
- Insurance requires a receipt.
- Unaware that must return packaging to claim insurance
- Purchasing a certain amount of insurance, no one should ask for a receipt or proof of the value of the item insured. It shouldn't matter, because the customer paid to insure the package for a certain amount.
- Consumer thinks that if a package is insured that the USPS will take better care of the package.

Delivery Confirmation

- Would not use USPS to send something that consumer wanted tracked
- Consistency is important, so tracking service should be included in the price for Priority Mail. Too many options, simplify the system, so it will work better. Also consumers will be able to make better decisions

Planet Code:

- Other services such as FedEx and UPS currently track the progress of mail.
- Planet Code's tracking isn't as comprehensive as FedEx and UPS.
- Cost for Planet Code would be too expensive for the service provided
- Study the advantages to pre-sized package mailing.
- Privacy concern, would USPS sell list of user to other mailers?
- Be able to track from home computer like FedEx.
- Would it get there?
- Willing to purchase if consumer could see the progress of a package
- *If it doesn't compare to the public sector don't offer.*
- Planet Code would be worthwhile if it was offered internationally

Miscellaneous issues

- Federal Express and UPS provide better service
- Postal Service deserves kudos for delivery on X'mas day!
- USPS biggest challenge is the volume of mail that it receives.
- The quality of service depends on the dedication of the Postal Service Employees
- Postal forms are confusing. Unclear on which forms should be used. Frustration to reach the head of the line to find out that you filled out the wrong form.
- Consumers would like to be able to confirm on e-mail when packages arrive
- Money orders should be tracked
- Computer terminals should be available at Post Offices for consumers' w/o computers to use for USPS business. (Digital Divide)
- Postal Service policies should be consistent. In the country Postal Carrier will hold package and leave a notice when no one is home. In the city it is left on the door stoop, where it can easily be picked up by anyone.
- Concern for Postal Carrier's working until 7-10 P.M. at night.
- International insurance the claim form is long and complicated. Consumers needs better information on international insurance service.
- Business concerns, accommodations were not made for bulk mailers during the anthrax Post Office closures. A single process for payment wasn't set up, so bulk mailers didn't receive credit for payments made to accounts.
- No competition for the USPS universal inexpensive service. Wouldn't want to loose the universal service.
- Concerns about the timely arrival of holiday gifts to Denmark
- Kudos for L'Enfant Plaza Post Office's "take a number system." Consumers a better served and can fill out forms for look at other products while they are waiting.
- Mail blocking for credit card offerings
- Increase price charge bulk rate mail users
- Notice to residents of closest post office and hours of operation
- Instructions on how to open mail after Anthrax scare
- Safety of drugs and food sent through mail that has been irradiated
- Willing to pay rate increase if mail is "safe."
- Don't support sports events such as Lance Armstrong, pay postal workers better
- Postal Service should limit the number of stamp options, because issuing new stamps is too expensive.

FOCUS SESSIONS

DECEMBER 4, 2001

SUMMARY OF MORNING AND AFTERNOON ISSUES

Focus Sessions, December 4, 2001. Summary of focus group leader of both morning and afternoon issues.

Session opened with welcome remarks by Shelley Dreifuss, Acting Director, Office of the Consumer Advocate. Kathie Klass welcomed the group and explained what the Consumer Advocate's Office hoped to get from the sessions. She explained that the session would be broken down into three segments: Introductions/Experiences, Current Issues, Postal Service five years from now.

Introductions.

Each participant was asked to introduce him/herself and describe an experience either good or bad that they had with the Postal Service.

- Went to Post Office to submit passport application and encountered long line. Postmaster came out and indicated anyone just wishing to submit passport application could come to front, thereby eliminating a long wait. Prefers community post office rather than commercial post office in the city, believes community post office focuses on problems and are friendlier in general.
- Postman left package with another person who signed for the package. She was never able to retrieve the package and even though it was insured, never received insurance reimbursement.
- One concern is that in his community post office all the postal clerks are foreign and this presents something of a language barrier. Familiar with postal services in South America and Europe and believes U.S. postal services are cheaper and more efficient; quality is high, expenses low.
- Was surprised that the Postal Service would ship live bees. She began business raising bees and they were shipped to her via the U.S. Postal Service. Concerned about the impact of the irradiation procedures on the *agricultural community*.
- Used online address change when moved. Did not receive mail. Called 900 number on website but got unsatisfactory responses. Finally called her local post office and resolved problem. Need better problem resolution.

- Mailed \$250 gift certificate Priority Mail on November 8. It was not delivered until November 20. Unable to trace or track while in transit. Finally delivered, but was stressful worrying if it would be delivered and if not she was out \$250.
- Mail comes very late in afternoon; wishes mail came earlier in the day.
- Went to post office to mail package to South America, clerk was uncertain about cost but put postage on the package. When n she went back two weeks later, the clerk indicated she had left a note in the customer's post office box because the postage had been in error and the clerk had paid the difference.
- Works from home and uses the post office in the community as link to community. Is not interested in online services, prefers personal interaction.
- Believes postal workers are in same category as firemen and policemen.

Kathie Klass indicated the discussion will move to current issues and describes the issues to be discussed:

Priority Mail.

- It is not clear to customers that Priority Mail is not **guaranteed** in 2-3 days.
- When service is described, clerks give impression that it **will be there** in time stated.
- Ads say it will be there in 2-3 days
- If paying extra for Priority Mail why can't you track it.
 - Kathie Klass mentions availability of delivery confirmation
- 10 years ago Fed Ex and UPS had the market for 2 day delivery.
Believes this service responds to that market.

Q: Has anyone had a problem with the Delivery Confirmation Service?

- My concern is knowing that the package gets there. If you send it and it does not arrive you can track it. The service does not take effect for 30 days. The only response you can get is that it is in the system. In the future I will use a service that can really track like FedEx or UPS.

- If you purchase delivery confirmation at the post office, it costs 40¢. If you print the label off the Internet, the service is free. Do you feel that delivery confirmation should be part of the Priority Mail fee?
- Consistency is important. To me already too many choices – Priority Mail, Express Mail, Standard Mail.
- If you are paying extra for a service you should be able to find out what happened now. My question is why am I paying extra money?
- I see two problems – one is volume of mail and two is the dedication of employees.
- I often use Priority Mail because of the packaging. If you added 40¢ I might stop using it.
- I agree that there should be fewer choices and services applied.
- It's not always clear which service to use.
- I have been satisfied with Delivery Confirmation.
- The tracking takes too long. It's inconvenient. I do not have a computer, and a lot of people do not have computers. That means going back and forth to the post office to check on a package. Trying to call is like calling a radio station – nobody answers.
- Can you call and punch in the number to track package? The number for services is not in the listing of services. You should be able to put in the number and get information.
- First-Class v. Priority Mail – First Class arrives at about the same time.
- Some post offices are very high tech and can give all costs and delivery estimates.
- First Class/Priority Mail, which is better?
- It all goes back to service – service is the name of the game.

Express Mail.

Overnight or 1-2 day delivery

- To me the choice should be First Class or Express Mail, I see no need for Priority Mail.
- Express Mail is competitive with FedEx and UPS

- I had difficulty with Priority Mail delivery. Was expecting a key that was promised by 10 am. It did not arrive. First Class comes as fast as Priority Mail.
- Charges are not comparable to FedEx and UPS.

Insurance.

How many of you have purchased insurance?

- I concur with the idea that there should be a direct number to call for information on insurance. If you paid for insurance – you should be able to get reimbursement.
- My problem with insurance was something that was irreplaceable, something that is one of a kind. How much insurance do you buy?
- I purchased a figurine for \$1,000. It came without its head and I was reimbursed.
- Someone sent me a sculpture worth \$16,000.00. It was broken in shipment. I had no problem collecting the insurance.
- My question is – how do you determine value? How do you get reimbursed?
- I think you should get the valued amount without a receipt.
- I was unaware that you had to have receipts.
- If something happens, you should get the insured amount.
- The cost of the insurance is what you are paying for.
- There is a perception problem with insurance.
- When I lived in the country, they took packages back to the post office if you were not home. In the District they just leave them on the stoop. What is the policy? Once again, it goes to consistency.
- Our mail comes at 7:30 pm.
- I mailed a package and had to place an insurance claim. The insurance form was one of the most difficult government forms I have ever seen. The small print said I might be charged for processing claim.

Any other questions?

- I do a lot of bulk mailing. I was told to mail the check to the Southern Maryland bulk mail center. They do not accept district checks. They made no provisions now that Brentwood has closed.
- I sent some Christmas gifts to beginning of November. Did not get a receipt but maybe I should have?

Q. Where to you see the Postal Service in five years from now?

- Better tracking
- Tracking number
- E-system for inputting information for documents. No more paperwork.
- E-mail notification when your package has been delivered or when package left at house.
- Higher employee standards
- Stay open longer hours on Saturday
- A lot of the problem is from what is going on inside the processing plant. Maybe better supervisors treating them like people.
- Tracking is not important to me I just want it to get there.
- If it is not as good as what the private sector is offering, don't offer it because people are looking for it to be as good as the private sector.
- Mail blocking – block junk mail or credit card requests. Block certain types of mail.
- Increase price of junk mail.
- When I moved, I would have liked to receive information on where the post office was and the hours of operation.
- Everything changed after 9-11. People's expectations and concerns have changed. I am concerned about how to open up the mail.
- Would like to know if my mail was on that route where the anthrax was found.

DECEMBER 4, 2001 FOCUS GROUPS

P.M. SESSION

AFTERNOON FOCUS GROUP: NOTES 1

Afternoon Focus Group, December 4, 2001: Notes 1

The participants after introductions commented on their experiences with the Postal Service.

- Individual works for an association; encountered a nasty carrier; found his mortgage payment envelope on the street.
- Individual is a fund raiser using direct mail; uses Express Mail extensively; dislikes long lines at Post Office.
- Individual works for an association; has found that package tracking is cumbersome and unreliable.
- Individual is a consultant; believes the Postal Service provides great value, no lines, great people.
- Individual is a government employee; works with GSA. Happy with carrier, delivery. Suggests Postal Service offer email.
- Individual is involved in direct selling. Would prefer that mail be delivered more than once a day at office and that post offices be open after 6.
- Individual works for an association; is moving to fax and email.
- Individual is a government employee; Had problem with bureaucratic experience in executing an international money order.
- Individual is a consultant as well as daughter of postal workers. Receives large volume of unwanted mail.
- Individual is with a trade association. No problems
- Student at Johns Hopkins. Problem with mail forwarding.
- Retired individual. Likes letter carrier; never knows when the mail will come.
- Individual is with an association; bulk mail is incredibly arduous. Likes dedicated letter carrier.
- Individual is a Washington Representative; Positive comments.

Priority Mail

- The value proposition is irritating. Is it really worth more than first class? Suspicious that it is maybe even slower than first class.

Express Mail

- Use is clear, but priority and first class overlap. Priority mail is used for special handling, but regular mail gets there first. Perception that Priority mail will be treated like express mail.
- Get rid of Priority Mail. Express Mail is sufficiently high to start looking for alternatives.
- Difficult to use; don't know when it will be delivered.
- FedEx is cheaper and guaranteed and tracked.
- Fed Ex instantly believes you when there is a dispute; not so for the Postal Service.

- It is cheaper to use FedEx, and the service is better. Three day FedEx is better than Priority

Delivery Confirmation

- Used as a safety net to decrease risk. If it has delivery confirmation on the package, then Postal Workers will give the package better treatment.
- Unaware of ability to print delivery confirmation paperwork on net.
- FedEx tracks its packages; why not the Postal Service

Service

- Service is shrinking, and prices are increasing.
- Use of a zone system--mixed reaction.
- Rate Increase: people will look for alternatives. This one will need to be explained. Advocate use of larger increases less often.
- Postal Service is secretly withdrawing service while raising price.
- Service was previously atrocious. Has made a dramatic improvement, but there is far to go. They want improved service.
- The Postal Service is not raising rates enough to provide good service.
- The Postal Service is difficult to deal with. Difficulties with rigid rules, Postal Service doesn't know when a package will arrive, and Postal facilities are operated for the convenience of the Postal Service.
- Individuals are moving to the Internet in lieu of using the mail.
- Reporters do not want mail; they want email.
- Would like an online account with the Postal Service to avoid standing in line.
- Would like templates to word processing programs to interface better with Postal uses.
- Need machines in Post Offices.
- Certified mail gives good service and is particularly good for the delivery of "nastygrams".
- Longer Hours would be better at Postal locations. Also, post locations that are open late more prominently.
- Distress that a letter carrier at an office building would not accept a package.
- Problem with amount of junk mail
- Would like to see change of address easier; also a refusal stamp that could be automatically put on mail and sent back to sender. Postal Service needs to be more competitive.
- Needs a patriotic campaign.
- Postal Service is not very technological.
- Some of the people working for the Postal Service are the type of people who are Human Resources problems.
- Minimal enthusiasm for Planet Code. Not really needed; see minimal benefits.

Insurance

- Filing a claim--no problem by one person.
- It takes a long time to issue an international money order.

DECEMBER 4, 2001 FOCUS GROUPS

P.M. SESSION

AFTERNOON FOCUS GROUP: NOTES 2

Afternoon Focus Group, December 4, 2001: Notes 2

General Comments about the Postal Service:

JC, Federal Affairs Lobbyist

Bad experience –carrier-13 years at address not a nice guy. Tries hard. Outgoing mail found in the street. Leaves notes about mail box needing to be accessible.

DR, Non-profit, uses direct mail. She is liaison to the Board of Directors. Express Mail experience at home, Chicago and during election season. Long lines at all Post offices she uses. Has shoveled snow for Mail Carriers.

JR, internet privacy group. Electronics side server unavailable and e-space is not reliable.

MT, Partner in consulting firm. Consumer Education, good things to say about the mail service. Heavy volume of mail at work. Good experience with carrier and Postal Clerks nice parking, not great. Maybe odd. Post Office across from Arlington Hospital open until 8:30 P.M. Washington, Blvd Post Office in Arlington historically no lines and happy Clerks.

PW, Silver Spring condo, happy with Letter Carrier "T." Carrier substitutes may be cause of late deliveries during day. Mail moves quickly around the county. Problem with mail at GSA since the Anthrax scare. Post Office should master e-mail. Will make phone calls this year instead of send X'mas cards.

BS, educational association. Mail is only collected once a day at her office. New Post Office opened in Silver Spring and is open until 6 p.m. Would be nice to know Carrier. Financial mail is sometimes financial mail arrives opened. Neighbor's mail is delivered to her house.

MM, hostelling organization. Responsible for updating organizations outreach efforts from mail to e-mail. Served as local TV station's e-mail editor.

SM, FCC, attended as private citizen. Generally good experience with Post Office. But international money orders must go through St. Louis and on to the merchant. Merchant must match money order with merchandise ordered.

CS, Consultant Policy Issues. Both parents careers in Post Office, bias in favor of Post Office. Good value for the dollar. As a consumer over 90% of her mail goes to recycling. Tried to sign up with Direct Marketing Restriction list but still gets the junk. Large # of credit card applications in mail. Expensive and is illegal from over seas.

SC, consumer organization, non-profit. Uses a lot of mail-no major business problems. Mail returned for incorrect rubber banding-seemed too picky. Large volume of junk mail

sent to the National Fraud Information Center. Gets boxes full of sweepstakes mail. Postal Service doing pretty good.

GE, Johns Hopkins Senior. 6 years of experience with the mail service. Mail forwarding experience overall fairly positive. Good service 24 hour Post Office at National Airport. Had mail an application to College on January 1.

PG, good experiences. New carrier was bad replaced after complaints by group. Delivery erratic 10:30-6:00 P.M. (this is due to carrier's day off.

KH, non-profit organization. Letter carrier was dedicated. Political campaigns, bulk mail advertising to sort to receive rate. Lifting sack too heavy. Bulk mail too hard .

KD, Auto Mfrer Government Relations Office. Individual experiences both positive and negative. It is a matter of the individuals providing the service.

POSTAL CONSUMER ISSUES

Priority Mail:

- Delivery time isn't guaranteed/ is it a bail and switch.
- Overlap of Priority and First Class
- Clarification of delivery times needed
- Not clear to consumer what happens with Priority Mail
- What do you get for the money?
- Priority and First Class package is same price.
- Consumer can't calculate value
- First Class arrives before Priority Mail, or as quickly
- How does Priority Mail work? (not clear/but how soon? There I more manual handling. Post Office gives impress that Priority is better deal. A letter gets there in many instances, sooner. First Class on average goes faster than Priority Mail.
- Assumes Priority is 3 days
- Suggested eliminating the distinction between First Class and Priority and work on better service.

Delivery Confirmation:

- Still must purchase postage at Post Office
- Used 3 or 4 times, but never checked on arrival
- Purchased to insure better service
- Delivery Confirmation worked fine
- Feels will get better service
- Used Delivery Confirmation every day, it was a valuable service for business. Proof of delivery. Good.
- If not received is it the same protection as return receipt?

- Priority Mail Chart is confusing it stops at 5 pounds (off the chart it goes to 70 pounds.)

Group leader asked question about Priority Mail printed label with free Delivery Confirmation. It verifies arrival. No one had used the label. Would you use it if you knew about it?

Should Delivery Confirmation be included in Priority Mail?

- Perhaps, but not sure Delivery Confirmation is needed for all Priority Mail and may not be worth the expense to the Post Office.
- Delivery Confirmation might provide security.
- Could be a way for fraud.

Priority Proposed for zoning

- Would cause the consumer to be price sensitive and compare with the competition.
- Feels shrinking services is the death spiral of the Postal Service
- Doesn't like zones/Priority Mail –paying for service not the discount. Too complex to figure postage and would have negative reaction to more zones.
- FedEx larger range of zones, can average cost in mind \$4-8 on 3 pound package. Range is too large.
- Doesn't want to subsidize rural area because she mails to urban areas
- Advantage for short distance
- No subsidy with FedEx- smaller zone bands, feels that he is subsidizing rural usage.
- Too many zones – 4 is enough. All at the table agreed

Impact of \$.34-\$.37

- No assurances to consumers that future increase will be delayed
- Value is still there/others agreed/but need an explanation
- \$.37 is not too much unless raise again, then perception may cause consumers to explore other options

Dreifuss asked, Do you want large increase less often?

- AARP – older consumers fewer changes with larger increases
- People expect \$.01 or \$.02 changes but all expect continued changes in postal rates
- Charge is a bargain, but Post Office should increase services or change services to warrant change in postage rates.
- Organization can ignore services if they want to. Customer Service dramatically improved Postal Service Tried to improve service. Improve ways to do job/improving services
- \$.34-.37 assumes it relates to Sept. 11. Needs specifics, before comments
- Mail to e-mail for hostels, mail costs were reduced from \$2000 vs e-mail merger \$100.
- Saving money for employer if uses email merge
- Public Relations email now-no mail/does not even fax to media
- Channel 9 preferred fax or e-mail

- Relies on mail because case managers have no email or fax access (digital divide for fixed income people)
- Email negative/very careful who has her email address.
- Email membership response rate worse than Postal Service Mail, 2000 mailing
- In transition—it's hard to be a consumer of the Postal Service, because it isn't set up for the convenience of the consumer
- Outcome of delivery would improve consumers attitude about the service than price more important
- Less use of mail may be cause for Postal rate increase???
- Less use would save cost of changes in postage, consumers are used to regular changes.

Express Mail – overnight or 2 day

- Zip code and machine is when you know it is 2 day vs. overnight
- No listing of zip code overnight vs 2 day
- FedEx cost is easier to determine
- FedEx refunds are easy to get
- No bank for charges
- FedEx doesn't take cash
- FedEx will pick up at Post Office
- Can labels be printed before you go to Post Office
- Standing in line for labels
- If available on line Postal Service needs to advertise product
- Wants on-line account. Deposit money with Postal Service or bill her.
- Templates for individuals with secure account
- Make it easy and go to website
- Rail Road Station has Express Mail Machines
- Post Office needs credit card machines that will label package and do postage
- FedEx is usually cheaper and more convenient
- FedEx offers 3'd guaranteed is same price as priority.
- Prices are not clear for comparison purposes

Insurance:

- Lost slip when package was lost. May help in keeping packages unbroken because Postal Service will take better care with package.
- FedEx has \$100 worth of insurance automatically
- Cremated remains only handled by Postal Service
- Filed claim for bent book. 2-3 weeks received a check for \$50.
- Insurance claim from E-bay product. Item was not working but mailer said item was damaged n the mail. Got reimbursed by Postal Service. Seems insurance could be open to fraud.
- Money order number and condition at time of purchase
- Use Paytel on internet instead of Postal Service Money Order
- Insurance takes to long to issue at the window if a line is long. Service is too slow.

Miscellaneous Issue:

- Needed to send stalker certified receipt mail, it worked and it was a good value.
- Get a response with certified mail
- Longer hours at Post Offices for student locations. Prefers till 7 P.M>
- Radical thinking re: hours is needed by Post Office
- Website locations of Post office, please provide hours
- Local Post Office sent hours of operation to local customers
- Only First Class package picked up in lobby of office building. Unaware that 3rd class mail had to be taken to post office. (Others have different experience in office building.) Policies need to be consistent
- It is hard to talk to Post Office by telephone
- Post Office is a quasi government institution. It is unclear to public and what difference it makes that it is quasi-government.
- Wants to be able to get on a list for no junk mail
- Now recyclable junk mail it is ok with her it used to bother her
- More postage for second mailing of same catalog

Visions of the future:

- Customer refusal stamp to put on catalog and send it back with stamps
- Eliminate deceased names on mailing list
- Address changes online
- Forwarding problems
- Internet executives have very little regard for Postal Service
- Best Postal Service approach is to argue that Postal Service is necessary and all want to do paper mail but if service is too bad, it will lose support.
- Postal Service needs to update has decade more to improve and reclaim its place
- Human resource issue she is willing to pay for investments if it will help keep up the service

Planet Code

SD said, business communications to track domestic letters. Can it be used for everyday consumers? How to promote? What about joint ventures with the Postal Service?

Bar code is on each envelop have unique not hand scanned code. Would a consumer pay an extra \$.50 for Planet Code?

- Could the envelope be printed at home?
- Return receipt service is \$2.70
- Limited use for consumers who pay bills over the phone
- To avoid a late fee on a credit card may be a use
- Interesting as a hobby, but no apparent use. If added Delivery Confirmation for \$.50 then ok to use but it is not a legal receipt.
- Postal Service is driving people to the internet
- Planet code doesn't seem useful but need a good way to market. People need to be educated about use.
- Impulse buy –needs to be easy to buy

- It will be confused with other products that are more useful for business than personal
- Transcontinental tracking is a use
- Feels his generation uses less mail/sees electronic birthday cards coming to him
- Digital divide moving quickly (all participants agreed)

DECEMBER 4, 2001 FOCUS GROUPS

P.M. SESSION

AFTERNOON FOCUS GROUP: NOTES 3

Afternoon Focus Group, December 4, 2001: Notes 3

Introductory Comments about the Postal Service:

- Unfriendly carrier...outgoing mail ends up in the middle of the street instead of being processed. Carrier complains about where trash collectors leave garbage pails
- Lines are too long at Post Offices
- Love Mail Carrier and both Arlington, Virginia Post Offices are helpful.
- Post accurate Zip Code information on the Web.
- Postal Service needs to master E-mail
- Improved weekday office hours for suburbs
- Problems with quality mail delivery when there is not a regular Mail Carrier
- Concerned about potential identity theft problems, because mail arrives open
- Youth traveling group is switching from "snail mail" to e-mail and fax for reaching members and media. If first class rate jumps will use more e-mail
- International money orders can only be processed in St. Louis, which is a problem for people doing business globally. They must place an order, which ends up separate from payment
- Sight impaired participant said he would like to have a service that he e-mails to the Postal Service and they print his correspondence on bond paper and use a laser to sign his name.
- Has had X'mas newsletter arrive in August. Tried to sign up for services to remove name from mailing list, but they haven't worked. Concerned about what all this wasted paper does to the environment.
- Positive experience with mail forwarding
- Homeowner's association complained about the quality of a Mail carrier and the Postal Service reassigned the Mail Carrier. Would appreciate a regular schedule for mail arrival.
- Avid letter writer, so mail is important to her.
- Bulk mail is a challenge for non-profits, because of the sorting required.
- It's the quality of people that make the Postal Service work!

POSTAL CONSUMER ISSUES

Priority Mail:

- Not clear on value of product
- It is a bait and switch
- Priority Mail can take up to 10 days and First Class Mail is faster
- There is no clear value for Priority Mail like there is for Express Mail
- Priority Mail and First Class Mail overlap
- Delivery in 2-3 days isn't guaranteed
- Unclear how Priority Mail differs from other classes of mail
- Value of Priority Mail does equate with other services such as Express Mail
- Get rid of distinctions between First Class and Express Mail
- No difference between Priority Mail and First Class
- Priority Mail arrives damage free

- Not pleased with zoned pricing for Priority Mail (it creates a budget nightmare for nonprofits)
- Individual consumers will find Priority Mail Zone pricing a challenge
- Urban/Urban mail services subsidize rural mail. This environmentalist had no problem with zoned services.
- Too many zones max out with four, with the fourth designated to Hawaii and Alaska
- FedEx guarantees their 3 day delivery service

Express Mail:

- Hard buying decision (unclear when it will be one or two day service)
- Unclear on how Express Mail determines what should be a one or two day delivery. If a package must be delivered overnight, it is easier to use a competitor's one-day guaranteed service. (Consumers don't have time to go elsewhere if they are at the Post Office and find out that Express Mail will take two days.)
- Use FedEx it is cheaper
- Fed/Ex complaint procedures are much better, "they believe you instantly!" Better level of personal service.

Insurance:

- Filed claim attached receipt check arrived 3 weeks later
- Made claim reimbursed for product

Delivery Confirmation:

- Insured mail to assure arrival
- Better treatment if use Delivery Confirmation
- It is a safety net
- Extremely valuable that to know it arrived (Does it offer return receipt)
- Would a tracking system in place help Anthrax detection?
- Mail chart for Priority Mail is limited to 5 pounds
- Not willing to pay the additional cost to include Delivery Confirmation with Priority Mail

Planet Code:

- Worth an extra \$.50 to track mortgage or credit card bills
- Important to explain why the service will be useful
- Duplicating existing service
- Useful only if provides the same quality of tracking service that the competitors provide
- Has the Postal Service looked at the patterns of the young? Would they use this service?
- Would it be another impulse purchase?

Miscellaneous issues:

- Increase in First Class mail will be a problem for older fixed income consumers
- Non-profits feel that they are held hostage to rate increases
- U.S. Postage reasonable compared to rest of the country
- Larger increases less often would be easier for consumers to adjust to
- Older consumers worry about minor issues, so regular increases in the price of stamp is a an issue with them
- Change the bargain – increase the price of postal services, but provide better service
- The Postal Service proved in the early 90's that they could improve service. They perform a record turn around. They should continue to build on the progress they have already made.
- Prefer infrequent raises for postal services
- One non-profit that caters to youth will expand its e-mail and fax services instead of using the Postal Service. (Last year they spent \$2000 for a major mailing this year the e-mail and fax expenses were only \$100.)
- Digital Divide occurs for low-income consumers and non-profits working with low-income consumers. This people and organizations depend on the Postal Service and are most effected by increase in Postal rates.
- Product and service renewals still depend on "snail mail."
- Consumer works hard to be USPS customer. Lots of rules and slow to make changes
- USPS need to have fewer inefficiencies
- Encourage consumers to print forms before they go to the Post Office
- Develop an on-line account for consumers to purchase Postal Services. This will eliminate standing in line.
- Work with software companies to include Postal Service forms on their systems. Consumers' can fill forms out before arriving at the Post Office.
- Automate machines to print out labels and charge to credit cards
- Postal Service is only carrier that allows the shipment of cremated remains
- Simplify money order process. The paperwork is time consuming for Postal Clerks.
- International money orders should be available at local Post Office rather than just in St. Louis. Consumer can use alternative services such as PayVal, which is less costly than a USPS money order.
- Certified Mail provides the best low cost serviced to provide confirmation of receipt of important mail.
- College campus Post Offices should gear hours to student needs (Open later in day and close later in the evening.)
- Set Post Office hours to coincide with the work schedules of people. Especially in urban areas where people tend to keep later hours. There is a need for evening hours and longer Saturday hours.
- Difficult to call local Post Office.
- Increase awareness of the various services offered by the Postal Service.
- Bulk advertising offer a sliding scale, best price for first mailing and increase price for additional mailing of same items.

- Develop a “refuse stamp.” Mail would be returned to sender with the mandate that the consumer wasn’t to be bothered again.
- Internet executives feel there is no need for the Postal Service.
- Americans historically love Postal Service

SUITED FOR CHANGE: JANUARY 24, 2001

FOCUS GROUP: NOTES 1

Focus Group January 24, 2002: Notes 1

Opening comments from participants:

- Kenneth -- Change of address took two weeks to become effective.
- Sonya -- Appreciates regular Postman. Moved in 2001, all mail continued to go to old address.
- Jerry -- Moved from Georgia where the mail carriers are friendlier than they are in DC. Forwarding of mail happened fast.
- LaVertta -- Doesn't use a Post Office, because she can purchase stamps at Safeway. Her mail comes at the same time everyday.
- Felicia -- Substitute mailman won't put mail in mailboxes, because the boxes aren't locked. The door to the building is locked. (Regular mailman leaves mail.) As a result of September 11, postal rates should go down, because of the inconvenience, instead of up. Also mailman should make more money because of the risks they take to deliver the mail. Mail carriers should carry change of address cards.
- Joanne -- Regular Postman is friendly. There is always a line at the Post Station. Usually only one or two clerks behind the counter.
- Athena -- Postman won't hand mail to consumer, insists on putting it in the box. Post Office is a good job.
- Rutha -- Mail now delivered at 5:00 P.M. instead of 7:00 P.M. When she owned a Pit Bull dog someone had to meet the Postman, so he could deliver the mail.
- Elise -- Everything is fine.
- Celestine -- Lines at the Post Office are too long. Post Office Box user has a problem finding Postal Clerk who can assist her with notices received in P.O. box. Often, "it is someone else's job."
- Simon -- Mail arrived promptly at new address. Problem with mail going to an old address.

Quality services from the Post Service:

- Postman takes the time to knock on the door so he can leave packages.
- In Florida substitute Postman alerts customers to date and time they can expect the return of their regular Postman. (Actually came back to tell the customer.)
- Appreciate the commitment of the Postal Employees.

Ideas for improving services

- Personable people need to be hired for Post Office jobs.
- Post Office should provide comment cards for customers to share their views.
- Train everyone on all procedures at the Post Office.
- In rough neighborhoods collection boxes should be firmly secured. (Important mail is taken to the Post Office or handed to the Mailman.)
- Replace damaged Collection Boxes (burnt mailbox was not replaced.)
- In unsafe areas mail with money orders is taken to Post Office.
- There are few Collection Boxes in SE Washington, DC. Most people walk their bills to payment centers.

- Postman leaves packages at apartment door when no one is home.
- Notices about packages or certified mail do not have time or date when customer can expect Postman to return. (Consumer feels that the Postman should re-deliver the material, she should not have to go to Post Office to pickup.)
- In Silver Spring there are no Collection Boxes.
- FedEx and UPS are different they have a better tracking system for packages. They also have provision for signing notices authorizing them to leave packages.

Certified Mail

- Problem with receipt of notices.
- Neighbors often sign for notices and hold materials for several days.
- Don't ask for Id of person signing the notice (should require Id).
- Someone else other than addressee may sign for Certified Mail, more concerned with address on the letter than who it is addressed to.
- In Georgia Postman had been delivering the mail for years, so he knew who should sign for Certified Mail.

First Class Mail

- Problems of prompt deliver when payments are sent to Verizon's Post Office Box in Baltimore. Problem seems to be Verizon's procedures rather than the Post Office's problem with delivering the mail.
- Proposed \$.03 increase is "highway robbery" (Pays bills in person and pays other 1/2 on line.)
- Paying bills in person allows consumer to walk away with a receipt and they receive prompt credit for payment (No time to purchase stamps and address envelopes.)
- Number of letters mailed each month.
 - 40
 - 2
 - 3-4
 - 0
 - 2
 - 0
 - 20 in three months
 - 0
 - 20 in three months

Money Orders

- Postal money orders cost too much (\$.80). The must be used when sending money to people who are incarcerated.
- Problems cashing money orders. Some places will only cash money orders purchased at their place of business. (However, it was pointed out that a Postal Money Order would be cashed at any Post Office.)
- Several participants felt that a Postal Money Order should be able to be cashed anywhere.
- Postal Money Orders are a good thing.

- Western Union charges \$.59 for up to \$499. (There are several places in the community that will cash Western Union Money Orders.)
- There is a fee to track Postal Money Orders.

Postal insurance

- Handmade breakable item made by a child and insured. Post Office didn't pay claim or explain why the claim wasn't paid.
- Need to explain how the insurance works.
- Postal clerks should volunteer information about insurance coverage, because consumers don't know what questions to ask.

Parcel Post

- Post Office provides tape to assist with improperly wrapping parcels
- Postal Clerk should tell consumer when a parcel isn't wrapped well enough to survive mailing.

Priority Mail

- No experiences

Express Mail

- Good experience

Misc. issues

How many pieces of mail received each day

10

10

2-3

5

3 pieces per week

10 (magazine and credit card offers)

12 college bound student in the house

4-5

- Receives mail for one year old child (credit card offers)
- Additional training for all front line personnel with an emphasis on customer service skills.
- On going training about new products and services, so clerks will be able to explain Postal Service products to the consumers.
- Training on serving senior citizens whom may need extra attention.

SUITED FOR CHANGE: JANUARY 24, 2001

FOCUS GROUP: NOTES 2

Focus Group January 24, 2002: Notes 2

The purpose of this focus group is to learn of your experiences. We will be discussing current issues – First-Class Mail, Insurance, Services. What could the Postal Service offer.

- Needed to change address when moved. Took two weeks and had to go back to the post office to check. Important mail is being forwarded.
- Has no complaints; mail is delivered between 12 and 1 every day
- Recently moved, has had difficulty getting mail.
- In the South they are more friendly. Mail does arrive on time.
- Mail comes on time, buys stamps at Safeway
- Lives in privately owned building. Everyone has been there over 5 years. New carrier wants to have lock on box.
- Believes postal employees should get paid more money for dangerous situations, such as anthrax threats
- Carrier is friendly; mail only late when they have a substitute carrier.
- Lines are too long in the post office; often only one person working. Believes postal employees do a good job in general
- Rules are too strict; wanted carrier to hand her the mail because she was there and the carrier knew her, but would not give her the mail, insisted on putting it in the box
- Mail did not get there until 7:30 pm . but now it does come by 5:00 am
- Sister used to live in the District, but moved to Maryland. Believes carriers are friendlier in the District, she had more contact with postal employees in DC. Misses that personal rapport
- Post office should be better able to monitor the customer flow. They should not take breaks at the same time that customers are trying to conduct business on their lunch.
- Should get away from “that’s someone else’s job”
- There should be comment cards at the window – customers could fill it out by answering general questions:

- Was employee helpful
- Was employee polite
- Was employee informative
- There should be more cross-training.

Collection boxes.

- Goes to post office, does not use collection boxes.
- There should be collection boxes within a specific radius of homes
- There is so much destructiveness; often collection boxes are not replaced when they are vandalized
- Community should not be penalized because of the acts of a few
- This especially a problem for the elderly
- Mailman left package on step, just happened to stumble over it.
- When mailman leaves a note, he should indicate when he anticipates returning, if only to tell you the time he usually delivers mail

Certified Mail

- Got notice twice, but no indication when mailman would return; evidently sent back.
- Will leave mail with anyone, don't ask for id.
- No one had actually sent certified mail

First Class Mail

How do you feel about an increase?

- It's highway robbery, but probably will not pose financial problem
- Will use drop-off boxes more
- Will use online service
- Will use payment enters; get credit sooner, more convenient, gets receipt

How many letters do you mail?

10+	1
6-9	0
3-6	2
1-3	3
0	3

Money Orders

- Cost too much; cheaper other places
- No difficulty getting cashed
- Had difficulty getting cashed, will only cash at post office
- Have to pay Postal Service to track a money order

Window service

- Post Office at Southern Avenue does very well. The line moves, and if it doesn't, someone gets extra help
- Employees don't explain things to you. Needed form but couldn't get one.

Insurance

- Had a package that was insured, but could not collect on claim
- Person at window should explain. How do you know what to ask?

Packages

- Did not know how package needed to be wrapped; clerk provided tape so package could be mailed.
- Mailed package to relative, but it was unwrapped when it arrived.