Why Hybrid Mail has got the international factor

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ew applications and innovations through advances in hybrid mail has always been based on national mail. Clear and simple. First, the volume of international mail is always very limited, in most countries to some 1% of the total mail volume. Secondly, one would expect that the percentage in hybrid mail would be even lower, since hybrid mail is often based on transactional communications, such as bank statements, invoices, account overviews, etc., which are national in nature. However, this does not coincide with the experience from many hybrid mail operators. Generally speaking, hybrid mail is serving more international mail than average. There are some reasons for this. The customers of hybrid mail services tend to be large mailers, of which many have operations in more than one country. They also tend to have customers abroad. Another reason is the use of hybrid mail for commercial mail, typically one-to-one marketing messages, campaigns and the like. Here the use of hybrid mail can solve many challenges in planning, timing, merging and production of letters.

International challenges

One thing is to use a hybrid mail service in one country; another is to have your network distributed over several countries. Hybrid mail is per se a network of distributed printing facilities where letters are produced in the most convenient location for the distribution - the general idea being that letters are produced and injected near the point of delivery. While the creation of a national hybrid mail network is often done rather easily, when going international a number of new obstacles – mainly of legal, financial and practical nature – present themselves. The legal issues have to do with responsibility. Who is responsible for the creation, production and delivery of a mail item sent to another country? And how do you ensure the quality of these? For some of the international networks, good agreements have been put in place, so that senders and operators can have a clear picture of where the letters are and how they are handled. Often the sender can receive an image of what exactly has been printed, as well a receipt that the letter is not handed over to the local post. One major obstacle is the cost issue, where the members of an international network must agree on the division of costs for every step of the process, as well as the postage with possible discounts. Some international cooperation has failed on a dispute about cost coverage. Addressing must be accurate and placed correctly. In France, the name and address of the recipient is on the right, just under the stamp, while in Germany it is to the left. Some posts will require additional marking in order to get a preferential rate on the stamp price. Many will request barcodes to be added. Therefore, while the mail volumes of international mail are not overwhelming, the difficulties and the complexity of the task can very well be. One has to overcome the rules and regulations for addressing and preparation in each country, then optimising postage rates and delivery schedules. If you are planning a mail campaign internationally, this becomes almost impossible. Senders turn to providers of international hybrid mail to have them handle the hassle.
It is a challenge to establish an international hybrid mail network. Yet many have done so, and today there are increasing numbers of hybrid mail networks that take your mail to the country of your destination, or at least one nearby.

The international networks
Providers of international hybrid mail predominantly print letters in the country of destination where local partners deliver the mail. There are a number of networks, where hybrid mail operators have joined forces to establish one common network. Others have created their own network, based on local presence in many places of the world. The following is a short summary of some well-known hybrid mail networks.

Digital To Print has created a network with print facilities to cover most of the world. The company was among the firsts to offer a global solution, and initially this was based on the network from 50 certified print and mail partners in nearly 50 countries receiving data for local production on a daily basis. This is by far the most extensive network within hybrid mail. As the founder of dtp explains, “Mailers can expand the reach of their customer and acquisition messages and get very timely delivery that makes a positive impact on the environment. Everybody wins!”

DHL's Global Hybrid Mail Solutions is a network based on their local presence in many countries, where they combine physical and digital mailing to offer hybrid solutions. The number of production sites is limited, but placed strategically in selected hubs to give easy access globally. The hybrid mail service uses the more than 50 processing centres around the world. DHL offers full transparency on the entire end-to-end process with a complete overview and any time access, achieved using their tracking portal or integrated solution.

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GrayHair Software, PrintSoft, BlueMailCentral and others are offering a solution based on existing networks of printers and can provide different levels of integration and service. French domestic market leader, Mailleva is continuing to expand its presence in several European countries. Its commercial strategy, based on partnerships with local printers, provides dense territory coverage and a printing facility at the nearest location according to customer demand.

Complete Management Solutions from the UK offers solutions and network to fulfill global mailing requirements. CMS is the largest and the fastest privately owned mail distribution network in the world. With 34 offices and agents across the globe, they have company offices and agents located throughout many parts of Europe, North America, Asia, Africa and Australasia, so the coverage is extremely comprehensive as well as effective.

The initiative from IHMC
Established in 2012, the International Hybrid Mail Coalition is an organisation that aims at engaging in research and advocacy to promote the inclusion of hybrid mail communication models within the Universal Postal Union regulatory environment. This is to provide a neutral settlement and exchange system within the UPU’s terminal dues system. It is anticipated that this will encourage broader use of international direct and transactional mail because settlement rates and schedules will be transparent from both the postal and user perspectives.

Based on the support from many industry players, IHMC is working together with UPU to find ways to design a system – which can also adapted to the electronic delivery of correspondence and other mail – which can be digitised or printed on paper anywhere in the world, across any border, with the push of a button. Users want to use the UPU system for electronic messaging which they wish made physical. New compensation models must be created to account for these new messaging forms. IHMC will map the current status, conduct pilot project and work on creating a new platform for international hybrid mail.