

Mailers. Companion



SEPTEMBER 2002

Special MERLIN Issue

Welcome! This special issue of the *Mailers Companion* is designed as a reference tool to help you maintain and improve the quality of your mail. High quality speeds the mail through the postal system at the lowest combined cost for all of us in the mailing business.

The industry/USPS-developed Mail Preparation Total Quality Management Program, or MPTQM, is the recommended approach for establishing quality measures in your mailing operation. It adapts features of the internationally recognized ISO 9000, TQM, and Malcolm Baldrige methodologies to our business. MPTQM is voluntary, but the USPS encourages you to use this new standard.

A registration form and other information is available on the MPTQM Web site, www.usps.com/mptqm.



It's Here!

A *Domestic Mail Manual* that is easy to use and understand. Page 28.



MERLIN, an acronym for Mail Evaluation Readability Lookup INstrument, is the newest approach to automated verification of mail at the time of acceptance. It ensures that the USPS receives quality mail into the processing and distribution system. MERLIN's capabilities are described on the MERLIN Web site, www.usps.com/merlin.

This *Mailers Companion* provides:

- A set of "Best Practices" to employ within your operation for improving quality and helping your mail qualify for the rates you claim.
- A guide to help you prepare your mail for MERLIN's arrival and to help you work with the USPS in the new environment.
- A MERLIN deployment schedule by USPS area to help you set your own readiness timetable.
- A technical reference guide to help you interpret the MERLIN reports sent when barcode quality errors are detected in your mail.

Please keep this issue in a noticeable place so that all of your employees can access it.

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— Business Mail Acceptance

Industry Best Practices — Mail Quality

The mailing industry prepared and offers this information to help all commercial mailers qualify their mailings for the rates intended. When consistently applied, reliable quality and discounted rate achievement can be expected.

Management Approach

Option 1 – Establish a Mail Preparation Total Quality Management (MPTQM) operation. All best practices that follow can be incorporated within that program. This is the recommended approach.

Option 2 – Incorporate in your operation the practices that follow.

Note: These practices focus primarily on barcode quality, whereas MPTQM addresses all mail preparation quality matters.

Implementing

Use the Implementation Guidance section of the *MPTQM Guidebook*. Establish procedures for designing mailpieces, reviewing and testing

mailpieces, hardware maintenance and operation, employee training, and customer feedback.

Set up a library of reference materials to include:

- Publication 25, *Designing Letter and Reply Mail*.
- Notice 67, January 1997, *Letter Design Template*.
- Eyepiece reticle – available through Gage Line Technology, Rochester NY. Phone 716-458-5310.
- *MPTQM Guidebook*. Full participation is not required, but the applicable sections on addressing/printing include excellent practices for quality control measures. Available at www.usps.com/mptqm.
- *Mailpiece Quality Control (MQC) Guidebook*. Participation in this program will help ensure that your staff is knowledgeable on USPS mailpiece design. Available at http://pe.usps.gov/mpdesign/mpdfr_mpqc_view.htm.
- *Domestic Mail Manual (DMM)*.
- *Mailers Guide to MERLIN* (page 4).
- September 2002 issue of *Mailers Companion*.

Establish an ongoing training program to ensure that your employees maintain a high level of awareness on the subject of MERLIN testing, mailpiece compliance, and addressing/barcoding standards.

Identify the Postal Service Mailpiece Design Analyst (MDA) available locally for support.

Training

Train all employees in quality measures relevant to their job functions (e.g., mailpiece design, addressing, barcoding, hardware operation). Train employees in MERLIN testing and reports analysis.

Require mailpiece designers to be MQC certified.

Operations

Mailpiece Design – Ensure that adequate margins for manufacturing tolerances are built into the design. Of particular concern are mailpieces designed such that addressing and barcode placement must be exact in order to meet the DMM; or final piece size is exactly on the dividing line between rate categories (letter to flat, flat to parcel). Pieces designed to these specifications may produce a wide variety of results when run on MERLIN. Consider the variations that are introduced during the multiple production phases involved in producing a mailpiece:

- Offset printing registration.
- Trim, bindery, and finishing tolerances.
- Image placement variations.
- MERLIN image processing variations.

Mailpiece Review – Review designs that are nonconforming or are not designed to exact Postal Service DMM specifications and incorporate into material acceptance procedures. Any pieces that meet these criteria should be placed into a high-risk category that would indicate these pieces could be subject to increased postage due to loss of automation rate, subject to surcharge, or change of rate category (USPS design analysts are available to assist in this area). Immediate action should be taken on any high-risk piece:

- MERLIN testing should be conducted to determine an appropriate course of action. See the *Mailers Guide to MERLIN* for complete information on testing (page 4).
- Customer notification should occur.



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Steve Kearney
Vice President
Pricing & Classification

Connie Totten-Oldham
Manager
Pricing & Classification Implementation

John Nagla
Editor
1735 NORTH LYNN ST RM 3028
ARLINGTON VA 22209-6039

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MEMPHIS TN 38188-0001

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- Mailpiece redesign should be considered (in many cases, very minor design changes can eliminate the problem).

Conduct MERLIN testing on as many mailpieces as machine/USPS operator availability permits. Concentrate first on pieces identified as high risk. A complete testing plan should be developed. The test plan will vary greatly depending on the size and type of your business, but you should consider the following factors when determining a test plan:

- Mailpiece types.
- Paper stock and coatings.
- Addressing/barcoding platforms.
- Barcode fonts available.
- Location of address/barcode printers – transport bases, inserters, web press, bindery equipment, etc.

The results of all tests should be retained and tracked using a spreadsheet-type grid so that trends can be more easily identified and investigated. Be certain you have the knowledge to interpret the MERLIN diagnostic reports.

Production

Follow your manufacturer's procedures specific to your printing platform. Inkjet manufacturers are producing their own best practices list based on specific experiences from internal testing and customer feedback with MERLIN.

If you are running old technology such as impact printers, you need to pay special attention to all quality measures needed to produce barcodes of consistently high quality.

Whenever possible use a 22 bar-per-inch POSTNET barcode when ink jetting. This is the middle of the barcode spacing specification. If another font is required, use caution

and consider MERLIN testing prior to actual production.

In general, don't push the limits on specifications. Use settings that are in the middle of allowed limits. If the limits must be approached, use caution. Conduct MERLIN testing ahead of time if possible. The results from your MERLIN testing can help you identify if you are approaching any of the barcode parameters.

Have all machine operators, mechanics, and set up personnel keep a checklist of items to verify prior to initiating production:

- Ensure clearance around the barcode – clearance applies to edges of Cheshire or PSL labels, window envelopes, other printing, and knockout areas.
- When running letter-size mail always use the Notice 67 template to ensure the barcode is in the read area.
- Ensure the POSTNET barcode has the correct number of bars. Incorrectly calculated check digit, missing start/end bars, or missing digits in barcode generation within software can cause barcode errors.
- Pull samples frequently during production to ensure that mail is being run as intended during setup. Use the eyepiece reticle and the Notice 67 template if applicable.
- Never "jog" pieces that are to be production mailpieces. Jogging results in transient piece movement and hinders encoder operation. There is a high likelihood of print variations on jogged pieces.

Hardware Maintenance

Always conduct maintenance in accordance with manufacturer's approved procedures and use authorized parts/materials.

For inkjet printers:

- Check that print head height (throw distance) is within manufacturer specifications. Be particularly cautious of pieces with varying thickness.
- Ensure that the material transport is moving the mailpiece smoothly, squarely, and consistently under the inkjet head before starting production.
- Ensure the encoder (tachometer) is operating smoothly and without vibration.

Remember, the goal of the encoder is to accurately reflect the piece motion under the inkjet head. Loose/tight transport belts, excessively worn encoder wheel, and an incorrectly placed encoder wheel will result in significantly degraded print performance.

Customer Feedback

Notify customers of ongoing initiatives regarding mail quality and acceptance procedures and provide them with feedback on how their mail fits into these initiatives. Assure them you are trying to help them attain the discounts they are seeking in accordance with USPS standards.

Review and Track Reports

Assign a person to review and track all MERLIN reports. This person should be a production coordinator or supervisor. All reports should be reviewed whether passing or failing. Establishing trends by tracking these results can help spot indications of impending maintenance or repair issues or can help identify other problems. This person also should be knowledgeable about the *Mailers Guide to MERLIN* (page 4) and latest information on MERLIN as published by the Postal Service.

The Mailers Guide to MERLIN

August 2002

What is MERLIN?

MERLIN, an acronym for Mail Evaluation Readability Lookup INstrument, is a tool used by the USPS to assist with the acceptance of business mail. It automates the previous manual acceptance process for First-Class Presort Mail, Standard Mail, and Periodicals mail to ensure that the mail qualifies for workshare discounts. MERLIN verifies mail against standards set in the *Domestic Mail Manual* (DMM) for proper postage discounts, proper sorting, proper barcodes, and proper piece counts along with other acceptance checks for both letter-size and flat-size mailings.

Guidance is current as of September 2002, and mailers are advised to review all available MERLIN information resources for the most up-to-date information (see Resources on page 9).

Importance of Mail Preparation Quality

Poor mail preparation can cause delays in the processing and delivery of your mail. Improving mail preparation quality can save rework costs, reduce confrontations over mail quality problems at the BMEU/DMU, and reduce USPS transportation and processing costs. Higher quality mail results in improved USPS delivery rates. MERLIN gives you diagnostic reports for improving mail quality. This guide shows you how to prepare for and operate within the MERLIN environment.

What can be analyzed by MERLIN?

MERLIN can process letters, postcards and a flat-size pieces that do not exceed 15 inches in length or 12 inches in height and have a maximum thickness of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. MERLIN verifications will be performed on both automation and nonautomation rate letter-size and flat-size mailings. MERLIN can process pieces weighing up to 16 ounces. Nonautomation mailpieces do not have to be tabbed or sealed for MERLIN processing as the equipment is able to verify a wide variety of mailpieces.

What can MERLIN do?

MERLIN is capable of simultaneously verifying:

- Presort/mail makeup.
- Weight/piece count.
- POSTNET barcode readability.
- PLANET barcode readability.
- Tray label accuracy.
- Meter identification and date.
- Address/barcode accuracy.
- Carrier routes.

- Walk sequence accuracy.
- Line of travel.
- Endorsements and rate markings.
- Combined mailings.
- Mailpiece dimensions (height, length, and aspect ratio, as well as thickness).

MERLIN generates mail diagnostic reports and electronically transfers data to PostalOne!. It will benefit mailers by:

- Identifying where improvements in mail quality are needed.
- Improving the efficiency of Business Mail Entry Units (BMEUs) and Detached Mail Units (DMUs).
- Bringing consistency, objectivity, and reliability to the acceptance of workshare-discounted mail.
- Connecting with PostalOne!.

What MERLIN checks are “active” in terms of potential postage adjustments?

Verification results are divided into two categories: additional postage and diagnostic information. Currently, the USPS assesses additional postage for poor quality in:

- Presort accuracy.
- POSTNET barcode readability.
- Shortpaid metered mail (First-Class Mail only).
- Piece count (permit imprint) accuracy.

Each of these verifications must meet USPS acceptance rates within published tolerances.

Diagnostic reports are used to evaluate a mailing and assist the mailer in correcting mailpiece problems. Diagnostic reports do not have a postage adjustment associated with them. MERLIN provides these diagnostic reports:

- Address accuracy.
- Mailpiece characteristics.
- Carrier route sequencing.
- PLANET barcode readability.
- Meter date recognition.
- Meter plate.

Verifications performed by MERLIN for which there is no postage adjustment at the time of this publication may become “active” in the future, and the USPS may begin to assess additional postage. Even now, some diagnostic reports may disqualify a mailing for a specific rate if the mailing does not meet applicable standards. For example, the Mailpiece Characteristics report may show that a mailing entered as a letter is actually a flat.

Preparing for MERLIN Deployment – and Beyond

Always take actions to ensure high quality mail preparation. In addition to those ongoing efforts, take the actions described below specifically to prepare for MERLIN deployment. Make every effort to proactively prepare for MERLIN deployment, taking advantage of all the MERLIN education, training, and resources available from the USPS, industry trade associations, and vendors. See Resources (page 9) for more information.

MERLIN Phases

The recommendations below are divided into the various deployment phases, with the first section comprised of actions to take during **all** phases of deployment. The subsequent sections include additional recommendations for actions you should take during that particular phase of MERLIN deployment.

Actions During All Deployment Phases

Take the following actions during all phases of MERLIN deployment, including the period before deployment occurs (Pre-Deployment Phase), during the deployment (Deployment Phase), during the 60-day grace period (60-Day Grace Period Phase), and after deployment (Post-Deployment Phase):

- **Obtain and review Industry Best Practices Guide to Mail Quality** – Obtain and thoroughly review the USPS publication *Industry Best Practices Guide to Mail Quality*, which provides general guidelines for achieving barcode quality on an ongoing basis. The publication is available from the MERLIN Web site, www.usps.com/merlin and in this issue of the Mailers Companion on page 2. In addition, contact equipment vendors, mail preparers, and industry trade associations for additional guidelines that are equipment specific, and other support materials.
- **Frequently monitor USPS Web sites, publications, etc., for program/policy changes** – Closely monitor the USPS Web site, USPS publications, and other sources of information, including trade association newsletters and vendor communications, for information on MERLIN program or policy changes.
- **Utilize USPS Barcode Error Reference Guide** – The USPS has developed a *MERLIN Barcode Error Reference Guide* to help mailers understand and resolve barcode quality problems detected by MERLIN. A copy of the guide is available on the MERLIN Web site at www.usps.com/merlin and also in this issue of the *Mailers Companion* on page 11.
- **When printing barcodes, print to the DMM specifications** – Use the barcode specifications shown in the DMM to set up your barcode printing specifications. Barcode specifications used by MERLIN, which can be found in the *Barcode Error Reference Guide*, are slightly less stringent than those in the DMM, but using the DMM specifications as a goal will allow more margin for error without risking additional postage assessment as a result of failing MERLIN barcode readability.
- **Pre-test samples for barcode readability** – At any time — even before your company learns of its MERLIN deployment date — you can submit mailpiece samples for MERLIN barcode readability testing. Contact your local USPS BMEU or DMU to determine if samples can be pre-tested locally first. If not, submit samples to the MERLIN appeals/analysis site in Chicago. Instructions for submitting samples to Chicago can be obtained from the MERLIN Web site. Samples will be analyzed in the order they are received, except that in cases where resources are not available, samples from mailers that are within 90 days of MERLIN deployment will be given priority.
- **Communicate barcode quality concerns to your customers and staff** – Your company staff, as well as your customers if your company is a mail service provider, should be thoroughly trained on mailpiece design specifications that can cause barcode readability problems. Internal procedures should be developed to identify high risk designs that may cause mailings to fail USPS acceptance and verification, including MERLIN. Customer communication, redesign, or further testing should be explored for these mailings. USPS Mailpiece Design Analysts (MDAs) are available for assistance in mailpiece design consultation. In addition, resources are available at http://pe.usps.gov/mpdesign/mpdfr_intro_all.htm.
- **Monitor all MERLIN test results** – Even mailings that pass MERLIN checks — particularly if the score is close to the pass/fail threshold — should periodically be analyzed to help identify potential mail preparation quality problems. For instance, a mailing that passes

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MERLIN barcode readability with a score just above the pass/fail threshold (currently set at 90 percent for letters and 80 percent for flats) may be in danger of failing later as quality problems may worsen over time.

- **Review all MERLIN diagnostic reports** – In addition to the reports that are generated by MERLIN when a verification fails, there are additional reports available. Request all MERLIN diagnostic reports that relate to the verification failure and periodically for mailings that pass MERLIN but results show potential problems in the future. A report request form is available from USPS acceptance personnel and also can be found on the MERLIN Web site at www.usps.com/merlin.

- **Conduct on-site reviews when mailings fail MERLIN** – Local USPS personnel will contact your designated company representative if a mailing fails MERLIN. Ensure that an on-site review of your mail at the DMU/BMEU is conducted by your company personnel as often as possible when mailings fail MERLIN. The disposition of the mail will remain the same. The mailer may take the mailing back and rework it, pay the additional postage, and enter the mailing into the mailstream. The mailer always has the option to appeal MERLIN results (see Post-Deployment Phase).

- **Review MERLIN Operator Hotsheet** – The USPS has developed a “hotsheet” that lists critical areas the operator should review when operating MERLIN. A copy of the hotsheet should be available from local USPS acceptance personnel and also can be found on the MERLIN Web site.

- **Review proper MERLIN mailpiece feeding techniques, speed settings, and mailpiece orientation** – Different types of mailpiece characteristics may require different feeding techniques, speed settings, or mailpiece orientation to obtain accurate MERLIN results. Become familiar with the proper procedures and settings by reviewing the information available from the USPS. USPS Orientation Posters should be posted at all MERLIN sites.

- **Keep records** – At DMU sites keep internal records, to the extent practical, of the number of MERLIN verifications — particularly during the 60-day grace period — the dates, machine down time, and any other problems encountered during the crucial deployment

phases. Contact USPS as early as possible if excessive machine down time occurs during the 60-day grace period, or if not enough MERLIN verifications are being conducted.

Actions During Pre-Deployment Phase

This phase begins when you learn that MERLIN will be deployed in your DMU/BMEU. From that point until the deployment phase begins, you should take the following actions, in addition to those described in Actions During All Deployment Phases:

- **Establish internal quality control measures, using available tools** – Establish internal measures to ensure mail preparation quality control. Review the USPS Mail Preparation Total Quality Management (MPTQM) program guidelines on its Web site (www.usps.com/mptqm) for assistance and consider programs such as the Mailpiece Quality Control (MQC) program located at http://pe.usps.gov/mpdesign/mpdfr_mpqc_view.htm. For barcode readability quality control, use barcode template Notice 67 for letters (at the time of this publication a flats template is being designed), as well as a barcode eyepiece reticle (vendors include Gage Line, 716-458-2000, www.gage-line.com).

- **Identify USPS contact points** – Use the MERLIN Contact List to identify the USPS contact points for MERLIN questions and information. In most cases, this will be your local USPS Manager of Business Mail Entry. The Contact List also identifies the USPS area contact should there be issues that cannot be resolved locally. In addition to the USPS, questions can be directed to your industry trade association or vendor (see Who to Contact With Questions on page 9).

- **Determine deployment date** – The USPS should notify all mailers of MERLIN deployment at least 90 days in advance. In addition, the USPS posts MERLIN deployment schedules on its Web site, www.usps.com/merlin. By regularly checking the deployment schedule and communicating with local postal personnel, your company should be able to determine the MERLIN deployment date as early as possible.

- **Review USPS Site Preparation Guidelines** – Become familiar with the USPS MERLIN Site Preparation Guidelines (DMUs only), available on the MERLIN Web

site. By reviewing the site preparation guidelines, you can prepare for MERLIN deployment and formulate questions and areas of concern as early as possible. The District MERLIN coordinator will contact all DMUs receiving equipment and provide the mailer with a site preparation handbook.

- **Review USPS Site Activation Procedures** – Review the USPS Site Activation Procedures, which describe key actions that need be taken by district and area USPS personnel before and during the deployment of MERLIN at a DMU. A copy of the USPS Site Activation Procedures are available on the MERLIN Web site. Additionally, use this Web site to obtain a copy the MTAC MERLIN Recommendations and pay particular attention to the “Customer Related Issues” section, which includes customer communications.
- **Attend the USPS site preparation meeting** – Approximately 60 days prior to deployment of the first machine in your district, the USPS will invite DMU mailers receiving MERLIN equipment in their plant to send personnel to a site preparation meeting. Key personnel in your company should attend this meeting to discuss MERLIN deployment at your plant.
- **Review all MERLIN verification processes** – Become familiar with the verification and sampling processes for all the checks MERLIN performs. This includes presort/mail makeup, verification of piece counts (permit imprint), and shortpaid metered mail (First-Class Mail only), for which the postage adjustment phase begins immediately after deployment has been completed. More information on the checks MERLIN performs can be found on its Web site at www.usps.com/merlin and by contacting your local USPS BME personnel.
- **Become familiar with the MERLIN sampling procedures that will be used to verify your mail** – Procedures may differ between BMEUs and DMUs, and a different sampling procedure is used for Drop Ship Management System (DSMS) mailers. In addition, there may be some local flexibility depending on the type and frequency of mailings your company produces. In all cases, however, the quantity of mailpieces verified on MERLIN should be 500 for mailings of less than 10,000 pieces and 1,000 for mailings of more than 10,000 pieces, for both letters and flats. It is the USPS’s goal to verify as many mailings over 10,000 pieces as possible,

depending on resources. For mailings under 10,000 pieces, the USPS verifies one in six mailings using a random sampling.

- **Establish a barcode quality testing plan for samples** – Establish a testing plan that will encompass all types of mail that your company produces, including samples from all addressing/barcode printing platforms, samples with every available barcode font produced from each platform, and samples on as many paper stocks as possible. Include in your plan the analysis of test results, including borderline scores as well as failures.
- **MERLIN training/education** – Ensure that the appropriate personnel within your company attend MERLIN training. The USPS offers to mailers the same training it gives its MERLIN trainers in Norman, OK. It is highly recommended that mailers send a company representative to the USPS training, particularly for mail service providers such as printers and lettershops. The cost, which includes the training, meals, and accommodations, is around \$900 per person. More information can be found on the MERLIN Web site. In addition, many industry seminars on MERLIN are conducted. Contact your local Postal Customer Council (PCC), trade association, or vendor for information on industry seminars. Review all available USPS MERLIN information and resources (see Resources on page 9 for more information).

Actions During Deployment Phase (installation of MERLIN equipment)

The Deployment Phase is the period of time it takes for all MERLIN machines scheduled for a BMEU/DMU site to be installed. Take the following actions in addition to those described in Actions During All Deployment Phases (see page 5):

- **DMU sites receiving MERLIN machines** – Ensure that all site preparation requirements are completed on schedule. This includes electrical and wiring requirements.
- **Test mail (Chicago Test Center)** – Test as much mail as possible by MERLIN during the Deployment Phase to ensure ample opportunity to identify and resolve problems before the postage adjustment phase begins.

Follow established test plans (as described in Actions During All Deployment Phases, page 5) for as many different types of mail as possible, and analyze test results for all mailings that fail MERLIN verification as well as those that have borderline scores.

- **Become familiar with USPS “overwrite” procedures** – Review the USPS procedures for overwriting erroneous barcode and presort errors reported by MERLIN. If you observe a questionable MERLIN barcode readability result, ask for a second level review by a USPS supervisor.
- **Establish internal appeal procedures** – Establish an internal procedure and policy for filing MERLIN appeals prior to the completion of the Deployment Phase, since the postage adjustment phase for checks other than barcode readability commences immediately after the completion of the Deployment Phase (see the “How to Appeal MERLIN Results” section on this page).

Actions During 60-Day Grace Period Phase

Once the Deployment Phase has been completed, the postage adjustment phase for all active MERLIN checks (see What is MERLIN? on page 4) begins with the exception of barcode readability failure adjustments. There is a 60-day grace period before postage adjustments are made for mailings that do not pass the barcode readability threshold (set at 90% for letters and 80% for flats at the time of this publication). The 60-day grace period begins one week after the installation of the last machine in a site. You should receive notification from the USPS of the start date for the 60-day grace period.

During the 60-Day Grace Period Phase, take the following actions in addition to those described in Actions During All Deployment Phases:

- **Test mail** – Continue to send mail to the Chicago Test Center to ensure you have ample time to identify and resolve problems before the postage adjustment phase begins for barcode readability.
- **Mailings tested** – For DMUs, the target is to conduct MERLIN verifications on a **minimum of 30 of your mailings** during the 60-Day Grace Period Phase. Monitor the number of verifications being conducted and

contact the USPS as early as possible if too few are being done.

Actions During Post-Grace Period Phase

Once the 60-day grace period has been successfully completed, additional postage will be assessed for barcode readability failures (see What is MERLIN? on page 4).

Take the following actions on an ongoing basis:

- **Pre-test future mailings where possible for barcode readability** – Continue to submit mailpiece samples for pre-testing of MERLIN barcode readability even after MERLIN has been fully implemented in your DMU/BMEU and the 60-Day Grace Period Phase has been completed. As new mailpiece designs are encountered, submit samples for testing in advance of the mailing so that problems can be identified and resolved in advance (see Pre-Test Samples for Barcode Readability on page 5).
- **Monitor the current MERLIN software version being used** – The current MERLIN software version that should be used is found on the MERLIN Web site. Check this area regularly for information on software updates and then check the software version information on your MERLIN diagnostic reports to ensure that the correct version is in use by your DMU/BMEU.

How to Appeal MERLIN Results

Review mailings that fail MERLIN verification and consider filing an appeal if you have evidence that the results are inaccurate. When notified that a mailing has failed MERLIN, your representative should conduct an on-site review with USPS acceptance personnel, including a request for a next higher level review by the local USPS MERLIN supervisor, if deemed appropriate. If, after local efforts have been exhausted, you still believe that the MERLIN results are inaccurate, you should appeal to the next level.

For verifications other than barcode readability, follow the procedures outlined in DMM G020.3.0.

For barcode readability failures, follow the same procedures for local on-site review and next higher level review, if appropriate. If, after local efforts have been exhausted, you still believe that the MERLIN barcode

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readability results are inaccurate, you may appeal. The USPS will package the pieces that were tested on MERLIN and send them via Express Mail. Currently the USPS pays the Express Mail charges for the test mail shipped to the appeals facility in Chicago. Information on the appeals process can be found on the MERLIN Web site. Consider filing an appeal particularly if the MERLIN barcode readability score is just under the pass/fail threshold (set at 90 percent for letters, 80 percent for flats at the time of this publication). If the appeal site results are higher, a refund will be made; however, if the appeal site results are lower additional postage will be assessed beyond the local assessments.

Resources for More Information

The USPS has made available three Web site addresses with pertinent MERLIN information. Soon, mailers will be able to access all MERLIN information through one Web site address, www.usps.com/merlin.

Currently, the primary MERLIN information Web site is www.usps.com/merlin and contains:

- MERLIN Deployment Schedule.
- Procedures for using the MERLIN Pre-Testing Site (for barcode readability testing only).
- Barcode Error Reference Guide (guide to MERLIN report error codes).
- MERLIN training information for customers.
- MERLIN frequently asked questions (FAQs) and answers.

The USPS Business Mail Acceptance Web site www.pilot.uspspostalone.com/nonsecure/bma contains:

- The latest MERLIN software version that should be in use.
- MTAC workgroup MERLIN recommendations (this includes a 129-page binder with a wealth of information, some of which is in draft form and some of which has been finalized).
- MERLIN deployment schedules.
- Procedures for using the MERLIN Pre-Testing Site (for barcode readability testing only).
- MERLIN Standard Operating Procedures for a Business Mail Entry Unit (BMEU).
- Document describing types of MERLIN reports available.

- MERLIN Barcode Error Reference Guide (guide to MERLIN report error codes).
- MERLIN Feedback and Questions (mailers can post MERLIN questions to the USPS).

The Mailers Technical Advisory Committee Web site <http://ribbs.usps.gov/mits/docs/mquality.htm> contains:

- The latest information from the MERLIN MTAC Mail Quality workgroup.
- MERLIN Standard Operating Procedures for a Business Mail Entry Unit (BMEU).
- Procedures for using the MERLIN Pre-Testing Site (for barcode readability testing only).
- MERLIN Deployment Schedules.
- Document describing types of MERLIN reports available.
- MERLIN Barcode Error Reference Guide (guide to MERLIN report error codes).
- MERLIN Site Preparation Information.

In addition to the USPS Web sites listed above, check your industry trade associations, mail service providers, and vendors to find out what additional MERLIN resources are available.

Visit these Web sites and review the available MERLIN information from the USPS and others as early as possible in the MERLIN deployment process, in addition to regularly checking for updates to the MERLIN program or documentation.

Who to Contact With Questions

When you learn that MERLIN is coming to your DMU/BMEU, utilize the MERLIN contact list provided by the USPS for your questions and concerns. Normally, the USPS MERLIN contact will be the District Manager, Business Mail Entry. Issues that cannot be resolved at the district level will be elevated to the USPS Area MERLIN Coordinator.

Also find out if your industry trade associations, mail service providers, and vendors have contacts for MERLIN concerns.

MERLIN Deployment Schedule

MERLIN

Deployment schedule current as of September 2002 and subject to change.

| Area | Total Number of Machines | Deployment Begins | Deployment Complete |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Capital Metro | 63 | June 2002 | March 2003 |
| Eastern | 179 | March 2002 | March 2003 |
| Great Lakes | 178 | October 2002 | June 2003 |
| New York Metro | 65 | January 2003 | October 2003 |
| Northeast | 88 | November 2002 | October 2003 |
| Pacific | 106 | July 2003 | November 2003 |
| Southeast | 116 | May 2001 | March 2002 |
| Southwest | 95 | September 2002 | April 2003 |
| Western | 243 | October 2002 | November 2003 |



For updates on the MERLIN deployment schedule and the latest MERLIN information, visit the MERLIN Web site, www.usps.com/merlin.

Mail Quality Corner MPTQM-Certified Mailers

The mailers listed here are certified by the United States Postal Service. Each has met all the standards of the Mail Preparation Total Quality Management (MPTQM) program.

Companies are added to this list when they pass a quality assurance review and deleted from the list if they fail a subsequent review.

The program is based on ISO 9000, TQM, and the Malcolm Baldrige criteria. For information, visit the MPTQM Web site at www.usps.com/mptqm or send an email to mptqm@email.usps.gov.

— Business Mailer Support

| Location | Company |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Akron, OH | Centurion of Akron |
| Baltimore, MD | Jetsort |
| Brockton, MA | JLS Mailing Services |
| Cedar Rapids, IA | PSI Group |
| Charlotte, NC | PSI Group |
| Chicago, IL | ZIP Mail Services |
| Cleveland, OH | MidWest Presort |
| Dallas, TX | PSI Group |
| Denver, CO | Rocky Mountain Mail |
| Des Moines, IA | Mail Services, L.C. |
| Detroit, MI | ZIP Mail Services |
| Downers Grove, IL | Automated Presort |
| Farmingdale, NY | Fala Sorting Services |
| Glen Allen, VA | Capital One |
| Grand Rapids, MI | Presort Services |
| Greensboro, NC | Excalibur Presort Service |
| Harrison, NJ | Horizon Blue Cross |
| Houston, TX | PSI Group |
| Jefferson City, MO | AAA Mailing Service |
| Kansas City, KS | PSI Group |
| Lansing, MI | Presort Services |
| Las Vegas, NV | PSI Group |
| Lincoln, NE | PSI Group |
| Omaha, NE | PSI Group |
| Omaha, NE | First Data Resources |
| Phoenix, AZ | PSI Group |
| Pittsburgh, PA | Pittsburgh Mailing |
| Roanoke, VA | Automated Mailing Sys. |
| St. Louis, MO | St. Louis Presort |
| St. Louis, MO | ZIP Mail Services |
| San Francisco, CA | PSI Group |
| Seattle, WA | PSI Group |
| Topeka, KS | American Presort |
| Weston, FL | American Express GMS |