



# ONEPOST: making the most of mailings

**With the postal market growing ever more complex, ONEPOST seeks to help mailers make the best of pricing structures and minimise their environmental impact**

**I**N THE TWO AND A HALF YEARS SINCE THE UK postal market was liberalised on 1st January 2006, 22 different licensed postal operators have fought to earn themselves some elbow room alongside Royal Mail as competing carriers. As a result, the business community is presented with a plethora of pricing and logistical options. Given this, it is perhaps surprising that no-one else in the postal market is doing the same thing as ONEPOST.

Since forming in readiness for the market opening, ONEPOST has grown significantly – from just three clients to over 150 across a variety of industries – on its offering of management and consulting services to mailers seeking to minimise their postal costs. It has most recently earned them a finalist position in the Badenoch Clark Business of the Year category of the National Business Awards Wales & West Country Regional Programme 2008, sponsored by Orange.

The company uses unique in-house software that provides a completely independent view of the market. ONEPOST marketing manager Luan Wise says: “We have bespoke software

that enables a comparison of prices by licensed operators against Royal Mail products – all those little things that each individual operator might do which will enable us to maximise the most cost-effective solution for a mailing are held.”

Simply by inputting a client’s mailing database – a list of catalogue or magazine subscribers, for example – the cost of the mailing options available to that client can be compared on a job by job basis. Variables not only include the destination split of the mailing piece, either across the UK or internationally, but also the weight, size and service requirements. ONEPOST’s software is updated as prices and arrangements change, and the client’s estimate is altered for each change in the mailing profile.

“We check that we’ve got the right solution each and every time,” says Wise, “because what might be right for a postcard wouldn’t be right for a catalogue. Very often we may even use multiple products and operators to achieve the greatest savings.” This is where ONEPOST’s independent position reaps the most benefits for clients.

Despite the opportunities that ONEPOST’s unique position

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in the market affords, it also entails responsibilities, Wise says: "Because we're talking to so many people in the direct mail industry we're in a prime position to influence what they're doing – all the parts of the mailing process, from paper to producing the mailing, to cleaning the data, to delivering it through the door; we can influence each step." As such, the company places great emphasis on the direct mail industry's environmental footprint.

In July 2003, to help drive long-term economic and environmental sustainability for the direct mail industry, the DMA signed an agreement with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to develop a direct mail and promotions producer responsibility scheme. This agreement aims to increase the collection and recycling of direct mail and promotions material, to publicise the services available to those who do not wish to receive direct mail and to improve targeting.

The DM industry can have a very positive influence on the public, Wise says, by providing a reminder and call to action to recycle the DM material they receive. The first recycling target for 2005 set by the DMA and Defra was not met, and unless urgent action is taken, the next target for the end of 2009 (55% of all direct mail) will also be missed.

"Use of a 'recycle now' logo on all material is a quick and simple action to implement," Wise continues. "The thinking is that, if these targets are missed, the Government may step in and require an opt-in for individual mailings."

The Mailing Preference Service, which allows the public to opt out of receiving unsolicited direct mailings, is a further example of "best practice" where the market has the opportunity to demonstrate that it is policing itself effectively, Wise says, adding: "Many suppression files are available and easy to use." Through greater targeting, mailers can cut out the cost of delivering to recipients who are unlikely to respond.

Transport, also, is an area where unnecessary emissions can be avoided and cost savings maximised, although the options are admittedly more complex. "Whilst Royal Mail continues to deliver the 'final mile', the bulk of activity within the liberalised marketplace boils down to logistics," says Wise. Responding to this activity, ONEPOST can provide more options than would be available directly from suppliers for cutting down on transit.

If, for example, a mailing originating in Bristol, destined for Bristol consumers, were placed with a carrier with a depot in the West Midlands, it might be necessary for the items to be transported from Bristol to the West Midlands and back to Bristol (to Royal Mail's Inward Mail Centre) before finally being delivered. ONEPOST could instead arrange for an alternative pick-up and direct delivery into the Inward Mail Centre, saving on time and emissions as well as cost.

The direct mail industry as a whole has been taking more steps in recent months to formalise its approach to improving the environmental performance of direct mailings, with a new proposed British standard being drafted by the DMA and the

British Standards Institution (BSI), in consultation with select stakeholders. Currently referred to as PAS 2020 (a publicly available specification – the form the document takes during consultation and before ratification), the standard will require production measures to reduce environmental impact, though its adoption by individual companies would be voluntary, and its value determined by market forces. ONEPOST is in support of the initiative, Wise confirms, saying: "It's a great place to start."

The standard would be certified by third-party bodies in the same way as ISO 14001, for example, and three levels would be attainable. In its current draft, the most basic level requires documented evidence of procedures for targeting mailings; cleaning databases against deceased, gone-away and opt-out lists; assessing sustainability of materials and waste levels; and encouraging consumer recycling with logos. High-volume mailers (sending 250,000 B2B items or 500,000 B2C items annually) could only achieve the highest level, which requires the eradication of non-degradable polythene; tough restrictions on papers, printing and finishing processes; and publicly reported emissions reductions.



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Further alterations and refinements to the standard's criteria are likely before its final publication, and particularly following the close of the consultation period at the end of July. BSI has reported receiving over 1,000 comments on the document from 60 organisations, and meetings are currently in progress to discuss stakeholders' concerns. Ensuring that the document maintains a balance that will encourage take-up of certification to the standard by producers at each stage in the DM manufacturing process is likely to be high up the agenda of these discussions.

With environmental standards and initiatives such as PAS 2020 constantly under discussion, on top of the complex pricing structures that exist in the postal market, the value of expert advice to decipher all the relevant documentation becomes ever more apparent. As direct mail producers strive to come to terms with the rapidly changing market, more of them are likely to take advantage of the kind of information that, at present, only ONEPOST can provide.

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