

The Distribution Solution for Direct Marketing!

An Introduction to Mail.dat

Large scale mailings are defined by the quantity, size, and weight of the mail piece; sortation of the mailing into trays, packages, sacks, and pallets bound for common USPS facilities; and of course the list of mail recipients.

In the past, accurately describing large mail job required hundreds or thousands of hard copy documents; creating a management and utilization nightmare for the mailing community and Postal Service alike. Today, an entire mailing can be defined in precise detail by a single Mail.dat file, without exposing any proprietary data.

WHAT IS MAIL.DAT?

Mail.dat is the industry database standard for mail production, presort, processing, and logistic operations related to a USPS (or Canada Post) mailing. Thanks to Mail.dat, lettershops, printer/mailers, marketers, and logistics companies, can easily exchange and analyze data related to a mailing in a common format. Sharing this data, in advance of actually applying names and addresses, helps all companies in the service chain plan and coordinate operations.

Mail.dat uses 19 relational data files, containing 319 individual data fields, to account for all information pertaining to a given mailing - with the exception of actual address records - and is typically created in the mailing list presort stage.

- Header record
- Segment record
- Mail piece unit record
- MPU / C relationship record
- Container summary record
- Container label record
- International container label
- Container quantity record
- Package quantity record
- Walk sequence record
- Seed name record
- Package label record
- LJ / Container relationship
- Component record
- Single piece record
- Special fees/charges record
- Manifest individual record
- Manifest summary record
- Postage adjustment record

While 19 data files are available, they are not all required. For certain purposes - such as logistics planning - only a few of the data files are necessary.

WHERE DID MAIL.DAT COME FROM?

Courtesy of IDEAlliance and www.maildat.org...

"IDEAlliance's (then GCA) first effort, the Production Container Summary, detailed a mailing by container, content and rate to facilitate Third Class transportation pool planning for destination entry.

The concept was soon expanded to all classes as The Enhance Production Container Summary. During that period, the mailing industry further recognized a need for package level detail. The mailing industry had learned that the relatively simple environment of a few years ago, and it's specific solution, had been quickly outdated by rising expectations of what can and should be.

While developing Mail.dat, a single criterion defined the outcome: account for each possible preparation and presentation variable that could exist within a mailing.

Therefore, excluding addresses, Mail.dat summarizes all information for a given mailing. Any analysis of a mailing can be fully satisfied, except analysis unique to an address.

The specification has continuously evolved since the first Mail.dat format appeared in 1996. As with its predecessors, the current Mail.dat specification is defined by circumstances as perceived at this time, but built-in flexibility makes it possible to readily adapt to new requirements, as they are recognized.

The Mail.dat Committee is constantly attending to the viability, currency, and accuracy of the Mail.dat specification. Each user and potential user stands as a critical contributor to the quality, efficacy, and history of Mail.dat."

WHY USE MAIL.DAT?

Confirm Tracking, PAVE Testing, ESP, Mail Acceptance, Mail Verification, Postage Payment, Destination Entry, Additional Entry, NSA'a; these are but a few of the many mail industry activities supported, facilitated, optimized, and standardized through the use of Mail.dat.

As the data exchange standard embraced by a large and growing segment of the mail production industry and the US Postal Service, Mail.dat is contributing to important gains in efficiency, economy, and strategy enhancement. And your company can easily join in.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

Complete documentation on Mail.dat is available from online at www.IDEAlliance.org.

For a demonstration of Mail.dat capabilities, or discuss the merits of Mail.dat in your workflow, please contact Direct Logistics today.

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