



PRODUCTION SOLUTIONS

CHECKLIST FOR POSTAL SUCCESS

2026



**PRODUCTION
SOLUTIONS**
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MAKE MORE POSSIBLE



As postage rates continue to climb, comprising a significant portion of your direct mail budget, the need for a lean, strategic postal approach has never been more crucial. What was once "nice-to-have" is now a necessity. Postage alone can account for nearly half of your overall package costs, making it essential to develop a well-defined, proactive strategy that:

- 1. Reduces postage expenses without compromising response rates,**
- 2. Captures every possible savings opportunity, and**
- 3. Streamlines postal logistics to keep supply chain, shipping, and commingling costs under control.**

With rising postage costs, insulating your direct mail program from these increases has never been more important. Accurate budget forecasting and partnering with top industry experts are key to achieving your marketing or revenue-driving goals.

This checklist for postal success will guide you in optimizing your program's postal strategy, allowing you to continue making smart investments in your direct mail initiatives.

YOUR CHECKLIST FOR POSTAL SUCCESS



HAVE A SMART POSTAL LOGISTICS STRATEGY

Evaluate the various destination entry-point options within the postal supply chain to actively minimize transportation, labor, and manufacturing costs.

Local entry: Local entry mail is delivered to the nearest post office from the point of origin, similar to dropping personal mail at your local post office. Since no postal logistics work is involved, this option is best used for mail near the mailshop, or for first-class mail that will not be commingled. Now, let's explore mail that requires more advanced logistics strategies. The USPS offers lower postage rates to mailers who assist with sorting and transportation, providing greater savings than simply using local entry. Most of our mail utilizes one of the following methods:

Commingle: Combine mail from multiple mailers to maximize postal savings. Mail is sorted and delivered to the USPS with much of the work already done. This method is especially cost-effective for both small and large mail volumes.

Drop Shipping: Prepaid, presorted, and palletized mail is shipped by the mailer to a USPS facility closer to the destination, qualifying for discounts when shipping at least a truckload to a single area.

Hybrid Solutions: Use a combination of delivery methods within a single mailing, such as local entry for nearby recipients, drop shipping for specific regions, and commingling for the remainder of the mail.

Each program is unique, and every campaign plays a vital role in communicating with the recipient. Be sure to weigh cost savings against your in-home date goals—time is money, and missing a key delivery date can result in opportunity costs far beyond just postage. Having an experienced partner by your side is essential for navigating these critical decisions, weighing the impact of savings, delivery timelines, and long-term program health. By optimizing your logistics strategy, you can ensure both the short-term success of each campaign and the long-term growth of your direct mail program.



TAKE ADVANTAGE OF POSTAL PROMOTIONS AND INCENTIVES

Each year, The United States Parcel Service (USPS) updates its postal promotions, providing valuable opportunities to reduce your mailing costs. However, navigating the constantly shifting schedules and details of these promotions can be a challenge. To maximize these benefits, you need careful planning and a clear understanding of the registration process.

**IN 2025, OUR CLIENTS ACHIEVED
OVER \$3,500,000 IN POSTAL
SAVINGS FROM USPS PROMOTIONS
WE MANAGED ON THEIR BEHALF.**

At Production Solutions, we take pride in being early adopters and experts in postal promotions. These incentives are more important than ever for controlling postal costs, and we're here to help. As your proactive partner, we'll simplify the process, uncover opportunities, and offer strategic recommendations tailored to your needs, ensuring you make the most of every dollar in your mailing strategy.



2026 PROMOTIONS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Integrated Technology Promotion

Previously known as "Emerging and Advanced Technology," this promotion incentivizes mailers to incorporate technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), augmented reality, virtual reality, video in print, and QR codes into their mailings.

- Eligible Mail Classes: First-class, Marketing, Nonprofit Letters and Flats
- Registration Period: Starts Nov 15, 2025
- Promotion Period: Any Consecutive 6-month period in CY 2026

UP
TO **5%**
DISCOUNT

Tactile, Sensory, and Interactive Promotion

This promotion rewards mailers for adding unique textures, scents, interactive elements, and specialty inks to mail. Designing a multi-sensory experience with your mailer is known to enhance customer engagement.

- Eligible Mail Classes: First-class letters, cards and flats, Marketing, Non-profit letters and flats.
- Registration Period: Oct 15, 2025 – Jun 30, 2026
- Promotion Period: Jan 1 – Jun 30, 2026

UP
TO **5%**
DISCOUNT

Continuous Contact Promotion

This promotion encourages sending more frequent mailings to the same recipients. Targeted, dynamic content keeps your brand visible, boosts engagement, and improves ROI. The key is to ensure each mailing complements the previous one, providing new information or updates, rather than repeating the same message, as well as getting sent to the same recipients

- Eligible Mail Classes: Marketing, Nonprofit letters and flats
- Registration Period: Feb 15, 2026 – Dec 31, 2026
- Promotion Period: Apr 1, 2026 – Dec 31, 2026

UP
TO **5%**
DISCOUNT
APPLIED AFTER
INITIAL MAILING



2026 PROMOTIONS, CONTINUED

First-Class Mail Advertising Promotion

The requirements for this promotion have recently changed. First-class mailings that contain marketing or advertising content, such as promotions, new product launches, or special offers, are eligible for qualification.

- Eligible Mail Classes: First-Class Mail with advertising content. Marketing Mail/Non-Profit Mail is not eligible
- Registration Period: Jul 15, 2026 – Dec 31, 2026
- Promotion Period: Sep 1, 2026 – Dec 31, 2026

UP TO **5%**
DISCOUNT

Catalog Insights Promotion

New in 2026, this promotion encourages mailers to use content-rich catalogs to drive customer engagement. The catalog can be in an envelope or self-mailed, but must be bound with at least 12 pages and include a description, price and images of the products or services for sale, along with a way to place an order. Non-profit organizations need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

- Registration Period: Aug 15, 2025 – Jun 31, 2026
- Promotion Period: Oct 1, 2025 – Jun 30, 2026

UP TO **10%**
DISCOUNT

Add-on Discounts for 2026

Add-on discounts are paired with a USPS promotion to increase your savings potential. While they cannot be claimed on their own, mailers may combine one or both discounts with another USPS promotion to unlock up to an additional 1% savings each. Registration is required each year, and the discount is available year-round.

Informed Delivery Add-On: This popular “interactive” promotion that reaches your target audience digitally, and in close succession to your printed mailers, continues as an add-on, providing up to an additional 1% discount on any mailing throughout the year. Registration is now open, and the promotion runs from January 1 to December 31, 2026.

Sustainability Add-On: Shows your efforts to be environmentally conscious through sustainably sourced printed materials, offering up to an additional 1% discount on postage. Current requirements include that the paper used have either Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certifications to qualify. Registration is now open, and the promotion runs from January 1 to December 31, 2026.



2026 PROMOTIONS, CONTINUED

Volume-based Incentive

USPS recently introduced its Volume-based Incentive, offering a 30% postage credit to any volume that exceeds a mail owner's 2025 volume of one million pieces or more.

This program is designed for organizations increasing their First-Class and Marketing Mail volumes. With complex eligibility criteria and a challenging enrollment process, early preparation is crucial. Registration is from March 1 to May 31, 2026. Credits are awarded in July 2026, October 2026, and February 2027.

So, theoretically, if your 2025 volume was 1 million pieces, and your 2026 volume is 1.5 million pieces, you would be eligible for a 30% postage credit on the 500,000 pieces that exceeded the first-year total.

Planning Ahead is Essential

To leverage these benefits, it's essential to align your mailing calendar with the promotions that best support your goals, as the registration periods and requirements can be complex. At Production Solutions, we're here to guide you through every step—from understanding eligibility and maximizing promotional opportunities to making strategic recommendations tailored to your needs. These promotions remain critical for optimizing your postal expenses, and we are committed to providing the support you need to make informed, long-term decisions.

By staying informed, planning ahead, and partnering with us, you can achieve both your marketing and financial objectives. Let's start strategizing together to ensure you take full advantage of these valuable opportunities.

**FOR A FULL CALENDAR, DOWNLOAD OUR
HANDY 2026 PROMOTIONS CALENDAR.**





CONSIDER FIRST-CLASS VS. MARKETING MAIL

Many direct marketing mailers, including nonprofit organizations, are shifting from USPS First-Class postage to Marketing Mail, and while this can offer savings, it's important you weigh the differences carefully:

Know what you can mail: Marketing Mail requires a minimum of 200 pieces or 50 pounds, with each piece weighing no more than 16 ounces. Though it's cost-effective, Marketing Mail isn't forwarded or returned without additional fees and has varying rates based on the type of mail, such as letters, flats, or parcels. In contrast, First-Class Mail offers faster delivery, includes forwarding and return services at no extra cost, and is ideal for personalized content and segmented mailing lists.

Consider the impact on delivery speed: First-Class Mail typically delivers within 1 to 5 days, depending on distance, while Marketing Mail can take 11 to 14 days to reach the recipient. Be mindful of time-sensitive campaigns where every response or transaction counts.

Test and evaluate: Before switching to Marketing Mail, test its impact on the intended recipient. First-Class may still be cost-effective for certain audiences or when timing is crucial. Testing allows you to weigh the pros and cons, giving you the insight needed to make the best decision for your program.

Evaluate your reply envelope strategy: If you currently use Stamped Reply Envelopes (SREs), consider testing a CRE (Courtesy Reply Envelope) or a Business Reply Envelopes (BREs) to explore potential cost savings. Additionally, evaluating the audience or what mailers might benefit from the cost-effectiveness of switching your reply envelope strategy.

Explore QBRM to reduce return mail costs: Qualified Business Reply Mail (QBRM) can reduce return mail costs but comes with limitations, such as allowing only one BRE size per permit. Although QBRM typically involves higher annual and quarterly fees, USPS announced earlier this year that these fees are now waived for mailers who enroll in their new Intelligent Mail barcode Accounting (IMbA) system.

By considering these factors and testing the impact, you can make informed decisions about which mail strategy will offer both cost savings and timely delivery.





KEEP IT CLEAN

Address hygiene is a powerful way to cut costs and reduce waste in your direct mail campaigns. Regularly cleansing your address lists eliminates undeliverable mail before it's printed or sent, saving money and conserving resources like paper and fuel.

With over \$20 billion lost annually to undeliverable mail, maintaining clean data not only boosts your bottom line but also promotes environmental sustainability. As your production partner, we help you implement a cost-effective, eco-friendly mailing strategy.

Here are some USPS systems and services to ensure every mailpiece counts:

CASS (Coding Accuracy Support System): A USPS software certification program that ensures address accuracy by verifying postal codes, including the 5-digit ZIP code, ZIP +4, delivery routes, and carrier routes.

NCOA (National Change of Address): A national database of individuals and businesses that have filed a change of address with the USPS, helping you keep your address lists current.

ACS (Address Correction Services): An automated USPS service that provides updated or corrected addresses for mailpieces that have been delivered (or attempted to deliver). ACS helps further cleanse your data files, but it's crucial to integrate the updated data into your databases for future mailings.

Some of these systems may seem duplicative at first glance, but it's important to remember that most direct mail project lifecycles range from 6-12 weeks. During that time, between the initial data pull and the moment your mail is ready to enter the postal system, it's crucial to perform both a front-end and final cleansing step. This ensures all addresses are accurate and up-to-date, accounting for any changes that may have occurred throughout the campaign's lifecycle. At Production Solutions, we proudly offer this service to all our clients, ensuring every mailpiece reaches its intended recipient.





UNDERSTAND AND MEASURE THE FULL IMPACT OF YOUR MAIL

Not all production partners provide the same level of mail tracking and reporting. It's important to know what you're currently receiving and what you should expect from your production team to gain visibility and make informed decisions.

Mail tracking: Do you know where your mail goes after it leaves the mailshop? Mail tracking adds transparency by allowing you to monitor its journey from the post office to the recipient's home. At Production Solutions, we track individual mail pieces, overall mail progress, percentage delivered, and more, giving you real-time insights.

Reply mail tracking: Just like outbound mail, we track inbound responses, payments or contributions. Using IMB barcodes, we can track overall volumes or individual items, giving you visibility into your caging results before the money hits the bank, so you can accurately forecast revenue.

Matchback: Matching order files or online responses back to your mail file helps you understand how effectively your mail is reaching the intended audience and provides valuable insight into where further investment in direct mail can drive results.



FOCUS ON THE FUNDAMENTALS

As they say, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and this holds especially true in the complex world of direct mail production. Simple quality control steps and tactical adjustments can significantly reduce postage costs. Here is a sample of key fundamentals we keep on our radar on behalf of our clients:

Consider using an indicia: A postal indicia replaces stamps or meter imprints, saving time and reducing labor costs. Test its impact on the mailer's experience, and follow USPS guidelines for proper use. We've successfully implemented this tactic for many clients.

Test cost-effective formats: consider a switch from flat rate to letter rate where appropriate, testing self-mailers over envelopes, or exploring lighter weight inserts and right-sizing packages.

Triple-check package thickness: Even a millimeter matters. Mailpieces nearing a quarter-inch require extra attention. A thorough quality check, even for repeat mailings, saves time and money and prevents issues down the line.

These are just a few examples of the quality assurance steps and cost-saving ideas you gain when partnering with Production Solutions. Your production partner should add value to your team by working closely to identify simple, cost-saving and quality control tactics early in the process and leverage them for continuous improvement. With the right experts by your side, you'll avoid surprises and enjoy a well-managed program where every campaign runs smoothly, accurately, and on time.



STAY INFORMED

We're pleased to share that the USPS will not raise postage rates in January 2026, offering stability and predictability for your mailing strategy. However, it's important to remember that USPS has the authority to increase rates once a year, at least until 2023, and without being limited by the CPI. While this isn't ideal, knowing what to expect empowers you to budget in advance and make informed decisions to protect your program's long-term success. With the next potential rate adjustment not expected until July 2026, you have valuable time to plan and prepare with confidence. Stay up to date by following Production Solutions on [LinkedIn](#) and by keeping up with our [blog](#).

We also encourage you to get involved! Every voice matters in our industry. Stay informed about the efforts of advocacy partners who are raising awareness of the challenges and impacts we face. We fully support their work and invite you to join the conversation. By adding your voice to the growing chorus of mailers, you can help advocate for the critical role direct mail plays in your fundraising or direct marketing programs.



The Nonprofit Alliance – A collective of nonprofit organizations and partner firms aimed to strengthen the nonprofit sector and enhance public engagement for greater mission impact. <https://tnpa.org>



Keep Us Posted – A nonprofit advocacy group of consumers, nonprofits, newspapers, businesses, and more united to promote a reliable, affordable U.S. Postal Service. <https://keepusposted.org>



USPS Postal Pro – Official source for USPS announcements and updates. <https://postalpro.usps.com>

It's crucial to have a partner with deep industry connections. At Production Solutions, we've built strong relationships within the USPS and the broader mailing industry, ensuring we stay ahead of new developments. Your postal partner should be well-connected to help insulate your program from potential risks and ensure its long-term success.



A PARTNERSHIP THAT DELIVERS

In today's evolving postage landscape, with USPS rate increases and complex processes, having a proactive postal strategy is more critical than ever. At Production Solutions, we partner closely with our clients to thoroughly evaluate mail plans, identify savings opportunities, and recommend package formats and timing strategies that maximize USPS promotions and annual qualifications. As early adopters of postal discounts, we ensure your campaigns are optimized for cost efficiency and impact.

Our expertise extends beyond production management—we act as an extension of your fundraising or your direct marketing teams, expertly handling complex USPS processes, including registration, data processing, and savings reporting. With PS managing the logistics, your team can stay focused on what they do best. In turn, we focus on streamlining budgets, mitigating risks, uncovering hidden value, and maximizing your direct mail program's potential. Every step of the way, we simplify the process, ensuring every opportunity is captured to offset rising postal costs and support the long-term health of this critical marketing channel.

READY TO OPTIMIZE YOUR POSTAL STRATEGIES AND MAXIMIZE YOUR BUDGET?

Start seeing results today! Let us help you discover new ways to save with a comprehensive, no-obligation assessment of your direct mail program. Reach out today and see how we can unlock postal and production efficiencies for you!

[PRODUCTIONSOLUTIONS.COM/SERVICES/PRODUCTION-AUDIT](https://www.production-solutions.com/services/production-audit)



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