



The Postal Service—An Amazing Record

I have made comments about the postal service in several earlier editorials (see, for example, October 1993 and June 1994). These comments, although passing, were positive comments about the postal service and particularly the U.S. Postal Service. I continue to be amazed and thankful for the service rendered—hence a special editorial on the subject.

As you can imagine, I get a great deal of mail associated with the journal; it arrives six days a week and for 52 weeks a year (except for the national holidays). My immediate contact with the postal service is my own letter carrier, Sam Andolino, who always goes the “extra mile” to make sure that I get my daily pile of regular first class and registered mail. Because my office is on university property, but is also my residence, my mail is delivered directly to me and not through the university mail system. Sam also picks up our outgoing mail and puts it on its appropriate way to authors, reviewers, or Bellingham for publication. On occasion he also collects the “postage due” on items with insufficient postage paid by the addresser.

The number of items that I know do not reach me is very small indeed—a mere handful out of an estimate of more than 30,000 items of mail since I became your editor in 1991. I usually hear about lost mail since authors always query me about the receipt of their manuscript. Reviewers always hear from me with reminder cards and letters, so the loop is again closed.

Some authors contact me the day after their manuscript was mailed! This usually occurs because mail is delayed in the corporate mail rooms rather than delayed by the postal service, a fact that I can surmise by comparing the data on the letter of transmittal and the postmark.

If a package is damaged in transit, the postal service does a remarkable job of finding out who the recipient should be and mailing the remaining material in a sealed plastic bag with a statement printed on it (see Fig. 1). This service enables me to be in contact with the authors and to get a new copy of the manuscript.

I had made some notes for this editorial and had placed them in my “future editorials” file. I was prompted to move it up on my schedule as a result of recent correspon-

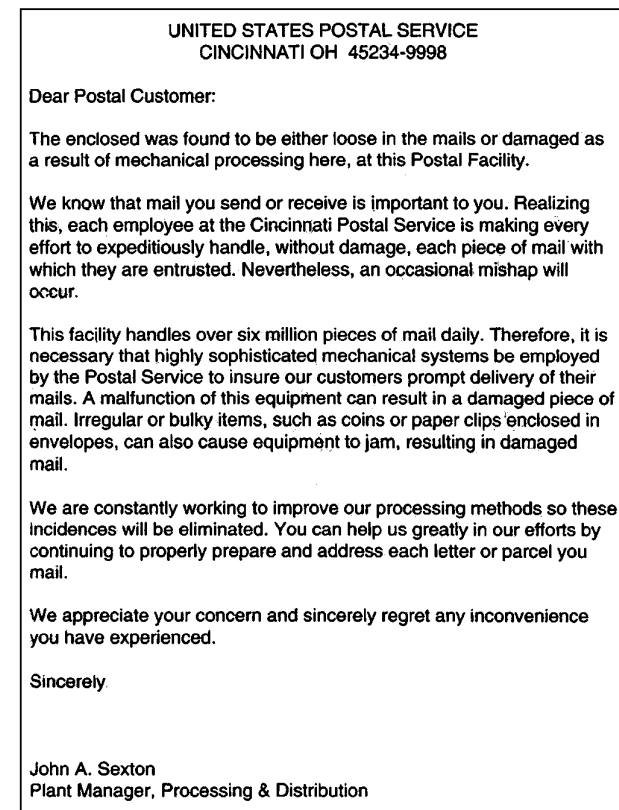


Fig. 1 Statement printed on the plastic damaged-mail bag.

dence about one of my editorial anecdotes. My editorial anecdote in the January 1996 issue recounted the story of the letter to Alabama that was misdirected to Melbourne, Australia, and then sent back to the addresser. I emphasize “and then sent back” because the letter finally did arrive at its correct destination. I admit that my anecdote could be interpreted as a snide comment. It certainly wasn’t intended as such, particularly since it was in my anecdote section. However, I was justifiably taken to task by one of our readers/members who wrote to me:

“I don’t work for the USPS, I don’t have any friends who work for the USPS, and I don’t have any other special interest in defending the USPS. Except I’m tired of all the snig-

gering at the mail system. I think in this case you did a poor job addressing the envelope, and as a result the mail system did not work well for you.”

The writer is entirely correct and took the time to remind me of the U.S. Postal Service Guidelines for addressing letters: “In our area over a year ago the U.S. Postal Service tried to disseminate some guidelines for addressing letters. The gist of it was to type if possible, otherwise print with uppercase characters, and use a certain 3–4 line format. Following these USPS recommendations, I’d have set up your envelope thus:”

ATTN: PROF. P.P. BANERJEE, E.E. DEPT., COLLEGE OF ENG.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE

[SOME STREET ADDRESS OR P.O. BOX NUMBER]

HUNTSVILLE AL 35597

Let us all take our colleague’s message to heart.

Editor’s Anecdote

As the editor of both *Optical Engineering* and of the Milestone Series of Selected Papers,* I have to write a lot of reminder letters: to reviewers to get their reviews and

*In case you are not familiar with the series published by SPIE—The International Society for Optical Engineering, there are currently 120 volumes in the series. Each volume, edited by an authority in the field, contains a collection of selected reprints from the world literature on the particular subspecialty of optical science and engineering covered by that volume.

to authors to get their manuscripts and their revisions. Nearly everyone accepts my cajoling in the best interests of all. This is the lead-in to a quote from a recent letter that I received.

“When I was working on my thesis experiment a very long time ago . . . and after I had made what seemed, to me, a major blunder . . . a Professor from the University of _____ told me that ‘every dog gets three bites.’ I’ve now just used up two bites in my interactions with you. One by not promptly responding to your request to review the enclosed paper by _____. The second by my interactions concerning the Milestone Volume, which I will address in a separate letter. I apologize for the delay. Hopefully, I have one bite left.”

Brian J. Thompson
Editor