

How Postage Gets Paid

A Primer on Indicias, Meter Imprints and Stamps

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Introduction

This article discusses the various ways to attach postage to your mail pieces, and the impact each might have on your response rates.

In a direct mail campaign, there are three main ways to affix postage to the pieces. You can use a Postal Indicia, a Meter Imprint, or you can apply Stamps. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. If you're not familiar with these terms, gather several letters from your mailbox. As we discuss the different types in detail below, you should be able to find examples for reference.

Postal Indicia

A Postal Indicia is a small printed box, usually about the size of a stamp, and printed on the mailpiece in about the same place. The contents of the indicia indicate the class of mail, and the postal permit under which the mailing was performed. The main advantage of using an indicia to pay the postage is cost. It's effectively free to add an indicia to a letter or postcard as the return address and other information is being printed. From a marketing standpoint, it can be useful when you wish to present a "corporate" image, or impress the user with the size of your company. In short, if there is advantage to your recipient knowing that they are part of a bulk mailing, then a Permit Indicia will indicate it to them. On the flipside, if the intent is to convey a personal message, the effect may be lessened by the same knowledge. Another possible disadvantage to using an indicia is identity. Unless you open your own permit (which costs at least \$150 per year), the indicia will bear either the name of your mailer, or the city and state of mailing, plus the permit number. If you're trying to do a regional mailing, and wanting to promote a "local" image, having an indicia that says "Dallas, Texas" when the mail is going to New Jersey won't help.

Meter Imprint

A Meter Imprint is recognized as red ink markings indicating the amount of postage paid. This is not to be confused with a normal "cancelled" stamp. There is no stamp present in metered mail. Most mailers will charge a small fee to affix metered postage to your mailing. This is partially to offset the effect of damaged envelopes, etc, or they may perform this as an off-line process. Since actual postage is applied, a damaged envelope that has to be replaced is money lost. Metered Postage can supply a more personal impact than a Postal Indicia. It can also provide the "flavor" of a small business or limited quantity mailing. It can be good for a non-profit fundraising letter, as it gives the impression of a small group intent on saving money (and thus passing it on to the cause at hand).

Stamp Application

Everyone is familiar with stamps. Most of us have used them at some point. Many people do not know that there are actually several different types of stamp to choose from. If you are mailing to a sophisticated crowd that will know a "real" stamp, you might want to spend the extra money and use one. However, for almost every application, there is a better alternative, Pre-cancelled Stamps. These items look like stamps, and they have value like stamps. However, they still allow you to utilize the bulk rates of First Class, and even Standard Mail. By using these stamps, you are able to create the impression of a more personal letter, and still pay as little as 19 cents to mail it (or less for non-profit rate). You can recognize these stamps because they don't have the "canceling" ink marks the USPS puts on regular stamps. They will also have "Presort" or "Presorted" printed somewhere in the stamp. You will have to pay a higher fee than metered postage to have these stamps applied, but in many applications, the boost to your "open rate" will be well worth it.

Conclusion

We hope this article has given you some insight into your options. Perhaps it will be a help when you're deciding how to pay the postage on your next mailing. Just remember, the payment method does have an impact, and you don't have to pay the full single piece rate to get a personalized look.