

Endicia

New USPS Tracking Barcodes And Label Changes

Harry's Hints Series

Version 1.0
1/19/2011

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Introduction

With the January 2, 2011 release of our Endicia software, we began using a new USPS barcode protocol called Intelligent Mail Parcel Barcode or IMpb, for short. If you have been using Delivery Confirmation in the past, the new barcodes look pretty much like the old ones, but the data inside have changed. For domestic Express Mail users, you will notice that the new tracking number looks identical to the Delivery Confirmation barcode. Gone is the old alphanumeric "EO123456789US" Express format—so that is a very noticeable change. In contrast, tracking numbers on USPS international packages have not changed.

The New IMpb Barcode Structure

Let's look at the new barcode structure. The first two digits are always a 94, which means that this label was created by a PC postage vendor. Next is a very important 3-digit "service code". Prior barcodes had a 2-digit service code—the new IMpb adds one more digit. The USPS has a published list of service codes in Appendix I of the USPS Publication 91 Addendum. The 055 in the example below means that this is Priority Mail with Delivery Confirmation. There are hundreds of possible service codes. They essentially cover all possible permutations of USPS services. For instance, there is a different service code for a Priority Mail package with Delivery Confirmation and insurance. There is another service code for First-Class Mail with Delivery Confirmation and Restricted Delivery. So, the new 3-digit Service Type Code (STC) encapsulates the mail class and any and all extra services.

The next two digits are a source identifier. The number 10 uniquely identifies Endicia Internet Postage. Next is a Mailer ID (MID). MID's are assigned by the USPS to identify the originator of the barcode. Because our loyal Endicia customers create millions of barcodes per day, we were given several special 6-digit MID's (the one shown in the example barcode is 200793). When using a 6-digit MID, we employ the 10 for the source identifier and we can generate up to 100 million unique tracking numbers.

Some of our customers have been assigned their own MID by the USPS, and we will then generate barcodes using their MID. These MID's are usually 9 digits in length. With a 9-digit MID, you can generate up to 100,000 unique tracking numbers (and this is the situation where we use the "15" for a source identifier).

Our goal with domestic tracking numbers is to maintain uniqueness for at least 6 months. So, you may see tracking numbers "re-used" but always with a gap of at least 6 months.



So there you have it. You can now read and understand the domestic tracking barcodes!

Goodbye "USPS Delivery Confirmation"—Hello "USPS Tracking #"

In a few weeks, the text banners above the barcode on your labels will magically change. For instance, where the "ZIP-USPS Delivery Confirmation" text appears, you will see "USPS Tracking #". Even "ZIP - USPS Signature Confirmation" will change to "ZIP - USPS Tracking #". You won't have to update your copy of DAZZle or Endicia for Mac—the banner text will simply change one day (spooky, huh?). The rewording reflects the USPS's continuing commitment to provide better package visibility during the delivery cycle. When Delivery Confirmation started around 2000, you got just that—a single scan indicating the delivery event. Now, you will typically see 5 to 7 events for a given package. So that explains the change in wording. If you are using Stealth Postage, it will be difficult to tell a Signature Confirmation label from a Delivery Confirmation label, so be aware of that. However, the delivering carrier will always know what to do when he or she scans the barcode: the scanner gun will tell him or her exactly what actions are needed.

Hey, What's that Weird Number on My Label!

Another thing that popped up on shipping labels starting with our January 2, 2011 release was a 4-digit number called the Retail Distribution Code (RDC). Do you see the "0006" on the image below? That's the RDC.



The RDC is used by your local Post Office to do a preliminary package sort. Your local Post Office prepares containers every evening that are filled with packages heading to the nearest USPS processing "plant". For instance, our local Palo Alto, California Post Office forwards mail to the San Francisco Sectional Center Facility (SCF) every evening. The RDC code lets the Palo Alto dock workers perform a first-level sort so that packages destined for the San Francisco Bay Area would go into one container and those packages going to the East Coast would be in another container. Previously, they sorted by looking at the ZIP Code of the address and then figuring out what container would be appropriate. Now, they can just sort based on the simple RDC code and save a ton of time. This preliminary sort at the inducing Post Office speeds up the processing at the main plant.