What is the Intelligent Mail® Package Barcode (IM®pb)?

The Intelligent Mail Package Barcode (IM®pb) is the Postal Service's next generation tracking barcode for parcels and Extra Services. It uses the same industry-standard GS1-128 symbology as the current Confirmation Services barcode but with several enhancements.

How does it work?

Similar to the current Confirmation Services tracking barcode, the IMpb may be applied to all domestic parcels and other mail pieces for tracking or where an Extra Service has been purchased. The IMpb includes customer account (Mailer ID), ZIP Code routing, and payment channel information, and denotes the mail class and service combination of the mail piece. The IMpb is tracked throughout our network, providing enhanced visibility to customers. The product (mail class) only IMpb may be applied to packages with no Extra Services to receive partial tracking information.

When will the IMpb be required?

Effective January 22, 2012, The IMpb is required for PC Postage customers. Also, customers claiming presort or destination entry prices, except Standard Mail, must use an IMpb, legacy tracking barcode, or Extra Services barcode. To provide time to modify their systems, customers were afforded a transition period until July 2, 2012 initially, then extended to July 31, 2012 to meet this requirement. The IMpb will be required for all tracking and Extra Services barcodes, and all First-Class Package Services, Parcel Select, Parcel Select Light Weight, Bound Printed Matter, Media Mail, and Library Mail parcels to claim presort and destination entry pricing effective January 7, 2013. This excludes Standard Mail.

What types of incentives does the Postal Service offer to encourage IMpb use?

Commercial customers[1] for certain products will receive end-to-end tracking including confirmation of delivery (Delivery Confirmation) at no charge. Also, an IMpb or trackable barcode is now tied to presort and destination entry pricing. Initially, customers may use the IMpb or the existing Confirmation Services or Extra Services barcode formats to qualify for end-to-end tracking at no charge. Effective January 7, 2013, commercial customers must adopt the IMpb and its corresponding file formats for all tracking and Extra Services barcodes.

How is the IMpb different from the current Confirmation Services / Extra Services barcode format?

The main differences between the IMpb and the current barcodes used for Confirmation Services and Extra Services are that the IMpb:

- Uses just one barcode symbology, GS1-128
- Supports a 6-digit or 9-digit Mailer ID
- Uses a 3-digit Service Type Code to identify the exact mail class and Extra Service combination
- Supports different barcode layouts across payment channels (retail, commercial, online)
- Offers simplified service banner text[2]
  - USPS SIGNATURE TRACKING # for signature items.
  - USPS TRACKING # for all others.

Can the Mail Owner/Service Provider assign the Serial Numbers?

Yes. Mail Owners/Service Providers are responsible for assigning the unique serial number for IMpb, Confirmation Services and Extra Services barcodes.

How long must the barcode serial number remain unique?

Serial numbers must remain unique for 180 days.

How do mailers benefit from using the IMpb?

The IMpb provides several benefits to customers. In addition to free tracking[1] for some products, the IMpb accommodates either a 6-digit or 9-digit MID and serial numbers up to 14 digits long. This means large shippers have more flexibility to maintain barcode uniqueness. The 3-digit Service Type Code within the IMpb identifies the product and service combinations, allowing for more granular and accurate reporting and measurement. Many new products and presort and destination entry discounts require the use of the IMpb barcode. Also, the new file format allows customers to link packages to Intelligent Mail Tray and Intelligent Mail Container barcodes (IMtl and IMcb) which increase visibility for nested pieces as they travel through the network.

Can I use the same Mailer ID I use for letters and flats for the IMpb?

Yes, except Electronic Verification System (eVS) customers. eVS customers must use MIDs specific for this program to avoid potential billing or reconciliation issues. For other programs utilizing Intelligent Mail package barcodes, the same mailer ID may be used as that used for letters and flats. The IMpb correct barcode constructs must be used for 6-digit and 9-digit MIDs, respectively.

[1] Does not include Package Services (Bound Printed Matter, Media Mail, Library Mail) or Standard Mail parcels.

[2] Except Certified Mail, Registered Mail, Adult Signature, Parcel Return Service, COD, and Open & Distribute Products

How do I qualify for a 6-digit Mailer ID?
Most mailers will continue to use the standard 9-digit MID. Very large-volume shippers, consolidators/mail service providers, and some PC Postage and meter customers will be assigned a 6-digit MID when volume does not allow them to maintain unique serial numbers for 180 days.

Are the 3-digit service type codes (STCs) for the IMpb and IMb the same or will there be new service type codes required for IMpb use?
The 3-digit service type codes used for the IMpb are different from those used with the IMb. The IMpb provides hundreds of numeric 3-digit service type codes which uniquely represent the mail class and any combination of services used. The use of 3-digit service type codes adds intelligence and efficiency to barcodes used for all package products (such as Express Mail, Priority Mail, First-Class Package Services, Parcel Select, Parcel Select Light Weight) and Extra Services, and other package products.

Will switching to the IMpb necessitate any changes in the data that I sent to USPS in my electronic file?
Yes. The IMpb requires Shipping Services File version 1.6 or higher for electronic manifests and Shipping Services Extract File version 1.5 for scan event extract files. New Error/Warning and Shipping Partner Event file versions are also required. These file formats add space and fields for the IMpb, tray and container barcodes for nesting, and for data specific to special programs (e.g., Hold for Pickup, Express Mail Manifesting, Open & Distribute). In addition, the ZIP + 4 or destination delivery address must be included in the electronic file.

Will I be required to re-certify my barcodes and / or electronic files?
Yes. Customers who currently use Confirmation Services or Extra Services barcodes and who submit an electronic file to USPS for payment and/or tracking will be required to re-certify their barcodes and files. To make it easier the Postal Service now has a Test Environment for Mailers (TEM) to support customer testing and implementation. All mailer IDs (MIDs) must be certified for IMpb.

I need more time to get my systems and processes ready for the IMpb. What do I do?
Limited exceptions will be provided for customers who may require additional time to comply with IMpb requirements. Mailers may send their exception request to vice president, Product Information, USPS Headquarters, Room 3667, 475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW., Washington, DC 20260–5626.

Will the Shipping Services Electronic Manifest File Version 1.6 accept legacy tracking and Extra Services barcodes?
Yes. To support IMpb adoption and ease customer transition, the Postal Service modified its Product Tracking System (PTS) to accept legacy Confirmation Services, Extra Services, and eVS barcodes in the new Shipping Services File Version 1.6. Legacy Express Mail barcodes as well as Global Express Guaranteed (GXG), and international barcodes are also supported in the new Shipping Services file.

Will the Shipping Services Electronic Manifest File support electronic Customs data for International packages?
Yes. This functionality will be provided in new Shipping Services File Versions 1.7 and 2.0. These version will be made available in the near future and will support electronic Customs data in new Detail 3 and Detail 4 records that will added as part of this version. Version 1.7 is a fixed length file format. Version 2.0 is a pipe delimited file with the exact same fields, content and edit rules as Version 1.7. Providing Customs data electronically allows USPS and customers to comply with Homeland Security laws and requirements.

Will the Shipping Services Electronic Manifest File support International packages in eVS?
Yes. This feature will also be provided in Shipping Services File Versions 1.7 and 2.0. International packages will be supported in eVS through the use of these files in the near future.

Where can I find more information about the IMpb?
IMpb barcode specifications are published in the Barcode, Package, Intelligent Mail (USPS2000508) document. In addition, Publication 199: Intelligent Mail Package Barcode (IMpb) Implementation Guide contains electronic manifest file specifications, service type codes, business rules, and other information needed to implement the IMpb. Both documents are posted on RIBBS and viewable at https://ribbs.usps.gov/index.cfm?page=intellmailpackage. Publication 205, Electronic Verification System Business and Technical Guide, for eVS users has been updated to reflect IMpb use and is also available on RIBBS at:
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