

What Is An IMB And Why Should I Care?

What is made up of 5 fields, 31 digits and 65 bars? You guessed it; the Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMB).

And here's why you should AND need to care:

- **The IMB is the only barcode that will allow a mailer to claim automation rates as of May 2011.**
- **The IMB will also be required on ALL business reply mail.**

So some of you may be thinking: 'great I have until spring of next year to get going on this...'

Wrong!

In May of 2010 postal rates were designated by service level into two tiers. One rate table for PostNet (current 11 digit barcode) or IMB Basic service and another rate table for IMB Full Service. Guess which one is least expensive? That's right, the IMB Full Service.

But wait. Two service levels? What does that mean? IMB Basic Service means that as a mailer you are simply producing the IMB on your mail pieces without uniquely identifying each individual mail piece. IMB Full Service is the process of uniquely identifying each individual mail piece, tray, and container for each individual mailing.

Let's breakdown the barcode to explain this further... As mentioned before, there are 5 fields which constitute the IMB and they are:

1. Barcode ID
2. Service Type ID
3. Mailer ID
4. Serial Number
5. Routing Code

Mailer ID and Serial Number are the 2 major components of this barcode. Mailer ID or MID is a 6 or 9 digit code assigned to individual mail owner's. **This field must be populated to use the IMB.**

Applying for a MID should be your first order of business and the easiest way to get one is to contact the Mail piece Design Analyst (MDA) at your local Post Office. If you are using a third party to produce your mail; then you may always use their MID if available.



FYI... Serial Number is one of the keys to distinguishing a mailing between Basic and Full Service.

If using Basic Service, this field may be populated with a static code or all '0's. If using Full Service; this field must contain a unique number for every record and that number must remain unique for 45 days.

The advantage to using Full Service IMB is two-fold. First are lower postage rates in the future. The second is the ability to track individual mail pieces, today, through the mail stream using one barcode.

Buyer Beware: Nothing in life is free and neither is tracking, but it is affordable.

Also keep in mind that you must either be a subscriber of OneCode Confirm Service or utilize a 3rd party mailer who is a subscriber to track these mail pieces.

Every mailer should be aware of the many potential benefits the IMB offers. For example, better planning for call center staffing by using the tracking element to know when the mail is arriving in a given area.

Another is using OneCode ACS to get "near real time" address updates and without cluttering your mail piece with service endorsements. Start putting these benefits to work for your mailings today and ensure you'll be ready when these regulations take effect.

For more information on the IMB and to download the appropriate fonts to print the IMB, visit the RIBBS website at <http://ribbs.usps.gov/OneCodeSolution/>.

Or contact me directly at any time.... I'll be glad to help!

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