

Your Postal Podcast 42nd Edition Transcript – November 2011

Source: yourpostalpodcast.com

Richard Watkins: Welcome to Your Postal Podcast. This is Richard Watkins of the Postal Service's Corporate Communications Office. In this month's edition, we'll take a closer look at the greeting card industry as the Postal Service gears up for the holiday mailing season. And we'll share a story of one of many honest postal employees -- and the reaction he received from a surprised customer.

Greeting Card Segment

Watkins: Greeting cards are an important part of the Postal Service, with more than 3 billion entering the mailstream every year. David Rupert gives us a history of the greeting card, as well as a look into the future.

David Rupert: Soon our machines, trucks and satchels will be filled with red and green holiday and Christmas cards criss-crossing the nation. Greeting Cards were first exchanged in the 1400s, with New Year's and Valentine's greetings the most frequent. The cards were often elaborate and ornate.

But things changed thanks to the postage stamp, according to Susan January, who's the Vice President at Leanin' Tree Greetings and also serves as the head of the Greeting Card Association of America.

Susan January: It wasn't until about the 1850s that greeting cards transitioned from a relatively expensive, handmade and hand-delivered gift to a more affordable means of personal communication. A lot of that was due to improvements and progress in printing processes as well as the introduction of the postage stamp.

Rupert: The first widely-circulated commercial card in the United States appeared in 1856. And today, there's cards for just about any situation, including a new line of cards for those who have just lost their jobs. A growing trend is the create-your-own card, according to Susan.

January: You're now able to buy a paper card online. You can upload your own photos into it. You can personalize the front of the card. You can write your own greeting on the inside. You can really make it a highly-personalized product and then have it digitally printed and you can actually have it mailed for you. Basically, you can see the product, design the product, personalize the product and have it sent without ever having stepped foot in a card store or actually bought or handled that card yourself.

Rupert: Technology isn't threatening the industry -- it's strengthening it. And the USPS will benefit as well.

January: When you're shopping online and you have the ability to personalize your envelope and put the recipient's address right on there and let Hallmark mail it for you, I just think it's a fantastic way of ensuring that many more cards are going through the mail with First-Class postage.

Rupert: So, what about e-cards?

January: I think there is a sense that e-cards have peaked. It was fun and novel, and the novelty has worn off. People still really appreciate a tangible, paper card.

Rupert : Apple recently unveiled an app for their smartphones, that enable a user to customize a card and have it mailed.

January: We're happy to welcome them to our party and to what we've known for the last 100 years. The fact that Apple has developed an app for paper cards certainly says to us that even they have recognized the significance and importance and relevance of paper communications – and that whole sense of when it's important, it's paper. You put it on paper, you write it on paper, you send it on paper.

Rupert : Some have observed that younger people don't really use cards much, turning to greetings like Facebook and text messaging. But the industry isn't fazed by that.

January: There has never been a time when young people were card users. Greeting card use doesn't kick in for an individual until they are likely out of college and married.

Rupert : So, what's the best-selling card of all time?

January: The Hallmark pansy card carries the distinction of being America's bestselling greeting card ever. They estimate that they've sold about 30 million of that card.

Rupert : Here's the real question. How do they think of all those pithy phrases?

January: There is a certain greeting card language that has to be learned. There's a real skill to being able to write something that makes someone feel that it's special and just for them.

Rupert: According to the association, approximately 7 billion cards will be purchased this year. And out of those, 60 percent of those will be mailed. How many will we see between now and Christmas? More than a billion, so get ready.

Honest Carrier Segment

Watkins: Our next item involves something else that many consider to be "good" or "old-fashioned" – and it's never gone out of style for Postal Service employees. That's honesty. Peter Hass tells us the story.

Peter Hass: Postal employees deliver countless examples of honesty along with the mail every day – but we rarely pay them much notice because it's what customers expect and what employees demand of themselves.

One Tucson, Arizona, couple's recent experience, though, prompted them to write a letter of thanks to their carrier in appreciation of a simple, honest act.

Rural Carrier Brian Cota was walking up Richard and Jessica Howell's driveway to make a delivery when he noticed something on the ground near the couple's carport – a hundred-dollar bill.

Brian Cota: “I had like three parcels, I was walking up through their carport to the door. I seen the hundred dollar bill laying there. And my first reaction was like, You know, ‘Oh, it’s a hundred dollars – I’m gonna put it in my pocket.’ But then, as soon as I started walking, it just hit me. A couple of nights before – I have two boys -- I was trying to explain to them, about doing the right thing, even if it doesn’t feel right at that time, you know, just try and do the right thing because you’ll feel better about it later. And then, like two days later, this happens. And then, you know, it’s like, man, it’s pretty cool.”

Hass: Because no one was home at the time, Cota, who has carried mail in Tucson for eight years, put a note along with the hundred-dollar bill in the Howells’ mailbox and hoped for the best. A short time later, a letter of thanks arrived at the Tucson Postmaster’s office. Cota learned of the letter when his Mountain View Station manager read it – and presented him with a certificate of appreciation – during a stand-up talk for the facility’s employees.

Cota: “Yeah, that was the first I heard about it...and then I was like, oh man, all this relief, because I so stressed about them not getting their money, or like what happened to it, because I had no idea.”

Hass: Jessica Howell, a Tucson elementary school teacher, said she had put the hundred dollar bill in her pocket on the way to give it to her mother, but somehow, the bill fell out before she got in her car. Howell and her husband were thrilled when they learned Cota had found and returned the money.

Jessica Howell: “I was amazed; it was cash, it was folded up. I was just amazed that I had gotten it back. I knew I had had it and I knew I wasn’t going crazy then (laughs). My husband and I decided to write a letter just thanking Brian for turning it back in...and we were amazed that someone would be that honest. I guess I would just feel like most people, if they found a hundred dollar bill probably wouldn’t – they’d say, “oh, somebody lost it” -- would not take the steps to try to figure out where it came from and to give it back.

News Roundup

Watkins: And now, here’s our monthly roundup of recent news about the U.S. Postal Service. On November 16th, *The Washington Post* reported that the Postal Service lost \$5.1 billion last year. USPS said it would have lost about \$10.6 billion in the fiscal year that ended in September if Congress hadn’t agreed to postpone about \$5 and a half billion in annual payments to prefund retiree health benefits. Mail volume dropped to about 168 billion pieces delivered, a drop of 3 billion pieces from the previous year. Deliveries of First-Class Mail, the most popular delivery option, dropped 6 percent.

Amid the losses, USPS delivered some good news: Revenue for Priority Mail and Express Mail jumped \$530 million last year, or 6 percent. The increases came as more customers used the Internet to purchase and ship products, USPS said. Standard Mail, normally used to deliver solicitations and catalogs, generated \$495 million in revenue, a 2.9 percent jump.

As the “Official Shipper of the Holidays,” the Postal Service recently released the suggested mail-by dates to ensure packages, cards, and letters reach their intended destination before the 2011 celebrations begin. Suggested mail-by dates include Dec. 20th for First-Class Mail; Dec. 21st for Priority Mail; and Dec. 22nd for Express Mail.

And the Postal Service has teamed up with one of the nation's leading companies producing decorative and commercial products to sell the 2011 White House Holiday Ornament at approximately 7,000 Post Offices nationwide. ChemArt of Lincoln, Rhode Island, has been the sole manufacturer of the annual White House Christmas ornament since the program inception in 1981, and was given exclusive retail distribution rights by the White House Historical Association. The 2011 White House Holiday Christmas Ornament is now available at select Post Offices until Christmas Day for \$24.99.

Watkins: Thanks for listening to Your Postal Podcast, a production of USPS Western Area Corporate Communications. Copyright 2011, All Rights Reserved.

#