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Keeping Up With the Postal Industry  
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Are you attending the 2011 National Postal Forum (NPF) in San Diego, May 1-4? Hopefully, you've registered because this annual event is a great way to connect with others in the mailing industry, take a look at some best practices and technology, and reassess opportunities for your mailing operations.

One of the best parts about NPF is its networking opportunities. Events are scheduled throughout the conference, including a golf outing, receptions, and opportunities for you to meet with U.S. Postal Service (USPS) representatives from your region. I certainly look forward to connecting with you at NPF if we have the opportunity.

NPF also features the largest exhibit hall in the mailing industry, showcasing the latest developments in mailing technology, innovation, and services. More than 100 exhibitors will be on hand, offering insights into just about everything the mailing industry offers.

Additionally, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe will speak at the opening session. Other notable speakers include USPS President and Chief Marketing/Sales Officer Paul Vogel and U.S. Navy (Ret.) Commander Kirk Lippold, the Commanding Officer of the USS Cole when it was attacked in 2000.

Surely, some of the discussions at NPF will focus on the first rate adjustment in two years for some mailing services products, which are being implemented on April 17 after being approved by the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC). First-Class Mail letters up to 1 ounce will remain at 44 cents, with additional ounces increasing to 20 cents each. One ounce letters to Canada or Mexico increase to 80 cents, while letters to other international destinations remain at 98 cents. The USPS website contains a complete list of all of the price changes.

Speaking of rate changes, you may recall a discussion of the USPS' exigent request to raise rates for several products in the January column I penned for Mailing Systems Technology. As I mentioned then, the USPS is appealing the PRC's denial of its proposal with the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Currently, the appeal process is still taking place, and it is unclear how – or when – the court will rule.

As the appeal process continues, there are two USPS proposals being considered by the PRC that business mailers should be monitoring. The USPS has asked the PRC to reclassify Commercial First-Class Mail under one pound parcels and Standard Mail under one pound parcels from the Market Dominant category to the Competitive category.

A change from Market Dominate to Competitive allows the USPS to adjust prices for those products on a competitive basis, rather than adjusting prices in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), as allowed by the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 (PAEA). This is part of the USPS'

long-range plan to align all commercial parcel offerings under the Competitive category.

It's important to stay informed and prepared to handle the adjustments occurring on April 17 and any other potential future postal changes. A key way to avoid disruptions in your business mail process is working with a business mail services provider that has the corporate and USPS experience to serve as a conduit to postal industry knowledge and updates.

Additionally, your business mail services provider should have automation technology that can quickly adjust to pricing and classification adjustments. This keeps your business mail processes working efficiently and effectively amid any changes, and ensures that you're applying proper postage to your mail pieces to optimize your bottom line.

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