

How to Get Started with Seamless Acceptance

Why It Matters to Your Print-to-Mail Profits



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What You'll Learn

In this white paper, you'll learn about:

- ⚙️ How Seamless Acceptance works
- ⚙️ The benefits of participation
- ⚙️ The challenges involved
- ⚙️ Steps you can take to prepare for Seamless Acceptance success

The Problem at Hand

Seamless Acceptance (SA) is here. The United States Postal Service (USPS) will begin verifying BMEU full-service mailings on July 1, 2021. Yet some small and medium-sized print-to-mail businesses aren't ready to make the switch to SA.

What is Seamless Acceptance?

First deployed by the USPS in March 2014,¹ SA is the method for streamlining and automating the verification, payment and induction of commercial mail into the USPS mail stream. SA is one of the primary sections of the USPS Mailer Scorecard, which ultimately determines your workshare discount.

As of March 2019, only 42% of mail pieces eligible for SA were processed through the program². In 2020, the USPS announced a discount of \$0.001 per mail piece beginning in January 2021 to increase participation in SA ahead of the deadline in July 2021.

While many of the largest mail preparation services are already participating in SA, small and medium-sized shops have been slower to make the leap. Many don't feel encouraged to participate in SA even with the incentives because they're overwhelmed by the challenges SA might create in their business. Yet these smaller shops are even more vulnerable to the impact of a USPS penalty for exceeding Mailer Scorecard error thresholds.

There is no "punishment" for not enrolling by July 1, 2021. However, whether or not you enroll, electronic verification will begin – and start affecting your bottom line.³



How Seamless Acceptance Works

SA makes it faster and simpler to get jobs out the door by streamlining the entire process of introducing mail into the USPS mail stream. It eliminates manual paperwork and reports, allowing you to work closely with the USPS to make sure your mail pieces, trays and pallets are prepared according to the postage paid. The result is a higher-quality mail stream for the USPS and valuable workshare discounts for participating companies.

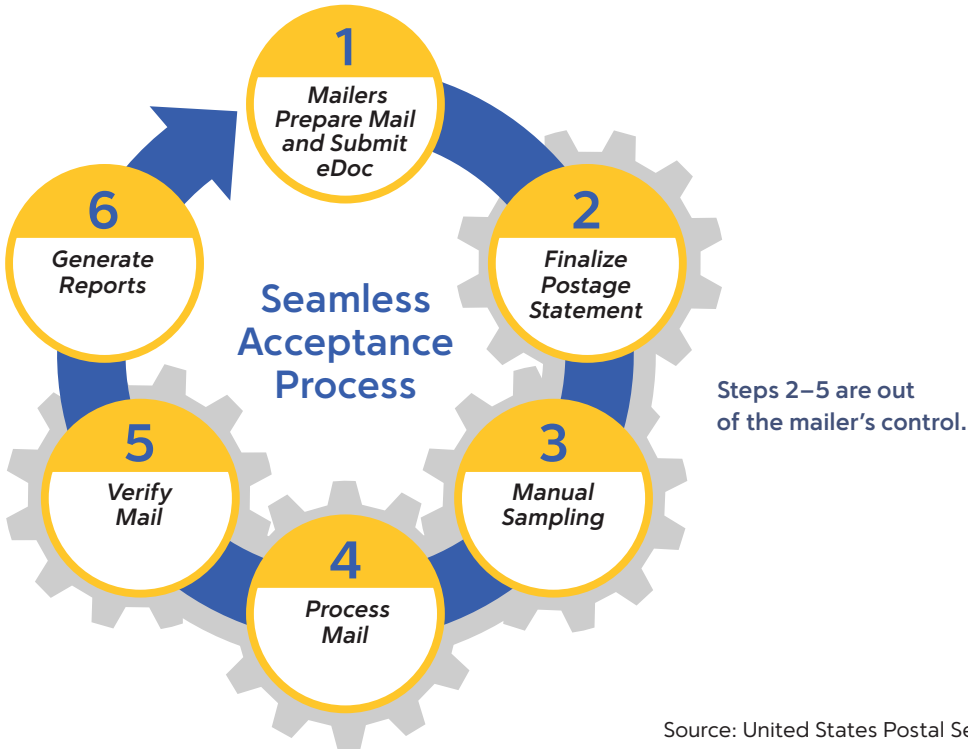
SA removes the USPS mail acceptance clerk from the process because all verification takes place electronically. Instead of the mail clerk checking jobs before they leave your facility or enter the mail stream, they are digitally matched to your eDocs after they enter the mail stream, and a sampling of the job is electronically checked for accuracy. If the sampling fails to meet quality thresholds, you are assessed a penalty.



Another key difference between SA and traditional acceptance procedures is your compliance with thresholds is measured over the course of a 30-day period for all your mail, rather than for each mailing. Because the process is highly automated and occurs after the mail leaves your facility, error detection is much more consistent and you don't have the opportunity to fix errors before mail leaves your control.

Before you can participate in SA, you must ensure you meet these criteria:⁴

- Meet all the content and price eligibility standards for the price claimed
- Prepare 90% Full-Service eligible volume
- Participate in the Seamless Parallel Program
- Participate in eInduction for DMU-verified origin entry or destination entry-drop shipments



Source: United States Postal Service

Benefits of Implementing Seamless Acceptance

Participating in SA creates many advantages for smaller mail operations, helping them increase profitability and reliability for their customers.

More production time

Because your jobs can enter the mail stream directly without the influence of or time required for a mail clerk, you gain more time to produce mail, in some cases hours more. This increased productivity boosts your bottom line, as well as customer and employee satisfaction. It also means you can ship parts of your jobs as they are ready, rather than all at once, further increasing throughput and efficiency.⁵

Flexibility in payment timing

With SA, you can choose when you pay for your jobs to optimize cash flow in your business. A payment process called auto-finalization allows you to upload your eDoc before or after your postage statement mailing date, giving you more control over when payment is made.

Less complexity in your processes

The automation of SA makes the mail preparation and verification process far simpler, so you can redirect labor spent on manual reporting and processes to other tasks that add value to your operations.

Absence of on-site acceptance clerk

Without an acceptance clerk involved, you have more control over the timing of your jobs and operate more efficiently without working around the clerk's staffing schedule.



Challenges of Implementing Seamless Acceptance

It's important to be aware of potential issues you might run into when getting started with SA. These are not reasons to avoid participating but knowing about them will help you prepare.

Once you're in, you can't get out

The biggest risk involved with SA is diving in unprepared. Once you start SA, you can't ever leave the program. If you don't have your processes and tools in order, one bad month of errors could generate penalties so large that your company can't recover.

One of the requirements for participation in SA is first participating in Seamless Parallel. In this program, your current procedures remain the same, but SA monitoring and reporting begin so that you can measure your performance before formally implementing SA.⁶

This is effectively a practice period in which you can work to correct issues that will create penalties under SA. You can remain in Seamless Parallel as long as necessary, but you can switch to SA after one month of meeting the program's thresholds if you're ready to make the leap. The SA incentive does not apply when you are in Seamless Parallel.

You won't know about errors until the mail is gone

Without an acceptance clerk involved, you won't know about issues with your jobs until after the mail leaves your facility when you receive your Mailer Scorecard performance and any penalties. If you rely on your in-person verifications to catch errors today, you'll need to develop more stringent practices to ensure you meet SA thresholds when you implement the program.

However, to prevent unexpected large assessments, the USPS will only charge you a penalty when you fail to meet thresholds more than three months out of a rolling 12-month period. You will then be charged more for postage starting in the fourth month you fail to meet the thresholds.⁷



USPS errors are difficult to contest without an audit trail

If you are charged a penalty by the USPS and you're certain the penalty was assessed incorrectly, the burden is on you to prove the error. Often this means spending weeks preparing, gathering sufficient documentation from disparate sources and interviewing your employees to ensure you have all the pertinent data to make your case. Because you don't know about the penalties until the month closes, gathering this information well after a job has closed can be even more of a challenge, especially because you're only allowed a limited time window to do so. However, if the information you present is not clear and convincing, you'll be stuck with the penalty, wreaking havoc on your profitability.

Undocumented mail pieces — mail that the USPS scans but can't find in the eDoc — present a particular challenge in the area of documentation since the penalty is paid directly by the mail preparer, not the mail owner.⁸ It's in your company's best interest to ensure you have a proper audit trail to prove you've paid postage for what the USPS thinks you've mailed.

What You Can Do to Prepare for Seamless Acceptance

To succeed in SA, you'll have to change something, whether that's refining your processes or adding automation. It's important to consider which option is the most cost-effective for your business. But one thing is certain: Getting prepared means becoming more comfortable with and adept at managing and interpreting your data.

1. Monitor your Mailer Scorecard data daily

Watch for trends in the thresholds your company is exceeding. Look for frequent errors that recur at the same point in your process so you can address them through better procedures or technology.

2. Work in the Seamless Parallel environment and build a bulletproof process around SA metrics

Seamless Parallel is an opportunity to work out the kinks of your operations before implementation to ensure success. In the parallel process, the USPS scores your mailings as though you were participating in the program. If you're monitoring daily, you'll see the issues and be able to refine your tools and processes to excel in SA.

3. Improve your audit trail

If you are incorrectly assessed a penalty for exceeding thresholds, you must be able to document the accuracy of your job or you will be forced to pay the entire penalty — a potentially devastating cost for a smaller mailer.

To avoid spending weeks preparing the proper information, spend time examining your documentation at every step of your process. For example, if the SA sampling process claimed that a job had undocumented mail pieces or mail at the incorrect weight, how would you go about proving that you hadn't been wrong? What paperwork do you have to show the steps you took to meet the requirements? Demonstrating an actionable, documented quality assurance process will save you a lot of time and effort in the future.



4. Implement automation tools to smooth the process and provide an audit trail

Because the SA process is automated, it makes sense to automate your own processes as well. Consider implementing software that streamlines the process and connects your digital documentation and physical mail for greater visibility of issues. Electronic, timely visibility of issues with your jobs before they leave the production floor will save you the time and money associated with USPS penalties. Work with a software provider that is well-versed in SA and understands the challenges facing small and medium-sized mailers.

Conclusion

Participating in SA might seem overwhelming, but all it really takes is solid tools and practice. Take advantage of the opportunity to operate in Seamless Parallel, which helps you find and correct issues with your operations and documentation.

SA has tremendous benefits for small and medium-sized mailers, but the challenges might appear daunting. Your production timelines and your profit margins are tight, so you can't afford to get hit with a large assessment or lose time fighting one that is incorrect. Take the time to seek out new best practices and technologies that can help you stay ahead of costly errors and give you confidence that your jobs will meet SA standards. Investing in tools that best suit your existing operations will save you time and money in the long run.



AutoViri™ Software

Making it easier to participate in Seamless Acceptance – and get the incentive discount.

Many smaller print-to-mail businesses have hesitated to enter SA because the Mailer Scorecard data is hard to interpret or because the process changes involved are too daunting.

AutoViri Software eliminates those worries.

- **You don't have to change your processes.** A simple hand scanner and easy-to-use dashboard tell you about issues at any stage of your operations.
- **You'll find errors before mail leaves your facility.** You'll be able to fix them before they become Mailer Scorecard penalties.
- **You'll have an automatic audit trail to contest inaccurate penalties.** Don't waste hours prepping to fight an audit. AutoViri creates a solid audit trail automatically.

If you have questions about Seamless Acceptance and the challenges it might bring your organization, CapStone Technologies wants to help.

Give us a call at (402) 465-5400 or email us at info@captechno.com. Our experts can share what we've seen with Seamless Acceptance or give you a brief demo of customizable AutoViri Software so you can see how it could fit into your business.

About the Author

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Fritz has more than 25 years of experience with project management, procedural analysis and business development in print-to-mail and document management operations. Prior to joining the CapStone team, Fritz owned a successful direct mailing firm and worked for nationally recognized statement processing and financial institutions. There he managed operations, efficiency development, facility design and emergency planning. Fritz has also been involved in the design and development of operations software for electronic work ticketing and productivity measurement.



Sources

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