ePostage® Integration Guide

Requirements and Best Practices

Contents

Overview

ePostage® combines the flexibility of retail mail entry with the benefits of centralized commercial payment. It is designed to meet the evolving shipping trends of online marketplaces, Ship-From-Store, or any customer requiring distributed shipping with centralized support, visibility, and control. By leveraging the flexibility of the vast United States Postal Service® (USPS®) retail entry network with the centralized reporting, payment and auditing of the Electronic Verification System (eVS®), ePostage offers a corporate entity the ability to manage a wide range of shipping channels through a single streamlined system.

With ePostage, USPS label creation, manifesting, postage payment, and tracking are managed by a centralized corporate entity (ePostage provider) with shipping labels distributed to individual mailers for entry into the USPS retail network. ePostage shipments can be taken to a postal retail counter, placed in a collection box or picked up by a postal carrier. Customers can also purchase insurance, Signature Confirmation or Adult Signature for ePostage packages.

Document Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide integration requirements and best practices for software developers creating an ePostage shipping solution utilizing the USPS Electronic Verification System (eVS). These requirements are provided in addition to those identified in the *Publication 205, eVS® Business and Technical Guide* which remains the main source document for eVS integration.

Intended Audience

This document is intended for merchants and software developers implementing ePostage, whether business or technical.

Authorization

Authorization for the usage of ePostage is provided by the United States Postal Service. For more information contact your USPS Account Manager. A USPS Account Manager, Technical Integration Specialist or Vendor Manager will review the process and assist in collecting the corporate data necessary for granting an authorization via the ePostage Request From.

There are three forms of ePostage authorization:

- Merchant Authorization allows an ePostage provider to create and distribute ePostage shipping labels for item fulfillment directly related to a merchant transaction, for example, on a marketplace or to support Ship-From-Store.   Merchant Authorization does not allow for resale or loan of labels either by the merchant or label recipient.

- Reseller Authorization allows an ePostage provider to distribute labels to third parties as an independent transaction. Those third parties may use the label directly or provide them to another party as in a marketplace or Ship-From-Store scenario. However, those third parties may not further resell or loan the shipping label.

- Commercial Off the Shelf (COTS) Vendor Authorization allows a shipping software vendor to include ePostage as an option in their software. However, that Authorization does not permit the entity purchasing the software to use ePostage, as such usage would require that entity to obtain its own merchant or reseller authorization. As such, the COTS Vendor Authorization, by itself, does not allow the usage of the label by the merchant for ePostage transactions.

Shipper Identification

To ensure the integrity, security and safety of the mail, as a condition of using ePostage, ePostage providers are required to report to USPS the contact details of the individual or entity to whom they provide the label. Resellers who provide labels to a customer who will in turn provide the label to a third-party must provide the contact details of both their customer and the sender who will eventually tender the shipment to USPS.

Domestic Origin

ePostage is not eligible to be used with Global Direct Entry, international break bulk entry, or any inbound international services. All ePostage shipments must originate from and be labeled in the United States; its possessions, territories or freely associated states; or from military or diplomatic installations (APO, FPO, DPO).

Required Information and Retention

ePostage providers must capture the following information at the time an ePostage label is created to identify the individual tendering the shipment to USPS and provide this information in the Shipping Services File (SSF).

- Sender First Name
- Sender Last Name
- Sender Business (if applicable)
- Sender eMail address (required if phone not provided)
- Sender phone (required if eMail not provided)
- Sender address (street address, city, state and ZIP Code™)

This label distribution information should be retained by the ePostage provider for a period of the current calendar year plus two additional years. Shipper information must include the sender's verified physical address location and may be different than the shipment return address. A Post Office Box or private mailbox is not acceptable as the sender's address.

United States Postal Inspection Service Inquiries

The Postal Inspection Service may request additional information from an ePostage provider at any time regarding a shipper's identity, authentication, and shipping history. To facilitate a timely response, ePostage providers are required to provide and maintain a point of contact to reply to Inspection Service requests.

In addition to individual shipment information, the Inspection Service may also request the following information:

- Information used to authenticate the shipper
- IP or MAC address(es) for a specific label request/response
- The shipper's shipment history
- Financial/payment account information (utilizing a subpoena or other legal process)

ePostage providers may report any ePostage issues identified on their platforms by contacting the Inspection Service at the following email address:

- ISACGRevenueInvestigationsProductSecurityReporting@usps.gov

Authenticating the Shipper Information

The ePostage provider is responsible for accurately identifying and reporting the shipper information for ePostage labels. ePostage providers are expected to implement reasonable procedures and precautions to validate the contact details of their customers. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Dual factor authentication
- Domestic IP address verification
- Payment method verification
- Clear consent from shippers to share their contact information with USPS

Reporting shipper information to USPS

There are two methods for reporting shipper information to USPS. The ePostage provider and USPS will agree upon the method as part of the ePostage onboarding process.

1. The preferred method is for the label provider to create a unique USPS Mailer ID (MID) using the name, validated address, phone, and email contact information of each ePostage shipper. To implement this method, ePostage providers should observe the following requirements:

   a. The provider should use the shipper's unique MID in the Intelligent Mail® Package Barcode (IMpb®) of any domestic ePostage labels requested by that shipper.
   b. For outbound international shipments, the ePostage provider should include the shipper's MID in the Customer Reference 2 field of the Shipping Services File (SSF).
   c. To indicate to USPS that a unique MID has been assigned to this shipper, the ePostage provider should include a value of "3" in the Shipping Services File (SSF) Postage Type field.

2. An alternative method allows for the ePostage label provider to assign a unique alphanumeric value known as a Merchant ID to each shipper and to report the Merchant ID together with the required shipper contact details in the Shipping Services File (SSF) for each label created for that shipper. To implement this method, ePostage providers should observe the following requirements:

   a. The Merchant ID format must be agreed upon by USPS and the ePostage provider in order to ensure uniqueness.
   b. The ePostage provider should indicate that contact details are included in the SSF by including a value of "1" in the SSF Postage Type field for all shipments.
   c. Contact details should be included in the SSF as described in Appendix A.

ePostage providers who are providing labels to a merchant, for example, a marketplace, who will then provide the label to a third-party must use a combination of both methods. A unique MID should be assigned to the intermediate merchant and contact details must be provided for the third-party shipper tendering the package to USPS.

ePostage Labeling

The following specifications are unique to ePostage labels and augment USPS eVS label guidance and requirements as set forth in the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM®) and Parcel Labeling Guide.

Postage Payment and Barcode Banner Markings

The Postage Payment and Barcode Banner text must indicate that this is an ePostage mail piece as follows:

- The last line of the indicia must be "ePOSTAGE" or "e-Postage"
- "EP" must appear following the barcode banner text

Price-Based Packaging Markings

It is required to include price-based packaging markings, including USPS Flat Rate packaging, to the right of the Return Address and right justified to the margin of the label.   When used, this must match the actual packaging used and the rate indicator provided in the Shipping Services File. A list of packaging rate indicators and corresponding descriptions may be found in Appendix B.

Weight Markings

Shipment weight must be included on the label along with the corresponding unit of measurement. It is recommended that the unit of measurement match the mail class (e.g. ounces or oz. for First-Class™ and pounds or lb. for all other mail classes.   Either actual weight or "priced" weight (rounded up to the nearest whole number) may be used. The weight markings should be included to the right of the return address and right justified to the margin of the label.

Shipping Date and Origin ZIP

The shipping date, in the format MM/DD/YY and Mailed-From ZIP Code markings may also optionally be included below the other ePostage markings to the right of the return address and right justified to the label margin.

Regional Distribution Codes

To improve delivery speed and accuracy, it is recommended to include the Regional Distribution Code on the label. When used, the Regional Distribution Code (RDC) should be placed on the right side of the label in the area below the price-based packaging and weight markings and above the carrier route code (if included).

Information on determining the RDC and downloading the current RDC assignment file may be found in Appendix C.

Label Examples
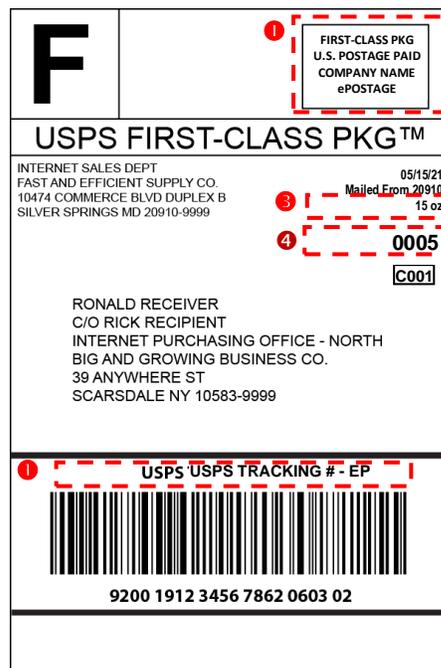
❶ **Postage Payment and Barcode Banner markings**

❷ **Price-Based Packaging markings** (see Appendix B)

❸ **Weight markings**

❹ **Regional Distribution Code** (refer to Appendix C)

Additional Label Considerations

- The return address information must be a domestic U.S. address.

- The addition of day-specific performance in the service banner (1-DAY and 2-DAY extensions) is optional and only applicable when USPS Service Standards and transit times can be determined via USPS Rate Calculator, Service Delivery Calculator, or Price Calculator.

- The Carrier Route Code is recommended but optional. If present it should be located to the right of and above the delivery address and below any endorsements. Carrier Route Code is only applicable when using a USPS Address Management System product that provides this information.

Best Practices

Duplicate Labels

ePostage providers will be assessed postage for all duplicate labels.   Generally, label duplication occurs when a shipper requests a single label for use on two packages. The best method to avoid duplication is through information and training provided to shippers.   An ePostage provider may identify duplicate labels via eVS reporting available through the Business Customer Gateway.

Matching the Mail Class to the Shipment

The ePostage provider is responsible for ensuring correct postage payment and for any charges resulting from mislabeled packages. This may include weight or packaging errors.

- Correct weight is always best determined via the use of a properly calibrated postage scale. Tips on determining weight by contents may help but are no replacement for actual weight provided by a scale.
- Packaging errors (e.g.: placing a First-Class label on a Priority Mail box) are best addressed via user guidance and help systems integrated directly into an ePostage shipping application.
- Proper use of Flat Rate packaging can be improved with shipping application rules that require the user to acknowledge packaging requirements or with filters to present packaging availability based on user preferences.

Ship Date Determination

Ship Date is the date the package is expected to be tendered to the USPS and should (to the best extent possible) agree with the Date of Mailing reported in the SSF. Shipments may be reported to USPS prior to the date tendered, however, to ensure IMpb compliance, shipments should be reported no later than the date of tender.

- ePostage shipping systems should prevent labels from being created with a Ship Date prior to the current date and should not allow ship date greater than 3 business days in the future.
- It is recommended that ePostage shipping applications automatically advance the ship date based on transmission of the Shipping Services file or on local Post Office hours.

PS Form 5630 Scan Form

A PS Form 5630 is required for retail entry when three or more packages are tendered.   Rules for creating a PS Form 5630 Scan Form may be found in *Publication 199, IMpb Implementation Guide.*

- To properly prepare for a PS Form 5630, ePostage applications should keep track of shipments created and may require a user to identify when shipment preparation is complete for a day (or other time period).

- Shipments tendered with the PS Form 5630 must be manifested together and may include shipments with the current or prior (but not previously manifested) ship date.

Unused Labels

ePostage providers may request a refund for manifested, but unused, labels only when the refund request is initiated by the shipper. It is against ePostage policy to automate refund requests based on the analysis of tracking data originating from USPS.

- ePostage labels can be effectively "cancelled" by the ePostage provider prior to transmission of shipment details in the SSF. Once a label has been transmitted to USPS in the SSF, it cannot be cancelled.
- Labels may not be altered for use on packages other than for which they were originally intended. If manifested, labels with errors should be destroyed and a refund may be requested.
- A request for refund of an unused label must be submitted within 60 days of the ship date and will not be considered after that time.
- A refund request received prior to processing of the associated SSF will be denied and may not be resubmitted. As such, USPS recommends use of the Postage Payment Extract file as a trigger for refund submission.
- Please refer to *Publication 205, eVS Business & Technical Guide* for information on preparing and submitting an automated refund request.
- It is the responsibility of the ePostage provider to ensure that cancelled or refunded labels are destroyed by the shipper and the ePostage provider is liable for postage if that cancelled or refunded label is subsequently tendered to USPS.

Extra Services

Extra services must be included at the time of ePostage label creation. They may not be added by the shipper at the Post Office. The following Extra Services are available with ePostage.

- Insurance
- Signature Confirmation
- Adult Signature

Shipment Mailability

The safety of the mail is the responsibility of the ePostage provider in conjunction with the shipper. To ensure mailability, ePostage providers should direct shippers to educational materials on how to prepare parcels for shipping with USPS, including reference to *Publication 52 – Hazardous, Restricted, and Perishable Mail*. Providers should maintain instructional material in their user documentation and/or provide links in their application software to the following available documentation on usps.com.

- https://usps.com/howtoship
- https://www.usps.com/ship/shipping-restrictions.htm
- https://pe.usps.gov/text/pub52/welcome.htm

ePostage vs. eVS Shipment Entry

A fundamental difference between eVS and ePostage is that while both use the eVS system for postage payment and reporting, eVS is intended for commercial entry while ePostage is intended for retail entry. Both entry methods are targeted to their respective customer profiles and entry at the wrong facility type may affect the customer experience and incur processing delays.

ePostage implementations which support both small and medium-to-large volume shippers should include business rules to differentiate eVS and ePostage shippers as well as a migration path to allow shippers to

convert from ePostage to eVS as they grow, and their entry needs evolve.   USPS will generally require shippers with greater than 50 pieces or 50 pounds to enter their mail through the commercial channel and USPS will work with ePostage providers to determine the best thresholds and rules based on customer profiles as well as to assist shippers in their transition.

Fraud and Liability

Liability for accepting a transaction ultimately rests with the ePostage provider. Understanding this liability is essential for providers, especially those relying on "card not present" online transactions. It is recommended that ePostage providers obtain and retain as much information as possible about their shippers and their corresponding transaction details including those provided from a credit card payment gateway provider (e.g. Authorize.net, CenPos, PayPal Pro, etc).

For their own protection, it is recommended that ePostage providers implement online fraud detection measures within their payment gateway account (i.e., address verification, fraud filters, etc.). In addition, below are potential proactive measures ePostage providers may implement to help detect fraudulent shippers:

1. Non-US IP address are a potential indicator of fraud. Out-of-state IP address deserves investigation.
2. The same IP address used by multiple shippers may be an indicator that the requestor is a bad actor.
3. A mismatch between the shipper's physical address and their credit card address should be investigated.
4. Consider using dual-factor authentication to confirm a shipper's identity.
5. Personal contact is an effective confirmation method. However, if you call a shipper, ensure that you speak with an authorized individual. Voice mails do not constitute confirmation.
6. Unusual eMail addresses may also be an indicator of potential fraud. If the name of the email address does not match the shipper name this could be an indicator of fraudulent activity. Avoid emails with random characters.
7. A physical address is required from the shipper and should be verified for accuracy and authenticity. A Post Office Box may be used as a return address but not as the shipper's "ship from" location.

In addition to the validations listed above, there are additional indicators in eCommerce transactions that may help identify it as potentially fraudulent.   The presence of more than one indicator increase the possibility of fraud.

1. First-time shippers are riskier than recurring shippers. When employing the criminal process of "card testing," online criminals are searching for previously unused sites. Once they commit fraud at one, they'll quickly move on to the next one.
2. Larger than normal orders, orders for a larger than normal quantity of the same item, or excessive orders in a limited time may indicate a bad actor is trying to maximize their fraudulent credit card spending prior to its discovery. Stolen payment cards have a very short life span and criminals know they must exploit their opportunities.
3. Expedited shipping, especially from first-time shippers may be another clue.   Shippers generally choose less expensive shipping options. However, since cost is not a factor in fraudulent transactions, overnight shipping may be a red flag.
4. Shipping to unusual locations, especially international shipments, comes with a higher risk of fraud.
5. Multiple transactions to or from the same shipping address using different payment methods may reveal a batch of stolen cards.
6. A mismatch between the shipping and billing addresses on its own does not denote fraud, however, when found in combination with other items on this list, should be investigated.
7. Multiple orders from a single IP address using different credit cards or shipping addresses may also signal credit card fraud.
8. Payment info in all capital letters may also indicated fraud. Although it is not known why, experts have been able to corollate this action with fraud.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list and ePostage providers are encouraged to research, review, and update their own policies to prevent fraud. Remember, the decision to provide a label to a shipper rests solely with the ePostage provider who should not provide a label if they believe the request to be fraudulent.

Appendix A – SSF v2.0 ePostage Sender Information

SSF v2.0 data elements required to identify an ePostage shipper (end user of the label) and the content rules for populating each field.

Record Type	Element Position	Field Name	Format (Size)	Content Rules
D1	31	Postage Type	AN(1)	Required – ePostage Shipper ID flag: 1 = sender information is provided D2/D3 of the SSF 3 = sender is identified by child MID
D1	76	Customer Reference Number 2	AN(30)	Required - Conditional When Postage Type is "1" Provide the unique merchant ID assigned by the ePostage label provider to the authenticated sender. When Postage Type is "3" Provide the eVS child MID assigned to this ePostage shipper location
D2	11	Sender E-mail Address	AN(64)	Required if Sender Phone not provided. Format: xxxxxxxx@server.url
D3	4	Sender Last Name	AN(75)	Required – Last name of sender
D3	5	Sender First Name	AN(49)	Required – First name of sender
D3	7	Sender Business Name	AN(100)	Required if sender is a business – Name of sender's business
D3	8	Sender Address	AN(148)	Required – complete address of sender [end user of the label] including secondary address information. **NOTE:** *The sender address **MUST** be a verified physical location (warehouse or place of business). A "PO Box" is NOT acceptable.*
D3	9	Sender City	AN(50)	Required – City name of sender's address
D3	10	Sender State	AN(2)	Required – Two char state code of sender's address
D3	11	Sender ZIP Code	N(5)	Required – 5 digit ZIP code of sender's address
D3	12	Sender ZIP+4	AN(4)	Optional – +4 add on of ZIP Code for sender address
D3	14	Sender Phone	AN(30)	Required if Sender Email Address not provided - Phone number associated with the sender. Format: nnn-nnn-nnnn

Developers using USPS Web Tools API's to integrate with eVS for "ePostage" labels should refer to the applicable API documentation for populating the corresponding XML tags to support shipper reporting.

NOTES:

1. When the Postage Type Indicator is 3, the MID used in the IMpb must be a registered child MID of the ePostage label provider. The child MID must correctly identify the contact name, address, phone, and email of the shipper. For international shipments that use an S10 barcode on the ePostage label, the child MID of the shipper "must" be populated in the Customer Reference Number 2 field. However, we recommend the child MID be provided in the Customer Reference Number 2 field for all shipments, both domestic and international as a best practice.

2. When the ePostage provider provides the label to a third-party shipper, the Postage Type indicator must be "1", regardless of the merchant being assigned a USPS Mailer ID that is used in the IMpb. All sender information listed in the table above is required and intended to accurately identify the true shipper preparing the package and using the ePostage shipping label.

3. Currently, the USPS Product Tracking and Reporting (PTR) system will not reject the entire shipment record in "Error" when a required ePostage element is invalid or not provided. However, it will return a "Warning" message for the missing/invalid field value.

4. Hybrid eVS/ePostage accounts, for example, where a customer ships both from a warehouse and from stores require additional processing as follows.

   a. A separate eVS permit is required for ePostage shipments to allow USPS to identify ePostage retail entry versus commercial entry for eVS labels.
   b. Additionally, a separate child MID must be used in the IMpb of ePostage labels versus the eVS labels tendered by this shipper.

Appendix B – Price-Based Packaging Descriptions

The following Rate Indicator codes and corresponding markings may be used to derive the recommended Flat Rate ePostage label markings.

PRIORITY MAIL EXPRESS		PRIORITY MAIL	
Code	**Marking**	**Code**	**Marking**
E4	FLAT RATE ENV	FE	FLAT RATE ENV
E6	LEGAL FLAT RATE ENV	FA	LEGAL FLAT RATE ENV
E7	LEGAL FLAT RATE ENV	FP	PAD FLAT RATE ENV
FP	PAD FLAT RATE ENV	FS	SM FLAT RATE BOX
		FB	MED FLAT RATE BOX
		PL	LG FLAT RATE BOX
		PM	MILITARY FLAT RATE BOX
		C6	REG RATE BOX A
		C7	REG RATE BOX B

Source: https://postalpro.usps.com/pub205 - Appendix G, Table G-5

Appendix C – Regional Distribution Center File Processing

The Regional Distribution Center Assignment file is updated monthly and available for download on the Operations web page of the USPS PostalPro website (https://postalpro.usps.com/operations). There are two file formats:

1) Uncompressed comma separated .csv file (ranged Destination Begin/End ZIPs)
2) Compressed .zip file format with one record for every combination of Origin/Destination ZIP

The file format of the Retail Distribution Center File is shown below.

#/Col	Field	Type	Size	Description
1 (A)	Orig_ZIP	Numeric text	3	3-digit Origin ZIP Code. Possible values: 000-099
2 (B)	Dest_Begin	Numeric text	3	3-digit ZIP Code representing the beginning of a destination ZIP Code range. Possible values: 000-999 Validation: Dest_Begin ≤ Dest_End
3 (C)	Dest_End	ZIP Code (3-digit) numeric text	3	3-digit ZIP Code representing the end of a destination ZIP Code range. Possible values: 000-999 Validation Dest_Begin≤Dest_End
4 (D)	MC_Set_Code	numeric text	3	3-digit mailing class set code. Possible values: 000-999 Values for ePostage Overnight Service Area 003 - Priority Mail Parcels 005 - First-Class Package Service 006 - Ground & Other Package Services
5 (E)	Retail_Dist_Code	numeric text	2	2-digit Retail Distribution Code (RDC). Possible values: 01-99 NOTE: Value "05" - Overnight Service Area

To obtain an RDC from the Retail Distribution Center Assignment File select the Retail_Dist Code:

Where
       first 3 digits of Entry Facility ZIP (from ZIP) matches Orig_ZIP and
       first 3 digits of Destination ZIP is ≥ Dest_Begin and
       first 3 digits of Destinatino ZIP is ≤ Dest_End and
           where
                    mail class is PM and MC_Set_Code is "003" or
                    mail class is FC and MC_Set_Code is "005" or
                    mail class is PS and MC_Set_Code is "006"