



Welcome to our presentation on the 10 most common mistakes in Mailpiece Design.

## Agenda

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- Listing Of The 10 Most Common Mistakes
- Discussing Each Mistake Individually

The Agenda for this module will cover the listing of the 10 most common mistakes. We will discuss each mistake individually.

## 10 Most Common Mistakes

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1. Not Meeting Minimum Mailing Dimensions
2. Dark/Black Background Color on Mailpieces.
3. Screening/Imaging
4. Return Address Placement on Letters & Flats.
5. Text or Graphics in the Barcode Clear Zone
6. Postcard Design
7. Insert Shift
8. Folded Self-Mailer Construction
9. Address Placement on Flats
10. Requesting Uniquely Assigned BRM ZIP+4 Code

The 10 most common mistakes we encounter are:

1. Not meeting minimum mailing dimensions.
2. Dark/black background color on mailpieces.
3. Screening and imaging.
4. Return address placements on letters and flats.
5. Text or graphics in the Barcode Clear Zone.
6. Postcard Design.
7. Insert Shift.
8. Folded Self-Mailer Construction
9. Address Placement on Flats
10. Requesting Uniquely Assigned BRM ZIP+4 Code

## Common Mistake #1 Not Meeting Minimum Mailing Dimensions

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Current Postal Minimum Dimensional Requirement for Mailing:

- Minimum Height: 3.5" inches
- Minimum Length: 5.0" inches
- Minimum Thickness: .007" inch

Information regarding how the placement of the delivery address can negatively impact the mailability of a design can be reviewed in section 601.1.3 of our USPS Domestic Mail Manual (DMM)

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One concern that we encounter is commercial mail which fails to meet one or more of the minimum mailing dimensions. When this occurs, the mailpiece becomes nonmailable. Some examples encountered:

1. A customer used 3" x 5" Index cards to create their commercial First-Class card design. The customer stated that they went with index cards because of the substantial decrease in material cost.
2. A customer created a 4" x 4" square card to be mailed claiming some form of Marketing Mail (Presorted Standard) non-automation letter pricing. The customer stated that they knew that they would have to pay more because the design does not meet our Aspect Ratio, but they did not think about it's size falling below the minimum for mailing.
3. A customer used a light weight paper to create a letter-size bi-fold self-mailer design for the purposes of obtaining some form of commercial letter pricing, but the thickness afforded did not meet minimum mailing standards. The customer stated that while they had figured the mail would be considered nonmachinable because the paper used did not meet the applicable minimum basis weight requirement, they never thought that with the design being folded that minimum thickness would be an issue.
4. A customer created a letter-size card with the dimensions of 4" x 6" but placed the delivery address parallel to the shortest dimension of the design. As a result for mailing purposes, the length was only 4" inches and the mailpiece was not mailable. The customer stated that they where not aware that the placement of the delivery address could negatively impact the mailability of the design.

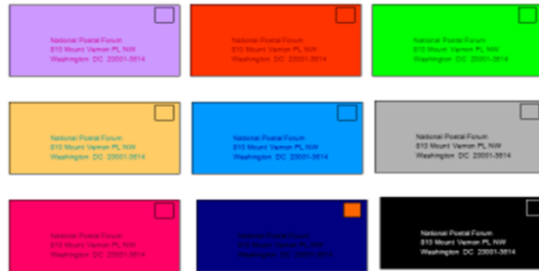
As information, current Postal minimum dimensional standards for general mailability are as follows:

- Minimum Height: 3.5" inches
- Minimum Length: 5" inches
- Minimum thickness: .007" inch

Information regarding how the placement of the delivery address can negatively impact the mailability of a design can be reviewed in section 601.1.3 of our USPS Domestic Mail Manual (DMM). Our DMM can

be viewed on line via our Postal Explorer website at <http://pe.usps.gov>.

## Common Mistake #2 Black/Dark Colored Background



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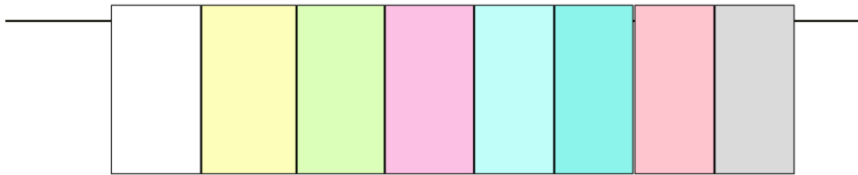
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Mailpieces must meet contrast and reflectance standards as outlined in the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM). Addresses and barcodes cannot be read by the automation equipment if printed on a dark or black background.

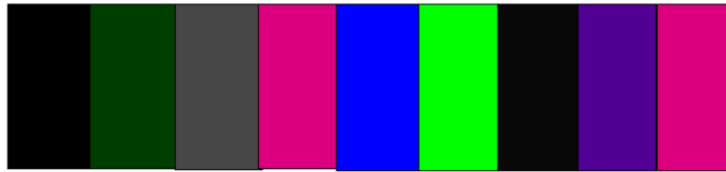
Letter mail automation processing can also be impacted by mailpieces with dark colored borders or edges. This is due to the automated equipment not being able to determine where the mailpiece begins and ends for the purpose of establishing the timing and spacing between mailpieces.

Black mailpieces do not reflect light and inhibit processing. While this may be acceptable, it is not recommended for successful processing on the automated equipment.

## PAPER COLORS



**RECOMMENDED: LIGHT PASTELS, NEUTRALS = GOOD**

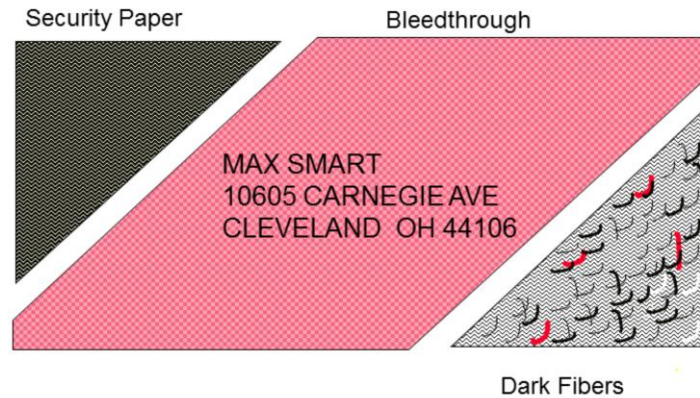


**NOT RECOMMENDED: DARK, BRIGHT, BLACK, FLUORESCENT COLORED BACKGROUND = POOR**

If using colors, light pastel backgrounds are recommended for mailpieces to provide enough contrast between the background and the ink. All inks used to address mailpieces should contain 1 to 2 parts black in their makeup.

The use of fluorescent color papers are not recommended because of their highly reflective properties.

## Common Mistake #3 Screenings/Imaging



### COMMON AUTOMATION PROBLEMS

Print reflectance difference requirements must be met by both the barcode and the surface on which it is printed. This ensures that the barcode can be successfully read and interpreted during processing.

The presence of dark fibers on the outside of an envelope or mailpiece, as well as the bleed-through of internal security screen or other print, pictures, etc. on mailpieces, can negatively impact processing on the automated equipment.

Bleed-through occurs when the envelope lining or security pattern are too dark, or the paper used to fabricate the envelope is translucent or of insufficient paper weight or thickness. Bleed-through can also occur if printing on the insert shows through and is visible in the address area.

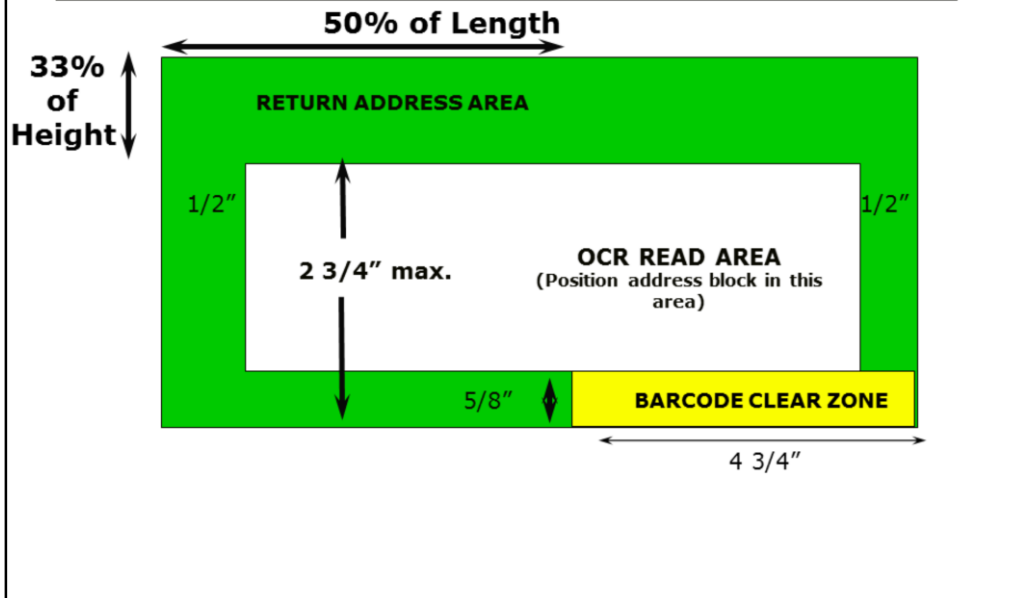
Heavy dark fiber content are not acceptable as a background for barcodes. The heavy fiber content has the ability to distort barcode parameters.

Strong background patterns should not be placed behind the delivery address or barcode. Patterns in the delivery address area can cause the address data to be miss-read. The address and barcode area should be free of interfering background print. It is recommended to leave an area completely free of all background patterns.

The maximum Print Contrast Ratio for designs, fibers or bleed through is 15% and can be tested by a Mailpiece Design Analyst using the USPS Envelope Reflectance Meter.



## Common Mistake #4 Return Address Placement

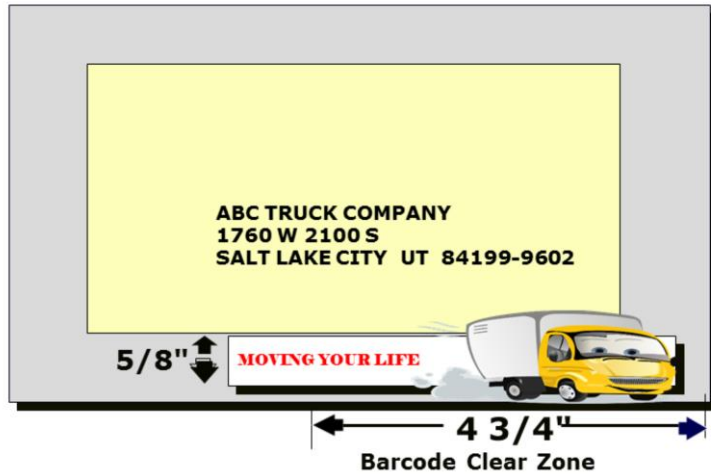


The delivery addresses on a letter-size piece should be within the OCR Read Area. The OCR Read Area is the area scanned by the Optical Character Reader (OCR). Return address information should never be in the OCR Read Area. It should always be above 2-3/4" from the bottom of the mailpiece and extend no more than 50% of the length of the envelope.

On a flat-size mailpiece, the return address should always be in the upper left corner of the mailpiece. Additionally, we recommend that the delivery address remain at least one inch below the return address and at least one inch to the right of the return address.

Proper placement of the return address will reduce the incidence of return address selection by automation equipment and looping the mailpiece back to the return address.

## Common Mistake #5 Text or Graphics in the Barcode Clear Zone

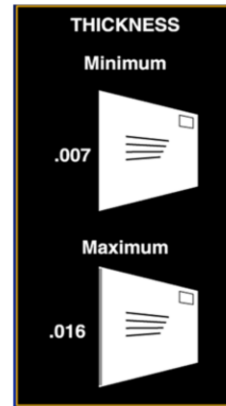
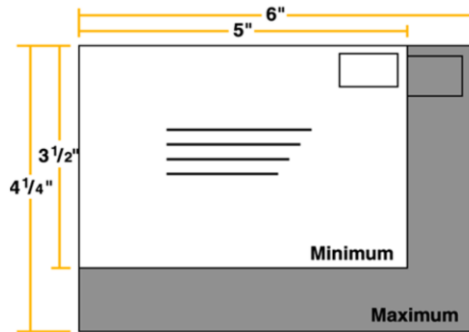


Many customers place text or graphics in the Barcode Clear Zone. It is not recommended if the mailpiece is not pre-barcoded.

The Barcode Clear Zone is the area where the automated equipment applies a barcode when a mailpiece is not pre-barcoded. It is a rectangular area in the lower right corner of the address side of cards and letter-size pieces, extending 4-3/4 inches from the right edge and 5/8 inch from the bottom edge.

A label may be affixed to this area if the customer-applied barcode cannot be read by the automated equipment. In addition, these pieces may be subjected to additional handling.

## Common Mistake #6 Postcard Design



In addition to meeting the applicable dimensional requirements the address side panel of presorted or First-Class postcards and cards must be properly formatted if it contains a message area.

The dimensional requirements are:

- A minimum of 3 ½ inches high, 5 inches long, and .007 inches thick,
- The maximum can be no more than 4 ¼ inches high, 6 inches long and .016 inches thick

The two format options for commercial cards containing a message area on the address side are:

1. Vertically divided
2. Horizontally divided

First we will look at the Vertically Divided.

## Postcard Design – Vertically Divided


Address, postage and any Postal Service markings must appear on the right side measuring at least 2 1/8" wide (measured from the right edge of the card)

There must be 1/8" clear space around the delivery address.

There also must be 1/2" margin on the right side of the card

2 1/8"

Wells Water Company 60513 Parnell Rd, Any Town, NY 12345				Presorted First Class Mail U.S. Postage PAID Any Town NY Permit #0123
SERVICE PERIOD		METER		
FROM	TO	PREVIOUS		
ACTUAL CY	/100 CU FT	BASE	IRRIGATION	
	/100 CU FT	BASE	IRRIGATION	
DC WA	FIRE FLOWS	ACCOUNT NO		
\$	\$			
PREVIOUS	CURRENT	LATE PYMT CHG	AMOUNT DUE	
\$	\$	\$	\$	
METER RATES: Schedule number 1 meter reading to be rounded off to nearest 100.				
WELLS WATER COMPANY 60513 PARNELL RD ANY TOWN NY 12345		ACCOUNT <input type="text"/> AMOUNT DUE \$ <input type="text"/>		
BALANCE DUE 10TH OF THE MONTH PLEASE RETURN THIS STUB WITH PAYMENT				
MR GORDON CAT 1234 RIVER RD ANYTOWN US 98765-4321				



**Not drawn to scale**

The address side of vertically divided cards must be divided into a right portion and a left portion, with or without a vertical rule. The left portion is the message area. The delivery address, postage, and any USPS marking or endorsement must appear in the right portion.

The right portion must be at least 2-1/8 inches wide (measured from the right edge of the card, top to bottom inclusive). If pre-barcoding in the address block the right side will have to be approximately 4" to accommodate the largest barcode and the 1/2" required margin.

For cards claimed at the presorted price, nondelivery address information may extend into the right portion only above the address block and if the information is shaded or surrounded by a border that has at least 1/8 inch clearance between the delivery address block and the border.

Mailers may choose not to shade or border the nondelivery address information if there is at least 1/8 inch of clear space around the delivery address block.

## Postcard Design – Horizontally Divided

Address, postage and any markings must appear on the portion containing the address and measure at least 1½” high from the top or bottom edge of the card

There must be 1/8” clear space around the delivery address

1 ½”



*With or without rule*

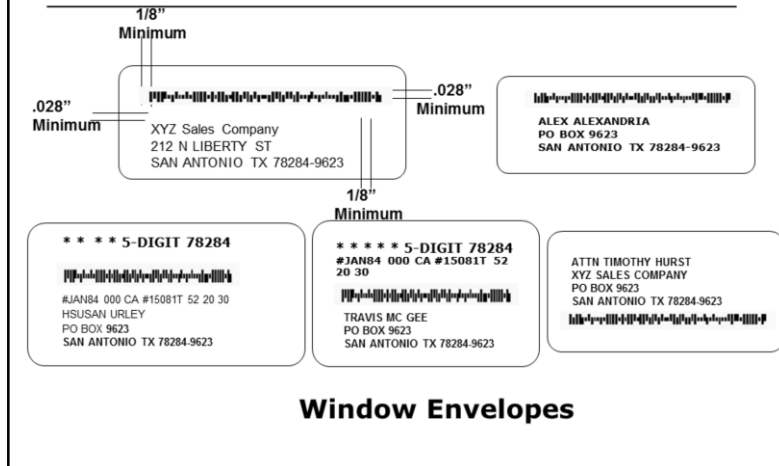
The address side of a Horizontally divided card must be divided into an upper portion and a lower portion, with or without a horizontal rule. The portion of the address side that does not contain the delivery address is the message area.

The delivery address, postage, and any USPS marking or endorsement must appear within the portion containing the delivery address. As an alternative, when the delivery address appears within the lower portion, it is permissible for the postage, return address, and any USPS marking or endorsement to appear in the upper portion. The portion bearing the delivery address must be at least 1-1/2 inches high (measured from the bottom edge of the card but above 5/8” from bottom, as applicable, right edge to left edge inclusive).

Only mailpieces that are pre-barcoded should have a return address in the bottom addressing area. Also, cards that are horizontally divided can only have an indicia or pre-cancelled stamps in the bottom addressing area.

If you are using live postage stamps, they must be in the upper right corner of the card. For cards claimed at the presorted price, nondelivery address information may extend into the portion containing the delivery address only if it appears above the address block and if the information is shaded or surrounded by a border that has at least 1/8 inch clearance between the delivery address block and the border. Mailers may choose not to shade or border the nondelivery address information if there is at least 1/8 inch of clear space around the delivery address block.

## Common Mistake #7 Insert Shift



Another common concern is window envelopes and insert shift. During Postal processing utilizing automated equipment, we frequently observe that some of the delivery address and/or mailer-applied barcode excessively shifts, becoming obstructed by one or more of the window edges. When this occurs, our automated equipment is unable to successfully process the mail.

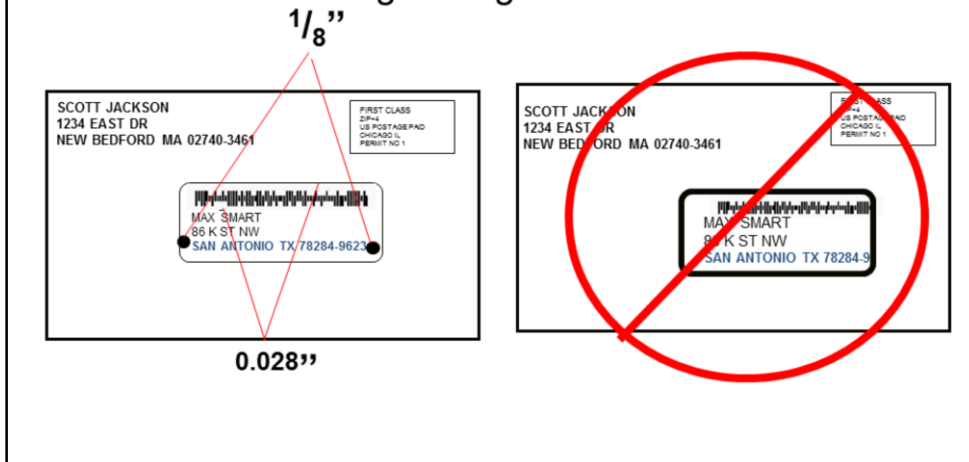
The address window must be located so the barcode is visible through the window and will meet the positioning requirements for address block barcoding.

The barcode in an address block barcode may appear:

- Above the address line
- Below the city, state, and ZIP Code
- Above or below the Keyline
- Above or below optional endorsement line

## Barcode Readability – Window Envelopes

Barcode may appear on the piece or on an insert showing through a barcode window



When the mailer-applied barcode is included as part of the address block showing through a window, the following minimum barcode clearances must be maintained during the insert's range of motion in the envelope:

- A minimum clearance between the leftmost and rightmost bars and the corresponding window edge of at least  $1/8$  inch.
- A minimum clearance between the barcode and the top and bottom window edges at least  $.028$  inch.
- The top of each bar of the barcode must be less than 4 inches from the bottom edge of the mailpiece; and the bottom line of the address block, including the barcode, must be at least  $5/8$  inch from the bottom of the mailpiece.

The printing of the barcode is prohibited anywhere between the address line containing the recipient's name and the city, state, and ZIP Code line.

The Postal Service prefers window coverings, but does not require them except for heavy letter mail. Window coverings, if used, must be sufficiently transparent to allow the barcode and its background to meet the reflectance requirements for barcodes. The Postal Service makes this determination by measuring the barcode's reflectance through the window material using a USPS Envelope Reflectance Meter.

The window must be at least  $1/2$  inch from the right edge of the mailpiece, and the leftmost bar of the barcode must be less than  $10-1/2$  inches from the right edge of the mailpiece, and at least  $1/2$  inch from the left edge of the mailpiece.

## Common Mistake #8 Folded Self-Mailer Construction

### What is a Folded-Self Mailer?

- A letter-size mailpiece formed by two or more panels that are created when one or more unbound sheets of paper are folded together and sealed.



We frequently encounter letter-size folded self-mailer designs that do not comply with our applicable machinable and automation compatibility construction and sealing standards. This significantly increases the customer's mailing costs.

A folded self-mailer is formed by two or more panels that are created when one or more unbound sheets of paper are folded together and sealed to make a letter-size mailpiece. The number of panels is determined by the number of sheets in the mailpiece and the number of times the sheets are folded.

Current construction and sealing standards for letter-size folded self-mailers can be viewed in Section 201.3.14 of our USPS DMM (available for viewing via our Postal Explorer website at <http://pe.usps.gov>).

Let's look at an example of a frequently observed mailpiece design that does not meet current Postal letter-size folded self-mailer construction standards.



## Gatefold Style - Folded Self-Mailers



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Gatefold style self-mailers are considered non-machinable and are not eligible for automation pricing.

Folded self-mailers must meet the following requirements:

- External panels must be equal or nearly equal in size (within 1 inch)
- Internal shorter panels must be covered by a full-size panel, and count toward the maximum number of panels.
- Optionally, internal shorter panels may be secured but must have only one edge that is shorter and be no further than one inch away from the edge of the external panel.

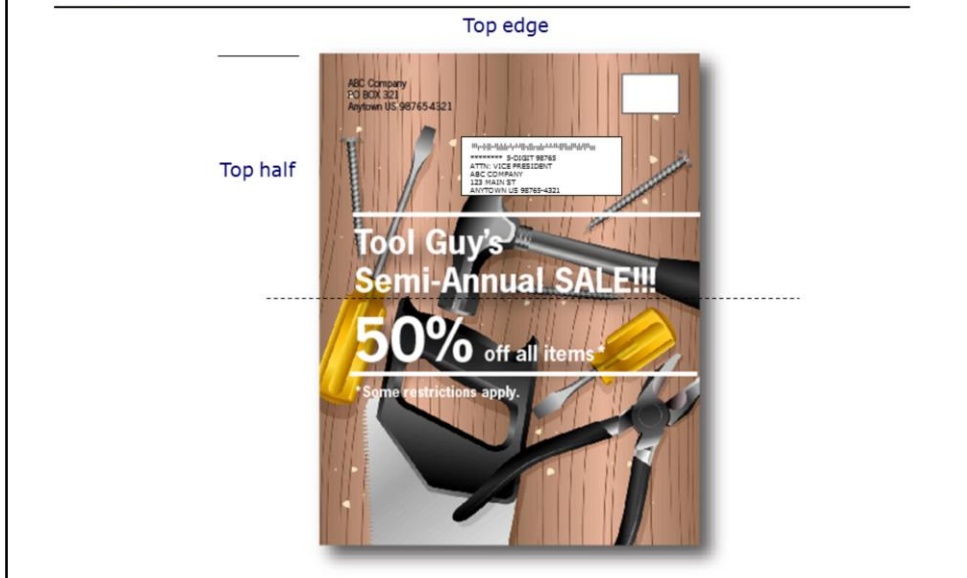
The only acceptable folding methods and the subsequent number of panels created when folding a single sheet of paper are:

- Bi-fold: folded once forming two panels
- Tri-fold: folded twice forming three panels
- Oblong: paper folded once to form two rectangular panels with one elongated dimension and parallel opposite sides
- The final folded edge is on the leading (shorter) edge

In addition to gatefolds, accordion and Z-folds are not automation compatible and are considered non-machinable.

## Common Mistake #9

### Address Placement for Enveloped, Polywrapped or Card-style Flats

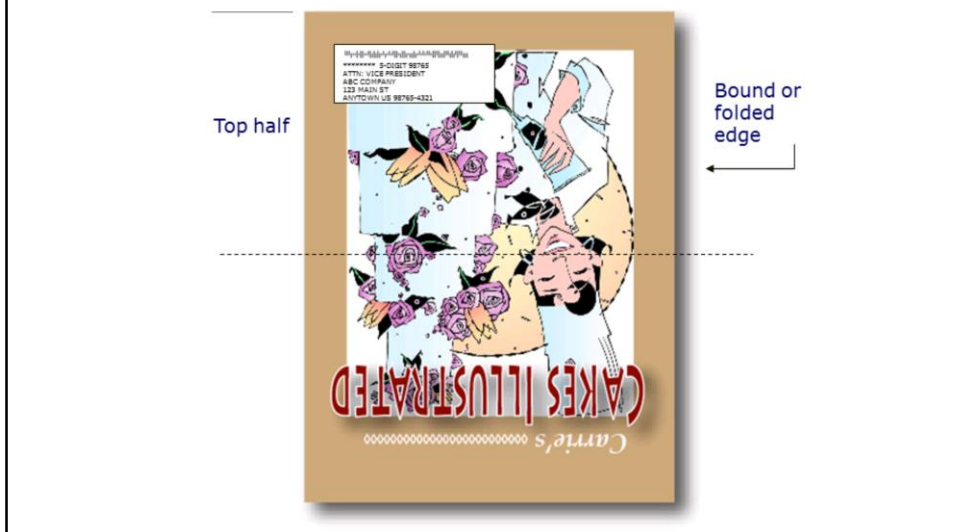


The following standards apply to enveloped, polywrapped, or card-style Periodicals, including shrinkwrapped Firm bundles, Standard Mail, Bound Printed Matter, Media Mail, and Library Mail flats mailed at presorted, automation, or carrier route prices:

The “top” of the mailpiece is either of the shorter edges. The entire delivery address must be within the top half of the mailpiece. Optimal placement is at the top edge (while maintaining the 1/8-inch clearance requirement).

If a vertical address will not fit entirely within the top half, the address may cross the midpoint if it is placed within 1 inch of the top edge. If the delivery address is placed on an insert polywrapped with the host piece, the address must not appear on a component that rotates within the bag and must remain visible throughout the addressed component's range of motion. The insert must be affixed to maintain the address entirely in the top half throughout processing and delivery or, if not affixed, the insert must maintain at least the beginning 0.5 inch of the address in the top half.

## Address Placement – Bound or Folded Flats



For bound or folded Periodicals, Standard Mail, Bound Printed Matter, Media Mail, and Library Mail flats mailed at presorted, automation, or carrier route prices not in envelopes or polywrap, the “top” is the upper edge of the mailpiece when the bound or final folded edge is vertical and on the right side of the piece. Exception: For Carrier Route (or Enhanced Carrier Route) saturation pieces, the “top” of the mailpiece is either of the shorter edges.

The entire delivery address must be within the top half of the mailpiece. Optimal placement is at the top edge (while maintaining the 1/8-inch clearance requirement). If a vertical address will not fit entirely within the top half, the address may cross the midpoint if it is placed within 1 inch of the top edge.

## Common Mistake #10

### Procedure for Requesting a Uniquely-Assigned BRM ZIP+4 Code

**UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE** **BRM/QBRM Application**  
For ZIP+4 Code Assignment/Validation and QBRM Approval

**1. Customer Information (To Be Completed by the Customer)**

Customer Name: First Name, Last Name, Title, Address, City, State, ZIP+4, Phone Number, Fax Number, E-mail Address, Business Hours, and other contact details.

**2. Mailing Permit Office Information (To Be Completed by the Post Office that Approaches the Permit Holder)**

Post Office Name, Address, City, State, ZIP+4, and other office details.

**3. AMS Information (To Be Completed by USPS Address Management Systems)**

AMS System Name, AMS System Number, and other system-related information.

**4. Customer Instructions for Obtaining Reply Mail Artwork — a Complimentary Service from the Postal Service**

Customers distributing BRM or QBRM mailpieces may obtain complimentary artwork directly from the Postal Service as follows:

- Visit 24 hours after receiving a permit number and ZIP+4 before using the U.S. Postal Service artwork tool.
- To create a business account, go to the Business Customer Gateway at [biz.gateway.usps.com/login.htm](http://biz.gateway.usps.com/login.htm).
- Use the Gateway account to request a Master CD (MCD), which is required for obtaining reply mail artwork.
- Select the link for "Automated Business Reply Mail (ABRM)" to design and print reply mail artwork.
- Access the ABRM user guide at <http://biz.usps.com/brm/abrm/>.
- For assistance with the artwork tool, call the MCD Support Center at 800-375-3232.

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All BRM must contain a uniquely-assigned ZIP+4 Code to separate the BRM from the customers regular mail. This is so the USPS can obtain payment for these mailpieces.

To obtain a uniquely assigned BRM +4 the customer must do the following:

1. Open a BRM permit or bring in a receipt from an existing BRM permit from another Post Office to the Post Office where the BRM will be returned, along with a letter of authorization from the permit holder showing the name, address, and telephone number of the local agent authorized to receive the BRM to the Post Office where the BRM is to be returned.
2. Complete Section 1 of the PS Form 6805 and bring it to that Post Office. In some larger Post Offices, the customer will need to bring it into the Mailing Requirements office.
3. The clerk will complete Section 2 of the form, verifying the permit is current, sign Section 2 and fax it to the District Address Management Office.
4. The District AMS office will issue a unique BRM ZIP+4 Code for the customer, sign Section 3 and return it to the clerk that signed Section 2.
5. The clerk will notify the customer that submitted the form and provide them a copy of the completed form, the instructions for the ABRM tool, the phone number (855-593-6093) and the email address ([mda@usps.gov](mailto:mda@usps.gov)) of MDA Helpdesk if they need help with the ABRM tool and retain a copy of the PS Form 6805.
6. Once the customer receives the form they can create their artwork on the ABRM tool.

## MDA SUPPORT CENTER

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### MDA Help Desk

Phone: 855-593-6093

Email: [MDA@USPS.GOV](mailto:MDA@USPS.GOV)

Monday – Friday  
7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. CST

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For further assistance with any mailpiece design request, please contact the MDA Customer Service Help Desk. Our hours of operation are Monday through Friday from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm Central Standard Time.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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**Visit our websites at:**

**[www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)**

**<http://pe.usps.gov/>**

**Contains the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM), International Mail Manual (IMM) and various publications.**

**<https://postalpro.usps.com/>**

**Contains information on Intelligent Mail, Full-Service, eInduction, Seamless Acceptance, etc.**

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For additional resources, please visit our website at [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com); <http://pe.usps.gov>; and <https://postalpro.usps.com>.

Thank you for joining us today. We appreciate your business.

This concludes our presentation.