

The Latest on Letters – the Surprising Facts on Mail Volume

By Erick Keskey, USPS

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If you were to take a quick guess, would you say the volume of letters delivered in the last quarter by the U.S. Postal Service has risen or fallen?

More than likely, most Americans would say “fallen.” And who can blame them? Certain members of Congress would have the American public believe that letter volume is on a swift, accelerating decline. They insist that email has displaced the letter, resulting in mail volume’s inexorable downhill trajectory, and taking the Postal Service down with it.

Despite these frequent claims, the facts just don’t back it up. In fact, recent USPS data shows that both First-Class, single piece letter mail volume and revenue ticked north for the Postal Service’s third quarter. Compared to the same quarter last year, First-Class, single piece mail volume was up more than 1.5 percent and revenue was up more than 6 percent – this represents the highest percentage third quarter year-over-year increase in the past five years.

As the data shows, the truth is that mail volume fluctuates, rising and falling in line with business trends and the state of the overall economy. The Postal Service, like countless other American enterprises, is still rebounding from the Great Recession. As the U.S. economy has improved, letter volume and revenue have increased.

As more businesses emerge from years of belt-tightening, USPS is helping them to expand their operations, reach more customers, manage their accounts, issue invoices and receive payments – all of which has had a positive impact on USPS mail volume.

While the Internet has certainly had an effect on mail volume and revenue, it’s not the one-two punch some might have you believe. Increased reliance on email and other forms of communication have had an impact on how Americans transmit information and do business, of course, but the Postal Service is a 21st century operation, adjusting to changing market conditions and continuing to provide a vital service upon which millions of Americans rely.

As the evolution of letter volume and revenue demonstrates, USPS is a modern-day enterprise, experiencing economic highs and lows just like any other business. It is not on a relentless downhill course, set for obsolescence.

The policymakers developing postal reform plans must take into account USPS’s present day performance and status, not where it was several years ago. Any discussion of Postal Service reform needs to be based in fact, not conjecture and misinformation.

It's unwise to assume letters are a thing of the past. The U.S. Postal Service delivers more than 160 billion pieces of mail each year – the vast majority of which are letters –and is an important part of American communities and our way of life. The U.S. Postal Service is an American institution ready for modern, business-minded, fact-based reform.

*Remember to check back on Delivering for America on Friday when we expect the Postal Service to release its fiscal year financial results. As we noted in August, the Postal Service is projecting a **\$1 billion annual operating profit**.*

Erick Keskey | Manager, Business Alliances

| 100 South First Street | Suite 123 | Minneapolis MN 55401-9998 | 612.341.7731 |
612.360.9264 |

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