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Attention Wholesale Lockbox Processors: High-Speed Sorting Does Not Always Mean High-Speed Processing

By Kurt Stoneking

In a world where sorters' rated speeds can reach dizzying proportions, why is it that at 3,600 pieces per hour, the OPEX Mail Matrix sorter has gained so much attention? The answer lies in the unique solutions that users have enjoyed using this flexible sorting platform.

The following paragraphs will profile three distinct applications for which the OPEX Mail Matrix has been employed. Whether used as a stand-alone solution or in conjunction with high-speed sorters, Mail Matrix offers benefits of price, configuration, and capability not otherwise attainable.

Smaller volume users, who have not been able to cost justify an automated sorter, have no option but to employ expensive labor to facilitate the sorting process. With the price point of the Mail Matrix far below its competitors, customers can now enjoy the benefits of automation, perhaps even for the first time. High-speed sorting can also mean high-cost sorting and poor cost justification. Managers are then left to face several unpleasant realities. The first is that down-line processes are bottlenecked in the sort room. Often workgroups are idle until the manual sort process has made mail available for processing. Secondly, during peak volume, workgroup personnel are often re-tasked with helping the manual sort staff to "get through the mail." Not only does this delay the processing during peak volume, but having untrained personnel sort mail also increases the risk of mis-sorting to the wrong workgroup. The Mail Matrix provides a significant benefit in that mail can be consistently sorted by a single operator into a sort scheme that segments the machine by workgroup and bin assignment. Sorting on a single pass means that mail is available to the workgroup while the sort is still taking place. By identifying which segment of the machine contains their mail, each workgroup can easily recognize when mail is available to be processed and can choose to "sweep" the bins that contain their mail before the sorting process is finished. This is impossible in a multi-pass system—regardless of speed.

Utilizing the Mail Matrix to sort mail in a single-pass that has been rejected from a high-speed sorter eliminates inefficiency and optimizes the processing of these envelopes. High-speed sorting does not always mean high-speed processing. While capable of sorting high volumes of mail very quickly, one shortcoming of these sorters lies in its processing of unidentifiable "reject" mail. Once an envelope is rejected, a separate off-line LVE process must take place which requires additional passes on the sorter itself. Reject reprocessing occurs each time the mail is passed down the high-speed sorter, creating difficult to manage sub-processes which can and often do result in hand-sorting. This is an inefficient use of the high-speed technology, as well as labor, and can reduce effective processing speeds by up to two-thirds or more of the system's capability. Many of these envelopes can be identified via the OPEX OCR engine and will not require manual assignment. By allowing the operator to access the database and make destination assignments while the machine is sorting, any envelope is now capable of reaching its intended destination in one Mail Matrix pass. In addition, the Mail Matrix offers the user the ability to sort flats and overnights (which cannot be sorted on most high-speed platforms.)

But how can this platform benefit a customer that services upwards of 3,000 or more customers? Answer: by partnering the Mail Matrix with high-speed sorting in an effort to take advantage of the strengths of each platform. A close look at standard PO Box volume distribution of mail reveals a unique characteristic of many large lockbox operations. Higher volume boxes certainly get the most mail and represent, in most cases, the highest processing priorities. These boxes, however, often do not represent the majority of the total overall boxes. Some smaller volume boxes receive just a few pieces per month. On this basis, an opportunity for efficiency exists in creating a solution that separates the high-volume/high-priority boxes from the rest of the smaller lots of mail. In this situation, the user places 100 percent of the



mail on the high-speed sorter and quickly “kills” boxes that are higher volume and higher priority into specific bins which can immediately be distributed for extraction and processing. The remaining bins are designated as “Mail Matrix” bins, so that these envelopes can be taken to the lower-speed machine for single-pass fine sorting on that system.

Dividing the work between the two platforms allows for each system to do what it does best. The Mail Matrix can be configured with a maximum of 1088 individual separations, with each section of the machine designated by workgroup, priority, process, or whatever criteria the user feels best suits the operation. This allows for ample space to be dedicated to those customers whose mail volume per month may not amount to very many envelopes, but who also expect the same level of service as their larger counterparts.

Further, beyond the sort room lays a maze of plastic pigeonhole bins arranged in a sequence designed to optimize the processing by workgroups. Because these smaller lots of envelopes have to be transported to the processing floor and further sorted by hand, the final link in this “high-speed” process proves to be the weakest. The sort scheme on the Mail Matrix can be configured so that the workgroups can

access their mail as it becomes available directly from the machine.

Finally, Mail Matrix brings additional capability in that it provides an automated solution for flat mail and overnight mail. Today, these envelopes require a great deal of manual processing that range from lookup to hand sort. The Mail Matrix platform negates the need for this expensive type of manual process and allows these envelopes to be sorted in the same process as standard mail.

The diversity of these applications underscores the suitability of the Mail Matrix platform across a number of applications, both as a stand alone sorter, as well as in combination with a high-speed counterpart. Single-pass sorting capability, flexible bin configuration, and price point are outstanding features of the system. When combined with the proper application, the Mail Matrix offers a powerful solution with significant competitive advantages.

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