

ADDRESS UPDATING

Key to Reducing Undeliverable-as-Addressed Mail

Authors: Pam Corbeille-Lepel, Lorton Data, Christopher Lien, Business Objects

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INTRODUCTION

THE USPS AND MAILERS GET SERIOUS ABOUT DELIVERABILITY

The United States Postal Service® (USPS®) is taking the issue of undeliverable-as-addressed (UAA) mail very seriously. And well it should, since UAA mail costs the agency nearly \$2 billion annually. It's such a major drain on USPS resources, in fact, that Postmaster General Jack Potter made a bold call to action: a 50% reduction in UAA mail by 2010.

UAA is very costly to businesses, too. The discussion of mailing economics often centers on postage and the potential loss of Postal Service™ automation discounts when addresses are inaccurate, incomplete, or not current. However, according to the Direct Marketing Association, postage accounts for only 24% of the overall costs related to a mail piece. When an address is undeliverable, for whatever reason, the entire mail piece is lost—therefore, business mailers must consider the total cost of producing and mailing the piece.

Not so immediately obvious is the cost of missed opportunities—particularly if your business relies on advertising mail to sustain and grow the enterprise. Each undelivered mail piece represents the potential loss of a sale, revenues, profits—and a customer.

On average, according to the USPS, 6.4% of the pieces in every direct-mail campaign are UAA and may never reach their intended destination. What if mailers could somehow prevent this previously undeliverable mail from reaching the waste bin and redirect it to their customers and prospects? Even a percentage point or two of increased response could drive significantly stronger results at the bottom line.

This white paper focuses on the single largest contributor to UAA mail—the estimated 44 million-plus Americans (17% of the population) who file changes of address with the USPS every year. In addition, 2.3 million U.S. businesses file changes of address annually.

The fundamental question to be answered: How can businesses—both mailers and their mail service providers—keep their mailing lists in sync with a highly mobile society? Today, more than ever, the answer is *change-of-address processing*. Increasingly, the USPS requires it, offering incentives to mailers who keep their mailing lists current—and disincentives to those who don't. Equally important, if not more so, sound business practices dictate change-of-address processing.

Fortunately, mailers enjoy access to a growing arsenal of tools and services that support address update best practices.

Besides discussing the various tools and services available today, this paper presents recommendations for deploying an effective address update strategy—one that yields optimal results and a strong return on investment (ROI).

THE CHALLENGE

44 MILLION+ ADDRESS CHANGES EVERY YEAR

The extent of the challenge is nothing short of astonishing. More than 44 million people file change-of-address notifications with the USPS every year. During peak periods, this translates to 1 million or more address changes per week.

Extrapolating the numbers further, 400 to 500 individuals in a database of 1 million names can be expected to file changes of address *every day*. In light of these statistics, it's easy to understand why the typical mailing list deteriorates by 1% per month.

The negative impact on business may be measured from a few different perspectives, starting with the direct cost of wasted mail. If each mail piece costs \$1.10 to create, print, and mail, and assuming 7,500 pieces from a list of 100,000 are not delivered due to address errors, the resulting waste constitutes a loss of \$8,250.

If the mailing promotes a product or service, the stakes are dramatically higher. From a mailing list of 100,000, the 7,500 pieces that never see the inside of a mailbox could easily represent a \$15,000 sacrifice in revenue, based on a 1% sales rate and an average of \$200 per order. Multiplied over several mailings during the course of a year, as well as over the lifetime of each new customer, the cost of taking no corrective action reaches staggering proportions.

EXPANDING AND ENFORCING THE RULES

Saddled with UAA costs of \$1.9 billion (and growing), the USPS has targeted address updating as a top priority for its commercial mail customers—and rightly so, considering that obsolete addresses constitute roughly 75% of the Postal Service's overall UAA costs.

Currently, the Postal Service requires mailers who receive First-Class Mail® presort and automation rates to update their addresses within 185 days prior to a mailing. By early 2009, this window is expected to shrink to 95 days, and the Move Update requirement will extend to Standard Mail®, which is currently the largest class of mail in terms of volume, and which consists primarily of advertising mail.

Noncompliant mailers* face the very real prospect of losing their postage discounts, which range from \$50 to \$95 per thousand (for First-Class Mail). They also may be hit with back charges and penalties—additional costs for failing to adequately engage in an address update strategy.

For all types of businesses, the motivation to effectively and consistently apply address updates to mailing lists has never been greater. The next section of this paper outlines the change-of-address tools and technologies that can support timely and predictable mail delivery, while helping to ensure compliance with USPS requirements for postage automation discounts.

* The USPS enforces Move Update rules through the Postal Automated Redirection System (PARS). This system enables the Postal Service to monitor each mailing right down to the individual pieces. Scanning address fields and comparing them with postage indicia, PARS flags any First-Class Mail piece for which a presort or automation discount is claimed but that doesn't meet Move Update requirements.

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES

REVIEWING THE ARSENAL OF MOVE UPDATE METHODS

As pointed out previously, the single largest factor in UAA mail is the failure to keep addresses current with Postal Service change-of-address filings.

Because address updating poses such a major challenge to so many mailers, this section limits its focus to change-of-address tools and technologies. However, before any address may be considered for move update processing, it should be complete (i.e., ZIP + 4[®] code, street name, city, state, and directional information) and correct (accurate address, fixed misspellings, and approved abbreviations).

Currently, the USPS allows mailers to use four “approved” and two “alternative” Move Update methods.

Approved Methods

- NCOA^{Link™} System
- *FASTforward*[®] (for multiline optical character readers only)
- ACS[™]
- Ancillary service endorsements

Alternative Methods

- Legal restraint
- 99% accurate

NCOA^{LINK} SYSTEM

Most organizations generating a substantial level of advertising mail will make NCOA^{Link} the backbone of their address update initiatives. At any given time, NCOA^{Link} contains more than 160 million address changes.

In a nutshell, mailing lists processed through NCOA^{Link} are updated prior to the mailing, using change-of-address information filed with the Postal Service. The USPS offers three levels of NCOA^{Link} licensing:

1. **Full Service License**—Access to the USPS change-of-address database for the preceding 48 months; includes weekly updates.
2. **Limited Service License**—Access to the 18-month change-of-address database; includes weekly updates.
3. **End User License**—Access to the 18-month change-of-address database; includes monthly updates.

ANK^{LINK}—AN ADD-ON TO NCOA^{LINK}

ANK^{Link™} is an optional enhancement for NCOA^{Link} Limited Service and End User licensees. Essentially, ANK^{Link} provides an indicator that a move may have occurred for an address during months 19 through 48. The notification doesn’t contain the actual new address. However, the service provider or mailer can send only the flagged addresses to an NCOA^{Link} Full Service provider for 48-month change-of-address processing.

FASTFORWARD

FASTforward is similar to NCOA^{Link} in that it applies address updates from the USPS permanent change-of-address database prior to the mailing. However, *FASTforward* requires the use of a

multiline optical character reader (MLOCR), and it contains updates from the previous 13 months (vs. 18 or 48 months for NCOA^{Link}). As mail pieces pass through the MLOCR equipment, names and addresses are checked against the Postal Service database. When a change of address is warranted, the correct address and barcode are sprayed on the mail piece.

ACS

Although the ultimate result may be the same, ACS differs from NCOA^{Link} and *FASTforward* in one fundamental aspect: Address changes are identified and communicated to the mailer *after* the mail pieces enter the mail stream.

Provided by the USPS[®] National Customer Support Center (NCSC), ACS delivers change-of-address information to mailers electronically (via secure web site or CD-ROM) or manually (paper). ACS participants may choose to receive address correction notifications daily, weekly, biweekly, monthly, or bimonthly. Costs apply to ACS services, ranging from 6 cents per corrected address for First-Class Mail[®] and electronic notification to 50 cents per corrected address for all other classes using paper notification.

With implementation of the new Intelligent Mail[®] barcode, the USPS has improved ACS by creating the new OneCode^{ACS™} solution. OneCode^{ACS} is available for First-Class and Standard letter-shaped mail, providing a very cost-effective method for obtaining change-of-address information. OneCode^{ACS} for First-Class[™] letters is free for the first two notifications and costs 5 cents thereafter for each notification of an address change. Standard Mail pricing is 2 cents for the first two notifications and 15 cents for each subsequent notification of an address change.

ANCILLARY SERVICE ENDORSEMENTS

Another post-mailing Move Update option, termed “ancillary service endorsements,” actually consists of four individual services—Return Service Requested, Temp-Return Service Requested, Address Service Requested, and Change Service Requested. Each of these on-piece address correction endorsements directs the Post Office[™] to handle UAA mail in a different way:

- **Return Service Requested**— The Postal Service returns the mail piece to the sender with a new address and the reason for nondelivery. There is no charge for this service.
- **Temp-Return Service Requested**— If temporary change-of-address, the Postal Service forwards the mail piece to a temporary address, at no charge, but doesn’t provide the sender with a separate notice of temporary change of address. If not, the mailpiece is returned with the new address or reason for non-delivery.
- **Address Service Requested**—The Postal Service forwards the mail piece during the first 12 months following a change of address; from month 13 through 18, it returns the mail piece to sender along with the new address; after month 18, the mail piece is returned to sender along with the reason for nondelivery.
- **Change Service Requested**—Used in conjunction with ACS. Mailers using ACS with electronic notification combined with a Change Service Requested or Address Service Requested endorsement may qualify for a First-Class Mail automation discount rate.

It’s important to note that ancillary service endorsements may involve substantial USPS charges, intended to cover additional handling costs incurred in the forwarding processes. The Postal Service bases its fees on mailer weight and the appropriate single-piece First-Class Mail rate, plus a non-machinable surcharge, if applicable. The sum from this formula is multiplied by 2.472 and rounded up to the next whole cent.

The USPS collects any fees for ancillary service endorsements *after* the mailing has occurred. This may pose logistical difficulties for lettershops or mail service providers as they attempt to collect additional postage from their customers.

ALTERNATIVE MOVE UPDATE METHODS

Some mailers who meet certain criteria may satisfy Move Update requirements without any of the approved methods described above. The two alternative methods, both of which must receive advance USPS approval, are:

- **Legal restraint method**—This method is for organizations that are restricted from incorporating Postal Service change-of-address information into their mailing list without permission from addressees. Nongovernmental entities must provide a citation of the specific legal restriction and copies of the statutes or regulations.
- **99% accurate method**— This method is for mailers whose customers diligently provide notification of address changes and who can demonstrate that their mailing lists are at least as current as the Postal Service database. It requires an ancillary service endorsement, advance approval from the USPS, a multistep validation process, and an annual letter to the USPS confirming current eligibility.

THE APPROACH

A BLEND OF PRE- AND POST-MAILING UPDATES

In a competitive and cost-conscious marketplace, the value of change-of-address processing is well-documented. According to the USPS and mailing associations sources, some mailers have realized as much as a 20-to-1 ROI—\$20 gained for every dollar invested.

(Because of the many variables involved, ROI varies from one business to the next. The USPS has developed an easy-to-use worksheet for calculating potential ROI—see the “Resources” section at the end of this paper.)

For most companies, especially those relying on mail as a primary marketing tool, the question is not *whether* to implement a change-of-address program, but *how* to proceed. Specific questions may include:

- Which tools and technologies deliver the best results and ROI?
- How often should a mailing list be updated?
- Can change-of-address processing be done in house, or should it be outsourced?
- Which criteria should a mailer use in choosing change-of-address products, services, and vendors?

PRE-MAILING UPDATE—HIGHEST ROI

Ideally, addresses should be run through an address updating process *before* a mailing occurs, using NCOA^{Link} (with or without ANK^{Link}), *FASTforward*, and/or an alternative method (i.e., legal restraint or 99% accurate). The reason is simple: Mail pieces enter the mail stream already updated, helping to ensure timely and predictable delivery.

With post-mailing methods, such as ACSTM and ancillary service endorsements, the business receives change-of-address information *after* the Postal ServiceTM determines the piece is undeliverable to the address on the mail piece. Alternatively or additionally, depending on the service, the mail piece may be forwarded to the intended recipient’s current address. In any case, the resulting delay could mean a missed opportunity, especially if the mailing promotes a time-sensitive offer.

Post-mailing address updates may also prove to be costly, sometimes beyond budgeted amounts. For example, electronic ACS notification can cost 6 cents per updated address for First-Class Mail and 25 cents per piece for other classes of mail. It’s also important to remember that the business has already incurred costs for the mail pieces (creative, printing, postage, etc.), regardless of whether they were delivered or not.

Forwarded mail presents another potential drawback. The address block contains extra characters, creating a cluttered look which may be negatively perceived by the recipient. The mail piece may proclaim, “We have an offer just for you,” while the implied message may be, “We have no idea where you live.”

POST-MAILING UPDATE—SAFETY NET

Although it should be the first priority, a pre-mailing address update usually isn’t sufficient for keeping addresses up-to-date. The reasons are two-fold:

1. People and businesses are moving all the time. From the point a mailing list is updated until the mail pieces are produced and delivered to the Post Office, a significant percentage of the addresses may no longer be current. (If the process takes two weeks, as many as 2 million U.S. addresses may change.)
2. The USPS uses different name-to-address matching rules for different address update services. Consequently, an address change missed during the pre-mailing update, using NCOA^{Link} or *FASTforward*, may be applied on the back end with ACS.

When used in tandem with a pre-mailing update, a post-mailing update should result in minimal cost to the mailer. The reason—most of the moved addresses will be updated during the pre-mailing phase, where costs are more predictable and, in many instances, considerably less on a per-record basis.

RECOMMENDED NCOA^{LINK} ADDRESS UPDATE STRATEGY

In determining a specific address update strategy, the goal is to strike the right balance between costs and expected benefit. The USPS ROI calculator, discussed earlier, can serve as a good starting point for determining a) how often to update a mailing list, and b) which address update products and services make the most sense (e.g., using an outside Full Service Provider for 48-month processing or Limited Service provider for 18-month NCOA^{Link} processing vs. deploying NCOA^{Link} in-house through an End User license).

Mailers who use *FASTforward* usually update their addresses each time a mailing is processed through their automated system. Other mailers will want to perform a pre-mailing address update using NCOA^{Link} in one or more of its versions.

There are no hard and fast rules for selecting a specific NCOA^{Link} service or update frequency. In general, the greater the dependence on mail to generate sales and acquire customers, the more thoroughly and frequently the mailing list should be updated.

Following is a recommended address update strategy for mailers who use the NCOA^{Link} service. It’s based on the best practices outlined in the Mailers’ Technical Advisory Committee Workgroup 97 *Address Quality Methodologies* document, available at <http://ribbs.usps.gov/bestpractices.pdf>.

PRE-MAILING TACTICS

Complete an NCOA^{Link} PAF

Prior to any NCOA^{Link} processing and once annually thereafter, the NCOA^{Link} licensee (mailer or outside provider) must complete an NCOA^{Link} Processing Acknowledgement Form (PAF). This form, which stems from the Privacy Act of 1974, requires the USPS to maintain records of all entities receiving change-of-address information. (See the “Resources” section of this paper for links to a PAF guide and the form.)

48-month NCOA^{Link} processing

Available exclusively from a Full Service NCOA^{Link} licensee, a 48-month update is performed once or twice annually. The 48-month database contains the Postal Service’s most comprehensive change-of-address information.

18-month NCOA^{Link} processing

To capture changes occurring between 48-month updates, mailers should perform (or outsource) 18-month NCOA^{Link} processing as close as possible to the mail drop. Adding the ANK^{Link} service to the process will flag moves that may have occurred from months 19 through 48, allowing the mailer to send these addresses to a Full Service provider for 48-month processing.

POST-MAILING TACTICS

ACS Address Update

A post-mailing address update with ACS notifies the mailer of address changes that occurred between NCOA^{Link} runs. It may also provide updates for addresses that didn't meet NCOA^{Link} matching rules. Available for all classes of mail, ACS must be used with either an ancillary service endorsement and participant code or an Intelligent Mail[®] barcode containing a business entity identifier (BEI).

Ancillary Service Endorsements

The combination of NCOA^{Link} (18 and 48 month) and ACS processing will capture and apply the vast majority of address updates to a mailing list. For the remaining "straggler" changes of address, an ancillary service endorsement enables forwarding of the mail pieces and/or address change notification to the mailer. The mailer may incur charges, but only for updated addresses (which should be a minimal number at this stage).

Bring Address Changes Back In-House

If an outside provider is processing the mailing list, the mailer should make sure that address updates are incorporated into the source database. A surprisingly large number of mailers overlook this important step.

PROCESSING IN-HOUSE, EXTERNALLY, OR BOTH

How much change-of-address processing should be handled in-house, and how much should be outsourced? The answer hinges on a number of variables, including size of the mailing list, frequency of mailings, resources and expertise available to manage the processes, and the level of investment which will yield an acceptable ROI.

Most mailers find it impractical and cost prohibitive to acquire an NCOA^{Link} license. In fact, only a relative handful of companies are licensed for 48-month NCOA^{Link} processing, given the high cost (\$175,000 annually) of a Full Service license, the rigorous application process, and the very stringent USPS[®] requirements for data formatting and transfers. Even the cost (\$7,500 per year) and requirements for obtaining an End User license call for careful consideration.

For the majority of mailers, a blended approach to address updating—combining some in-house processing with outside services—makes the most sense.

The following checklists are intended to assist mailers with selecting an NCOA^{Link} service provider and the software that contains an interface to vendor and/or USPS databases.

Recommended Criteria for NCOA^{Link} Service Providers

- Provides both 48-month and 18-month NCOA^{Link} processing
- Uses reputable, industry-leading software to interface with the USPS database
- Has flexible input file and media requirements, eliminating the need for customers to perform costly data conversions
- Offers a complete continuum of database, mailing list, and data conversion services, such as telephone append, ZIP + 4[®] processing, merge/purge, presort, bar-coded mailing labels, and inkjet files

- Ability to match processes and security features to client needs, versus forcing clients to adapt to the provider and processes
- Delivers high-quality reports that increase the usefulness and value of change-of-address information
- Possesses in-depth knowledge of current industry trends

Recommended Criteria for Postal Automation Software:

- Has embedded technology enabling connectivity with the USPS and NCOA^{Link} vendors for sending data and receiving updated addresses
- Accommodates all three levels of NCOA^{Link} move updating processing
- Contains integrated caching technology or another cost-effective means to mitigate the performance impact of NCOA^{Link} processing (due to large database sizes and encrypted nature of the secured data, some mailers have seen performance degradation of 200% or more without some form of data caching)
- Uses a seamless, preferably single-pass, approach to correcting, completing, and updating addresses
- Provided by a vendor with an established track record of staying in sync with all USPS address quality initiatives and, ideally, possessing a history of close collaboration with the Postal Service and keeping mailers informed of upcoming regulatory changes

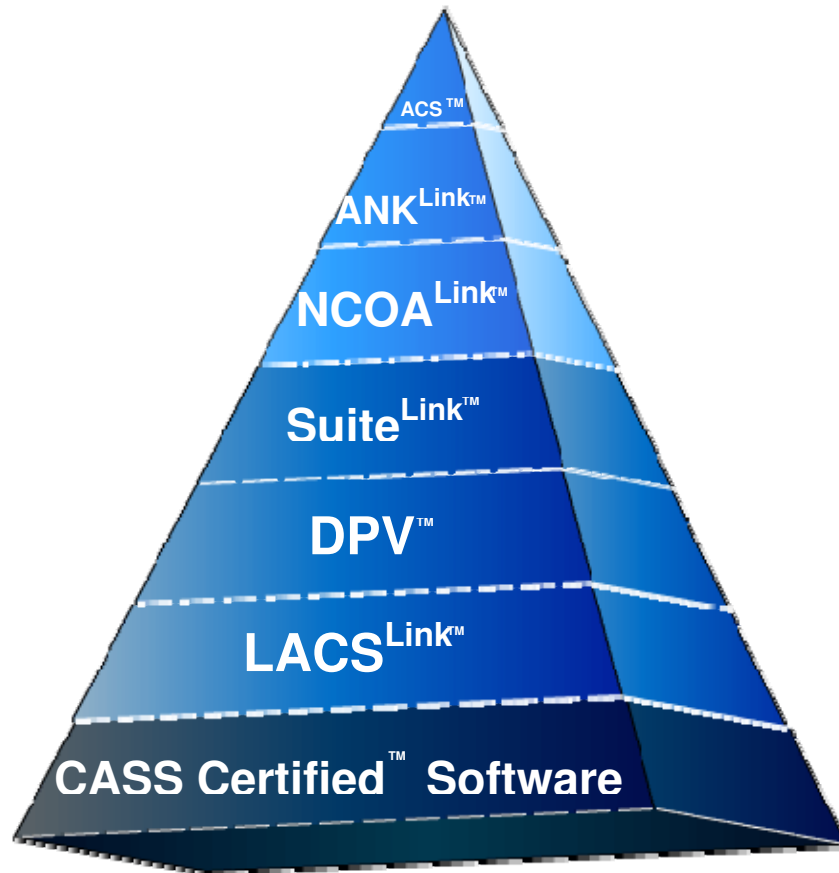


Figure 1. USPS address quality solutions for standardizing, validating, and updating mailing lists.

SUMMARY

The argument for mailing list address updating is compelling from a number of vantage points. From strictly a cost perspective, mailers who religiously apply Move Update methods can significantly reduce their UAA mail—and thus the dollars wasted on production and postage for pieces that never get delivered.

Postage automation discounts are also at stake. Mailers who don't meet USPS Move Update requirements risk the loss of their presort and automation discounts. This issue will only intensify as:

- The Postal Service™ steps up enforcement of the rules
- Move Update requirements are expanded from First-Class Mail® to Standard Mail®
- Pre-mailing address update window shrinks from 185 days to 95 days

From a marketing perspective, the case for address updating is even stronger. By improving the timeliness and predictability of each ad mailing, businesses should experience a boost in response and sales. What was once a 1% or 2% response potentially now becomes a 3% or 4% response—a substantial difference when applied to tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of mail recipients.

In contemplating potential ROI, marketing strategists should also consider the lifetime value of each consumer who becomes a customer. Even a fractional percentage increase in the productivity of a mailing list represents a huge windfall in sales over the long term.

Another potential beneficiary of address update technology is the mail services provider. Lettershops and other vendors can give themselves a competitive edge by offering their customers the opportunity to reduce UAA mail and increase the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns. By partnering with a firm specializing in NCOA^{Link} processing, these mail services vendors can offer their customers powerful solutions without having to make a major investment in address update technologies.

Whether adopted by a mailer or a service provider, the commitment to an address update strategy should be robust and long term. It should place a primary emphasis on updating addresses before the mailing occurs, yet it must also be able to capture changes of address on the back end.

In addition to implementing a solid strategy, mailers and service providers need to carefully choose their move update products, services, and vendors. This requires thorough research, including verifiable comparisons of features and benefits, as well as discussions with peers to gauge real-world performance and dependability.

RESOURCES

- USPS National Customer Support Center: 800-238-3150
- USPS web sites: www.usps.com and <http://ribbs.usps.gov>

USPS Publications

(Click on link to access document)

- [Updating Address Lists Is a Smart Move](#) (USPS Publication 363)
- [Combined NCOA^{Link} Processing Acknowledgement Form](#)
- [NCOA^{Link} Processing Acknowledgement Form \(PAF\) Guide](#)
- [Certification of Move Update Compliance](#)
- [Move Update ROI calculator](#)
- [Best Practices in Address Quality](#) (from Mailers' Technical Advisory Committee)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Pam Corbeille-Lepel is Sales and Marketing Director at Lorton Data, a privately held company located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. With 18 years of experience in the direct marketing industry, she consults with businesses ranging from nonprofit organizations to Fortune 500 companies. Corbeille-Lepel began in the direct marketing industry representing mailing software and lettershop and bindery systems. For the past 15 years, through Lorton Data, she has provided a wide range of list management and database marketing services, designed to help clients reach their targeted audience and improve their return on investment. Corbeille-Lepel can be reached at Pamcl@lortondata.com.

Christopher Lien is Director of Commercial Mail Marketing for Business Objects, responsible for setting the strategic direction of the company's Postalsoft brand of products. Mr. Lien has been active in the mailing industry for more than a decade. During this time, he has developed several software products utilizing Mail.dat for electronic auditing and dynamic drop-shipment planning. He has been heavily involved in industry groups, such as the Association for Postal Commerce, the Mailing & Fulfillment Service Association, Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers, and the IDEAlliance, for which he currently serves as representative to the Postmaster General's Mailers Technical Advisory Committee.

ABOUT LORTON DATA

Founded in 1989, Lorton Data is a leading provider of direct marketing database services. Lorton Data offers solutions to build and maintain one-to-one customer relationships. These solutions include data quality services, database-marketing solutions, and access to the industry's most accurate and comprehensive marketing information databases. Lorton Data serves businesses across all industries, ranging from nonprofit organizations to Fortune 500 companies. Customers use Lorton Data products and services to increase the effectiveness and reduce the cost of their direct marketing, fundraising, and other communication efforts.

For more information, visit the Lorton Data website at www.lortondata.com or call (651) 203-8200.

ABOUT BUSINESS OBJECTS

Business Objects has been a pioneer in business intelligence (BI) since the dawn of the category. Today, as the world's leading BI software company, Business Objects transforms the way the world works through intelligent information. The company helps illuminate understanding and decision-making at more than 44,000 organizations around the globe. Through a combination of innovative technology, global consulting and education services, and the industry's strongest and most diverse partner network, Business Objects enables companies of all sizes to make transformative business decisions based on intelligent, accurate, and timely information.

Business Objects' Postalsoft® mailing solutions improve address quality, increase mailing efficiency, and maximize postage discounts. The software standardizes, corrects, and verifies addresses; assigns ZIP® codes, ZIP + 4® codes, and carrier route numbers; prints delivery-point barcodes; presorts and palletizes mail; processes manifest mail; matches/consolidates address records; drives high-speed laser printers; and more.

Business Objects has dual headquarters in San Jose, Calif., and Paris, France. The company's stock is traded on both the Nasdaq (BOBJ) and Euronext Paris (ISIN: FR0004026250 - BOB) stock exchanges. More information about Business Objects can be found at www.businessobjects.com. To request a consultation with a Postalsoft® sales expert, email SalesTeamMailbox@businessobjects.com.

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