AUTOMATION BEATS
YELLOW-STICKER BLUES

Lake Michigan Mailers opens up new revenue streams and improves customer value with automated returned mail services.

Returned mail presents a logistical and operational challenge for companies with large volumes of mail. Companies often have to perform a significant amount of manual work to determine the reason that a mail piece was returned, and then make additional efforts to update address information.

Having recognized this challenge, Lake Michigan Mailers Inc.® now offers a service that automates returned mail processing for its customers using an OPEX Falcon® high-capacity scanner and specialized software. Not only has this saved their labor and costs for their customers, but it has also created a new revenue stream for Lake Michigan Mailers.

Lake Michigan Mailers is a family-owned company that offers document creation, mail assembly, mail processing, presorting, data management, digital marketing, and distribution solutions to private companies, schools and universities, healthcare providers, government agencies, and other organizations worldwide.

The company also offers document scanning services to its clients. Several years ago, Lake Michigan Mailers invested in an OPEX Falcon scanner to accommodate a growing demand from customers to turn their printed pieces back into digital data. The company frequently receives dusty, moldy boxes of documents that have been kept in storage, in some cases for decades. The documents are often fragile, oddly sized, bent, folded, and dirty.

"We had more and more clients giving us very difficult material to handle," says David Rhoa, President of Lake Michigan Mailers. "We received a lot of material that was in poor condition or required a great deal of prep work before

being scanned. When we saw the Falcon scanner, we knew it could vastly improve our scanning process." And as Rhoa was soon to discover, the OPEX scanner also presented a new opportunity to automate returned mail processing for Lake Michigan Mailers' customers.

A Big Return On Returned Mail

Returned mail is complex and expensive to manage. It can cost several dollars per piece to process and resend First-Class Mail items. For Lake Michigan Mailers' customers, it was a significant challenge to deal with this returned mail, and it often stacked up for months in their facilities as they attempted to sort out correct addresses for each piece and mail those items back out.

Rhoa says his company recognized an opportunity but had no cost-effective means to address it. "This problem has been plaguing our customers for 40 years," Rhoa says. "That yellow-sticker mail would stack up in their offices just waiting to be processed."

While Lake Michigan Mailers offers its customers list cleaning solutions to correct addresses prior to mailing, some customers are prevented from using such services. "Some of our customers, financial institutions or companies engaged in recall notifications, for example, are often required to mail to the address they have on file — because their charters or governmental regulations prevent them from updating addresses without first making direct contact with the recipient," Rhoa says. "We saw a potential revenue stream there, and an automated solution would help harvest that data off the mail piece and then give it back to the customer in a meaningful way."

The company deployed the Returned Mail Solution developed by OPEX and software partner, CPT Intelligent Technologies. The returned mail is scanned on the Falcon scanner, and CPT's software determines to whom the mail was sent and why the post office returned it. The solution also initiates database lookups to update those addresses and scan the contents of the envelope to classify the document type so the images can be routed for proper processing.

To test the solution, Lake Michigan Mailers used documents from a customer that needed immediate help with a large volume of returned mail. That test proved successful, and Lake Michigan Mailers has been offering returned mail processing as a service to its entire customer base.

"We do a lot of 'recall notice' processing," Rhoa says. "Depending on what government agency is involved, they want to know if you sent the recall notice to the customer, and why that notice was returned. With the OPEX/CPT solution, we can capture that yellow-sticker information and feed it back to our client to show them who has not been notified and what they can do about it. Before this, our clients manually entered that data, and it took weeks or even months to complete."

Clients use Lake Michigan Mailers' Returned Mail Solution in various ways. In some cases, the company pulls the data from the return sticker and feeds it back to the customer, so they can update their own internal databases. In other situations, Lake Michigan Mailers works with clients' existing databases to send subsequent communications to customers.

"In very complex scenarios, we pull the contents from the envelope and provide notices that an attempt was made to contact the customer, the address was no longer valid, and here is the address where the item was non-delivered," Rhoa says.

According to Rhoa, some of Lake Michigan Mailers' customers are saving 10 to 30 hours of labor per week, depending on their mail volume.

> **... Some of Lake Michigan Mailers' customers are saving 10 to 30 hours of labor per week, depending on their mail volume.**
>
> *David Rhoa, President*
> *Lake Michigan Mailers*

The Returned Mail Solution has created opportunities for Lake Michigan Mailers that were not previously possible without the level of automation their new system provides. "It gives me chills to consider the amount of work that would be necessary to do this manually," Rhoa says. "The OPEX/CPT solution has allowed us to bring to market a viable, cost-effective service that meets our customers' demands. We simply couldn't ask for more than that."

Interest in Returned Mail Solution has been high, and offering it has helped gain business from new clients as well as expand business with existing customers, Rhoa says.

"We're working with customers to enlighten them about what is possible," Rhoa says. "Our goal is to provide our customers meaningful data to manage their operations. If we can harvest a field from their document and place it into a database that they can search and validate, we are elevating them to a position light years ahead of where they are today! This Return Mail Solution from OPEX Corporation and CPT Intelligent Technologies is THE application that can do just that."