

SELLING USPS DOOR TO DOOR

Customer
Connect
having record
year as bills
in Congress
threaten
its success

Letter carriers make personal contact with millions of Postal Service customers daily, a resource any company would love to have. The NALC and the Postal Service created a program—Customer Connect—several years ago to take full advantage of this role to build business. Customer Connect has proven to be a successful program because of the work of letter carriers.

This year, the sales leads developed by carriers on their routes through the Customer Connect program have generated more revenue than any previous year. With \$238 million in new sales, the program already has topped its goal for the fiscal year.

“Customer Connect continues to be an overwhelming success, and it’s growing,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “Letter carriers understand the opportunities that are out there and are proud to sell the Postal Service to their customers.”

“Customer Connect really opens the door to a relationship with customers, particularly small businesses,” USPS Employee Engagement Program Manager Cecilia Winters added.

That relationship is threatened, though, by proposals to eliminate door-to-door delivery contained in two postal bills in Congress.

In the House, H.R. 2748, a bill introduced by House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-CA), calls for replacing door-to-door delivery with

neighborhood cluster boxes. A similar plan is contained in S. 1486, a Senate bill from Sens. Tom Carper (D-DE) and Tom Coburn (R-OK). (See story on page 4).

“The end of door-to-door delivery not only would severely threaten the high level of service we provide to customers, as well as our jobs, it also would take away an important competitive advantage from the Postal Service—personal service, including developing business through Customer Connect,” Rolando said. “Every letter carrier needs to contact Congress immediately to encourage his or her representatives to oppose these bills. Tell your representatives about the role you play in bringing hundreds of millions of dollars in new business to the Postal Service when you deliver the mail door to door.”

A push for quantity and quality

Two factors are responsible for this year’s Customer Connect success: the number of leads, and their quality. So far, the leads have numbered nearly 45,000 this fiscal year, and letter carriers have boosted the quality of the leads by talking to customers to get a handle on what customers need.

“The carriers are having conversations with their customers and turning in quality leads,” Winters said. To build on this success, USPS will ask carriers to “cement the lead” more often by making contact and engaging

the customer rather than just turning in potential leads to the USPS sales staff. To use sales terminology, the carriers are initiating the conversation so the leads aren't "cold" when sales staff members follow up.

Another product to sell—EDDM

Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) is helping drive the growth in Customer Connect revenue. With EDDM, Customer Connect is expanding beyond convincing customers to use USPS for parcel shipments to promoting the Postal Service as a unique advertiser for local businesses.

It's easy for carriers to spot potential EDDM customers, Winters said, by keeping an eye out for flyers stuck inside doors, under car wiper blades, or even the illegal ones stuffed in mailboxes. EDDM is an easy sell to many local businesses that want to reach local customers with the reliability and prominence of the mail, but without the expense of purchasing address lists and labeling each piece.

Pam Stepney, St. Louis Branch 343 member and Customer Connect coordinator for the Gateway District, tells carriers to find EDDM leads right in the mailbox. Carriers in her district remove flyers they find stuffed in mailboxes and take them to their supervisor, who sends the advertiser a firm reminder that anything going in a mailbox requires paying postage, and also delivers a pitch to use EDDM instead.

"If they want to advertise" using a mailbox, Stepney said, "let them pay postage and we'll put them in the mailboxes."

These efforts have generated some new customers, including many local

The screenshot shows the Etsy website interface. At the top, there are navigation links: Sell, Registry, Community, Blogs, Mobile, Gift Cards, and Help. Below this is the Etsy logo, Register, Sign In, and a search bar with the text "Search for items and shops". A shopping cart icon is also visible. The main content area is titled "About Etsy" and includes a sidebar with "About Etsy", "Team", and "Press". The main section is "Connect & Exchange" with the subtitle "Build relationships in a marketplace that reconnects producers and consumers." It features three columns: "Discover" (amazing, beautiful things through our vibrant community), "Converse" (with makers, curators, and other shoppers about what you love), and "Buy and Sell" (in a marketplace full of the best handmade & vintage goods... and supplies for making). Below this is a section titled "Etsy is the marketplace we make together." with the mission statement: "Our mission is to reimagine commerce in ways that build a more fulfilling and lasting world." and a list of values: "We are a mindful, transparent, and humane business.", "We plan and build for the long term.", "We value craftsmanship in all we do.", and "We believe fun should be part of..."

business owners who were unaware of EDDM. Another benefit is that some EDDM customers bring their mail pieces to their post office, and they may buy more products while there.

Stepney encourages carriers to watch for other opportunities on their routes. "If they see UPS, FedEx, DHL (packages)—it's a good time to go to their door," she said. Carriers should watch to see where competitors' trucks are going on a regular basis, too.

"I also push them to look for leads outside their home office," Stepney said. Even carriers with no businesses on their routes can look for leads among the employers of friends or family, and the growth of home-based businesses selling products through websites like eBay means residential areas are ripe for new sales.

Some carriers across the country have found good leads from packages shipped to their own homes through competitors, or by approaching printing companies to ask them to offer EDDM services to their customers.



From l, Region 15 NBA Larry Cirelli with carriers Daniel Randall, Leo Facto and Tony Martucci

Stepney urges carriers not to give up on leads that don't pan out. A lead that says "no response" or "not interested" isn't necessarily dead—sometimes all that's needed is for the carrier to follow up to make sure the contact information is correct, to ask for the best time to call, or to resume the conversation about products.

She also has a suggestion for the Postal Service to improve the program's success: "If we had kits in our postal vehicles"—samples of EDDM pieces, shipping boxes, stamps—"we could show them everything we offer in the office."

As a carrier with 35 years under his belt, **Tony Martucci** of Brooklyn Branch 41 is well versed in selling the Postal Service to his customers. “All you have to do is ask one question: Do you want to save money?” he said.

Martucci, who is the Triboro District Customer Connect coordinator, works to promote the Customer Connect program to his fellow carriers with regular stand-up talks.

“Some carriers feel a lot of angst” about Customer Connect, he said. Some think the Postal Service is dumping its sales function on them—but Martucci urges those carriers to remember that the NALC is a partner in Customer Connect because it benefits us.

“Without the company, we have no jobs,” he tells them. “This is ‘carriers to the rescue.’”

“The secret to success is our relationship to the customer,” Martucci said. With more than 25 years on his route, “everyone on my route, they know my wife, they know my kids. They trust me.”

Surfing the e-commerce wave

Even carriers who have walked their routes for years can find new leads. Start-up e-commerce businesses are emerging everywhere, often in homes—while others are growing fast and relocating to larger facilities, sometimes in neighborhoods that haven’t seen business growth for a while.

Two carriers from Martucci’s branch, **Leo Facto** and **Danny Randall**, both noticed a new tenant in a commercial building in an area of Brooklyn popular with tech companies. Facto is the foot carrier for the building and Randall carries parcels by truck. They each submitted a lead.

The company was Etsy, which lets creators of handcrafted items sell their wares through its website, etsy.com. Etsy made USPS its preferred shipper, and it helps its users ship by mail to their buyers. Etsy users now ship more than 4 million items a month—double the volume from 2011, when Facto and Randall submitted the lead—generating several million dollars of annual revenue for USPS.

Carriers should remember that small leads often grow into big accounts for the Postal Service, Denver Branch 47 member **Jeffrey Frey** said.

“Amazon.com started in a garage,” he said. Many USPS business customers “started small, and now they’re huge.” Home-based business entrepreneurs are popping up with creative ideas that depend on shipping and that have growth potential. Frey cited one successful Customer Connect lead in his district—a woman who shipped homemade cookies to auto dealerships for use as thank-you packages for their customers.

Frey, who is the Customer Connect coordinator for the Downtown Denver station, complains that USPS sales staff members don’t always follow up aggressively on small leads, which could discourage carriers from turning them in. But carriers should keep trying because, as the record Customer Connect revenue results show, it all adds up.

New and growing businesses are especially good leads because the Postal Service can offer them service from the ground floor, Frey said. Letter carriers can point to the Postal Service’s Click-N-Ship online service, or to private services like Stamps.com and Endecia.com that provide postal products, to show how convenient shipping by U.S. Mail has become.

The carrier’s universal service is a big advantage over competitors too, Frey said. When a carrier sees a package waiting for UPS or FedEx pickup when dropping off the mail, he or she can tell the customer, “I could take those now.”

Frey urged carriers to keep up with the details of how the Postal Service can help potential customers.

“Knowing our products and services is critical for us as carriers to get more business and more revenue coming in,” he said. “Carriers need to keep themselves informed.” He recommended that carriers learn what it’s like from the customer’s point of view by registering for a Click-N-Ship account and sending a package, and by understanding EDDM and keeping an eye out for its best potential customers.

“If you see a restaurant that just started up,” he said, “they could use Every Door Direct Mail.”

Like Stepney, Frey urges carriers to look everywhere for leads. “A lead doesn’t just come from your route,” he said. One lead that grew into a large account, he said, came from a carrier who played basketball with a high school friend who had become a logistics manager for a large company.

“In your everyday walk of life, leads are out there,” Frey said.

“Customer Connect is a great example of the many ways letter carriers work to promote and strengthen the Postal Service,” Rolando said. “We have to tell members of Congress how we do that, and we must oppose short-sighted ideas, like dropping door-to-door service and eliminating Saturday delivery, that would only hurt the Post Office and our economy as a whole, especially just as e-commerce is booming.” **PR**