



Sorting Through Delivery Options as Security Concerns Persist

By Jim Berluti

MAIL. OVERNIGHT. SAME-DAY. GROUND. AIR. FAX. E-MAIL. IN THE INFORMATION AGE, CORPORATE AMERICA HAS HAD MANY OPTIONS FOR SENDING DOCUMENTS AND PARCELS. NOW, IN THIS NEW AGE OF TERRORISM AND BIOTERRORISM, COMPANIES FACE DIFFERENT CONCERNS AS FEARS ABOUT SECURITY PERSIST.

For the delivery industry, the immediate impact of the September 11 attacks was drastic: Airports were shut down, parking was restricted in many public areas, vehicle checks were common and building security was

heightened. Today, many industry changes have been institutionalized: Airports are still on high alert; delays are still common; couriers are mandated to show their identification; increased building security measures remain in place, especially in high-rise buildings; and new Federal Aviation Administration regulations require that carriers exercise greater scrutiny before they do business with shippers.

Shortly after September 11, the mail became a terrorist target, and the anthrax scare spread wildly. Even before the attacks, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) faced a loss of \$1.6 billion for the year. The attacks cost the USPS at least \$50 million. Then came further problems with the anthrax crisis, resulting in millions of dollars in additional costs to reroute, inspect, and sanitize the mail.

Expensive high-tech devices may help to “zap” potentially dangerous germs, but they will come at a price, as will plans underway to buy private aircrafts (mail and packages are now transported on commercial flights). These costs are being passed along to consumers in the form of higher rates. At the same time, rigorous postal procedures continue, with many company mailrooms maintaining enhanced scrutiny measures and discarding unsolicited mail.





Assessing the New Environment

What has been the upshot of these changes for shippers in the United States? In general, companies — as well as carriers — have been asked to accept challenges in the interest of national security. Of all the distribution channels, the U.S. mail may have been the hardest hit in this new environment, as delays and tracing difficulties continue today. An expected result has been an increase in the volume of corporate e-mails and faxes. At the same time, however, these mediums have obvious limitations for shippers that need to send parcels, precious cargo and legal documents.

While it's still unclear how express parcel services will be affected in the long run, evidence suggests that ground transport systems are in a good position to address shippers' newfound concerns. Certainly, the choice of a carrier depends on the circumstances, but, with ongoing security issues, it's wise to refer to the following *shipper's checklist*:

Air vs. Ground — With fewer exchange points, ground transportation is more efficient than air transport even in the best of times. In this new environment, however, additional concerns have arisen: It is now more difficult for couriers to navigate around airports, Next Flight Out delays continue, and there is lingering anxiety about mixing passengers and packages. Accordingly, it's not surprising that

national carriers, which typically rely on commercial airlines to ship parcels to a central hub, have tried to step up their ground transport systems.

National vs. Regional — In addition to being a generally safer mode of transportation, regional carriers that specialize in ground transportation are generally more reliable than the nationals — especially during

emergencies when airports are forced to close. (In the days immediately following September 11, for example, **Eastern Connection** (Woburn, MA) was called on to ship vitally needed blood and antibiotics to Ground Zero.) Furthermore, at a time when it's paramount to know the origin of shipments, regional services have the advantage of being more familiar with

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their customers than the national giants — and this promotes peace of mind. For these reasons, many companies are shifting their zone-based business to regional services that cover those areas.

How Does Your Business Measure up?

In these times when security is a major issue, customers are becoming more careful with their delivery options. They may check customer references when evaluating a prospective carrier. Or, they may request that you conduct a preliminary analysis of their delivery needs.

Additional selection criteria include the following:

- Same-day service. Ideally, carriers should offer on-demand, same-day messenger service as well as priority overnight service.
- Provisions for early-morning deliveries and late-night pickups. Many regional carriers provide 24/7 flexibility, and some guarantee

standard next-day deliveries by 9 a.m. (as opposed to the fixed 10:30 a.m. delivery time of the nationals).

- Provisions for delivering medical supplies and blood work (if applicable). This includes driver training, on-site couriers at medical institutions, and bar code technology that enhances security and patient confidentiality.
- Compliance with new guidelines established by the Health Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).
- Real-time tracking and tracing technology, such as hand-held scanners and bar code scanning.
- Online ordering and tracking. Check company website for details.
- Professional and courteous drivers. This includes visible company identification.

In the final analysis, none of us can predict the future course of terrorism in this country. And while we all hope for better times, we need to prepare for contingencies in the way we conduct

business, because, in the mail and distribution industry, it may never again be “business as usual.”

Regarding the Postal Service, some fears about mail delivery may prove to be irrational, but they are still fears nevertheless. Regarding air and ground services, it is clear that regional carriers will never replace the nationals. Rather, they will continue to offer more flexible and personalized alternatives that complement the work of the giants.

Whatever the circumstances, you can expect your clients to evaluate the options before hiring your company to deliver the goods **CM**



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