

Notes of meeting at LB Hillingdon to discuss Walksort on 19 September 1995

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Present: Keith Clayton LB Hillingdon
 Howard Nunn LB Hillingdon
 Andrew Passmore LB Hillingdon
 Susan Patrick LB Hillingdon
 Norman Bennett CFM London-North
 Martin Jackson CFM London-North
 Jeff Elliott Royal Mail
 Jayne Mortiner Royal Mail
 Sue Statter Royal Mail

Sue Statter is a Business Consultant in charge of the Walksort launch. She explained that the Royal Mail were not able to offer bulk discounts to users, but were able to give discounts if the customer performed some of the tasks themselves.

One of these is to pre-sort and bundle up packages ready for use by the postman. This is being launched on 1 October 1995 as Walksort. To achieve this a new 8-digit code is being introduced, with the first 5 digits being the local delivery office code, and the last 3 being the walk code. These will be related to existing postcodes, and Royal Mail will be making available to users a database which will provide walkcodes and postcode cross references. This will be reissued every Jan/Feb and Jun/Jul to reflect changes in the walks and any new postcodes (these dates being just before annual billing and electoral roll times).

In order to qualify for a discount of 40%, the user is required to have at least 2000 packages, and a penetration of 1 in 4 properties being delivered to per walk. A 97% accuracy is required for the postcodes used.

The packages must be bagged according to the delivery office and bundled according to walk. Each bundle will have a label attached to it denoting that it contains a walksorted set of packages (why not denote this on the sack?)

This is clearly attractive, as the current discount is 13%, and does not entail too much extra manual work. However, it does need the 8-digit code to be visible in the address window, and the packages to be sorted into order. This can be achieved in two ways for Hillingdon's Council Tax output: either the field is on the Oracle database or it is added during the pre-print handling at CFM. The former is preferable in terms of effort involved at CFM, but the latter is feasible, and could then be extended for use by other systems if required.

However, there is an alternative Royal Mail package which will be launched early next year. This is Streetsort, and is based on the Local Authority Sort currently used (loosely) by Hackney, Haringey and Tower Hamlets. For this, packages must be sorted into number within street within postcode, and bundled for each street within postcode. However, the accuracy of postcode is being tightened up, and each bundle must be labelled with the postcode. This latter requirement was the reason that Hillingdon were unable to use this system before, as the Uxbridge Sorting Office were very strict on their requirements.

The other boroughs got away with the bundles simply being bagged up within postcoded sacks, but may find the procedures tightened up this time around.

The new discount being offered for Streetsort is 35%, whereas the LASort offered up to 29%. As far as processing is concerned, CFM already offer this service, and the onus is on the boroughs to ensure the postcodes are correct. However, proper labelling of the packages would severely affect the efficiency of the mail handling process.

My recommendation is that we do nothing at the moment, but be prepared to make changes if required. It is very possible that the Royal Mail may be prepared to negotiate on requirements, particularly with the Streetsort at a local level. There does not seem any compelling reason why the packages need to be labelled when the information is already on the packages: if it is known that a sack has been presorted in street order this should be sufficient. If they insist, the extra work in bundling by CFM would necessitate in the cost being increased which would eat into the user's extra discount.

If the Walksort becomes the preferred system, then it depends on where it is stored, and we are not in a position to know this at the moment. As has been said earlier, it is easier if it is available on the package systems it makes the print formatting simpler, but an add-on system is feasible at a cost. This cost may be able to be spread or even absorbed as an overhead. If it was required more generally, and would be the simplest solution for the old mainframe applications which are linked to the street indexes. These would require major changes to add the extra field, which would not be cost effective given the lifespan of the applications.

I am not really clear why the Royal Mail has introduced this parallel system for locating addresses. If the postcode is not useful enough, why not replace it with the walkcode?

Martin Jackson

20/9/95