

TRANSCRIPT – YOUR POSTAL PODCAST – JANUARY 2015

Diedre Tillery: Welcome to Your Postal Podcast. I'm Diedre Tillery. In this edition, we'll explore a U.S. Postal Service strategy that is convincing hi-tech customers to use USPS services. We'll also talk to a woman who is behind an innovative effort that uses traditional mail to connect military recruits in training camps to their friends and families.

The Consumer Electronics Show is one of the world's largest exhibitions, gathering massive worldwide media attention. In the middle of all the latest gadgets and gizmos, the USPS had an attractive display that attracted thousands of visitors. Our David Rupert was there to find out why.

David Rupert: Innovation. Hi-Tech. Cutting-edge progress. Those are all marks of the Consumer Electronics Show. The yearly gathering in Las Vegas is the world's largest showcase of technology, drawing nearly 5,000 exhibits, 3,500 media members and 150,000 attendees. So why is the Postal Service here?

Cliff Rucker: This is where we should be, right? As more and more electronics get smaller and lighter this fits into our wheelhouse for shipping. More and more businesses are getting a direct consumer model and we should be their shipper of choice.

David Rupert: That's USPS Vice President of Sales Cliff Rucker.

Rucker: I think that's one of the issues of why we should be there. We're one of the most advanced technology companies around. It gives us an opportunity to tell our story; it gives us an opportunity to let people to see us in a another light. We have a lot of set ups for people to see digitally enhanced mail and different things we do. It's another way for us to get out in front of the public and tell our story.

Rupert: Acting Manger of Sales Operations and Planning Michele Thompson provides good reasons for USPS presence at shows like this and others.

Michele Thompson: Everybody asks us that. We actually have buttons for our team to wear that say, "Ask us why we are here." Regardless of the show that's one of the most widely-asked questions. "What is the Postal Service doing here," whether it's at a technology show, etc. The fact of the matter is, we can help these businesses grow whether it's in their shipping or their Direct Mail reaching customers and targeting customers. The Postal Service is the perfect solution to help them grow.

Rupert: What kind of attendee at the show benefits from Postal products and services?

Thompson: We're looking for those customers who are shipping the smaller electronics in the shipping side. We're very competitive with our recently reduced Priority Mail prices up to 20 pounds now. We used to be the known as the lightweight shipper from one to five. Well, now those benefits extend all the way up to 20 pounds. Our

competitors are also leveraging a DIM weight surcharge as of early January. And the Postal Service does not have that same type of surcharge as our competitors do.

Rupert: The booth was a big hit, turning heads with its expansive design and use of space. In fact, Time Magazine named it one of the 20 best exhibits of the show. The design drew thousands of people in, and the Sales staff kept them with a message that spoke to their sense of value and efficiency.

Thompson: We showed a very large retailer who happened to be here a sample of Direct Mail with augmented reality. And they were so excited about what mail can do and the fact it's not your old-fashioned mail that you're looking for. Mail's now interactive. It touches the consumer and their end consumer in many more ways than it has in the past. Just educating that type of customer, so our Sales team can then get these leads and follow up on them.

Rupert: Although Cliff Rucker is in charge of sales, he knows what's really behind the Postal Service's success.

Rucker: First, off, I want to thank employees. Without their great service they provide, we can't sell packages or get customers to do business with us. Customers today have a lot of shipping choices and you know what our employees did a great job during the holiday season which is going to position us for the future moving forward.

Rupert: Gazing into the postal crystal ball, Rucker sees good things ahead.

Rucker: There's a bright future in the package world and in the mail world and my team is committed to keep growing it.

Tillery: "Mail Call." To a young military recruit, those two words are among their most anticipated moments, providing relief from days of intensive training. Unfortunately, the digital age has impacted personal communication for these recruits. But there's still hope. Here's Peter Hass with the story.

Peter Hass: E-mails and text messages are the standard personal communication methods for an entire generation. For new recruits, not having access to their phones or the Internet can be .. challenging. Helen Simmons, along with her husband Bob, heads an organization called Write2Them, that is helping bridge the digital and traditional communication divide.

Helen Simmons: We focus on boot camp and basic training, because recruits when they enter military service don't have access to their smartphones or computers. They have no access to e-mails, text messages, social media like Facebook. So the only communication they have with family and friends is through letters that are delivered by the Postal Service.

Hass: Here's how Write2Them works. The organization provides a unique e-mail address associated with the military member. Friends and family members then send digital notes and photos to that address. Each day, Simmons and her staff print out

hundreds of these digital messages that are then stuffed into envelopes, addressed and stamped.

Simmons: There's nothing better than mail call when you're name is called. And those letters provide positive support for these young men and women who are going through some of the most challenging moments in their life. They're challenged physically and mentally for an eight- to 13-week period. And those letters just brighten their day -- keeps them going.

Hass: Write2Them provides service to all nine military basic training and boot camp locations, as well as all four service academies. Since 2012, they have processed more than 62,000 e-mails and 15,000 photos and converted those into 27,000 letters. They started the service as a result of their own son's experiences.

Simmons: We started Write2Them as a way to make it easier for us to stay in touch with our son while he was at Air Force Basic Training at Lackland AFB, TX. So we knew the challenge would be how to get a letter to him every single day that he's at basic training. And the answer for us was well, it's easy to send an email and attach a photo. We can also invite family and friends to also send emails to him. That's why we started Write2Them, and later, we realized it would be useful and helpful to other families.

Hass: The organization has now branched out to reach a greater number of recruits.

Simmons: Our goal is that every recruit's name is called at mail call. And we have a volunteer letter writing program that, when we know of a recruit who is not getting any mail, we can send him a letter, or her a letter.

Hass: The impact has been remarkable.

Simmons: We have received several letters back from people -- young men and women just said how much it meant to them to know that someone cared. Just to get a letter of support saying, "You can do it." We just want to make sure they know that they are appreciated...and that they're not alone.

Tillery: Thanks for listening to *Your Postal Podcast*. We'd love to hear your thoughts on this month's program. Please email your feedback and story ideas to YourPostalPodcast@USPS.com.

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