

Customer Connect adds up for USPS

By touching every address in the United States at least six days a week, letter carriers naturally develop special relationships with their customers. Since USPS's Customer Connect program began in 2003, thousands of carriers have successfully leveraged their interactions with business customers to encourage them to use the Postal Service, rather than rely on private delivery and mailing services. Below are some recent stories about Customer Connect leads submitted by letter carriers that have helped USPS earn new revenue.

In Texas, a 'good rapport' with customers leads to a great partnership

While finishing up his usual delivery route, Austin, TX Branch 181 member **Bill Hoagland** received an assignment to swing by and do a pickup for Capital City Stamps, a local Austin business that manufactures, sells and ships office supplies.

While picking up the packages, Hoagland and the owners started talking—and before long, they had “developed a pretty good rapport,” the carrier recounted. The owners mentioned that they were primarily using FedEx and UPS to ship their products, and complained about the expense of their deliveries.

Hoagland saw his opportunity to connect the customers to USPS. “I told them, we can do even better, and help out with their costs,” he said. He filled out a lead for the sales team, and after meeting with a USPS sales representative, Capital City Stamps switched a large amount of its shipping to the Postal Service.

The 21-year letter carrier advised his fellow carriers to reach out to their customers. “You just have to ask,” he said. “It doesn't hurt anything to



Bill Hoagland

ask.” He continued, “You're on your own route, so you probably know the people anyway.”

Hoagland thought that was one of the key reasons his pitch worked; as a letter carrier, he can build connections with his customers, since “I'm the one who sees them every day.” The carrier's willingness to reach out to his community has paid off: Hoagland's lead generated more than \$362,960 in new estimated revenue for USPS.

Some light banter generates heavy savings in California

At one of her usual stops on her route, Santa Ana, CA Branch 737 member **Belinda Wilhelm** noticed that the number of packages she was picking up was dwindling. “I used to be there daily—and then I started going in and there was nothing,” she said. The store, Shark Wheel, sells skateboards and was even featured on the TV show “Shark Tank.”

One day, she went in and solved the mystery of the missing shipments—there was a big pile of packages with

FedEx labels, sitting in the corner. “I started joking with [the owner], telling him ‘I see how it is,’” Wilhelm laughed. They continued to banter: sarcastically, she asked him, “Is it going good with FedEx? They pick up for free?”

As it turned out, Shark Wheel's owner was not happy with the service. He told Wilhelm about the high costs and inconvenience of having to drop off the company's packages. With this, the carrier saw a chance

to convince him to come back to USPS. “I told him, ‘It's cheaper with the Postal Service; seems like a no-brainer [to switch back].’” She added, “They were just throwing away money.”

When she got back to the post office, Wilhelm filled out a lead and passed it to a sales representative. After speaking with the sales team, Shark Wheel switched its business back to USPS.

When it comes to Customer Connect leads, the 32-year letter carrier has a simple strategy: “Anywhere I see FedEx or UPS trucks, or I notice a [shipping] bill from one of those companies, I just ask the owners, ‘Oh, how much stuff do you ship out? We could save you some money.’”

She continued, “I think a lot of carriers don't do [Customer Connect] because they don't want extra work, but that's a terrible way to look at it. If you want the Postal Service to make it, you have to drum up as much business as you can.” Due to her drive to go the extra mile, Wilhelm has generated more than \$221,722 in annual revenue for USPS. **PR**



Belinda Wilhelm