

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 instead of relying 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 Missouri, a beautiful deal from the beautiful game

It was the growing number of returns that puzzled **Jackie Rains**, a member of St. Louis, MO Branch 343.

Soccer Master, a new business that sells soccer equipment and apparel on her route in Fenton, MO, didn't get much mail, but the mail it did get was, increasingly, postage-due return packages—some quite pricey.

Rains explained to the man at the front desk that if the company mailed its packages via USPS, the returns would be free of charge—but she had no luck persuading the disinterested worker.

After a front-desk changeover, however, things started looking up. She explained the situation to her new contact, Chandler Becker, and he promised he'd bring the matter up with a company honcho the next time he stopped in. Time went on and she would ask Becker every so often if he had brought it up with his boss. He always forgot.

"Finally, one day I had a postage-due and I said, 'I bet you still haven't remembered to talk with anyone about getting the Post Office to come in,'" Rains recalled.

Turns out the man standing next to Becker at that very moment was the man Becker kept promising to tell.

Rains was sure to get the man's contact information and also made sure that he was the person who would make the decision. "I have had cases where Person A thinks it's a good idea, but they don't say anything to Person B," she said. Person B is then contacted by a Customer Connect rep and chalks up the contact as a random sales call and the lead fizzles out. "I learned a long time ago to make sure you got the right person," Rains said.

She immediately passed on the lead when she returned to the office. "This one sounds really positive," she remembers saying.

That is putting it mildly. The change was so successful at the Fenton site that Soccer Master switched to the Postal Service for shipping at all its sites, snowballing revenues to USPS to \$678,032. "All because of a postage-due return package," Rains mused.

That snowball may grow: Soccer Master plans to branch out into another sport, field hockey. "That's even more business for them," Rains said, "which, in turn, is more business for us."

She credits "persistence and patience" for seeing it through. "I didn't give up on them."

The kicker? "I can only remember returning one package since they switched over," the carrier said, because USPS forwards packages while the competitor did not. "Maybe one."

Iowa nail polish lead brings in a whole lot of scratch for USPS

Chuck Posegate of Ames, IA Branch 1081 has participated in Customer Connect a long time—so long that he can't remember when he began. So when he saw a new company move onto his route, his CC antenna went up.



Goooooool! St. Louis, MO Branch 343 letter carrier Jackie Rains (center) with Chandler Becker (l) and Bridgett McAllister, managers at the Soccer Master warehouse in Fenton, MO.

The company was Tonic Polish, an internet-only cosmetics business whose stock in trade is dazzling nail polish suffused with glitter, giving cutting-edge talons an aurora borealis effect.

Posegate said he saw the company's two employees "coming to the dock one day with a bunch of white tubs of outgoing nail polish and I asked somebody who that was." Because he could see that they were already using USPS, his tack was to sell them on new and better service. It is not unusual for a CC lead to be about improving services rather than moving business over, he said. "A lot of the time people are already using the Postal Service," he said, so the aim is "trying to enhance what they're getting. Then they'll sign up for even more services."

Enhance it he did. "I pick up all their stuff now, instead of them taking it to the post office ... and they love, love, love me to death," Posegate said. By selling them on Package Pickup and a few other programs, he has increased Postal Service assets by \$76,000.

Posegate wants to keep letter carriers motivated about Customer Connect. He urges carriers to keep their eyes and ears open, e the initiative when opportunity knocks. "Whatever it takes," is his advice. **PR**