

UNION POSTALE

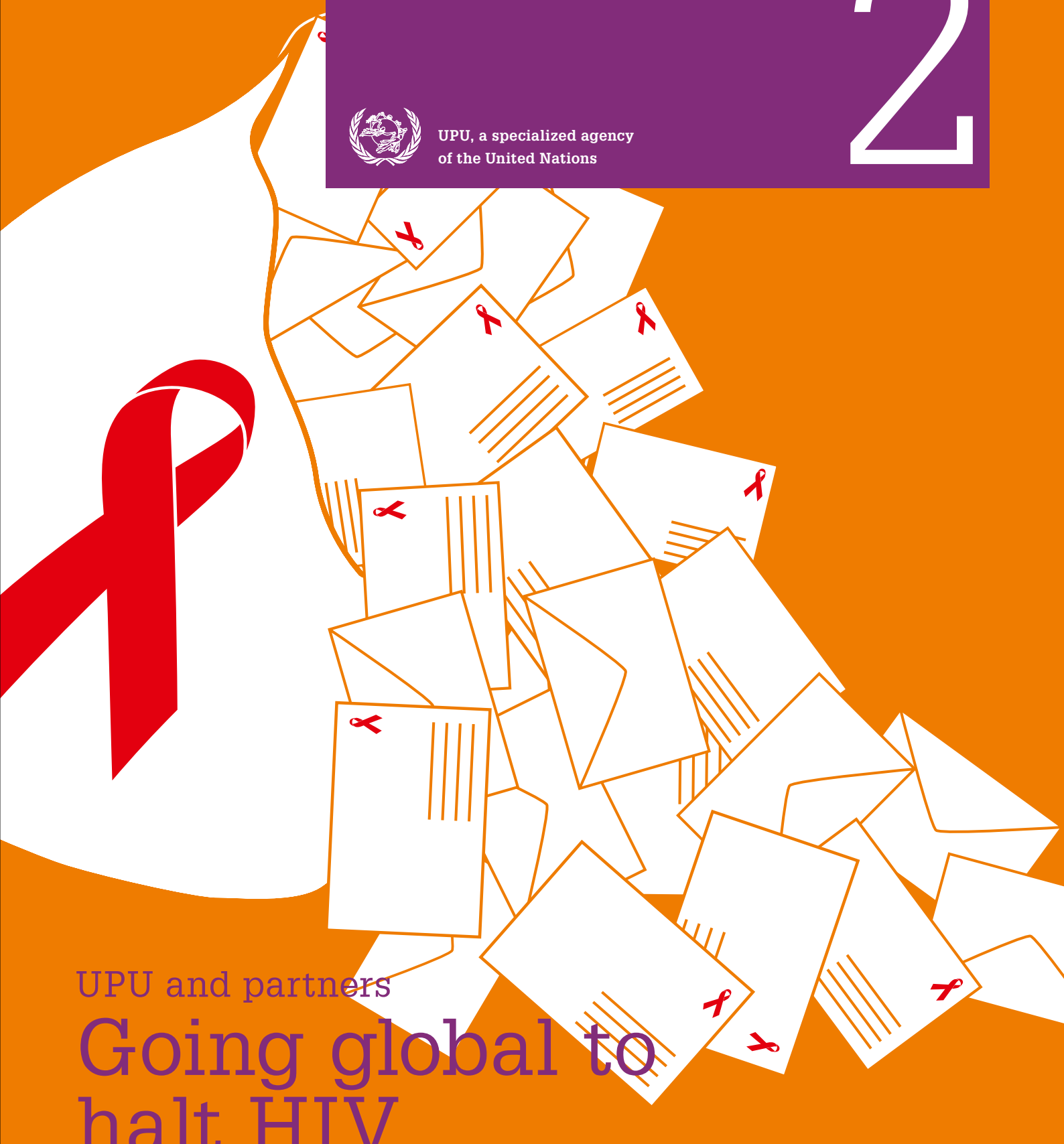
June 2009

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UPU and partners

Going global to halt HIV

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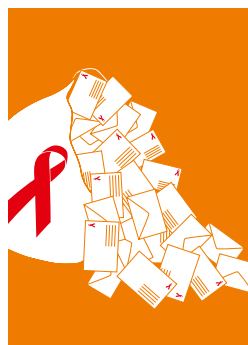
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Hannover - Germany

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in brief

UPU to test secure authentication

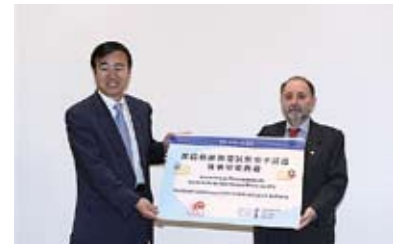
Macau Post has presented certification technology to the Universal Postal Union for research and development purposes. The UPU will now be able to deliver electronic certificates, giving individuals a digital identity that enables them to securely sign e-documents and make transactions online legally binding.

The UPU will use this technology to issue a limited number of certificates to International Bureau and nominated specialists from UPU member countries for non-commercial purposes.

"This is a significant step for the UPU because this technology is normally expensive and complex to set up or procure," said Paul Donohoe, the UPU's electronic postal services specialist. "Many member countries do not yet have access to this technology. Now, they will be able to study it and make recommendations on its use by participating in a UPU trial on sending and receiving secure electronic communication, and all at little or no cost."

The electronic certificates will first be used at the International Bureau to secure computers and networks, including securing remote access to the UPU website and securely identifying computers authorized to connect to the internal network. Later, members of the Postal Operation Council's e-services group and members of the Telematics Cooperative will be able to take part in a pilot on the use of digital signatures for exchanging documents and e-mails. The pilot will also enable the UPU to do some practical development work on electronic postal certification marks, postal registered e-mails and other e-services within the UPU community.

"It is our objective and challenge to find innovative ways to maintain the economic viability of our Posts and guarantee their social dimension in terms of providing the universal service," said Carlos Roldão Lopes, Macao Post's CEO. "In this era where the Internet and the dematerialization of paper are threatening our tra-



UPU Deputy Director General Guozhong Huang receives the certification authority from Carlos Roldão Lopes

Photo: Macau Post

ditional business, we are convinced that these challenges can be transformed into big opportunities, based on a new identity and creative role for the Posts through the utilization of the electronic network."

Macao Post's CEO officially handed over the technology to UPU deputy director general Guozhong Huang in a ceremony in Macau held at the end of May. The presentation concluded a two-day conference on e-commerce in Hong Kong, organized by the UPU in association with Hongkong Post.

EMS posts first-class results in 2008

The EMS Cooperative has announced excellent results for 2008. The 155 operators making up the EMS network offered a very high quality service, as demonstrated by the results based on the performance indicators.

In 2008, almost 86 % of EMS items were delivered on time and operators were able to resolve 96 % of customer inquiries punctually. During the cooperative's general

assembly, several countries were awarded prizes for their performance in 2008. These were based on analyses by independent consultants and the efforts made to meet the principal EMS standards.

A total of 18 countries and territories received gold, silver or bronze awards for excellent service (on-time deliveries, tracking of items and handling of customer inquiries). Hong Kong, Japan, the Republic of Korea

and Singapore took gold. Australia, Brazil, the People's Republic of China, the Czech Republic, El Salvador, Finland, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand and Sweden were awarded silver. Canada, Estonia, Ukraine and the United States received bronze awards.

EMS traffic worldwide totalled 44 million items in 2007, an 8.5 % rise since the previous year.

The figure

33,000,000

Editor's note

More than just a campaign

The world is grappling with new viruses every day. The H1N1 strain, better known as the swine flu, has now reached pandemic proportions. But another virus, known about for decades, continues to spread too. And despite incredible progress made in extending the lives of those who live with it, there is still no cure. The only way to fend off the HIV virus, which leads to AIDS, is to protect oneself and others.

That basic message, "Protect yourself", is still critically important. As we near the 30th anniversary of the virus' discovery (in 2011), the UPU and its member countries are embarking on a major HIV prevention campaign in post offices around the world by partnering with the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the International Labour Organization and UNI Global Union. Sure, the world needs more than campaigns. A cure is needed. But until science finds it, prevention campaigns such as this one must remind the public that AIDS

kills and continue to complement other initiatives that make up the response against HIV/AIDS.

The world has six years left to fulfil the promise to stop and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015, as part of the United Nations Millennium Goals for Development. This promise requires the help of partners, including international organizations such as the UPU and others.

New editor-in-chief

After more than six years as editor-in-chief of *Union Postale*, I'm pleased to pass on the reins to Faryal Mirza while I continue to contribute to the magazine. This is Faryal's inaugural issue since joining the Communication Programme team at the International Bureau in March. An experienced journalist, Faryal will continue to work towards the ideals of imparting news that help move the postal sector forward and that inspire readers through the work and experience of others.

In this issue, a perfect example is the article on *Exporta Fácil*. This export programme through the Post hails from Latin America and has enabled thousands of small entrepreneurs to participate in cross-border trade. The UPU hopes that such a programme could be extended to other regions, further demonstrating the postal sector's important role in facilitating global trade that helps individuals and member countries reduce their poverty gaps.

Finally, be sure to read our new feature called "People". In every issue, an article will focus on one of the 5.5 million employees, who make up the worldwide postal network, and especially on those who move the mail. The feature will not only make you discover the life of a postal worker in a particular country, but will also give you information about the Post generally and life in that country. A good read for sure.

Rhéal LeBlanc, assistant editor

That's the number of people worldwide estimated to be living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The UPU has joined forces with UNAIDS to bring a campaign about HIV awareness to post offices worldwide. See cover story for more.

UPU names RFID supplier

The UPU has chosen AIDA Centre, a company based in Spain, to supply radio frequency identification (RFID) tags and equipment for its Global Monitoring System (GMS). The new system will measure mail-service quality using state-of-the-art technology. An RFID tag is a computer chip used to store and transmit information.

Having successfully competed in a tender process, the firm will supply some 100,000 tags to 20 UPU member countries taking part in the GMS' testing phase. This will be launched in August 2009 with the insertion of tags into test letters, which will be used to measure the actual time taken to deliver mail to its final destination.

By the end of July 2009, the AIDA Centre will install the equipment needed to capture RFID tag signals in the exchange offices of the 14 countries without such facilities. A German company, Quotas, will recruit and train participants sending and receiving the test letters.

When a test letter containing a tag passes near an antenna, a signal is transmitted and the captured data stored. From 2010, these data will be sent to the central information management system operated by the UPU and could be used to calculate terminal dues.

E-services get a boost in Tunisia

The importance of sharing experiences to develop electronic services was the key conclusion of a recent conference organized by the UPU and Tunisia Post. Speakers at the May event in Tunis included the Union's director general, Edouard Dayan, and the Tunisian minister of communication technologies, El Hadj Gley. Other attendees, such as Bishar Hussein, the president of the Union's Council of Administration, and Rodah Masaviru, the secretary general of the Pan African Postal Union, stressed the strategic importance of new services for the postal sector's growth.

During the proceedings, the UPU presented its strategy and action plan for e-services during 2009-2012. Tightly aligned with the Union's Nairobi Postal Strategy, these cover stimulating the use of new technology to strengthen the postal network and to modernize and diver-

sify products and services. Presenters also stressed the importance of providing a high quality, affordable and innovative universal postal service adapted to technological changes and encouraging market growth through the use of the latest technologies.

On the conference's sidelines, Tunisia's prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi, met with Dayan. The talks focused on relations between the UPU and the North African nation and the development of postal networks and e-services to narrow the digital divide.

Tunisia is currently chairing the e-services group of the UPU's Postal Operations Council. It also hosts Trainpost, the Union's e-learning platform aimed at postal employees. By 2009, nearly 2,500 employees of at least 120 UPU member countries had taken its courses.

Italy is new chair of Telematics Cooperative

Italy has been elected to chair the UPU's Telematics Cooperative. Giorgio Pomponi of Poste Italiane succeeds Christopher Grosser of Australia Post. The new chair is elected for a period of four years.

"During my term of office, I hope to strengthen postal operators' interconnectivity, as well as access to electronic postal services for the least developed countries," Pomponi said.

Through its operational arm, the Postal Technology Centre, the Telematics Cooperative designs, installs, manages and maintains advanced technological applications for the UPU member countries. The Telematics Cooperative was founded in 1996 and currently has 128 members.

Formal agreement to hold Congress 2012 in Qatar

The UPU and Qatari government have formally paved the way for Qatar to host the 25th Universal Postal Congress in 2012. The two parties signed an agreement at UPU headquarters on April 3 to hold the next Congress in the capital, Doha. It was also announced that Ali Mohammed Ali Al Ali – chair and general manager of Qatar Post – would be Congress' designated chairman.

Qatar's then minister of business and trade, Sheikh Fahad Bin Jassim Bin Mohammed Al-Thani, signed the agreement alongside the UPU's Director General Edouard Dayan. More than 2,000 delegates from the UPU's 191 member countries are expected to attend the Doha Congress. The gathering occurs every four years.

On a separate note, the UPU was saddened to hear of the sudden death of Sheikh Al-Thani. Aged 40, he died tragically in a car accident on April 30.



Doha, site of the 25th Universal Postal Congress in 2012

Photo: Qatar Financial Centre



Giorgio Pomponi

Photo: Alexandre Plattet

New guides to bridge the digital gap

The UPU has been involved in two book projects, aimed at improving postal services in developing and least developed countries. The first project culminated in March with the launch of the Union's Direct Mail Advisory Board's *Direct Mail Guide for Developing and Least Developed Countries*. This is designed to help Posts better understand and promote this marketing tool. The English guide offers a theoretical and practical look, as well as best-practice examples. It has been distributed to all UPU member countries.

The second project is a collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union. The book to be produced will focus on the postal sector's use of information communication technology (ICT) to reduce the digital gap and improve services, especially in rural areas. It will be launched in 2010 during the UPU Strategic Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. In recent years, several UPU projects in Asia and Africa have led to more post offices being equipped with ICTs and being better interconnected, often with the help of the ITU.

Write to us!

Do you have an opinion about an article you've read in *Union Postale*, a particular viewpoint or a best practice to share with other readers? If so, we want to hear from you! We welcome letters to the editor in an effort to make *Union Postale* a conduit for two-way dialogue. Send your letter by mail or e-mail (faryal.mirza@upu.int) with your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address. Where necessary, letters chosen for publication may be condensed.

The letterbox

“ Surinam calling... ”

Dear Faryal Mirza,
Congratulations on your appointment as editor-in-chief of *Union Postale*. I have to tell you how much I appreciate the articles in the magazine; in our weekly radio programme, which I edit and present, I have often entered information extracted from *Union Postale*. A recent radiogram featured a mix of the UPU's high-level meeting on the global economic crisis in Bern, which coincided with our Post Krutu, a meeting with all of our staff, to discuss policy and development of our company. This week, I have focused on the Millennium Development Goals as part of the mission of Posts to achieve a better life for every individual in the world.

Yours sincerely,

Judith May

Manager International Affairs and PR

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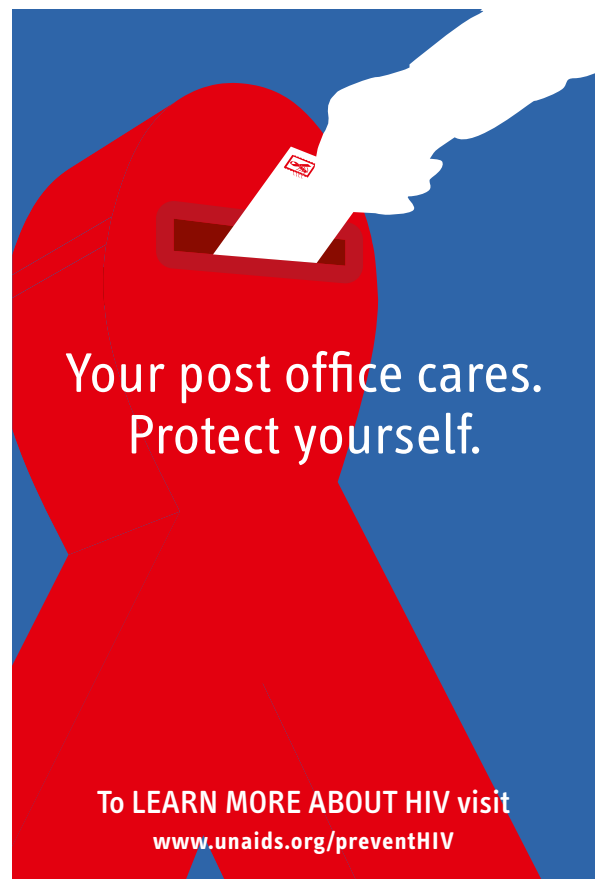
Posts spread HIV prevention message

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By
Faryal Mirza

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Illustrations:
UNAIDS

Thanks to a unique collaboration between the UPU and UNAIDS, Posts around the world are participating in an awareness campaign on how to prevent human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Also onboard are the International Labour Organization and UNI Global Union.

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The bold campaign materials are available in seven languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish



Halting the spread of HIV by 2015 is one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG). To make this a reality, the UPU and UNAIDS together with the ILO and UNI Global are joining forces to increase HIV awareness by launching a global campaign in July 2009. Post offices in participating countries will become information hubs on HIV, reaching out to the general public and postal employees. Posts will be at the forefront of raising awareness about this virus, in line with the UPU's commitment to sustainable development and achieving the MDGs.

At the heart of the campaign is the Posts' unrivalled physical network – its 660,000 post offices – that will ensure that both staff and customers are made aware of HIV prevention. Stopping new cases of HIV is crucial to curbing the spread of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). And awareness-raising through a campaign like this one is an important way of spreading the message.

HIV affects millions of individuals and continues to cut a swathe through the world's population. According to UNAIDS figures, an estimated 33 million people live with HIV and there are nearly 7,500 new cases of HIV infection everyday. About two million individuals died of AIDS-related diseases in 2007. And the UPU wants to help. Many Posts already promote health, including the prevention of HIV, providing further testimony to their social role. "This awareness-raising campaign is part of the UPU's ongoing effort to promote sustainable develop-

ment and social responsibility among postal operators," says UPU Director General Edouard Dayan.

Global reach

Alison Phillips-Pearce, the UNAIDS campaign coordinator, said that the joint initiative will have an "enormous outreach, making the campaign very global", given the Posts' vast physical network. Also, the network has a special characteristic. "The Post is a place that is open to everyone from the young to the old and does not discriminate against anyone," Phillips-Pearce adds.

Claude Montellier, head of the sustainable development programme at the UPU, believes that much could be done through the Posts, given that they already provide universal access to information. "Promoting social responsibility can take place through the development of awareness programmes about diseases for postal staff and the public," he says. He adds that it was the Post's unique position that led the UPU to consider ways the postal network could benefit the public at large. In 2007, the UPU organized a seminar on sustainable development, attended by various international organizations under the UN umbrella. The UPU then approached the World Health Organization about starting an HIV campaign. It was the WHO that suggested UNAIDS as a suitable partner. The other partners were also a natural fit.

Two years later, the campaign is a reality. To help Posts achieve the campaign's aims, UNAIDS created bold materials, including posters, postcards and fast facts. The cam-

“The Post is a place that is open to everyone from the young to the old and does not discriminate against anyone.”

Alison Phillips-Pearce, UNAIDS

Living with HIV and AIDS

33,000,000

people live with HIV worldwide.

67%

of all people with HIV live in Africa, where AIDS is the leading cause of death.

7,500

new cases of HIV occur everyday.

700,000

people are infected with HIV in western and Central Europe.

2,000,000

people died of AIDS in 2007.

HIV in campaign pioneer countries

Country	Population	People living with HIV (estimate)
Brazil	191,791,000	730,000
Burkina Faso	14,784,000	130,000
Cameroon	18,500,000	540,000
China	1,328,630,000	700,000
Estonia	1,300,000	9,900
Mali	12,337,000	100,000
Nigeria	148,000,000	2,600,000

Source: UNAIDS, 2007.

Your post office cares.
Protect yourself.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HIV:
www.unaids.org/preventHIV



Campaign launch

The seven national pioneers are all set for the campaign's official launch. If you are a member country that wishes to do its part to halt the spread of HIV, please contact Claude Montellier, UPU head of sustainable development, (claude.montellier@upu.int; +41 31 350 3209) or his assistant, Ariane Proulx, (ariane.proulx@upu.int; +41 31 350 3582).

paigned will have three stages. The first phase will target postal customers with the participation of seven pioneering countries. These pioneers – Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, China, Estonia, Mali and Nigeria – were selected based on their geographical spread and disease prevalence rates. Estonia, for example, has Europe's highest rate of HIV infection. During the campaign's initial phase, nearly 24,000 post offices worldwide will display and distribute the information materials. And this number will rise once other UPU members join the ranks of the seven pioneering countries in 2010. The second phase – also in 2010 – will target postal workers and the third stage in 2011 will be a philatelic campaign on the discovery of AIDS.

Consultative process

For UNAIDS' part, Phillips-Pearce shed light on why the campaign materials had taken their chosen form. "The materials were the outcome of a consultative process with our partners. Based on previous experience, we knew that we had to have a message that would catch people's eye while at the post office." The materials were tested on a global level and across genders. Participants were asked to comment on the original 14 designs; the goal here was to find out if the message was clear. The end result was the slogan: "Your post office cares. Protect yourself." However, some countries may adapt the slogan in line with their reality. "An adaptable slogan was needed to ensure that the message was meaningful to the country it is displayed in," Phillips-Pearce said. In Brazil, for example, a more direct message was required, so the slogan on campaign materials there will read: "Your post office cares. Protect yourself. Wear a condom."

Cameroon Post is hoping that its 220 outlets will make an impact on the country's HIV prevalence rates. It is the first time that this postal operator has participated in a health campaign and there is a good reason why. "HIV and AIDS touch the lives of a very large part of our population," says campaign coordinator, Mireille Ndanja Njilla. She believes raising awareness of the virus is crucial. This especially in a country where just over five per cent of the local population aged between 15 and 49 are thought to be living with HIV, according to UNAIDS' latest figures.

The campaign's second phase will focus on postal employees in 2010 with help from the ILO and UNI Global Union. The ILO is preparing a toolkit for postal employers to use to inform their staff about HIV. UNI Global is working on gaining the support of both the Posts and the unions for this phase. The third phase is planned for 2011, where the UPU will invite its member countries to issue a stamp to commemorate the discovery of AIDS. It was in 1981 that the first scientific article related to this disease was published. Shortly afterwards, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – part of the United States department for health – coined the term "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome".



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Help, get my handbags out of Brazil!

Photo: UN Photo/ Eskinder Debebe

Helping small businesses slash export red tape

.....
**By
Itziar Marañon**

The Exporta Fácil programme is a silver lining in a very cloudy sky for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Originally a pioneering initiative from the Brazilian Post, the service has been rolled out in a number of South American countries. Exporta Fácil enables MSMEs to export their goods cheaply and with little paperwork via the post office.

One small business owner using *Exporta Fácil* in Peru is Rosa Lafosse. She epitomizes entrepreneurship. She brims with get-up-and-go, set out with a clear vision for her business and has plenty of plans for the future. Lafosse set up *Packtos* – a small-scale enterprise that makes jewellery – in 2003 primarily to give all her family members a job. The entrepreneur threw all her energies into promoting her business by attending international jewellery fairs, building up a clientele, fighting off all manner of setbacks and taking training courses. Yet, despite all her efforts, the company had one major problem. It could not afford to export its products as the cost of dispatch would have made them uncompetitive. When *Exporta Fácil* was launched in Peru in 2007, Rosa's business was one of the first to take the plunge. "We were invited to the programme launch and sent off our first parcel there and then," says Lafosse. "It cost a mere 30–50 US dollars to send a large package. That meant we could factor the mailing cost into the product without raising the price significantly."

For Lafosse, the service has been safe and simple to use and the providers have proved to be very accessible. "I sent some merchandise to Shanghai, China, and thought that the parcel had been lost. I was on the verge of giving up all hope but sent an e-mail to the address I found on the *Exporta Fácil* website. Believe it or not, they replied. They told me that the parcel had arrived and even who had signed for it."

Recipe for success

Exporta Fácil is no panacea. It cannot guarantee success. Even so, since its creation in Brazil in 2001, it has opened the doors to international markets for over 10,000 local companies. It started life as the logical follow-on from a raft of measures taken by the Brazilian government together with *Correios do Brasil* to foster exports by MSMEs. The Brazilian Post offered its comprehensive postal network containing 8,000 outlets to export goods at a cost that was much cheaper than the competition. *Exporta Fácil* also slashed the number of forms that had to be completed to dispatch parcels under 30 kg and with a value of less than 10,000 US dollars. *Exporta Fácil* also freed exporters from dealing with other authorities involved in the export process, such as customs, health and environment agencies, as the Post took on this responsibility. Incidentally, the value threshold was recently raised to 50,000 US dollars.

This all dovetailed with the needs of a sector, which could not have otherwise exported its products, according to a study conducted at the UPU by its chief economist, José Ansón, and economist Justin Caron. "The areas that the programme reaches tend to be poorer, with fewer services and businesses than areas that often export their goods," explains Ansón.

Thanks to *Exporta Fácil*, small businesses and traditional craftsmen often operating on a shoestring were given a leg-up to grow or, in some cases, just to exist. The UPU study shows that one in ten Brazilian exporters – 2,084 to be precise – in 2005 would have been unable to send their products abroad without this service.

Multinational project

The initiative has taken on a life of its own in recent years and has been exported from Brazil to other Latin American countries. *Exporta Fácil* has won over a growing number of countries and the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal (PUASP), thanks to its effectiveness. PUASP is a restricted union under the UPU umbrella. Other key factors include the way it boosts the Posts' social cohesion role and opens up new avenues for doing business. According to PUASP secretary general, Serrana Bassini: "Given that big companies only operate in big cities, where there is the greatest access to other big cities abroad, the only link between certain backwaters away from those big centres is the Post. In turn, the Post shouldn't only be delivering letters – a declining market – but should be the cement that holds society together."

Peru was the first country to follow Brazil. *Exporta Fácil* was launched on July 16, 2007, initially with World Bank help and cooperation with *Correios do Brasil*. It then joined the PUASP-coordinated programme set up to implement *Exporta Fácil*, which had been lent support by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). "Since it was launched, exports have rocketed to the two million dollar mark or 6,000 dispatches," says Juan Luis Kuyeng, head of multisectoral programmes at the Peruvian commission for the promotion of exports and tourism. Peru now boasts a user-friendly website that includes online forms, training sessions for exporters and a business advisory service.

Uruguay has also recently got on the *Exporta Fácil* bandwagon. Its postal operator, *Correo Uruguayo*, first asked small-scale businesses about their needs. "They told us why they found exporting so off-putting. They mentioned high costs and insurance premiums," said Cristina González, its CEO. Since March 2009, dispatches have been possible from Colonia and Paysandú, as well as the capital, Montevideo. By June, the service should be extended to all 90 computerized offices in Uruguay's national postal network.

Weaknesses

Lafosse knows many entrepreneurs that use the programme in Peru and believes that, if the number of users is to grow, more should be done to publicize it. Another potential stumbling-block is that many institutions in each country have to reach agreement before the programme can get off the ground. Then, there is a need



.....
Rosa Lafosse's company has been selling jewellery since 2003.

Photo: Paktos

to train the people that make up the export chain, including system users and postal, customs and ministry officials. "Computers had to be installed in some post offices in Peru but they also needed an IT expert. That is because many successful businesspeople know nothing about computers," explains Lafosse. "Some straightforward training would make a huge difference."

Be optimistic? Yes, we can!

Legalizing trade that would have otherwise been invisible is one plus point of the programme. "It benefits local economies. That is vital because one of the main problems facing our countries is that people cannot find jobs locally, so they move abroad or to the outskirts of big cities. This programme has an impact – it truly leads to decentralized production," adds González.

Hot on the heels of Uruguay is Ecuador, which is set to offer Exporta Fácil from June 2009. "It is our intention that small entrepreneurs should be able to export their products at low cost and in full safety," states Roberto Cavanna, CEO of Correos del Ecuador. "Exporta Fácil assists where most governments have done little: in cottage industries and micro-businesses," he adds.

A roll-out is also being prepared in Central America. Technicians from Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay have recently carried out tests in Costa Rica. Together with El Salvador, this Central American country is keen to join the swelling ranks of Exporta Fácil members. "The initial project included funds to implement the programme in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay. Now, there are negotiations for a second phase with the IDB that should cover four or five other countries," says Bassini. "But that means more trained staff will be needed. The idea is that countries where the system is launched should train up their own technicians, who can then help Exporta Fácil to move into other countries."

UPU keeps watch

For its part, the UPU is keenly aware of the welcome impact on international trade that Exporta Fácil has and can have. And that is due to the unique marriage between exporters and their post offices the programme has arranged. "Postal networks offer local access to the logistics of international trade. All it takes to enable more businesses to export more goods to more places is for initiatives like Exporta Fácil in Brazil to be transposed to other countries," says UPU's Director General Edouard Dayan. The UPU also has a role to play in ensuring Exporta Fácil's expansion to other countries. "One of the chinks in Exporta Fácil's armour is the need to negotiate the receipt of packages in the recipient country," explains Peru's Kuyeng. "Whereas outgoing dispatches are a piece of cake, we still need to do more to make it easier for products to reach their final destination. UPU agreements might be a solution. Failing that, bilateral arrangements between national postal administrations could be the answer." The Union is also keeping a close eye on developments because there are other regions – such as Asia – that might be able to take a leaf out of the Latin American book.

It is two years since Lafosse embarked on her enterprise. She now exports to a dozen countries and her products are sold on cruise ships. Above all, her dream of providing work for all her family has come true. "We are currently negotiating special rates for dispatching small items to be sold on our website. We are clubbing together with people selling pottery, organic cotton and a whole load of products that could have a global market," she explains. She has also just opened her first shop outside Peru in neighbouring Ecuador. A website, coordinated distribution with other small producers, a chain of shops, exports to three continents, expansion abroad... Financial crisis? What crisis?

Brazilian minister commends Exporta Fácil



Hélio Costa, Brazil's Minister of Communications

Photo: heliocosta.com

How does Exporta Fácil benefit Brazilian exports?

Hélio Costa The programme's main benefit is that it gives micro- and small companies in Brazil access to the international market. It also cuts red tape, makes the logistics easier in every area of the country and spreads an export culture by disseminating information on the whole process.

How would you sum up the effects so far?

The overall figure for exports of Brazilian products through the postal export programme was the equivalent of 13 million US dollars in February 2009.

The figures point to a steady rise in exports through Exporta Fácil. We are working on the assumption that, in the third quarter of 2009, the total value of Brazilian products exported by the Post will break through the billion US-dollar mark. In February, exports via the Post rose by around 17 %, whereas Brazilian exports fell by 2 % compared with January.

What has Exporta Fácil meant for Correios do Brasil?

It has enabled us to enter a new market segment. It is one of the services that show to what extent Correios do Brasil can be modernized and meet customer needs. Exporta Fácil is the second best

known brand name at Correios.

In other countries where the programme has been implemented, only the state postal operator uses it. In Brazil, Exporta Fácil competes with services offered by private operators. Should that be changed?
Each country has its own project but the basic premises must be met: making the lives of our customers – small and micro-businesses – easier by streamlining the export process and making it less costly, while making the geographical coverage as extensive as possible.

It is only natural that governments use their public operators' infrastructures as, in most countries, they alone can offer a nationwide service. It is a matter of state policy.

The programme is being introduced in other Latin American countries? How does that benefit Brazil?

Brazil has a vested interest in strengthening the communications infrastructure throughout South America. No logistical network on the continent can rival the Posts. Postal operators must, therefore, be strong so that they can help governments to implement their policies of social and economic inclusion across the land. They also need to be well run and profitable.

A programme such as Exporta Fácil can boost trade among our countries and strengthen the global postal network, offering new quality services that are affordable.

What is the main hurdle in the way of regional expansion?

The main issue, in my opinion, is the ability to meet growing demand for technical cooperation. We are training a network of technical experts in each country where Exporta Fácil has been introduced. The next goal is for the network of specialists to help other countries that have shown an interest in the project to discuss and take other steps to improve the service. The exchange of ideas and successful projects among the various postal administrations and the fostering of a business culture in the sector can and will strengthen the image of the Posts as vehicles of development in the countries of Latin America.

Itziar Marañon is a freelance journalist based in Switzerland.

Postal leaders deal with world economic crisis

As dark clouds gathered over the world's economy, the UPU faced the oncoming storm by convening a high-level debate on the global financial crisis in April 2009 in Berne, Switzerland. At the same time, the Union unveiled its research into how postal operators were faring in these difficult times.

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By
Faryal Mirza
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Illustration:
buro.sequenz.net

The worldwide postal sector employs more than 5.5 million employees and operates 660,000 post offices – with this kind of reach, how could it remain unaffected by the current financial crisis gripping the world? Bearing that in mind, the UPU organized a high-level debate on the crisis' effect on Posts, using the occasion to publish the results of its own research. This work, led by UPU Chief Economist José Anson, shed an informative light on the performance of designated postal operators in certain key markets. It revealed that the postal sector is certainly feeling negative effects stemming from the crisis. However, it is not showing signs of an economic depression like other industrial sectors, such as the automobile industry.

First, the good news: certain postal financial institutions have experienced tremendous growth since the crisis began. Some European operators, such as Swiss Post and Germany's Deutsche Post, recorded annual growth rates above 50 % in the number of postal deposits and savings accounts opened in 2008. This was thought to be a result of the wholesale loss of trust in banks expe-

rienced by consumers. In such a climate, many postal institutions were able to offer a safe haven for customer deposits and savings, thanks to government-backed guarantees. Interestingly, the number of postal deposits and savings account displayed a similar trend during the Great Depression of the 1930s, according to UPU statistics.

Letter losses

However, domestic letter post has been feeling the crisis' brunt, while domestic parcel volumes increased slightly. UPU experts say the increase could be due to record e-commerce sales during the last quarter of 2008 or strong resilience of online sales to the crisis observed in several countries. The news was not so positive, however, on the international parcels front. After experiencing growth in the first three quarters of 2008, volumes decreased by 4.5 % in the last quarter among surveyed operators. Experts again believe that international parcels are not benefiting from e-commerce as cross-border sales remained challenging.

Stock-exchange listed Posts

Worldwide, there are five Posts – in Austria, Germany, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Singapore – listed on stock exchanges, as well as two express courier companies – Fedex and UPS. A comparison of the evolution of their share price with their reference index from August 2008 to January 2009 – the six months covering the worsening financial crisis – showed that, while the share prices of some operators were closely correlated with their reference index, those of others evolved much more positively than the market. Considered defensive stocks, listed postal services' shares tended to resist better during a crisis and could even gain value, said UPU experts.

UPU research into the effect of the global financial crisis on the postal sector will continue with updates later this year.



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The Post can be a safe haven in turbulent times

High-level meeting

On April 2, 2009, movers and shakers from the postal world gathered at the UPU's International Bureau in Berne. They were united by one common goal – to discuss the impact of the economic crisis on the postal sector. They included nearly 50 chief executives from international Posts and delegates from almost 200 countries.

Panellists from leading postal operators and sector partners revealed how their businesses were faring during difficult times and shared their strategies for dealing with the global economic downturn. The director general of the UPU, Edouard Dayan, said the meeting was “another example of the UPU's capacity to unite the postal sector around common issues requiring analysis and shared actions”.

Challenging times

That Posts were feeling the effects of the fallout was undeniable. Peter Bakker, CEO of TNT Post, the Netherlands, revealed that the express business was suffering. “This is the first time that we have seen a 20 % volume decline in some parts of the express business. Customers are trying to save costs...” he revealed. John Potter, postmaster general of the United States Postal Service (USPS), said that his operator was reeling from blows dealt on two fronts. First, there was the downturn in mail volumes and the billion-dollar losses the USPS announced for 2008. Second was a recent postal law obliging the operator to make multibillion dollar contributions to a retiree health fund. “This is a challenging

time. Tough choices have to be made in the coming years,” he said. Massimo Sarmi, CEO of Poste Italiane, also had sobering words for the sector. “The traditional business model cannot survive in the mid term anywhere,” he said. These remarks were echoed by Emmanuel van der Mensbrugghe, director of the International Monetary Fund's Offices in Europe. “There is a need for regulation and market reform is necessary not just in organizations but in activities,” he said.

And business problems were not limited to postal operators. An industry partner, like eBay, had also noticed that clients were tightening their belts. “There is certainly a marked change in customer behaviour. As people suffer economically, they are looking for deals,” said Nick Staheyeff, eBay's chief financial officer for Europe. This called for a shift in strategy. “We are trying to react and predict significant changes in our users, which is not easy in this climate,” Staheyeff added.

Defying the tide

The French Post offered an analysis of why its operations had not been pulled totally under by the turbulence in the world's markets. Jean-Paul Bailly, CEO of La Poste, explained that two factors had kept things afloat. “La Poste has a wide range of activities, which provide great opportunities in times of crisis. Also, our postal bank did not have any toxic assets and had excellent results in 2008,” he said. The bank is the country's fourth largest retail bank in terms of deposit and savings accounts and provides nearly 23 % of the postal group's turnover. In 2007, this amounted to 4.7 billion euros. Also, La Poste

would see some benefit from the French government's economic recovery plans in the near future. This would enable 600 million euros to be poured into the modernization of post offices, accelerating investments in buildings and transport, as well as sustainable development, between 2009 and 2010, according to Bailly.

Crisis? What crisis?

On the other side of the globe, both Russia and Morocco said that their respective Posts were yet to suffer from problems related to the economic crisis. Alexander Kisselev, Russian Post's director general, told the audience that his government was doing its part to cushion the postal sector, not least by adding the Post to its list of 200 strategic enterprises. This was the first time that the Post had appeared on this important list, said Kisselev. Anas Alami, director general of Moroccan Post, however, said he was certain that hard times were on their way. "We will suffer from a retreat of funds and a reduction in money transfers from abroad," he said. According to World Bank figures, Morocco received 5.7 billion US dollars in 2007 in migrant remittances.

Looking ahead

As for the way forward, at least one operator is concentrating on a strategy of diversification. Hongkong Post is "providing value-added services to customers, moving into logistics and offering one-stop shops for internet merchants", revealed Deputy Postmaster General Chan Yau-fung. The USPS postmaster general added that the focus had to be on growth. "We have to tighten our belts as much as we can. The goal is to optimize and standardize networks," Potter told delegates. EBay and the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) – a trade organization representing more than 3,600 firms using direct marketing worldwide – both made it clear that they were

not writing off the postal sector just yet. "I don't think the crisis will mean an end to the mail industry. Commerce will continue to exist, but we need to find ways to reduce trade barriers with the help of postal services," stated Nick Staheyeff. The DMA's executive vice president, Ramesh Lakshmi-Ratan, added that direct marketers were very optimistic about the Post's prospects. "Marketeers see the Post not as a mail industry but as a communication one that uses a mix of channels. Mail is a critical component of that mix," he said.

Seeing the light

That better times were ahead was emphasized by Helen Dendrinou-Louri, deputy governor of the Bank of Greece. "Recovery will be slow but recovery there will be," she told delegates. Also seeing the light at the end of the tunnel was the secretary general of the International Telecommunication Union. "This crisis may challenge many businesses... but it will, I believe, revitalize communications – and I include postal services – and enable... new business models and new technologies to emerge. The financial crisis should be seen as an opportunity," Hamadoun Touré said. Andreas Taprantzis, CEO of Hellenic Post and chairman of the UPU's Postal Operations Council, ended the conference on this note: "We need to build on new foundations. All leaders need to keep their optimism high and we heard the same message from all corners of the world."

The debate highlighted that the global financial crisis was not simply a harbinger of bad news for postal operators. It revealed that the cloud had a silver lining, not least because of the trust consumers had in Posts. This, coupled with diversification and innovation, would go a long way in keeping the sector's head above water.

UPU research into how the postal sector is faring in the global economic crisis

Survey participants: 15 of the world's largest Posts and private courier companies.

The surveyed operators accounted for:

- 66 % of total worldwide letter-post volumes;
- 88 % of parcel-post traffic; and
- Up to 75 % of express volumes.

The following figures refer to a comparison between numbers from the last-quarter 2007 and last-quarter 2008.

- Domestic letter volumes: –5.9 %
- International letter post: between 3.7 % and –2.8 %
- Domestic express services: –4.4 %
- Express revenues: –7.9 % worldwide

People

Emmanuel Havugimana

By
Balthazar
Twagilimana

Photos:
Alfred
Ndayishimiye

“People” is *Union Postale’s* new series, dedicated to the individuals forming the backbone of postal services. Our first is letter carrier Emmanuel Havugimana, a 39-year-old based in Kigali, Rwanda. Married with four children, he has just celebrated one year as a driver for express mail services (EMS). He earns approximately 140 US dollars a month. Outside of work, Emmanuel loves to sing and is a choir member.



Why did you decide to become a letter carrier?

Emmanuel Havugimana My aim was to meet a lot of people and to have the opportunity to get to know many areas in Kigali and elsewhere.

Are you happy that you became a letter carrier?

Yes, I am very happy, and I enjoy my work because my wish has come true.

What do you like about your job?

My job helps me to build up relationships. At the Post, we work as a team and as friends. And when delivering mail, I meet different kinds of people. I make a new friend almost everyday.

How much do you work a week?

Normally 45 hours. I work five days a week during the first half of each month. During the other half, I work seven days a week when I stand in for my colleague, who is in charge of carrying mail bags from or to Kigali International Airport at weekends.

What benefits do you get from your employer apart from your salary?

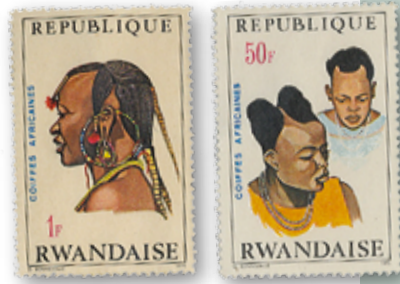
Because I work under statute rule for public servants, I have 30 days of paid holiday a year. I also benefit from health insurance and my employer contributes to my social security.

The route

My daily route is about 80 km. Most of the time, I go by car but on sunny days I use a motorcycle. My route takes me through different landscapes. I go past so many people, who are very busy and moving very fast. I meet street workers in charge of cleaning Kigali and I see many buildings in construction as the city is growing day by day.

It takes five hours in the morning and four hours in the afternoon to finish my route. I mostly deliver mail to companies or public institutions. And the mail is given directly to a person, who must sign for a receipt. Usually I meet secretaries or personal assistants of the bosses but sometimes I also meet the boss.

Rwanda Post



The job

Has this changed much over the years?

Yes. When I was hired, I signed a short-term contract. But after six months, my contract changed and I joined the permanent staff.

How secure is your job?

I think my job is secure because we will always have mail to deliver. And I see these days that EMS services are improving. So, I expect to work for the Post for several years to come.

How are postal workers regarded in your country?

In Rwanda, postal workers are regarded as the carriers of much needed means of communication, particularly by those people, who are not yet hooked up to modern technology.

If you had not become a letter carrier, what would you have been?

I would have been a taxi driver. Even before seeking employment in the Post, I was a driver. I like this kind of job because it allows me to meet different people and make so many friends.

Balthazar Twagilimana is an employee of Rwanda Post.

The National Post Office (ONP) is a state-owned institution created in 1992 with financial and administrative autonomy. It is supervised by the ministry of science, technology, scientific research and information communication technologies.

The Post has an operational network with 21 points of contact countrywide. This number is expected to increase in the future under the "2020 Rwanda Government Vision", whereby postal services will be provided in remote areas. The Post has significant potential development opportunities as it already provides services to all other sectors (transport and mail delivery to public and private institutions and individuals), and conducts various services on behalf of banks (such as payment and money transfer services).

Mail delivery

The majority or 80 % of mail in Rwanda is delivered to post-office boxes because physical street addresses are not yet well organized. Consequently, no house-to-house mail delivery is carried out. Only EMS items are delivered to the addressee's residence or office.

Main postal services

The ONP offers a wide range of services. These include staples like postage and stamps for letters and parcels, registered mail and EMS, as well as internet cafés, commercial telephony and fax. Also on offer are financial services, such as current and saving accounts and money transfer.

facts & figures

Rwanda

Capital city	Kigali
Official languages	Kinyarwanda (universal Bantu vernacular); French; and English. Kiswahili (Swahili) is used in commercial centres
Country population	10,473,282 (December 2008)
Area	26,338 km ²
GDP per capita	353.9 USD (2007)
Currency	Rwandan franc (RWF) – 1USD = 570.7 RWF
Main industries	Cement, agricultural products, small-scale beverage production, soap, furniture, shoes, plastic goods, textiles, cigarettes

Buying basics

Milk	500 RWF/litre	(0.88 USD)
Rice	800 RWF/kg	(1.40 USD)
Manioc	300 RWF/kg	(0.53 USD)
Fish	1750 RWF/kg	(3.07 USD)
Bananas	130 RWF/kg	(0.23 USD)
Cigarettes	50 RWF	(0.09 USD)
Coca-Cola	300 RWF	(0.53 USD)

International mail volumes 2008

	Import (kg)	Export (kg)
Letters	55,332	9,258
Parcels	58,612	2,571
EMS (number of items)	3,008	6,081



The interview

It has been a year since Rodah Masaviru was elected secretary general of the Pan African Postal Union (PAPU), a restricted union of the UPU. She takes stock of her time in the high-profile seat and reveals how the regional approach will give postal services in African countries new impetus.



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By
Faryal Mirza

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Photos:
Daudi
Mssemmaa/
Majority
World/keystone

In praise of the regional approach



As *Union Postale* goes to print, African leaders from the postal world will be gathering in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, to discuss how to reform and modernise Posts in their continent. Featuring prominently on the agenda of PAPU's annual meeting in Egypt is the UPU's next development plan for Africa, the sequel to the Union's first plan, which ran until 2008. PAPU's secretary general is no stranger to the challenges facing the sector. Prior to her election, the Kenyan national spent four years as assistant to her predecessor, as well as 22 years working with her native country's postal operator.

What was your first year at PAPU's helm like?

Rodah Masaviru Since I was elected in June 2008 and assumed office the following August, I have had memorable experiences at the top of the organization. The position comes with a number of challenges. Africa has about 70 % of the world's least developed countries, which has an impact on the ability to undertake reforms effectively and that are necessary for modernising Posts. Postal services are among the many services that compete for the limited national resources in least developed coun-

tries. This hinders the development of adequate postal outlets for delivery of quality services. Here, the penetration level is very low compared to that in industrialised countries. On average, there are about 100,000 people to each post office in Africa. In the developed world, it is about 10,000 per outlet. We at PAPU are trying to sensitize governments to appreciate the key role played by the Post in socio-economic development, given its widespread network right down to the grassroots level.

When you reach out to governments on the importance of the postal network, are they listening to what you say?

Yes. The very fact that African ministers endorsed the recommendations of a recent study carried out by our mother organization, the African Union, shows that they are listening. Among the recommendations was the need for governments to give priority to postal development programmes within their national development plans. Another was to clearly define policies and regulations, as well as the responsibilities of the government, the operator and the regulator. Now, putting in place recommendations is one thing and implementing is another. Stakeholders need to go a step further to implement them.

How will this translate into action?

We have recently developed a vision and strategic objectives as our road map for postal development in Africa. The latter will guide us in focusing on pertinent issues. Once approved by the PAPU Administrative Council at June's annual meeting, we can pursue implementation of the outlined concrete activities. Key among these is the development of e-services. There is a lot of potential in this area, particularly serving money transfer needs of migrants in and outside Africa. These communities contribute significantly to national economies, although these have been temporarily upset by the global financial crisis.

How much of a need is there to develop e-services in PAPU countries, given that the use of information communication technology (ICT) is still low and the former's development is dependent on internet connectivity?

ICT provides a wake-up call and opportunity to diversify our products and services and bridge the digital divide. There is no other sys-

tem as widespread in Africa as the postal system and if we are able to have e-services even in the rural areas, we can contribute to eradicating poverty.

The future of the Post lies in financial services and e-commerce because if you have an efficient money transfer system and you are able to do the logistics of goods, then you are in business. The market for money transactions already exists and is yearning for an affordable, secure and quality service. Given our network, we have an advantage because if the remittances come from overseas, for instance, then the person residing in the rural area does not need to travel a long distance to collect the money. The post office is right there with the customer. As long as Posts have e-connectivity, they can receive the money instantly and deliver to the customer.

At the moment, connectivity is low for a number of reasons: underdevelopment of ICT infrastructure and lack of electricity in most rural areas where the majority of people reside. The low purchasing power and relatively low literacy levels contribute to low demand for and investment in ICT services. But there is potential for rapid growth in these areas given that governments have now developed robust ICT policies and in a number of countries they are spearheading the roll-out of broadband connectivity in rural areas. With this, post offices will effectively fill the gap and reduce the high cost of doing business as they are present at the grassroots level and can deliver the products to recipients in urban areas and elsewhere.

What else is on the cards to modernise the African postal sector?

We are moving forward with the regional approach, which was adopted by the 24th UPU Congress in Geneva last year. Following that, the UPU and PAPU organized a meeting in February 2009, in Aru-



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Rodah Masaviru in front of P.O. boxes, the letter boxes for most Africans

sha, Tanzania, where the PAPU secretariat is located. The main aim was to brainstorm and identify priorities to be included in the UPU Regional Development Plan for Africa for 2009–2012. In attendance were the African Union, Regional Economic Communities and sub-regional organizations. They all appreciated the need to pool resources for optimal utilization and joint implementation of identified projects.

The regional approach is very good. Countries are able to assess their gaps collectively and pool their resources to create one quality network. After the meeting in Arusha, we sent out a questionnaire to Regional Economic Communities and sub-regional postal organizations in Africa. Africa is big and each region unique with its own set of requirements and level of development. In the questionnaire, they were asked to indicate the status of their postal services, for instance whether physical or electronic money transfers were taking place. They also had to identify the activities they wanted to undertake to improve services. The results will be discussed in June 2009 to zero down to the specifics of actual projects that can be undertaken jointly by PAPU, UPU and the sub-regional organizations. With these activities, we should be able to move postal services in Af-

rica a step higher in terms of quality and range of products provided to our customers. That way, we can win back some of the market that we have lost to our competitors.

Why have the public postal operators lost market share to private competitors?

People have this perceived image that any private courier company can offer a better-quality service than the Post. This may not actually be true as my own experience recently testified. I sent an item to the United States through a private operator, expecting it to be there in three to four days. It took more than seven days to arrive. I sent another item by EMS, a typical postal product, and it was there in four days. Sometimes, the image these private companies have is one they have carved themselves. We need to demonstrate to the public that we are present too and can offer even better quality services. However, we have to be consistent when it comes to quality levels.

What other stumbling blocks are there to PAPU members providing a better service?

Certain private operators show themselves as one whole integrated network, whereas the post offices appear as separate networks because of different levels of

services. This is why sometimes Posts are unable to tell customers how long their item will take to reach Canada, for instance. We need to come out as a truly unified network and that is why we must all collaborate and work together to ensure that any gaps at one end of the network are addressed because poor quality of service in Africa will affect the very excellent service offered by Posts elsewhere. We need to ensure that items move and reach destinations within the expected service standards and that we and our customers are able to track and trace the items. This is an area where the regional approach works very well and can result in one quality global network.

Ideally, a quality universal service should be offered to everybody, requiring contributions from all stakeholders. The service should be very well defined by governments and its funding established and sustained. In many countries, this is not the case. The other challenge is poor infrastructure, which affects the ability to offer affordable and quality services.

What are the main focuses of the next UPU development plan for Africa?

One is quality of service, which is key to customers. There is a lot to be done on the development of the physical, electronic and finan-

“There is no other system as widespread in Africa as the postal system and if we are able to have e-services even in the rural areas, we can contribute to eradicating poverty.”

cial-services network and the diversification of products and services. Human resources and promotion of best management practices are also covered. Training is key because you can introduce new products but if the staff are not trained properly, they will not deliver.

Under each plan heading, we identified specific areas needing attention. Under quality of service, for instance, we said we would focus on regional cross-border mail transmission by road. Currently, some African countries that are neighbours cannot send mail directly to each other. Mail often goes to Europe first before it comes back to Africa. This has been typical of the West African countries where long transmission times are experienced and high costs incurred in triangular routing. To address this, a pilot project on mail transmission by road involving a number of countries in West Africa was undertaken. This resulted in remarkable reductions in transmission times.

Quality monitoring is another key area. If you cannot measure the quality of your services, you won't know where and when to make improvements. We also need to improve track and trace. Most of our competitors ensure that their customers are able to track and trace items, which has enhanced customer satisfaction and their

market share. National addressing is another important area. In many countries, mail is delivered through post-office boxes, except for the EMS service, which is door-to-door. However, home-delivery cannot be effective if you do not have appropriate addressing systems.

As far as development of electronic services is concerned, financial services are key and we already have some sub-regional projects, particularly with the involvement of the UPU, France's La Poste and the International Organisation for Migration. The intention is to have all countries embrace electronic money transfer systems.

What were the main results of the last UPU development plan for Africa?

Some quality improvements in some regions of Africa with regard to mail exchanges between them, which contributed to moving towards achievement of the J+5 standard fixed at the Bucharest Congress. Cost-accounting systems were installed in 20 countries and 14 Integrated Postal Reform and Development Plans were formulated to assist countries improve the postal sector, including modernization of their Posts. Through sensitization programmes, some countries have undertaken a commercial approach to management of their postal entities. Some coun-

tries have put in place policies and regulations, clearly spelling out responsibilities of each key stakeholder with guidelines for fulfilment of universal service obligations. However, there is a need for enforcement to ensure a level playing field.

In which areas requiring concrete actions will we see the first improvements?

Concrete actions will be on projects geared towards improvement of the quality of service, the development of physical, electronic and financial services network and diversification of products and services. Human resources will also be developed and best management practices promoted. Once these are in place, we shall be in a position to offer diversified ICT-based products and services in line with customer needs, including prompt information to them at the click of a button.

We must also be able to effectively monitor the quality that we are offering and this is being addressed by the UPU's Global Monitoring System. Many countries thought that monitoring using radio frequency identification or RFID technology would be costly and therefore prohibitive. However, the UPU is in the process of offering a very affordable monitoring system and that will assist enormously.



The ruins of a store in Kinglake, Australia

Photo: Richard Sharman

When disaster strikes

This year brought earthquakes and bushfires to Australia and Italy. These natural disasters left devastation in their wakes, demanding quick action from Australia Post and Poste Italiane to restore postal services. This is the story of how they rose to the challenge.

By
**Monika
Kugemann**

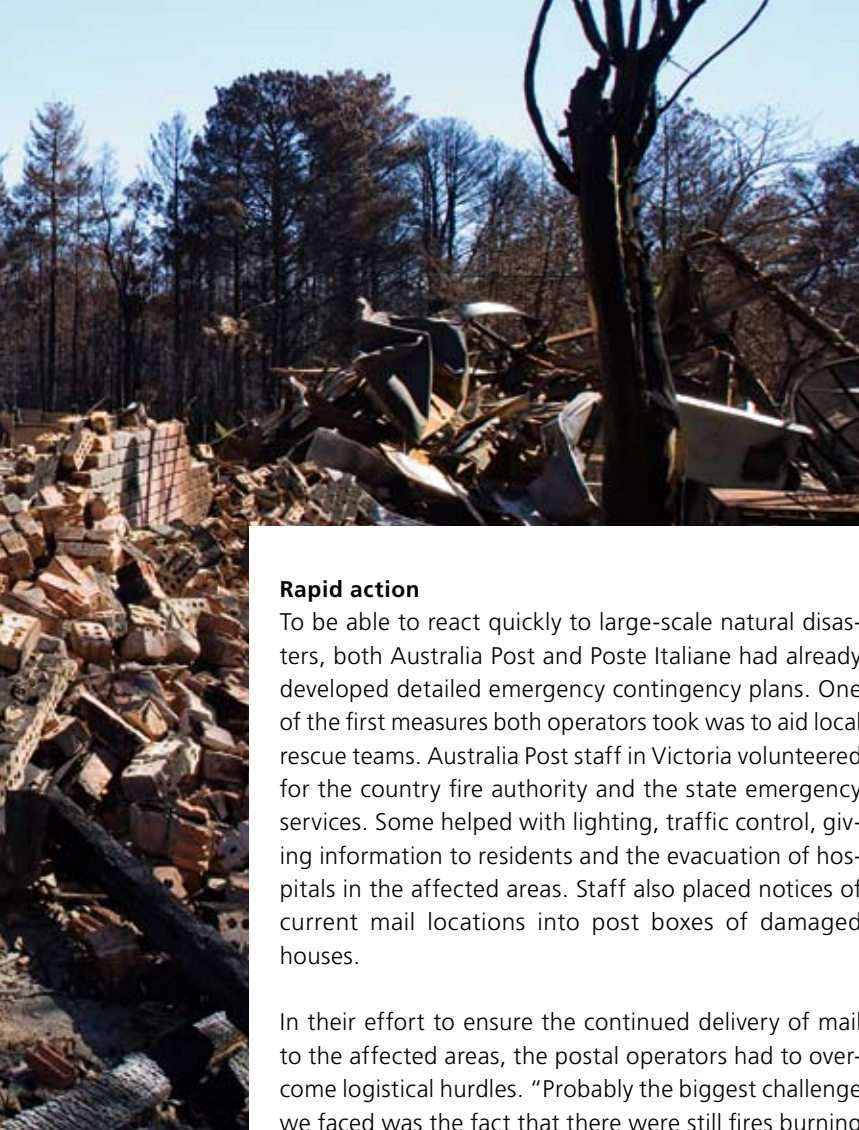
On February 7, 2009, a heat wave and heavy winds of up to hurricane force sparked what was to become one of the worst bushfires in Australian history. A month later, the fires that had started on Black Saturday in the state of Victoria had claimed the lives of 210 people, destroyed over 2,000 houses and burnt 421,670 hectares of land. Approximately 50,000 people were in some way affected by the catastrophe, according to a local reconstruction authority.

Christopher Grosser, group manager at the Victoria headquarters of Australia Post, could see and feel the

impact of the powerful fires from 40 kilometres away. "In my lifetime, I never knew a day like that, never experienced temperatures that hot in Australia, nor a day as violent as that day was," he says.

A natural disaster of different character but similar dimensions occurred in Italy's Abruzzo region on April 6, 2009. An earthquake of 6.3-magnitude damaged 26 cities and towns, killing 294 and leaving around 40,000 homeless. In the worst hit area, the medieval city of l'Aquila, the earthquake rendered about two-thirds of buildings inhabitable, according to local officials. The tragic event "swept away over a thousand years of history, art treasures and the economic and entrepreneurial fabric of an entire area", according to Poste Italiane.

In their wake, the two catastrophes temporarily disabled local postal operations, destroying not only postal infrastructure but also delivery destinations. In Australia, three post offices were lost in the fires, 34 regional areas were inaccessible to the Post, with another 21 areas partially affected. The damaged mail volume, however, was low, as the fires had started on a weekend. In Italy, 53 severely damaged post offices had to remain closed.



Rapid action

To be able to react quickly to large-scale natural disasters, both Australia Post and Poste Italiane had already developed detailed emergency contingency plans. One of the first measures both operators took was to aid local rescue teams. Australia Post staff in Victoria volunteered for the country fire authority and the state emergency services. Some helped with lighting, traffic control, giving information to residents and the evacuation of hospitals in the affected areas. Staff also placed notices of current mail locations into post boxes of damaged houses.

In their effort to ensure the continued delivery of mail to the affected areas, the postal operators had to overcome logistical hurdles. "Probably the biggest challenge we faced was the fact that there were still fires burning along the state for several weeks afterwards," explains Alex Twomey of Australia Post. Some areas were considered unsafe, others were entirely closed to the public. In addition, staff could not easily determine whether the inhabitants of deserted houses had survived and relocated to shelter points.

For the inaccessible areas, Australia Post undertook several measures. "We held the mail of people, who had lost their homes or could not get to their homes," explains Twomey. "We also offered free mail redirection to another address, so people could redirect mail to family or friends," he adds. A third measure was to set up temporary delivery operations in several recovery points, where people were being sent if they had lost their homes. Mobile delivery centres were set up in two towns.

In Italy, the first emergency initiatives were aimed at giving the maximum possible support to the most essential needs of the citizens, revealed Massimo Sarmi, CEO of Poste Italiane. Five extra-large trucks delivered thousands of tents to host the homeless in the reception areas set up by the civil defence. A special task force of 20 engineers reactivated IT communication networks, provided assistance to the victims and determined which post offices were safe to re-open.

Just a day after the earthquake, 10 mobile post offices were installed in l'Aquila and its surroundings. ATM Postamats in the mobile centres enabled the homeless to withdraw cash and make other operations 24 hours a day. By April 11, delivery service was resumed in the devastated areas, mail being sorted alphabetically in Avezzano before being distributed to towns and villages around l'Aquila. "In the tent cities, the seat of the civil defence served as the general delivery point where the postman stopped and handed mail to the people," said Fabio Meacci, postal services director.

Solidarity with victims

In addition to these first measures, Poste Italiane and Australia Post provided financial support to those affected by the disasters. Australia Post made a donation of one million Australian dollars to the Victorian Bushfire Relief Fund of the Red Cross. "We also enabled the public to donate money to the victims of the bush fires into the Red Cross fund through all our post offices across the country and raised about five million dollars," reports Twomey.

The Italian postal operator set up a solidarity account to which customers of BancoPosta could transfer donations either online or via mobile phones. The transfer commission was directly credited to the fund. PosteMobile, Poste Italiane's subsidiary for mobile services, enabled customers to donate a euro to the account by sending a free SMS and it gave a 10-euro bonus to customers from l'Aquila and surroundings. The public response to the Poste Italiane's help was overwhelming, remembers CEO Sarmi: "An elderly lady in one camp said: 'I've lost everything, all I've got left is my BancoPosta account.'"

Postal workers were also among the victims. "We had some staff, who had lost homes or were impacted on by the fires," explains Twomey. Affected employees were supported with short-term financial contributions to cover hospital treatment or stays in hotels. The Post also continued to pay staff living in the affected areas that could not make postal deliveries. Postal employees in Italy were also personally affected by the earthquake. "My first thoughts can only go to our Poste Italiane colleagues, who lost their lives or their loved ones in the earthquake," says CEO Sarmi.

Fireballs

In Australia, Tom Blewonski, manager of Kinglake post office, was lucky to have left the office for the weekend before the fires reached town, destroying 300 houses. "The town was surrounded by fire and many people died trying to flee in their cars," he says. "Some of the local residents told me about the extreme heat and how the wind was swirling round, with the fire not just coming from one direction but three. Others spoke of large fireballs dropping from the sky," he adds.

The UPU's EmIS – Facilitating emergency communications

Returning to his surprisingly untouched office a week later, Blewonski combined professionalism and compassion to deal with customers' requests on mail and other matters. "I had customers coming in asking about other residents, if I had seen them or knew if they were all right," he says. "As for the mail of people, who lost loved ones or had passed away, that was hard."



Getting help from a mobile post office in l'Aquila

Photo: Poste Italiane

At one of the Australian recovery centres, the staff's local knowledge and enthusiasm were crucial, said delivery manager Ian King, speaking to Australia Post's workforce magazine, *Post Journal*. "Many staff that live in the area came to the facility and helped out with the mail sorting and holding as well as helping people, who came to collect their mail," says King. "It was a very significant and overwhelming gesture that showed the incredible compassion of Australians and also the amazing ability of our staff to band together in hard times."

And it was in hard times that two postal operators rose to the occasion, thanks to their contingency plans and staff, enabling postal services to be restored as quickly as possible and minimizing the suffering of their customers.

Monika Kugemann is a freelance journalist based in Switzerland.

Created by the UPU after the attacks of September 2001 in the United States, the Emergency Information System (EmIS) allows designated operators to inform their peers about emergency situations affecting their international postal operations.

"By quickly circulating relevant information, the EmIS maintains the continuity of the universal postal service, while avoiding unnecessary claims or complaints by postal operators," says Seydou Konaté, UPU mail programme manager.

The EmIS is part of the UPU contingency plan and should be included in the emergency plans of postal operators. Distributing messages in French and English, the system is accessible any day of the year, including public holidays. Currently, the EmIS database comprises 250 electronic addresses. Since its inception, the system has been used between 19 (in 2002) and 63 (2008) times. The majority of messages concerned natural disasters and industrial action. A minority reported terrorist attacks, political unrest, wars or major accidents.

When an EmIS message reaches a postal operator, it is forwarded to the national post office network, the mail inquiries centre and to staff overseeing contracting services with businesses and SMEs, explains Christopher Grosser of Australia Post. "It's the sort of information that customers and individual consumers, as well as businesses need to make judgments about sending things into [affected] areas," Grosser says.

La Poste heralded for unique policy

Det Norske Veritas, the international certification body, has just commended France's La Poste for its programme ensuring continuous quality improvement in all business areas. The scheme has been hailed as the most extensive in Europe and has earned the mail division ISO 9001 certification.

Recognition by an external certification body reflects the efficient and successful implementation of quality management throughout the country, down to the level of individual post offices.

The project is characterized in particular by its wide scope, targeted deployment on the ground and the number of sites involved. It involves a quality certification approach which is heavily customer-oriented, and an endorsement system covering economic, staffing and security aspects, along with environmental and other challenges.

In 2008, the quality of mail services reached the highest levels in La Poste's history.

Source: La Poste press release

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Express delivery in Balkan countries

The national operator in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Makedonska Posta, has signed an agreement with operators from Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia to jointly launch an express delivery service in their respective countries. The service, which offers delivery within 24 hours, will be cheaper than courier services currently on the market.

Makedonska Posta, a state-owned company, operates 300 post offices. Nine private companies, including DHL Macedonia, Delivery Express and Kargo Ekspres, are licensed to operate in the country, which has a population of two million. Makedonska Posta plans to conclude similar agreements with other carriers from countries in south-east Europe.

Source: SeeNews

Swiss Post says bye to 50 g monopoly

Swiss Post will lose its monopoly on letters over 50 grammes from July 2009. The lowering of the monopoly threshold on letters from 100 g to 50 g was approved by the Swiss government. It believes this further step to liberalize the market is justified by developments in the EU. One quarter of the entire letter market will now be open to competition. The sector is due to be fully liberalized by 2012. Private operators gave the measure a lukewarm reception, saying that the national operator's remaining monopoly on letters under 50 g would give it an unfair competitive advantage.

Source: Agence télégraphique suisse

US strike against direct marketing mail

In the first resolution of its kind to be adopted in an American city, San Francisco is said to have set the wheels in motion to create a register, which would allow its citizens to opt out of receiving unsolicited mail. The resolution is not legally binding. However, commentators say that this was the first time that US legislators resisted pressure from

the marketing sector and the United States Postal Service and sided with the people.

Moves to introduce similar legislation in more than 20 American states have been unsuccessful in spite of a survey which showed that 89 % of Americans support the setting up of a national register of a similar nature.

Source: PR Newswire (US)

2009 World Mail Awards

Amongst the winners at the 10th World Mail Awards in Munich were Post Danmark (Customer Service, E-commerce and Technology), Peter Bakker of TNT Post (Industry Leadership), Deutsche Post (Innovation), Swiss Post (People Management), Royal Mail (Retail Project Award), and Magyar Posta (Modernization).

Source: World Mail Awards

TNT Post and DMA support sustainable direct mail

TNT Post and the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to show their commitment to maintaining best environmental practices in direct marketing.

The memorandum covers the responsible use of direct mail and the implementation of at least two

initiatives over the coming years.

TNT Post's latest environmental initiatives - CarbonNeutral services and greenPost products - will form the basis of the MOU. TNT Post and the DMA are attempting to minimize the impact of direct mail on the environment in the hope that other sector partners will follow suit.

This announcement was made following the recent launch of the PAS 2020 standard, which is the first environmental standard of its kind to deal exclusively with direct marketing.

Source: FEDMA Update

More than a third of Europeans shop online

Over 30 % of 16 to 74 year-olds in European Union (EU) member states went online to purchase or order goods or services for private use on at least one occasion in 2008. The most popular types of goods and services purchased on the Internet

were: travel and accommodation (14 %); sports clothes and items (13 %); books and magazines (12 %); household goods and tickets for events (both 11 %); film and music (9 %), and electrical goods (8 %).

The percentage of private customers using the Internet to shop has risen steadily: from 20 % in 2004 to 30 % in 2007. Between 2004 and 2008, all EU member states reported an increase in online shopping.

Source: Eurostat



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