

Certified and E-Certified Mail Explained

“Traditional” Certified Mail

Sending



- When preparing certified mail using USPS form 3800 (the standard green certified form provided by the Post Office), the mailer keeps a receipt (the tear-off portion of the certified form).
- If you require *proof of mailing*, you can take articles of certified mail to your local post office and have your receipts date stamped or “round dated.” For batches of certified mail, the post office accepts a summary page called a firm sheet (USPS form 3877, commonly referred to as the Firm Mailer Book). Firm sheets can also be round dated, demonstrating proof of mailing for multiple articles from a single date stamp.
- It is important to note that the only method for a mailer to obtain legal proof of mailing is to deposit certified mail at a post office, branch or station in order to collect round dated receipts or firm sheets.
- If proof of mailing is not critical, certified articles can be given to your local mail carrier or deposited in a post office mail drop, a street letterbox, or any other receptacle for First-Class Mail.

Delivery

- Each form 3800 receipt has a unique article (tracking) number and corresponding bar code.
- When a certified mail piece is delivered, the bar code is scanned (capturing the date and time of delivery) and the recipient’s signature is obtained.
- The signature record is maintained by the Post Office and is kept on file for 24 months after delivery.

Delivery Status Options

- Customers can retrieve the delivery status of certified articles in three ways: (1) over the Internet at www.usps.com by entering the article number shown on the mailing receipt; (2) by telephone at 1-800-222-1811; or (3) by bulk electronic file transfer for mailers who provide an electronic manifest to the Postal Service.
- Online delivery information (via the USPS website or other 3rd party systems) does not include the signer’s name or an image of the signature. Web or software-based delivery status shows only the date, time and zip code for each delivered certified letter.

Fees and Return Receipt Options

- The fee for certified mail is \$2.30 in addition to the normal postage due.
- For an additional fee, you can request a copy of the signature record before or after delivery with *Return Receipt*.

- Most mailers pay an additional \$1.75 *at the time of mailing* (on top of the \$2.30 certified fee) for the *optional* Return Receipt service. A typical \$0.37 letter would cost \$4.42 to send using both certified and return receipt services at the time of mailing. The Post Office will mail you back a green post card bearing the recipients signature.
- The Post Office also offers an electronic return receipt service *at the time of mailing* for a reduced fee. For \$1.30, the mailer can receive a copy of the signature via email attachment.
- Considering the high cost of certified/return receipt mail, many savvy mailers have turned to return receipt *after* mailing. It is increasingly common for businesses to request and pay for certified signature records on an as-needed basis instead of spending \$1.75 more on every certified letter. For up to two years after delivery, the post office can fax, mail, or email the signature record for any certified article at your request. While return receipt after mailing is a higher cost option at \$3.25 per signature record, it is almost always more economical in the long run. For example, if a signature record is required for an average of 1 out of 10 certified letters, the cost for return receipt with mailing would be \$17.50 versus only \$3.25 for return receipt after mailing – a savings of over 80%!

What is “Electronic” Certified Mail?

- Electronic or e-certified mail simply refers to software based systems (including some postage meters) that have the ability to upload certified tracking numbers directly to the Post Office. E-certified systems centralize the processing of certified mail allowing for fast and consolidated tracking functionality. Some e-certified systems require proprietary versions of form 3800 while others can utilize the standard USPS supplied form.

E-Certified Myths

- E-certified systems do not eliminate the handwriting or keystrokes that are typically involved in preparing certified mail. Many systems (such as enabled postage meters) generate an e-certified receipt with blank lines where the mailer should record the recipient’s information (otherwise, the mailer would have no record matching the certified letter and it’s tracking number to the addressee). Other systems require keyboard data entry.
- Unlike the Electronic Delivery Confirmation Service, there is no discount to the mailer for electronically transmitting certified tracking numbers to the USPS. An e-certified letter still costs \$2.30 plus postage.
- E-certified technology does not “eliminate” the \$1.75 return receipt *with* mailing fee. As previously mentioned, return receipt is *always* optional and can be used before or after the time of mailing for any certified article, electronically or otherwise prepared.
- As of today, a hardcopy return receipt with a verifiable signature is the only universally accepted and legal (acknowledged by all court systems) proof of delivery. Printouts from a tracking website or software program are not acceptable substitutes.
- You do not need to electronically file certified mail using an e-certified system in order track delivery status online. Online delivery status is available for any certified article, regardless of how it is submitted. Again, the signer’s name and signature are not available for viewing when confirming delivery online.

Visit <http://www.usps.com/send/waystosendmail/extraservices/certifiedmailservice.htm> for more information about Certified Mail and the best way to utilize this service in your organization.