

## National Change of Address Linkage System Product (NCOA<sup>LINK</sup>)

### Information Sheet

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The United States Postal Service<sup>®</sup> (USPS) has developed a new technology product that will help mailers update addresses with the latest change-of-address information on file. Mailers will be able to process a mailing list and update that list using secure data store technology. This new product is called NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> and is made available under license from the USPS.

#### Why the change?

Currently, mailers can process their address records using *FASTforward*<sup>®</sup> or National Change of Address (NCOA) commercial processing to obtain change-of-address information in order to comply with the USPS Move Update requirement and qualify for First-Class Mail<sup>®</sup> Automation and Presort discounts. However, the current change-of-address products require a high level of security (exemplified by the *FASTforward* system or processing by a very restricted licensing group like the NCOA licensees) to protect the data and stay compliant with the United States Code protections for address lists.

Under current practice, the USPS has restricted the release of our NCOA data to a limited number of licensees who are authorized to provide a new address only to a mailer who is already in possession of the name and old address. *FASTforward* met the same restriction by enclosing the data in a secure box and creating the requirement for a specific interface, approved and monitored by USPS to be able to provide the forwarding information. The Licensees to whom the USPS provides NCOA data are closely monitored to ensure they comply with the licensing requirements and are using the NCOA data in only the prescribed manner.

Because of the strict requirements associated with access to NCOA or *FASTforward*, the use of the move update information is not widespread within the mailing industry. Mailers are often unwilling or unable to send address files to NCOA Licensees or through the *FASTforward* system. As a result, mailers continue to create mail with deficient addresses that result in additional processing and handling costs for the USPS. Therefore the USPS developed the NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> Product. NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> provides a way to increase protections for the data, while maintaining compliance with legal requirements. The product enables the USPS to securely release address information in a format that is not a clear text address list, but is instead a mathematical formulation. As a result, mailers can integrate the NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> Product directly into their own in-house computer technology and have the ability to update address-specific information in the course of their business operations.

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Improving the quality of mailer address information benefits both the mailer and the USPS. A mailer benefits by managing correct address information for the customer, reducing mailing costs and other business costs associated with handling of inaccurate address information. The USPS benefits from reduced volumes of undeliverable-as-addressed mail, resulting in lower processing and handling costs. The process also enhances the privacy and security of the NCOA data. This win-win result for the customer and the USPS is the reason the USPS is making the change from NCOA and *FASTforward* Mailing List Correction (MLC) to NCOA<sup>LINK</sup>.

### How is the NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> Product different from NCOA data?

NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> is a secure dataset of approximately 160 million USPS changes-of-address. Instead of the clear text data format found in the NCOA data, NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> data is in a format that is unintelligible to the reader. There is no text address data embedded in the NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> data. Only by presenting a name and address as represented on the change-of-address order provided by the moving customer, and processing it using the specific logic defined by the USPS can the mailer obtain any useful information. The information returned from an NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> inquiry is a mathematical 11-digit representation of the new address. Thus, NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> cannot by itself be used to produce a listing of addresses. The mailer must already be in possession of the name and old address as is currently required for NCOA and *FASTforward*.

### How will the NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> Product be made available?

NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> is intended to be licensed to Individual Mailers as well as Service Bureaus that provide services to mailers. The USPS will also be certifying vendor interfaces written for NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> licensees to access the data.

### Why is the USPS requiring a license to obtain NCOA<sup>LINK</sup>?

The USPS has elected to provide NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> through a limited license due to a need to ensure that the use of this USPS proprietary intellectual property is limited to its intended purpose. NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> by its design is secure and cannot be used to data mine address information. Nevertheless, to continue to protect the security of the address information the USPS has a need to impose some specific conditions upon the use of the NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> Product. The NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> Product licensing approach provides the USPS with an enforcement mechanism having the flexibility needed to release NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> while enabling the USPS to retain control over the use of the product.

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### **Program benefits.**

The program strategy for providing NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> is beneficial to the USPS, licensed providers, and the mailing industry. The program will be implemented under a two-phase model. Phase 1 is to engage interested parties in writing a certified interface to the data product. Phase 2 is to license the use of the data to mailers and service bureaus that use a certified interface. Mailers opting to use a certified interface similar to their current process should be able to implement the new address update technology in their daily processes without having to reengineer their entire business process.

The secure nature of NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> will allow developers to provide access to sensitive address data in a more convenient and secure format, reducing much of the administrative oversight by the USPS required under the current format. The USPS benefits from wider distribution and use of the NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> Product to improve address quality and reduce undeliverable-as-addressed mail. NCOA<sup>LINK</sup> opens up new opportunities for mailers to use the mail as the most effective communication medium at the lowest-possible cost for both the mailer and the United States Postal Service.