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How Big Data And The Internet Of Things Will Change The Postal Service

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Do you possess "expertise and critical knowledge of the Internet of Things, data strategy and analytics, and the Postal Service's operations, infrastructure, products and services"? You might try and send your proposals to the United States Postal Service, which is looking for a supplier to help it make its "Internet of Postal Things Project (https://www.fbo.gov/index?

s=opportunity&mode=form&id=cc32418e7fd43de7195f31d09c7662d5&tab=core&tabmode=list&=)" real. Just in case you're wondering what the hell I talking about, here's a quick recap.

Let's start from something fairly obvious: few things are so widespread and pervasive like the Postal Service. Perhaps less obvious is the notion that few also collect so many data: postal operators collect a plethora of information from their rich physical networks. The U.S. Postal Service, for example, scans mail pieces and parcels up to 11 times, which represents a potential of 1.7 trillion scans a year. Its big data supercomputer center is already one of the most powerful in the United States.

In the future, according to a report released in May (https://www.uspsoig.gov/story/white-papers/international-postal-big-data-discussion-forum-recap) by the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG), "the convergence between the increasing amount of actionable data, the ubiquity of network connectivity to integrate and share this data, and the rapid development of analytics may open up a new world of opportunities for postal operators — the "Internet of Postal Things."

New packaging display at the United States Postal Service (Photo credit: Aranami)

The possibility of equipping the postal network (vehicles, mailboxes, mail pieces and parcels, sorting centers, etc.) with low-cost sensors will exponentially expand the capability of postal operators to collect valuable data. This new rich data sources could help the Postal Service improve operational performance, customer service, create new products and services, and support more efficient decision-making processes. The "Internet of Postal Things", experts say, could also have a positive spillover effect on other adjacent non-postal sectors, as the information collected by and for the Postal Service could be useful to others.

Affixing sensors to postal trucks could help, for instance, reduce fleet maintenance costs, optimize routes, report dead spots in mobile and wireless coverage, or monitor environmental conditions, detecting harmful chemical agents and pollution. Data collected by such sensors could also become a basis for a new portfolio of postal services for government agencies and other public and private entities. For example, accelerometers could be placed on board to evaluate road conditions and detect potholes – the data collected could then be sold to municipalities.

Postal big data could even help retailers select new retail sites:, as it's already happening in Germany, where DHL offers businesses paid access to an online geomarketing tool
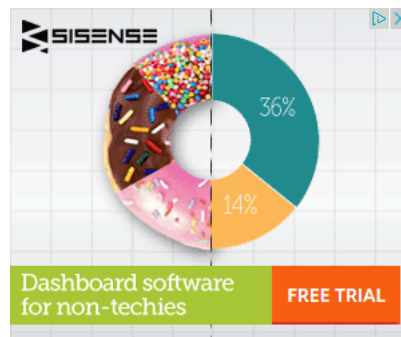
(http://www.dhl.com/content/dam/downloads/go/about_us/innovation/CSI_Studie_BIG_DATA.pdf) called Geovista, which combines geodata from Deutsche Post (/companies/deutsche-post/) Direct, external socio-demographic and housing data, and statistics on consumption patterns. This information helps marketers select new retail locations and prepare sales forecasts. Opening the data could also create opportunities for third party developers: France's La Poste is working with innovative software companies to set-up new services that leverage its databases, such as postcodes, post office locations, or change of address files.

On the end user side, postal big data could foster the rise of new consumer-centric delivery services: the report's authors quote the SoPost (http://twitter.com/sopost) platform, which, in the UK, lets people use Facebook and Twitter accounts as their postal address (http://techcrunch.com/2012/12/03/sopost/) for the delivery of gifts or product samples, without actual delivery details being shared. In Sweden, DHL has been testing (http://www.dhl.com/en/press/releases/releases_2013/logistics/dhl_crowd_sources_deliveries_in_stockholm_with_n PtQ) "crowdsourced deliveries", giving individuals the opportunity to deliver packages with products ordered online directly to other end consumers. Using a mobile app, the MyWays service connects individuals who ask for flexible deliveries with those offering to transport parcels along their daily routes for a small fee.

With these and other best practices in mind, on June 17 the OIG has issued a solicitation for a company that will help it take advantage of all the data it produces and will also imagine new ways to build innovative services around them. Those interested in sending their proposal, and win the 100,000.00 contract, however, should better hurry up: the closing date is today.

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