

Setting Up Your Maildrop

The first step in this process is to evaluate how much privacy you require for your activity and the distance you want to place between the authorities and yourself. If you are merely replying let us say, to contact advertisements in newspapers and magazines and you do not want your existing partner to find out, a Maildrop situated in your local town should suffice.

Alternatively: you may want to avoid being seen entering and leaving the Maildrop by someone you or your wife knows and decide that more security would be preferable. You might find a service in town or city a few miles away suits you better.

In contrast, if you have the taxman breathing down your neck and you expect a degree of real trouble you might want to consider a Maildrop in a foreign country or even another continent. The further away your Maildrop is from you, the harder it will be for anybody to connect and associate you with it and the mail that arrives there. You must bear in mind that depending on how you propose to collect the mail a good deal of time and expense might have to be worked into the equation.

However, the extra expense involved in lengthy trips to collect your mail might well be worthwhile. If you are being looked for by the authorities and you are using a Maildrop in your own locality you are running the risk of somebody recognizing you becoming familiar with your movements, finding out where you are living and possibly exposing you to the agencies and the individuals that are looking for you. There are unfriendly eyes and ears everywhere. Anonymity is your best protection and is worth the extra investment.

When you make your decision you should take into account that third world countries and the more relaxed European nations such as Greece and Spain are not really worth considering. Their postal services are inefficient and mail takes ages to arrive if it hasn't already been stolen. If you are considering the US as a possible location for your Maildrop, take into account that, as usual, the authorities lead the way in restrictive legislation. In some states clients must turn up in person, show ID and fill in forms before they can open a Maildrop facility.

Moreover, the post office has a list of many Maildrops on a computer disk. This information is loaded onto the computers of banks and credit reference agencies. If these addresses are used to obtain bank accounts or credit, those applications will be flagged and at the very least rejected. You will not be able to secure credit cards from listed Maildrop addresses. When using the US, we suggest you contact the various establishments and speak to them to see what they have to offer. Despite Big Brother breathing down everybody's

neck, there are still some deals that can be pulled off.

Once you have settled on your own requirements you can then set about contacting the particular services that might suit your needs and then determine which offers you the best deal and the most flexibility. It is always wise to select a Maildrop service that has been in operation for at least three years. Maildrops appear and disappear with disconcerting regularity. If a service has been around for three years and has a fair number of existing clients, it is likely to stick around. An established operation is unlikely to just up and disappear leaving you to begin the process all over again.

When contacting a Maildrop service I strongly recommend you do not do so in person or from an address to which you can be connected. Do not have details of the Maildrop services sent to your home. Information of this nature may find its way onto a computer database or a manual record and could ultimately land you in just the kind of bother a Maildrop is designed to help you avoid. Secrecy, caution and discretion at all times are the secrets of success as far as making yourself invisible is concerned. Ask for details over the phone that is not your own. The last thing you want to do is to leave a paper trail leading the authorities to your doorstep. Modern phone bills show itemized calls. A detailed investigation into your affairs will reveal calls to Maildrops and your secret address will be exposed. We also advise against using fax machines as they can be intercepted in the same way as telephone calls.

Use a phone in the comfortable and quiet lobby of a large hotel. These phones are available for public use and it is highly unlikely that particular calls can be accredited to a particular individual. Do not use a credit card to pay for your calls as transactions are held on record and contribute to damning paper trails.

Hotels can also be used as a place to which you can have mail sent. Simply book a room a week or two in advance and instruct the Maildrop companies to forward the details you require to the hotel for safekeeping until your arrival as a guest. Similarly you might inquire whether your bank would be prepared to hold mail for you until you call to collect. This should be easy to arrange, particularly if you are a long-standing, affluent and valued account holder.

Avoid contracts like the plague if possible. These documents are kept on file and represent another paper trail that will link you to the service and will blow your cover if they fall into the hands of an adversary or an investigator. If you contact the service by phone in the first instance, contractual signings and wrangles will be easier to avoid. When you begin to use the services, pay all your bills on time and work toward an understanding with the Maildrop operator. You may well find he will not force any contractual obligation upon you if he likes the steady and reliable payments you make.

You might approach the Maildrop you are looking to secure by phone and pretend that you live and are calling from another country and be prepared to give them an address in that country as your "home" address". This address should be another Maildrop address. You should instruct the Maildrop you are attempting to set up not to send any mail to this "home" address. Tell them to do so would be impractical as you spend a great deal of time away from that address traveling on business. Instead, suggest that you will arrange to collect the mail they are holding for you as and when you visit their area on a business trip.

Use An Alias

For security purposes use an alias. If you are doing nothing illegal then you have every right to call yourself whatever you wish. Your real name could turn out to be the weak link in the chain of security you have established. A committed investigator, be he from the private or public detection industry, will find it easier to locate your whereabouts if you are using your real name. It is easier to link you to specific items of mail if they have your real name emblazoned across them. It is an exceptionally easy operation for the authorities to trace an individual to his residential mailing address. Even if you move to a new address and you take out a forwarding order with the post office you can still be located by the professional investigator. The Post Office will not divulge to him where you are but there are means at his disposal. The investigator can take advantage of a particular delivery system that requires the postman to make a note of the address to which he finally delivered a parcel.

The investigator could later pay a backhander to see this. By using an alias and a Maildrop you will not attract the snooper's attention in the first place. Similarly, the snooper can organize items of mail requiring a signature at the point of delivery. If an agent of the authorities suspects that you are the John Smith he is attempting to locate and he has a sample of your signature, your handwriting and a postman happy to provide a quick peek for a few bucks, this might be one method he will use to establish whether you are his target or not. If, in the first instance you had used an alias, his attention would not have been directed toward you because your alias is not connected to any investigation he is carrying out. By adopting an alias you lower your profile, you prevent anyone from establishing who you are and you can play hide and seek with governments, officials or individuals who wish to pinpoint you and your whereabouts for reasons of their own. Nobody will connect you to just another name on an envelope. To all intents and purposes you are invisible and untraceable. Your alias can take the heat off you.

When opening your account at a Maildrop you should avoid giving your real name if possible for the reasons we discussed earlier. If you have camouflage ID, then consider using it. If not, try to ignore requests for proof of identity. As you become an established client it is probable that the Maildrop will let the matter drop. However, you must remain vigilant. Do not pay your account with a check or a credit card that has your real name on it. Instead pay by postal order or with cash. Once you have established an assumed identity be careful not to let the cat out of the bag with a simple error. I also recommend you do not under any circumstances send a cash payment via DHL. If an item of mail containing cash arrives or is headed for a country with currency restrictions either DHL or customs officials will open it. And this will probably land you in all sorts of trouble and attract the official attention you can well do without.

How To Retrieve Mail

The retrieval of mail is the most delicate point of your Maildrop operation. It is an area prone to mistakes and errors of judgment. The way you collect or receive your mail requires a great deal of care and consideration. As we have already discussed, do not mention your address or phone number to the Maildrop service. These details will almost certainly be held on file if you freely provide them. Complete discretion is your safest bet.

Investigators will use bribes to obtain the information they want. A junior, disillusioned and hard-up Maildrop employee when approached in this generous manner could prove to be an eager source of useful and interesting information. Investigators are notorious for their cunning and imaginative approach to detection. One popular method of finding somebody who doesn't want to be found is to advertise in the national press saying that the target is heir to a fortune and that he should contact the "solicitor" placing the advertisement. If he should fall for the ruse he will probably need a solicitor for a completely different reason than he originally suspected. If you think of your pursuers as clever, manipulative, sly, morally deficient, sophisticated, committed, wily and tenacious then you will not be too far from the truth and you will be prepared accordingly. Underestimate your adversaries at your peril. Unscrupulous investigators, if they are already on your tail will probably set up a mail cover on the addresses of your family, friends and associates.

Return addresses that appear on mail sent to these addresses will be diligently noted and checked out. If you are indiscreet enough to contact people from your past the game will be up very quickly. Remember that Maildrops are legitimate business operations. If faced by police officers investigating a serious crime, be it actual or bogus, the Maildrop operators will help in whatever way they can. Help yourself by not helping them lead

the authorities to you. Keep personal facts private. Drugs, pornography and money laundering are the current "evils" of society against which anti-privacy legislation is implemented, promoted and rationalized. Any investigation into you and claiming to be connected to any one of these areas will render ineffective any confidentiality, discretion or privacy you assumed existed between yourself and the Maildrop operation. Legitimate Maildrops do not want to be associated with any of Big Brother's pet hates or the criticism that will inevitably follow if associations are made.

When considering how to retrieve your mail you face two options. The mail can be forwarded to a third party address or collected from the Maildrop offices.

If you decide to have the mail forwarded, you must have another address where it can go. The same privacy considerations will apply to this second address as applied to the locating and setting up of the first. This could involve further planning and expense. You might decide to use a hotel or your bank as the final drop destination of your incoming mail. Do not provide the first Maildrop with a fictitious address or one where your mail is not expected. This can only lead to confusion and loss.

It is essential that you always know exactly where your mail is going and that you make sure it is expected and causes no alarm when it reaches its destination. If you are operating under an assumed name be careful this does not compromise you at the second address. If you are known at the final destination for the mail it will look very strange and unnecessarily suspicious if it is addressed to somebody else. As always, detailed and thorough preparation is all.

Collecting mail from a Maildrop presents problems too. Collection of mail involves physical presence at the Maildrop and physical connection to the items in question. Therefore, forethought is imperative. The shrewd operator can minimize a large proportion of the risk if he sticks to sensible and safe guidelines.

Do not be a creature of habit. For your own good do not allow people, particularly employees of the Maildrop, to become familiar with your routines. Better yet, do not have any routines for people to become familiar with. If you are going to collect mail from the offices of the Maildrop arrive on an irregular basis and arrive without prior warning. If you cannot predict where you are going to be at a certain time nobody else will be able to.

If you are lucky enough to have trustworthy friends and acquaintances, you might consider sending one of these to collect your mail for you. In this way you, can avoid visiting the Maildrop and having to leave with mail that will incriminate you or cause trouble. Hotel bellboys or taxi drivers might be prepared to perform the collection in return for a suitable cash payment.

Alternatively, if you have managed to set up your Maildrop without actually visiting the premises you could inform the operator that a friend will collect your mail and then collect it yourself in the guise of your friend. The Maildrop operator is likely to take you at your word and will automatically assume that the collector, i.e. you, is in no way connected with the mail arriving at his premises. As long as Maildrop operators are paid on time they are quite happy to keep their nose out of your arrangements.

If you rent a box at a Maildrop with 24 hour access which provides its clients with, a key, you can turn up at off-peak hours when the offices are unmanned to collect your mail. This way you stand far less chance of being observed and will succeed in further lowering your profile.

However, if you opt to collect the mail yourself in person be aware that your activities may have been discovered or are at least suspected by whoever or whatever it is you are trying to avoid. If, when you collect your mail, you do not recognize return addresses on envelopes or you are unsure whether mail is actually mail you have solicited leave those items in your box after memorizing the details. You can always collect them at a later date if subsequent investigations alleviate your suspicions.

Do not leave the premises with any item you are unsure about. It is better to be safe than sorry. One popular ruse amongst investigators in the US is to mail a large, bright parcel to Maildrop boxes they are suspicious of. When the unwitting box user leaves the drop, with his easily identifiable package, officers follow him and any privacy he has secured for himself has disappeared due to a distinct lack of attention to detail.

Going into your Maildrop with a briefcase, backpack, etc will provide a safe way to transport letters and packages out.

Testing Your Maildrop

Once you have chosen a suitable Maildrop, agreed terms and made suitable provision for the retrieval of your mail, you must then begin to test the operation. I recommend an initial trial period of three months. This will give you ample opportunity to test the service's reliability and to minimize the amount of money you stand to lose if the service does not measure up. These tests do not have to involve sensitive correspondence. It could be mail that you have prepared and sent yourself.

Issue instructions to the Maildrop and review the diligence with which they respond. This will not only test the level of service they provide but will also familiarize them with receiving explicit instructions from you. Issue precise

instructions when you require services that differ from the usual process. Dry runs are essential. You cannot expect the Maildrop operatives to be as intelligent or blessed with common sense as you are. Test a series of instructions and see how adeptly the service can react to different scenarios. If you fax instructions, follow this up with a phone call. Assess the friendliness and the attitude of the staff. Are they cordial or are they brusque and flippant? By testing the service you let the Maildrop get used to you and the way you like things to operate. By testing you are giving them an opportunity to adapt. This makes for an easier, more fluent and successful working relationship at a later date when more could be at stake. You will doubtless have criteria of your own to test. Only when you are completely satisfied with the level of service and discretion involved should you begin to use the Maildrop for its real purpose.

How To Establish Yourself As A Valued Client

Maildrops, like any other business look extremely favorably on clients who pay their bills on time. Prompt payment can work wonders and ensuring that you do this is the first step toward establishing yourself as a valued client and building up a good rapport. If at all possible pay your account in advance. Failure to pay bills on time can and will bring things to a grinding halt. The Maildrop will be displeased and far less likely to put itself out for you in the way they would for a prompt payer. It is in your best interests to keep the Maildrop happy with your account.

If you have used a cover story when opening the Maildrop account make sure the manner in which you pay corresponds with your earlier claims and disclosures. If you have told the Maildrop you are residing in New York, Paris or Bangkok, make sure postal payments have corresponding postmarks. The less grounds you give anybody, including Maildrop operators, for suspicion the less closely they will scrutinize your activities. Be as cordial and pleasant with staff as you would expect them to be with you. Maildrop employees, like any other workers, are far more prepared to go the extra mile for a client who respects them and uses his manners than they are for a client they can not stand the sight of. For the rude, ignorant and offensive client it is only a matter of time before his attitude impinges on the level and quality of service he receives. Nobody likes to be of service to a belligerent ignoramus. Too much familiarity is not advisable but small gifts to key Maildrop employees, be they financial or otherwise, could well buy you a modicum of loyalty if, for example, a private investigator takes it upon himself to snoop about asking questions and offering cash sums for information.

Use the knowledge and social skills you have picked up in other areas of your life and activities. If you can exploit a Maildrop employee's personal

interests, then do so. A happy working arrangement is a good working arrangement and worth the investment of time and imagination.

The Benefits Of Being A Valued Client

More often than not, Maildrops provide all manner of services to valued clients whom they can trust to pay their bills. These extra services can be invaluable to your business or personal affairs. Many Maildrops will undertake secretarial and accounting work, effectively providing the roving entrepreneur with a home from home office. Some Maildrops will even run your business affairs if the price and conditions are right. The majority of Maildrops will offer simple banking services, phone, fax and telex services, personal phone lines, a relay call facility and answering machine services. There are some Maildrop facilities that will undertake to organize the incorporation of companies. Computer space can be rented. Many will provide shelf or safe storage space.

Translation services can often be found at Maildrops. Many such Maildrops are happy to resource services and products for valued clients, they will undertake to solicit information on your behalf, they will remail bulk loads of your correspondence ensuring the postmark of their district appears on the envelope and not your own. They will ship out products. For valued clients the possibilities are endless. Maildrop services are flexible entities, geared toward serving the client and represent a useful business and personal tool enabling the user to tend his affairs with the optimum of privacy and a minimum input of time, money and labor.