

# PRONEWS



**PROLIST**  
DIRECT MARKETING SERVICES



March 2020

## Mailing in the Era of COVID-19

I think it's safe to say that this is new territory. Our nation and our industry have been through some trying times, but nothing quite like this. Can you mail? Should you mail? What's next?

It is difficult to answer any of these questions definitively, but hopefully we can offer some direction, and maybe some reassurance. For our purposes here, we're dealing with four major issues:

- **Supply chain:** Can you get the materials you need to produce a mailing? Is your mail service provider even open?
- **Delivery:** Will the Postal Service deliver your mail? On a timely basis?
- **Logistics:** Are freight companies transporting mail?
- **Response:** Are prospects going to respond? How will response rates be impacted? What can you do to measure and adapt?

### Supply Chain

It takes a lot of elements to put a mailing together. Items need to be printed which requires availability of paper and ink. Lists need to be acquired and combined and sorted, which requires a data and mailing company being open to mail them.

Paper, at this time, is plentiful (aside from the toilet variety.) Domestic paper production is thus far still up and producing – and we expect it will remain so. Imported papers may become a challenge with disrupted shipping, but our clients continue to use primarily domestic paper. Similarly, recycled paper appears to remain available.

Converted paper products, such as envelopes, are also still largely in production and easily available. Envelope manufacturers are generally considered “essential businesses,” and remain open even in those states with business restrictions.

Ink inventories are OK so far, and should be fine assuming the supply chain eases over the coming months.

Lists and list services can generally be operated remotely, and should not be a challenge.

Will your printers and mailers be open? Of course, this is being decided on a state by state basis, but mailing services have been specifically identified as an “essential service” by the Postal Service, and by each of the states that have locked down as of Sunday, March 22. Beyond being permitted to be open, ProList is also taking extraordinary measure to protect our employees and operations. **We plan on staying open.**

## **Delivery**

The Postal Service recognizes the critical role it plays in helping to bind the nation together in times of crisis, and has risen to the occasion. To quote: “The Postal Service is an entity of the Federal Government, and the provision of postal services to the American people is designated as an essential function under federal law during times of emergency.”

Our tracking partner, SnailWorks, has had a close eye on delivery times and status, and has seen no performance issues. In fact, lighter than normal mail volumes are helping make service particularly good.

The one delivery issue you should be aware of is foreign mail. As you can imagine, circumstances around the globe are creating delivery issues, particularly in hard-hit areas of Asia and Europe. IMEX has an excellent update here: <https://www.imexglobalsolutions.com/advisory-alerts>

## **Logistics**

Freight companies are taking measures to meet customer commitments, and continue to perform well. Co-mailing and commingling providers continue to operate as “essential services” as a part of the Postal Service supply chain.

## **Response Rates**

This is the big question – will your donors donate during this crisis? There are a lot of variables, but preliminary results seem at least OK so far. Donors have a lot of distractions right now, and perhaps financial worries, but they also have more time to spend with their mail, and there is less competition in the mailbox. Many donors are looking for ways to participate serving the needs of others and sending a cash donation can easily be done while still practicing safe social distancing.

SnailWorks does track response rates for some clients – a day by day report on how many replies have been put in the mail. The graph below shows results for a mailing dropped on March 3. You can see that there are still active responses the week of March 16. Overall the response is about 25% less to date than a similar mailing dropped in early February, but there is certainly activity. The specifics of your cause and your creative will certainly play into your

results. Response may be slow, but it's not dead.

Unique Piece Id Counts by First Scan Date



This also shows the importance of tracking response. As you test new messaging and offers, you want to get quick feedback on response so you can act accordingly.

If your mail isn't for fundraising, you need to adjust to what your desired results are. Obviously, event marketing is largely on hold for now, but mail may be a new tool for marketing your virtual event. Email is exceptionally saturated right now – direct mail has a better chance of cutting through clutter.

This may be an excellent time to add Informed Delivery to your mailings. ID can give you the opportunity to add a COVID-19 message even to a mailing that has already been produced.

## ProList Stands Ready

Whatever your next move is with your mail, ProList is ready to help. We offer print, data processing, personalization and mailing under one roof. This is critical in times of a limited supply chain. We can also add tracking of your mail – both outbound AND response – you need to do this. We can also deploy an Informed Delivery campaign to accompany your mail.

Mail is a part of the nation's critical infrastructure, perhaps now more than ever. We'll help you keep your mail effective and successful.

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Contact us to learn more! Jeff Thomas, VP of Sales and Business Development, [jthomas@prolist.com](mailto:jthomas@prolist.com) or Sylvia Taylor, Director of Marketing and Client Relations, [staylor@prolist.com](mailto:staylor@prolist.com).

To learn more about ProList on our website visit: <http://www.prolist.com>

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