

The Flute Network

CHAPTER TWO

**February and March 2007 issues –
USPS Delivery Performance Data,
as reported to us by our subscribers
(A replication of our 2006 Study)**

May 30, 2007

This report and all accompanying materials are freely offered in support of the Mailers Technical Advisory Committee (MTAC) Workgroup #114, the Postal Regulatory Commission, and the USPS - in conjunction with our collective efforts regarding USPS Service Standards and Measurement concerns.

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I. INTRODUCTION

During recent meetings of MTAC #114 in the winter and spring of 2007, several representatives from the USPS as well as our group leaders have voiced a sincere interest in receiving data from “the industry” regarding our respective experiences with USPS performance (i.e. postal “performance data”). The Flute Network is a small non-profit Standard Mail A mailer – and we are honored to share the relevant data we have garnered for our own purposes towards that effort (our data date from February 2004 to mid May 2007). In the interests of getting this material released sooner-rather-than-later, this particular report will likely be far more informal in feel and tone than was our Testimony before the PRC last September 2006 (which dealt with similar content), but it will be no less thorough and accurate for it.

In light of the lessons from the fable of how the “three blind men describe an elephant” (i.e., one man, feeling only the trunk describes it as being broadly tube-like, strong and wiggly like a fat snake; one man feeling only the tail describes it as being skinny, hairy and limp like a rope; the last man feeling only the side describes it as being broad and flat, high up, and wrinkled --- each one assuming that their experience alone can be taken as descriptive of the whole animal...) – Flute Network data and experiences are hereby being put forward in the hope that they will be combined with much more data and information stemming from other perspectives, experiences, and view points -- and that by doing so we might collectively reach understandings and find insights which would most certainly elude us otherwise. (Our signature editorial tag line for Flute Network is this: “Always remember - no matter what, we really are all in this together!”- and it most certainly holds true in this context as well...)

II. FORMALLY BRINGING FORWARD “FN-CHAPTER ONE” – The Flute Network data as offered in our PRC Testimony, September 2006

In 2006, seeking to understand and find a way to work with our own frustrations around the actual mail delivery of our print publication (as compared to what was put forward in the USPS standards of “3 – 10 days, nationwide”), The Flute Network asked our subscribers for help and initiated a pointed study -- we asked our subscribers to let us know the date they received each of two specific issues (the February and March 2006 issues) *and* the zip code where they received them. The data that came in validated our perceptions at the time that delivery performance really was, literally, all over the map. It was some months later that we learned that the data we had collected might be pertinent to concerns before the Postal Rate Commission (now the Postal Regulatory Commission) in the R2006-1 Rate Case which they were actively

considering. To cut to the chase, The Flute Network enlisted as an Intervenor and immediately went to work to organize our collected data and experiences in the form of formal Testimony, and make it available for use in their deliberations.

The Flute Network (and Janyce Pritchard [aka “Jan”]) eventually filed a number of documents with the PRC in conjunction with that case, all of which are still available at the PRC website:

(1) Our Testimony (currently available online at <http://www.prc.gov/docs/53/53091/FLUTE-final.pdf> -- submitted 9/5/2006);

(2) This was followed by a Reply to four Interrogatories from the USPS regarding questions they had regarding parts of our Testimony (submitted 9/29/06 and available online at:

<http://www.prc.gov/docs/53/53656/FluteReplytoInterog.pdf>)

(3) We later filed an Initial Brief (which essentially is a sort of “Readers Digest” version of the most pertinent parts of our more far-ranging original Testimony, along with a proffering of comments, insights, and thoughts about how our offerings might fit within the larger picture of the collected positions which other parties had put forward in *their* testimony, etc., with the PRC in this case...). Our Initial Brief is available online at: <http://www.prc.gov/docs/55/55518/arialFNinitialbrief.pdf> [Please note: we originally submitted our Initial Brief on 12/19/06 – we later learned that some folks had trouble reading it due to the type style and formatting of that particular document – SO – on 12/29/06 we filed another version of that document with *no changes in it *other** than changing the font to Arial – which in turn did cause a bit of pagination shift, but those are the only differences between the two documents. The version cited here is that later [and hopefully more readable] version, which - due to having been filed during the Holidays - technically turned into its having been filed and accepted as of 1/3/07).

OK – back to the point here.... our original Testimony for the PRC was written and submitted in September of 2006 (*i.e, recently*), - and in it, we included detailed explanations about The Flute Network itself and our publication, a history of our ongoing interests and concerns regarding USPS related matters (along with the history of our efforts to sort these matters out), *and also* those parts of my own personal and professional background which lent themselves to such an effort. While all of that certainly lends itself to the current consideration as well, in the interests of time and space (as well as a respect for the reader who may well

have already seen it all before!), I will not be duplicating all that here – *rather we will be building upon it* (hence, this document is very much a “Chapter Two” in purpose and mission, as well as by name!).¹

Our original data from 2006, all of which was included in our Testimony in 2006, is again hereby commended to our collective and current concern.² (For those who may find it helpful, an MS-Word version of that raw data is also available at the PRC site at: <http://www.prc.gov/docs/53/53091/EXHIBIT-V-data.doc> -- this was submitted to the PRC along with the PDF version which was included as Exhibit V in our formal Testimony on 9/5/06). This data reflect the experience of the flow of Flute Network’s February and March 2006 issues, as they originated from Waynesville, NC (28723) and moved basically from east to west across the country. **For our purposes now, let that body of data be considered “FN-Chapter One”.**

II. AND NOW – “FN-CHAPTER TWO”....

A. NEWLY DEVELOPED BACKGROUND

Much to my surprise last fall (major understatement there), events conspired to the ultimate effect that Flute Network did *not* cease publication after all. (...For a number of reasons, the USPS related delivery frustrations being one, we had reasonably expected our May/June 2006 issue to be the last...) Instead, based on what we learned from our subscribers in the wake of our 2006 study, combined with the discovery of a new printer/mailer option - we did indeed work through the whiplash of doing a total about-face and began publication again with that new printer/mailer, here in California in September of 2006. So far, we have produced and mailed 8 issues of The Flute Network together, all of which are now being mailed out of San Bernardino, CA (to be specific - SCF San Bernardino, CA 92403). Our ninth issue, the July/August 2007 issue, is currently in press.

The Flute Network continues to be the non-profit, entirely volunteer entity that we have been since we began in 1984. Primarily a print publication, we *now* go out free of charge 9 times a year to some 6,100+ different flutists and flute teachers nationwide. Our sole mission continues – that is to serve as a bulletin-

¹ However – if this document is the first you’ve heard of The Flute Network, it is likely you’d be interested in knowing about all that.... While that material is indeed readily available online, I will be happy to supply a copy of those sections, directly, for anyone who wishes it – please feel free to ask, and be sure to let me know how you’d like me to send it! My contact information is on the cover page of this report.

² One minor correction – or bit of errata – in the original Testimony is probably worth putting in place here: in reference to the table of raw data included on page 29, for the math to be correct, line 10 on page 30 should read: [for] “8 [issues] – delivery took 18 – 34 days” to go between Waynesville NC and San Bernardino ... not the 4 as currently listed there. The original data from which that table was derived was included on the page before. I apologize for that error going unnoticed until just recently.

board service for flutists, flute teachers (*AND* the people who love them...), and to help people get word about things as efficiently and economically for them as we possibly can. We do maintain a website (www.flutenet.com), where most (but not all) of each print issue also appears during the time that each print issue is the “current issue”. Also available on our website as a Flute Network service are listings of the Masterclasses (worldwide), a continuously updated list of “Stolen and Lost Instruments”, and a few other articles of a service nature. As regards our print issue mailings, we are maintaining our Non-Profit mailing permit in Waynesville, NC (Permit #37), and are mailing with a “ghost permit” under Colour Concepts, Incorporated mailing label (...we are “ghost number 81311” under CCI’s Non-Profit Permit No. 2968).

By December of 2006, it became apparent to us as we continued to advise our advertisers about how to plan the best timing of *their* ad content, that the conclusions we had reached from our earlier study might – or might not – be applicable to our new production process, especially now that basic direction of “mail flow” had been changed. Our Board of Directors decided that we should investigate those questions again, and we put in place plans to replicate our 2006 study with our February and March 2007 issues. Specifically, questions of concern were: (1) is the flow of mailings any different from “west to east” than it was from “east to west”, and if so, how?, and (2) most importantly - do we, and/or our advertisers, need to plan differently, given the realities of mail flow from our newly revised mailing pattern?

B. THE PARTICULARS relevant to our 2007 Study, MTAC #114, a CD, and the overall sequence of events

This year we were able to give our readers a “heads up” about our plans in the Greetings section of our January 2007 issue and asked that they be on the look-out for their next two upcoming issues (...that January 2007 issue went to press on December 10th, 2006).³ At the suggestion of an insightful friend, this year we included a specialized “form” to make it easy for folks to note their zip code and the date it was received, and pre-printed it on each mail piece where it would be easy for folks to use – this appeared on each of the February and March 2007 issues, in the panel devoted to addresses and special messages.⁴

As in 2006, no one was promised - nor did anyone receive - anything in return for their participation in our 2007 investigation, other than the assurance that their help really mattered and was going to make a

³ Copies of the relevant Greetings sections from January, February, March, and April 2007 issues are included as an Appendix to this document.

⁴ Copies of the address-section of the February and March issues are included in the Appendices.

difference (as it had, indeed, before!). As before – our subscribers demonstrated a sincere interest in being of help, some going to great lengths to be sure we received their information. *All* information that was received in connection with this 2007 study has been included in this report. Our first responder this year replied with their information on January 27, 2007 – our last bit of data particular to these two issues was received here on May 16th.

It was in early March of 2007 that I first learned of the MTAC #114 efforts, and was invited to participate with the Standard Mail Subgroup. The March 14th meeting of that Subgroup was the first of those I attended (via teleconference), and it was during the course of that day that I first learned of the CD which was available from the USPS which outlined specific 3-digit zip to 3-digit zip code Service Standards (...Now, the existence of such a thing as this was great news to me! – it sounded to be something far more useful than the generalized “3 – 10 day” expectations for standard mails which was what we had been working with thus far). I requested a copy of this CD and publicly offered – then and there - to perform (and share!) an “overlay” of the data that Flute Network was then actively collecting [regarding delivery performance of Flute Networks] with those refined and specific Service Standards as given on the CD. The disk arrived here on April 5th and we continued to collect our data, with plans to devote time to all of this when we returned from an overseas trip, in early July.

During the May 5th MTAC - Standard Mail Subgroup meeting, however, it became apparent that a shift of plans was being called for when it came to the MTAC cause – i.e., moving up our formal analysis of Flute Network 2007 data to the soonest possible moment. The result is the document you are now reading. The promised overlay of Flute Network 2007 data with the USPS 3-digit to 3-digit Service Standards from the Fiscal Year 2007, Quarter 2 is reflected in its entirety in the Raw Data, and can be found Appended to this document.⁵

C. NITTY GRITTY: New Particulars of Mail Prep, relevant to our 2007 study data

I continue to subscribe to Accuzip (a commercially available full service program for maintaining and managing USPS related mailings), and maintain The Flute Networks mailing list personally. Address corrections and changes of any necessary sort, any deletions and additions, etc. are made continuously –

⁵ Our sincerest THANKS go to Kurt Kramer who helped me not only to find the pertinent information on the CD, but also went to the trouble of pulling out the particular data we needed and sending it on to me in a form that we could more easily apply – all this very late one afternoon. His chart of the relevant USPS Service Standards from the 2007, Quarter 2 disk is included as part of this document.

and the list for each issue is always verified through Accuzip programming before being we go to press with each issue. However, given our new printer arrangements, I no longer print the labels and produce and supply all the mailing forms for each issue, as we used to do when our production came out of North Carolina... (slight correction to that: I do still produce those mailing documents with Accuzip, but they are for our own record keeping and general use and not supplied to USPS with the mailings)⁶. Flute Networks actual mailings and all those forms are now managed by Shannon Smith – Director of Mailing Services at Colour Concepts, Inc..⁷ (CCI also prints our publication).

As the address list for each Flute Network issue is received at CCI Mailing Services, they manage it with Firstlogic mailing software (also fully CASS and PAVE certified), run the Address Correction and Encoding (ACE) to generate the CASS report, etc., do the Presort and produce all the related forms for the mailing as a whole. After being printed, each individual Flute Network is folded into the 5 ½” by 8 ½ “ size and tabbed in two places along the edge opposite the fold, inkjet addressed, and presorted for the trays as it comes off the Kirk-Rudy Wave Jet and Kirk Rudy tabbing machine⁸, there in the CCI plant. The respective trays are then assembled, sleeved and strapped, and put on a pallet. When complete, the whole pallet is shrink wrapped, and the USPS paperwork (including the 3602, qualification report, and CASS certificate⁹) are put with it, inside the shrink wrap so as to insure nothing gets lost. CCI trucks all their mailings to the SCF Business Mail/Bulk Mail facility in San Bernardino, 92403, on *at least* a daily basis. A copy of the 3602 is also taken by the driver to be “round stamped” by the USPS and is returned to CCI for their files, so that copies of it can also be made for any of the CCI mailers who wish them (...like us).

⁶ Although it is indeed a duplication of service, I continue to verify all addresses and run the CASS certification on the specific and updated list for each issue before sending each list to Shannon solely in order to better “chase” problem addresses, and to do all we can to keep our list on the highest of standards as far as USPS is concerned. Also, we continue to subscribe to USPS Address Correction Services (we are #BYNMLCH), and we interface with that information using the ACS Module from Accuzip

⁷ Shannon Smith is also a part of the MTAC #114 – Standard Mail Subgroup, joining about the same time that I did. Just in the last year, alone, Shannon and CCI produced and mailed out pieces for some 500 companies – these mailings ranged in size from 200 pieces to some 400,000 pieces, and ran the gamut from being locally targeted to a nationwide blanketing. He and CCI have typically generated between \$1.5 and \$2 million in postage for the USPS on a monthly basis.

⁸ The Kirk-Rudy machine mechanically spaces out the respective bundles and trays as it processes the Presort – and the specific tray number for each individual Flute Network piece is also printed in the endorsement line of each address.

⁹ Copies of these forms, specific to the mailing of our March 2007 issue, are included with this report.

D. 2007 FLUTE NETWORK FINDINGS

1. Transit of Flute Network Issues From Entry into the USPS System – SCF San Bernardino, CA – to Delivery *in* San Bernardino, CA

Over the course of the eight issues we have produced and mailed so far, the dates of mailing and receipt of each issue at two local San Bernardino addresses were as follows:

| Issue | Date rec'd by USPS - SCF 924-- | Date rec'd at street address: 92407 | Date rec'd at PO Box in 92427 | Days in transit |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Sept/Oct '06 | 09/22/06 | 10/02/06 | 10/02/06 | 10/10 |
| Nov '06 | 10/23/06 | 10/26/06 | 10/25/06 | 3/2 |
| Dec '06 | 11/22/06 | 11/27/06 | 11/27/06 | 5/5 |
| Jan '07 | 12/18/06 | 12/22/06 | 12/22/06 | 4/4 |
| Feb '07 | 01/24/07 | 01/29/07 | 01/30/06 | 5/6 |
| March '07 | 02/20/07 | 02/28/07 | 02/28/07 | 8/8 |
| April '07 | 03/21/07 | 03/26/07 | 03/26/07 | 5/5 |
| May/June '07 | 04/23/07 | ...not yet rec'd | 05/02/07 | x/9 |

To be clear – the above chart reflects mailings from 3-digit zip of 924 to two addresses in 3-digit zip code 924 – the Service Standards as they currently stand indicate delivery can be expected in 3 days.

2. Our February and March 2007 Study

All of the raw data that came in regarding receipt of both issues are included with this document and are charted out by date and zip code, along with maps of the USA depicting those zip codes relative to the originating SCF San Bernardino, CA post office. As promised during the MTAC #114 Standard Mail Subgroup meeting in March 2007, the “overlay” of our data with the USPS Service Standards is provided in those charts as well – the number next to each zip which is enclosed in parentheses is the number of days

given in the existing USPS Service Standards for delivery - *to* – specific 3-digit zip codes - *from* - the originating 924 zip code (source: the CD of Service Standards, 2007, Quarter 2).

a. Regarding the February 2007 Issue

The February 2007 issue was received at SCF San Bernardino on January 24, 2007. We heard from 259 folks about the receipt of their February issue.

By USPS Service Standards, 2007, Quarter 2 data - none of them arrived “early”.

Two (2) were received “within” the established Service Standards, specifically:

- zip code 90260, was received Day 3, a Saturday, from mailing at 924 – the standard gives 4 days
- zip 27403, was received Day 9, a Friday, from 924 – the standard gives 10 days.

One issue could be considered to have been “close” in its arrival time - (i.e., delivered one day later than expected according to the Service Standards):

- zip code 90065 was delivered on Day 5, and the standards say 4 days for that zip.

The remaining 256 issues that we heard about were delivered between 2 and 43 days beyond the number of days identified on the USPS Service Standard CD.

From the point of view of the current Service Standards, and taken in bulk, only 25 issues – nationwide - were reported as being delivered within the initial 10 day span after mailing; 111 were delivered on and between Days 12 and 17; 60 delivered on and between Days 19 and 24 (there was a huge snow storm effecting NY and PA on our Day 19 – it’s unknown just how that effected potential for USPS delivery in those areas, but is certainly worth noting); 37 were delivered on and between Day 27 and 31; and 24 were delivered on and between Day 33 and 52.

b. Regarding The March 2007 Issue

The March 2007 issue was received at SCF San Bernardino Post Office on February 20th, 2007. We heard from 333 folks about receipt of their March issues.

By USPS Service Standards, 2007, Quarter 2 data - none of them arrived “early”.

Two (2) were reported as received within the established Service Standards:

– zip codes 90260 and 90403, both, were received on Day 4 (a Saturday), and the standards say 4 days for those two zips.

Four (4) could be considered to be in the “close” category:

– zip codes 10023, 27215, 11733, and 34116 were all received on Day 11 (a Saturday), and the Service Standards for all of those zips is 10 days.

The remaining 327 were reported as being delivered between 2 and 56 days beyond the number of days expected according to the Service Standards.

From the point of view of the current Service Standards, and taken in bulk, 26 folks – nationwide - reported receiving their issues on and within the initial 10 day span after mailing; 195 received theirs on and between Day 11 and 17; 85 were received on and between Days 18 and 24; 17 were received on and between Day 25 and 31; and 9 were received on and between day 32 and 65.

c. Notable Exceptions Among the Data Received for Both Issues

- i. On March 20th, 2007 - Day 55 of our February issue delivery - we heard from zip code 32506 that she *never got* her February issue at all, but that she received March on March 6th (the March data is included with the other March issue data; that February issue which was reported as “never received”, however, was not included in our raw data count... [we choose to think it just might show up for her, even yet]...).
- ii. Zip code 70505 reported receiving her March issue *before* her February issue – March issue was received on March 6th (Day 14, a Tuesday) and her February issue on March 8th (Day 43, a Thursday). Service Standards for zip 924 to 705 is nine (9) days. These data are reflected in their respective February and March counts.
- iii. Zip code 70814 reported receiving her February and March issues both on the same day – March 17th, a Saturday (this represents days 52 and 25 respectively; the Service Standards give 924 to 708 as nine (9) days.)
- iv. On April 11, 2007 – Day 50 of our March issue delivery – we heard from 75156 that he *never got* his March issue, but received his April issue on April 7th (the April issues entered the mail stream on March 21st – so that would be Day 16; Service Standards give 924 to 751 as being eight (8) days.) That his March issue

was never received is noted here, but as with the missing February issue above, was not included in the raw data count.

v. Three other people contacted us about receipt of their February and March issues, but their information was not sufficiently specific to allow us to responsibly code them. Efforts to contact these folks for more specifics were not successful, consequently we did not include their data in this report – however their efforts and interest in participating are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

3. Method of Responses

All together, 592 responses to our requests for information were volunteered to us. Of that number, 151 were sent to us via USPS mail (cards and notes, and most often the whole address panel was sent along as well; sometimes too, just the completed “form” that we’d provided for notation purposes was sent in); 8 people placed phone calls to us with the requested information; and 433 submitted their data via emails.

E. INITIAL REFLECTIONS from 2007 FLUTE NETWORK DATA

All the raw data is included as an Appendix to this document. We gratefully acknowledge Google Maps for their website services which provided us an opportunity to graphically represent the relative position of receiving zip codes relative to SCF San Bernardino (CA) post office which was the entry point for all Flute Network issues. One map of city/state/zip code data was constructed for each day that we had information about Flute Networks being received. In the Raw Data Charts, the number in parentheses positioned next to each zip code is the number of days the Service Standards (2007, Quarter 2) gives for the respective “origin 924 to receiving 3-digit zip code”. By comparing maps across time, then, it is possible to get a feel for the “flow” of Flute Networks as they traversed the USPS system across the country over time..

We have not yet begun to plumb the depth and range of what might be gleaned from the 2007 Data, however two trends of importance (to us) did pop out, almost immediately, while doing the charting.

First - it is clear that, in our case, trays tagged for SCF 924 were not (*consistently*) being pulled from the pallet before being sent to the BMC in Los Angeles. (I understand that Shannon will be actively pursuing this issue with our local USPS SCF office – he suspects that this could explain some of the frustration experienced by other of his customers, too, whose large mailings have been taking 10-plus days for local

delivery ...seemingly without reason, until now - but always with serious consequences for those particular companies.) Nothing is known, here, also, about how pallets and trays are actually managed or handled after leaving the BMC in Los Angeles to move across the country as well – if similar inconsistencies in handling are happening down the line, that could contribute to some of the delays (relative to the Service Standards) evidenced in the data.

Second – that local delivery can vary widely once a “batch” reaches its “local” area post office for delivery to its destination is evident in the data as well. Taking Los Angeles as a case in point (all of these zip codes are geographically close (relatively speaking), and in the Service Standards for 4 day delivery from a 924 origin) – but were delivered with wide variation in time:

February issue was received in:

Lawndale, CA 90260 – on Day 3
 Los Angeles, CA 90065 – Day 5
 Northridge, CA 91324 – Day 9
 San Pedro, CA 90731 – Day 9
 Glendale, CA 91205 – Day 10
 Glendale, CA 91206 – Day 15
 West Hollywood, CA 90046 – Day 30

March issue was received in:

Lawndale, CA 90260 – on Day 4
 Santa Monica, CA 90403 – Day 4
 Glendale, CA 91207 – Day 8
 Diamond Bar, CA 91765 – Day 9
 San Pedro, CA 90731 – Day 10
 Glendale, CA 91205 – Day 13
 South Pasadena, CA 91031 – Day 14
 Sylmar, CA 91342 – Day 15
 West Lake Village, CA 91362 – Day 15

If – as is widely suspected¹⁰ - Standard Mail moves only in an “as there’s room for it” basis - or alternatively - “only when there’s enough of it to be worth dealing with”, then that could account for some of these time differences – and it makes a mailers’ ability to reliably predict delivery next to impossible. I have no knowledge of any of the specifics about the range of delivery times in these cases (it really is rather striking!) – however, it is reasonable to suspect that LA is not unique in having such a varied profile in local deliveries of Standard Mail (especially nonprofit Standard Mails).

¹⁰ This “suspicion” was widely cited by most of the companies who talked with us as we conducted our 2006 Study, and has recently been reiterated to me again just in the last week by the owner of a large local Real Estate company and the Superintendent of a local public school system as being why they no longer use the bulk mail system, when they otherwise would. The CEO of a large non-profit professional organization also has put this “understanding” forward to it’s membership in their May 2007 newsletter, in a paragraph acknowledging and responding to the significant number of complaints that they’d received from the membership about their not having received organization publications which had been mailed to them some time ago. (Copy available upon request.)

F. COMPARING ACROSS 2006 and 2007 FINDINGS

1. Regarding February Issues

In 2006 we heard from 228 respondents; in 2007 we heard from 259 folks.

In 2006, the flow of our mailings moved from “east to west”; the bulk of recipients received their issues on and between 12 – 19 days from date of mailing.

In 2007, the flow of our mailings moved from “west to east”; the bulk of our recipients reported receiving their issues on and between 12 – 24 days from date of mailing (171 people)..

2. Regarding March issues

In 2006, we heard from 307 respondents; in 2007 we heard from 333 folks.

In 2006, the flow of our mailings moved from “east to west”; the bulk of recipients reported receiving their issues on and between 32 – 41 days from date of mailing.

In 2007, the flow of our mailings moved from “west to east”; the bulk of our recipients (208 people) reported receiving their issues on and between days 13 – 24 --- a significant improvement from 2006¹¹, and more in line with the experience of our two February issues as noted above.

3. OUR OWN CONCLUSIONS – SO FAR

In light of what we learned in 2006, when it became clear that we would indeed be going back into production, we adjusted our deadlines and press times up by a week (i.e., to the 10th of the month prior to the next months issue- for example, January 10th was the deadline for our February 2007 issue, February 10th the deadline for the March issue, and so on) thus allowing a “cushion” of 4 – 5 weeks for delivery time to our nationwide subscriber base via USPS. Our hopes in doing this were that more people might then be receiving their issues *within the month that appeared in the banner heading of each issue...* and our data from 2007 investigation appear to show that this hope has generally been realized. We continue to hope that this time allowance might be realistically (and reliably!) reduced; indeed, we would prefer it so.

¹¹ Why this change???? ...heaven only knows!..... (Several theories *have* been proffered, so far, from folks we’ve talked with about this, but in the absence of further good information, those are mostly of a nature best shared in a far *less formal* setting than this document, and perhaps – better yet - discussed over a glass of good wine!)

At this point, given all that has come to light in the meantime regarding USPS processes *and* the demands being made of it, we at The Flute Network continue to be totally respectful of – and honestly, rather somewhat in awe of – how the USPS manages to deliver our mailings at all (and sooner or later, for the most part) to all those gazillions of addresses around the country. (One thing that really became obvious while working with Google Maps in this effort: there sure are a mind-blowing number of *little-bitty roads* now, in even more little towns that weren't even there last year – all of which have specific addresses and are scattered all around this country – *far more* than one might casually imagine!. No doubt the task of managing the mails has only become more complex and complicated over time as a result.¹²) It is not unusual, then, to think that the “realities” of current mailer experiences have also, then, likely far out-paced the established expectations and understandings about mail delivery times... However, what has *not* changed is the over-arching need for USPS **and** its customers to be as “in synch” as possible about these matters.

As a case in point, knowing from our 2006 Study that in “reality”, it’s taking up to 5 or more weeks for Flute Networks to be received by many (if not most) of our subscribers, we chose to adjust accordingly (...not that we’re totally *thrilled* about it, but at least we *know better, now*, just what the “realities” are that we are dealing with, instead of trying so hard to hold to a belief in what amounted to – at best, “out of touch information” – as given in the USPS Standards of “3 – 10 days, nationwide”). Essentially, then, we are a case in point as to how the ability to plan better for receipt of ones mailings can make all the difference in the world (...well, *that – and* being graced with all the understanding and supportive subscribers, who so generously invested themselves in these investigative efforts, as well!).

The larger questions remain however. USPS customers (ourselves included) need – and deserve – to know better how to predict the timing of their mailings, and this can only come with *accurate information* about mail flow, for all mail classes, over time. The current MTAC #114 efforts towards those ends represent real potential for realization of that hope - in that we indeed are a diverse and widely inclusive party – and we are, indeed, (1) actively comparing notes about this “elephant” – or at least *what we each know* of it, and (2) looking at ways the USPS itself might better assess its own performance, possibly reconsider *how* it does its work, and make adjustments *if-and-as needed in order to actually accomplish that which they believe they can do* towards meeting our mutually desired ends. Technological advances in scanning and tracking technology offer tremendous potential for individual mailers as well as the USPS to better assess these matters

¹² Just this past weekend, there were reports in the newspapers, on CNN and MSNBC about the assignment of a unique zip code for a *shoe store* to be opened this summer on the eighth floor of the Saks Fifth Avenue flag-ship store in New York City: 10022-SHOE. ...Now, I doubt we will be adding them to *our* mailing list, but the *fact* of it is testament to the very kind of fine complexity I’m referring to!

as we move into the future. For now, however, (to the best of my knowledge) we have only what currently exists as the ground upon which any such efforts for the future must find traction. That there is, currently, still some discrepancy between mailer and mailing expectations and experience is perhaps still an understatement (i.e., there are perhaps far more than three versions of this this “elephant” -- versions that have yet to see the "light of day" by virtue of being shared - it is good that there is room for all of *them* as well!).

IN SHORT: Our collective efforts most certainly stand the best chance of bringing the best results for ALL of us if our work can be inclusive and based in *as much “reality” as we can (a) get our hands on, and (b) get our minds around.* It is hoped that the raw data related to The Flute Networks experience with Standard Mail A non-profit delivery, from both 2006 and 2007, may assist in our collective effort.

Appendices:

1. The address panels for the February and March 2007 issues.
2. Mailing forms from our March 2007 mailing – CASS, 3602, qualification report, tray tags
3. The Flute Network Raw Data 2007 - with maps, and Service Standards overlay
4. From the Service Standards, 2007, Quarter 2 - a chart of 924 to other 3-digit zip codes
5. Page One of the January through April 2007 issues of The Flute Network..