# Do You Know What's Really Inside Your Envelopes?

There are varying degrees of what the mailing industry refers to as "mail piece integrity". Up to now, some mailing operations have been able to get by with rudimentary "end of the line" inspection systems. Perhaps even an old-fashioned batch balancing process did the trick managed with nothing more sophisticated than a clipboard.

Those days are ending. Many mail applications designed today, and certainly those of the future are significantly more complex than the mass mail jobs legacy mail inserters and inkjet lines were originally designed to support. Data availability, capabilities of modern document composition software, and access to low-cost full-color digital print engines now make it easy for organizations to create messages meant for an audience of one. Documents are likely to be highly personalized by including customer-specific details, variable images, and offers based upon past customer behavior or demographic and psychographic profiles.

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There is no doubt the availability of multiple communication channels – email, text, social networks, or online – has lured volume away from physical mail. The mail volume that remains is likely to be part of an integrated multi-channel approach rather than a standalone effort. As a critical component of an overall communications effort, every single mail piece must be tracked and verified as properly assembled and finished. Customers willing to pay the price to produce postal mail today are insisting on these capabilities.

Service providers unable to run jobs featuring a high degree of personalization due to inadequate integrity control systems are limited to accepting only the old-style "spray and pray" type of projects, along with razor-thin profit margins. Long-term survival prospects in this scenario are questionable, particularly as volume continues to decline. Legacy direct mail production has definitely become a commodity.

**DDS Enables Businesses to Offer More**
Recognizing the need for more comprehensive document and mail piece tracking and control, engineers at Document Data Solutions, experts in the field of variable data inline color printing and document integrity, developed Advanced *Event Driven* Tracking, a revolutionary document integrity module for their industry-leading vision and printing systems. This new capability uses a collection of sensors and encoders to inform DDS Tracking control systems (*i*DataScan™ and *i*DataPrint™) about the status of each component in a mailing piece as the packages are assembled on their way to the final output module. If something goes wrong, the DDS system stops the equipment and alerts the operator. Embarrassing and costly mistakes can be avoided.

"Other mail integrity systems, like our competition, may rely upon a 'first-in, first-out' method or 'virtual tracking'. Both these approaches make some assumptions about what goes on between the first scan and the last – a dangerous practice when processing sensitive documents such as checks, health insurance information, bank statements and the like", says Robert Ellis, President of Document Data Solutions.

A number of vendors have traditionally offered camera-based mail tracking systems with limited functionality at the low end of the price range. Aimed at smaller shops, these rudimentary systems are certainly better than having no tracking at all. However they can sometimes provide a false sense of security.

*Consider the following scenario:*

*On a multi-page bank statement application, the second page of one account has gotten out of order and is now in the feeder between pages intended for another account. Perhaps this happened because of a jam that occurred while printing. Or the stack fell off the cart while being transported to the mailing area.*

*Will a tracking system doing a sequence check with a camera at the output conveyor catch this error? Probably not! Will the job appear to have been processed correctly and will the balance totals agree? Probably so! Will private financial information be mailed to the wrong account holder? Almost certainly!*

Low-cost tracking solutions are usually not really integrated with the inserting equipment. Using a stand-alone camera system to verify a sequential number scanned through an envelope window provides no assurance the contents are correctly matched and assembled.

**A Brand-New Approach to Document Integrity**
Event Driven Advanced Tracking from DDS works with both the DDS Print Controller *i*DataPrint™ and *i*DataScan™ products. Through the use of additional hardware and software components, Event Driven Advanced Tracking essentially enables a "handshake" relationship between a mail inserter and the DDS vision and printing software. No longer must mailers assume a piece scanned at the beginning of the machine is located at a certain place in the document track based solely on machine "cycles". Event Driven Advanced Tracking can tell exactly when individual pieces have progressed from one machine station to the next. The system knows when pages are missing or out of order because the DDS tracking system creates and associates a unique identifier with each and every mail piece. This unique identifier is used to track every piece as it moves through the system

**Accurate Envelope Personalization a Competitive Advantage**
Mailing jobs calling for addresses printed on closed-face envelopes have always been particularly challenging. A standard quality control practice calls for stationing an additional operator or quality control person at the output envelope conveyor. At regular intervals the extra employee removes a mail piece and opens it to make sure the personalized contents match the name and address printed on the envelope.

Obviously this manual method of verification is labor-intensive and expensive. And because it relies on human hands and eyes, it can be unreliable. Once a mismatch is discovered, production grinds to a halt as additional mail pieces are opened and examined in an attempt to

find the last good match. After adding Event Driven Advanced Tracking an $i$DataScan™ / $i$DataPrint™ read and print operation can eliminate excess labor while simultaneously ensuring more accurate results. Reduced labor expense and increased throughput improves profitability on this type of work.

Switching to closed face envelopes allows mailers to standardize on a common format and combine small jobs into larger ones. This strategy lowers material costs, reduces inventory storage requirements, minimizes machine idle time, and improves productivity.

Designers can gain valuable document real estate by switching to closed-face envelopes. Typical applications must reserve over four square inches of space that can contain only the mailing address and barcodes. By printing the address on the outside of the envelope, space on the documents can be used to hold additional detail lines or variable messages. It may even be possible to reduce page counts by making use of this extra space. Of course confidence in knowing the contents of the envelope match the address printed on the outside is absolutely necessary for these types of jobs.

Addresses are not the only variable information that can be printed on envelopes. Based upon individual customer profile information, full-color inkjet heads mounted on inserting machines can print targeted marketing messages, maps, or other content designed to encourage mail recipients to open the mail pieces and respond.

For mail service providers, capabilities such as those described above can have double benefit: they can be distinguishing features enabling them to capture more work in a competitive marketplace and at the same time raise their profit margins. Some mail service providers have even reported success at charging a premium for their mail piece tracking capabilities enabled by the DDS vision system, $i$DataScan™, featuring Advanced Event Driven Tracking!

**Making Legacy Equipment Young Again**
Some of the newer mailing equipment on the market today includes excellent tracking capabilities, which is great. What aren't so great are the price tags on brand-new pieces of equipment. In-house mail centers and mail service providers have trouble getting budget approval to purchase new mailing equipment at a time when mail volumes are falling. This leaves mailers in a bind. How does one compete for business calling for more sophisticated capabilities when it requires a substantial investment in new gear?

There are plenty of fully-depreciated pieces of mailing equipment installed all across North America. Some machines are over 40 years old and still chugging away every day! Though DDS systems are frequently integrated with state-of-the-art inserting platforms, no one expects every operation to have the budget to replace perfectly good equipment, even if it is "a classic".

DDS vision systems with Advanced Event Driven Tracking were designed to be installed on
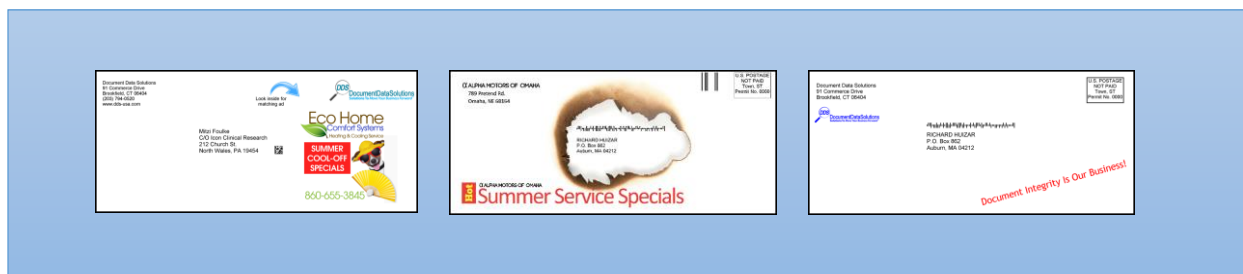
inserters of practically any vintage. The installation usually takes only a day so disruption to the business is minimal. After the conversion, document service providers are able to bid on more complex jobs that require matching or personalization – and charge rates commensurate with the value of these services.

## Operator-Friendly and Highly Configurable

Advanced Event Driven Tracking is fully integrated with DDS tracking and control systems. A simple user interface enables the system to be programmed to recognize an event and then initiate an unlimited number of concurrent actions. An event might be a case where a statement page is missing, or a letter and a personalized pre-printed insert don't match. Actions initiated by Advanced Tracking might include alerting the operator, stopping the machine, diverting the piece, or queuing up a reprint.
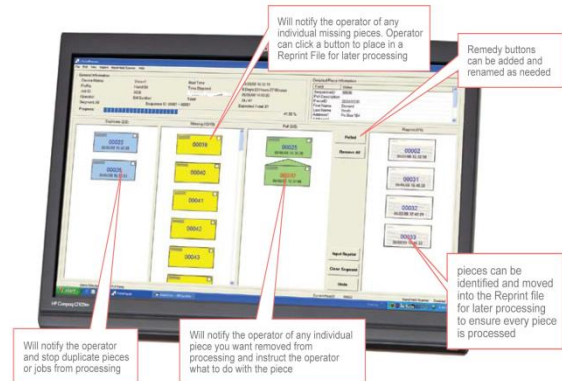
Of course Advanced Tracking is not limited to mail inserting machines. The technology has been installed on equipment used to accomplish any paper-handling process such as folding or bindery.

DDS customers can be upgraded in the field to Advanced Event Driven Tracking under their current service agreements. All DDS customers will be able to take advantage of the investments DDS has made to enhance the capabilities of their products.
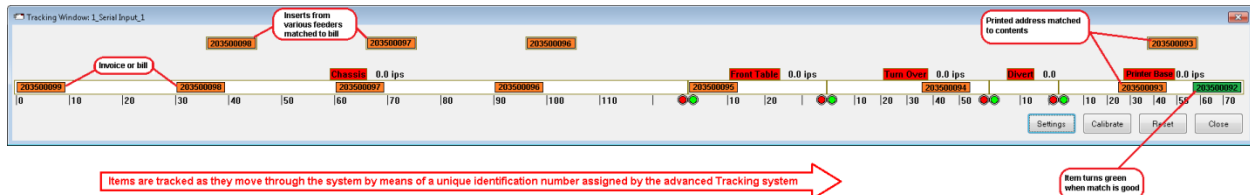
## Staying in the Mail Business

Companies planning on remaining in the business of producing direct mail or transactional documents really have little choice. Multi-channel customer communication strategies, elevated customer expectations, a highly competitive marketplace, and a need to justify the value of mail all point to a need for in-house operations and mail service providers to have more control over the integrity of the mail they produce. New laws such as HIPAA/HITEC have increased the cost of accidental privacy breaches. It is risky to rely upon decades-old methods of quality control to handle today's complex mailing jobs. It's time to retire those clipboards.

Advanced Event Driven Tracking from DDS provides the opportunity for companies of all kinds to distinguish themselves from the competition. They can evolve from commodity providers into solution partners who can help their customers achieve their objectives. They can grow their businesses rather than simply trying to hang on to existing work in a declining market by simply adding tracking and mail piece integrity to their operations.

To find out more about how $i$DataScan™ and $i$DataPrint™ with Advanced Event Driven Tracking can improve your bottom line, contact Document Data Solutions to schedule a demonstration. 203-794-0520 or sales@dds-usa.com

### About DDS

*Document Data Solutions (DDS) is dedicated to providing unrivaled consulting and customized data collection, quality control solutions and printing solutions. We develop real-world solutions for inkjet printers, inserters and finishing equipment including data collection and reporting.*

*DDS has evolved from years of experience and research in the print and mail industry. We have generated strategic alliances with key corporate partners. This insures unique solutions tailored specifically for our customers through the use of the highest quality, cutting-edge software and hardware technology.*

*DDS has one of the most comprehensive product and service offerings in the industry. Our services include, consulting, software development, On-Premise solution development, test lab, a full machine shop, powder coating and rapid response / turnaround time.*

*DDS has such a wide array of solutions that we would like to be your single source for all your unique printing, scanning, data collection and reporting needs.*