

Change of Address in Countries Worldwide

Merry Law

Editor

*Guide to Worldwide Postal-
Code and Address Formats*

This paper was made possible through the proud support of



GrayHairSoftware.com



DIALOG MARKETING

POSTADDRESS
GLOBAL

PostAddressGlobal.com

Businesses send mail. Even in these days of reduced mail volumes, businesses mail to customers, potential customers, suppliers, competitors and partners. Incorrect addresses cost money – postage, printing, and handling – beyond the inefficiencies of invoices or marketing material not reaching the proper destination.

In the U.S., business rely on files from the U.S. Postal Service (U.S.P.S.) for address hygiene services for address standardization, address verification and change of address (COA) notifications for both residential and business addresses. The U.S.P.S. charges a fee for the use of these files but offers postage discounts for pre-sorted mail that has standardized and verified addresses. Both businesses and the U.S.P.S. benefit from the arrangement: businesses save money and more mail reaches its destination, while the U.S.P.S. receives better addressed and sorted mail with fewer undeliverable items to return. The address change and mail redirection is free to the addressee for one year.

Before further discussing COA services, it is useful to clarify some terms in address hygiene. Address standardization is the computer processing of a file to place the elements of each address in the proper positions. When working with international addresses, standardization is done within each country in the file. Address verification matches the address to a file that confirms that the address is correct against a file of addresses from a national postal authority, government agency or other authoritative source. Addresses can be verified to the building or house number, as in the U.S., or at the city level. As an increasing number of countries introduce more automation, new and more detailed address verification files are being created and released. Street level address verification is available in approximately 50 countries; city level verification can be done in about the same number.

Address standardization and address verification are concerned with the address itself but not with the addressee. Change of address services differ in that the particular addressee is verified as having moved from one address to another. This difference, that the individual's name is processed, makes COA services subject to more restrictions in some countries. It also makes the processing more sensitive to differences in spellings and nicknames. Individuals at a single address named Robert A. Reeve, Bobbie Reeve, R. A. Reeve, and Rob Reeve, Jr. may be related individuals or the names may be variations for one person.

Worldwide the service offered by the U.S.P.S. is not the norm. While many postal operators offer COA and mail redirection or forwarding services, most countries do not have COA files that are available to mailers. Where they do exist, the COA data is typically available for consumers, not businesses. If business COA data is maintained, it is not usually a large file. Some providers of COA information allow the suppression or removal of recent movers but do not provide new addresses, often due to privacy laws.

Other than the U.S., the following countries have a COA consumer service:

- Australia
- Austria
- Belgium
- Canada
- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Ireland
- Italy
- The Netherlands
- Norway
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- The United Kingdom

The following countries have a business COA service:

- Australia
- Belgium
- Canada
- France
- Germany
- The Netherlands
- The United Kingdom

It is possible to identify undeliverable addresses in many countries where change of address information is not available. Spain's privacy laws, for example, prohibits the use of private address information for use in providing change of address but addresses there can be verified as deliverable.

Two addressee-related issues reduce the effectiveness of these services. A fee for mail redirection paid by the addressee may lessen the number of filings for change of address notifications by those relocating. In those countries that charge per piece of forwarded mail, the cost is not known in advance which may make a resident still more reluctant to file a change of address notification. Further, some countries require the prior agreement of the addressee to allow use of that individual's (or family's) change of address to be

used by an organization other than the postal operator with whom it was filed. This latter requirement is common in countries with strong personal privacy laws, including those in the European Union (EU). Where possible, companies offering the change of address files try to compensate for them by supplementing the information with new addresses from other sources.

With the liberalization of the EU's postal sector and the introduction of competition, more than one source of information is available in some countries. EU postal liberalization requires countries to permit competition in the postal sector. A country may have more than one designated postal operator and no single operator can have a monopoly on providing mail services as the U.S.P.S. does in the U.S. As the postal operators are under less direct government control, some countries have established other government agencies to maintain the official national address database. Others rely on the postal services. The different postal operators may have slightly different information, as an addressee may not always provided information to all of them and as addressees permit one company but not another to provide data to other companies. Because of this, international address hygiene service providers may use multiple sources of information in a country.

The change of address files that do exist are not available to all companies worldwide equally. Some countries with personal privacy laws may only make the actual change of address files available to companies with a domestic presence or to companies in other countries with similar laws. All of the countries with COA services, other than the U.S., have privacy laws and regulation. The requirements vary from one country to another. Deutsche Post Address, which specializes in international COA services, is able to provide consulting on this issue.

Companies that have registered under the Safe Harbor Agreement between the EU and the U.S. will have greater access to information for COA from EU countries. Some EU countries have a very strict processing acknowledgment form that customers must sign prior to running the service. Part of the agreement may stipulate that all U.S. companies associated with the handling of the data must be Safe Harbor members and the usually agreement holds the mailer responsible. The EU privacy regulations are currently undergoing modification, with significant changes expected within the next year. While this will not remove privacy protections or the need for U.S. companies to participate in the Safe Harbor program, it may make legal requirements more uniform across the EU countries.

Providers of international address hygiene and COA services can provide some guidance regarding privacy considerations. Since each country has differences in their regulations, even within the EU, mailers should not assume that compliance with the laws and regulations of any country will mean compliance in other countries. Legal advice should be sought from an attorney or other legal professional with expertise in this area if more details are needed.

Charges imposed by the postal authorities, and passed on to the client by service bureaus, can include a "per hit" fee and may also include a separate charge for processing the file. This means a company wishing to clean addresses may pay a fee for processing and an additional (usually small) charge for every address change that is provided. If no address changes are found, the processing fee would still apply.

The charges vary, and the price may differ depending on how the mailer plans to use the cleaned addresses. For example, if a mailer using the service will in turn update their house file with the COA data, the costs will be higher "per hit" than if they are using the service on a promotional mailing which would be considered a "one-time" usage of the data. Compared to the fees for processing levied by the USPS, international fees are generally substantially higher.

In many countries, national change-of-address services are separate from address standardization services with no requirement that a file must pass through address standardization prior to the verification and COA processes. (In the U.S., standardization is required.) Address standardization of a file prior to processing for address verification and comparing the addresses to the COA database makes correct matches more likely. Although the standardization processing does increase the overall cost of processing, it is often worth the cost to take full advantage of address verification and COA services.

For many countries, the time needed to gain approval for processing and to acquire the files may be far longer than U.S. mailers anticipate. These times can vary for a number of reasons and mailers should consult potential international address hygiene vendors, like Deutsche Post Address and Grayhair Software, for estimates based on their particular requirements. Some countries do not allow certain of their files used for address hygiene to be exported to other countries because of security considerations. (The U.S. has such laws as well.) Whether this applies depends on the exact hygiene services – address standardization, address verification, COA – and in which country or countries the addresses are located. Address hygiene vendors can provide further information and guidance on the requirements.

One person acquainted with the issues of international COA said, “Overall, my experience is that most of the postal authorities have made their COA services difficult to access and very costly – so cost prohibitive that it is outside the budgets of most [U.S.] mailers.” Some mailers disagree and find the services useful and cost effective, given the higher costs for international mail and the potential customer retention. Each company must make this judgment based on their own unique circumstances.

About the author

Merry Law, president of WorldVu LLC, oversees their publications and worldwide marketing programs. She is editor of the authoritative *Guide to Worldwide Postal-Code and Address Formats* and author of *Best Practices for International Mailings*. Merry is a member of the Universal Postal Union POC Addressing Work Group and of the U.S. International Postal and Delivery Services Federal Advisory Committee. She can be contacted at mlaw@worldvu.com.

About the sponsors

GrayHair Software, Inc. is an industry leader in the development of critical services that improve business mail, including Intelligent Mail® barcode assignment, mail tracking, address quality, presort analysis, postage reconciliation, mail monitoring, consulting and global address validation and global hybrid mail services. GrayHair offers consulting services through its GrayHair Advisors division, which provides independent guidance on strategic issues. For more information, visit www.GrayHairSoftware.com and www.GrayHairAdvisors.com.

POSTADDRESS GLOBAL provides Address Verification, International Change of Address (COA), Suppression and Deceased Files – globally as a smart one-stop shop. POSTADDRESS GLOBAL supports companies in international markets by correcting, cleaning, updating and researching addresses. Whether it’s a matter of addresses deduplication, data updating and enrichment or identifying deceased data, we offer a large range of services to maintain international databases and for foreign mailing campaigns. POSTADDRESS GLOBAL is the trade name of Deutsche Post Adress, a joint venture between Deutsche Post, the largest logistical and postal company in the world, and Bertelsmann, the largest media company in Europe. Visit www.postaddress.com for more information.