Internet & Computing/Tech Talk

# Eliminate Busywork With Address Labels

By Ed McCarthy
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**In this week's Tech Talk, we look at an advisor's question on printing address labels for his monthly client newsletter.**

**Q**

I send out a monthly newsletter to approximately 500 clients (ACT 2000 is my client database software). I use an inkjet or laser printer to print 15 pages of labels that I must peel and stick on each envelope. Is there a more efficient way to get the client addresses on the envelopes?
   —**W.F.,** *Los Angeles, CA*

**A**

I'll answer this from two approaches. On a purely mechanical level, it sounds like you need to stop printing labels and get a printer that has an envelope feeder with a fairly decent capacity. (I don't use ACT, so I'm assuming it can print envelopes sequentially.) Some feeders can handle only a limited number of envelopes, such as 10 or 20 at a time. Constantly reloading a small volume feeder for a 500-piece monthly mailing will drive you nuts, so I'd recommend a printer with a feeder that can hold at least 75 to 100 envelopes. If you can't add a feeder to your current printer, it will take some shopping to find a printer with the features you need—color, speed, etc.—but you should be able to find one that can handle the job. Consider the following manufacturers: Kyocera (www.kyocera.com), Lexmark (www.lexmark.com), Hewlett Packard (www.hp.com), Oki (www.oki.com), and Xerox (www.xerox.com).

Although the above is a solution, I'm not sure it's the most efficient use of your time. I suspect you would be better off by outsourcing the printing/envelope stuffing work to a third party, such as a mailing service or a virtual assistant. The concept behind outsourcing is straightforward: An organization (you and your staff, in this case) should focus on its core competencies. If a task does not directly involve a core competency, hire an outside organization that specializes in that activity and have them do it for you. For example, clients hire financial advisors because the advisor specializes in financial and investment management, while the client specializes in some other income-producing activity. In turn, I believe the advisor should focus on his core competencies— client-focused activities—and not spend time on ancillary activities such as stuffing envelopes.

The economics generally support outsourcing. For instance, if your income-producing time is worth $100 per hour and it takes two hours to perform a clerical task, that downtime costs you $200 in foregone income. If you outsource the task and it costs you $100, you're ahead of the game.

You can find printing and mailing services in your local Yellow Pages. You might also consider a virtual assistant, a firm that can provide a wide range of office support services, including database maintenance and mailings. Your virtual assistant can be located anywhere: I work in Rhode Island but use Total Office, Inc., a virtual assistant firm located in Akron, Ohio. We exchange files by e-mail or other online methods, including an Web-based intranet, with phone and fax for other communications. If you want to go this route, the International Virtual Assistants Association maintains directories of virtual assistants based in the United States and several other countries.

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