



DIGITAL MAILROOM IN HEALTHCARE: COMMITTING TO ELIMINATING PHYSICAL SNAIL MAIL

By Erin Head

I previously wrote an [article](#) in 2019 discussing health information exchange (HIE) and how it can play a big role in integrated care. The opening paragraph of that article referenced the call for physician offices to be “fax-free zones by 2020”, as penned by the former CMS Administrator, Seema Verma, in 2018 in reference to the exchange of patient information among providers. Now that a few years have passed (and we are still sending faxes), I not only want to stand firmly behind the call for no more fax machines in healthcare, I also want to expand on that further; no more sorting through physical “snail” mail in healthcare!

As the COVID-19 pandemic caused many organizations to deploy remote workforces, there were several physical processes that were quickly identified as nearly impossible in a remote work environment. We found ourselves searching for workarounds to recreate these workflows as quickly as possible and identified some things in hindsight we [should have modernized](#) a long time ago.

The age-old mailroom is one of those areas that stands out in this ordeal and leaves us questioning the volume and purpose of all of the physical mail healthcare organizations receive daily. Between the incoming and outgoing faxes and mail, it feels as if we have not made much progress with the tools we have available; although we do have some online faxing and electronic mail options available to us today.

Mail travels across many different departments, facilities, and destinations in healthcare organizations and it doesn't always end up where it is intended. This causes delayed processing time, lost mail, and potentially confidential information in the wrong hands. The physical mail process was flawed, even before deploying remote workers, and those remaining onsite still experience these challenges as well. Whether it's an invoice, a subpoena for medical records, a request for an insurance audit, reimbursement denials and appeals, or junk mail, healthcare staff are left sorting through gobs of mail every day as part of their routine. When physical access to the mailroom was cut off as employees began working offsite, healthcare leaders scrambled to connect the paper from point A to point B to maintain this routine workflow and still struggle with this today.

This bears the question: Why not look for long term alternatives to physical mail and in-person processes instead of temporary workarounds? This poses a unique challenge as the sources of physical mail are just as varied as the content and destinations. Do we continue to have staff pick up physical mail daily to sort and distribute it -- which seems distracting and unnecessary -- when many other workflows are handled remotely? Do we employ onsite couriers, which can be expensive? Do we send out a message to thousands of potential mailers that we no longer accept physical mail, which -- let's face it -- is nearly impossible? Or do we look for a more agile solution to intercept the mail at one location, scan it, and sort it electronically to the rightful recipients?

A solution, such as [Iron Mountain Digital Mailroom](#), can eliminate these paper-based challenges by classifying, categorizing and digitally capturing physical mail before it ever crosses through the door of the physical mailroom. This approach creates a streamlined process for remote workforces as well as those remaining on-site, because it addresses the above mentioned challenges and connects mail to its rightful recipient in a secure, efficient manner. Mail can be sent to a unique address instead of multiple addresses and department destinations. By funneling all of the mail to one location the risk of loss, delay, and misrouting is reduced dramatically and the mail sorting process can move mail to any digital recipient within a system and is more cost effective than the current, disjointed workflow.

Isn't it time for us to use the tools available to us to work smarter not harder? Take the fuss out of sorting mail and solve the challenge once and for all of shuffling paper from one place to another. Let's set some long term solutions in place to finally modernize the mailroom functions. Secure online faxing and Digital Mailroom are just some of the ways to take those paper-based, labor intensive workflows to the next level and reduce the contact and risks involved in the process regardless of the physical location of your workforce.

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