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Postal services — Quality of delivery: Reforwarding

National foreword

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European foreword

This document (CEN/TR 16894:2015) has been prepared by Technical Committee CEN/TC 331 “Postal services”, the secretariat of which is held by NEN.

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Introduction

The European Commission emphasises the need to have common rules for the development of community postal services and the improvement of Quality of Service (QoS).

The purpose of re-forwarding of postal items standardization is to supply all POs with a useful set of rules how to measure the QoS in re-forwarding. A survey among operators showed that all contributing countries provide this type of service, although with varying offers on type of mail, duration of contract, and modes of processing. The technical recommendations on re-forwarding measurement take the varying service levels into account and should be flexible towards any PO's service offer.

It is essential to set the re-forwarding monitor up as an independent measurement, performed by an independent network of senders and receivers managed by an independent supplier.

Beyond this, this document describes a best practice approach of measuring re-forwarding with a basic design and sample. The design can be extended and refined to meet more advanced criteria of representative sampling, e.g. in mail characteristics, geographical spread, customer type, and differentiation of performance indicator. It is recommended to focus on the type of contract that covers the majority of contracts, e.g. on the domestic measurement (although re-forwarding contracts are offered as cross-border service as well), and / or on those of private households or permanent relocation.

The measurement should be based on a defined methodology which shall be objective and be auditable even if no audit is foreseen. The methodology and the sample design should be defined before the start of the measurement.

1 Scope

This Technical Report specifies methods for measuring the quality of a re-forwarding service of domestic addressed mail that is collected, processed and delivered by postal service operators. As a European Standard or technical specification it relates to the measurement of services given to household and business customers who receive mail at their homes, their post office boxes, or at their office premises and have contracted their national Postal Operator (PO) to re-forward their mail for a defined stretch of time to an address that deviates from the one presented on the postal items that are to be delivered to them.

It is not the purpose of this standard to measure the POs performance in a way that provides direct comparison of postal service providers.

2 Symbols and abbreviations

PO	Postal Operator
QoS	Quality of Service

3 Service characteristics

The re-forwarding service is characterized by the fact that a person or company asks the PO to deliver their mail to a different address from the one that is written on the label of the postal item. This service is used when private households, businesses or other type of organizations leave their premises temporarily or permanently and the alternative address is not (yet) commonly known to their correspondents.

Holidays or travels / stays away from home for health, educational or job purposes are typical examples of temporary absence which has a predetermined end. Alternatively, re-forwarding contracts are set up if a person, family, or business relocates permanently, i.e. move to another place of living. This type of re-forwarding service typically runs for several months.

To measure this type of service, real re-forwarding contracts shall be used. The method to monitor the quality of the re-forwarding service is to send the test items to a person having a re-forwarding contract under this address. The test letters are being sent to the old/not valid address, and are considered correctly re-forwarded if they arrive at the new / now valid address.

Without the real registration of the re-forwarding request the usual process of re-forwarding cannot be carried out by the PO. PO employees shall be able to refer to their usual database or source of information to identify a test item as a letter that should not be delivered to the address written on it but to someplace else. Both addresses, the one that is written on the envelope and the one where the item is re-forwarded to, shall be real addresses, postally correct and verified, and available in the PO's information system as a re-forwarding case. Only then a sorting process or postal employees are able to correctly re-direct the item and the postman is able to deliver the item to its addressee.

4 Test items

The need for real re-forwarding contracts renders the finding of participants in the measurement rather demanding. A sample of test customers with the comparatively rare feature of a re-forwarding contract needs to be picked and their mail monitored for test purposes (test mail) for a certain period. The test period should begin with the contract start date and last until the end of the contract. A defined number of test letters is sent to this test customer and monitored during this period.

The start and end date of the contract should be considered carefully in the posting plan because a letter posted on the last day before a contract starts might slip through the sorting, before the contract

becomes active and the re-forwarding information is available. If a letter was posted the day before the contract terminates, it will not reach the postman until the day after the contract becomes invalid and the re-forwarding information might get unavailable. These critical days shall be proportionately included in the measurement.

The QoS(QoS) result *Fulfilment of the re-forwarding service* shall be measured by the percentage of mail that is properly redirected and arrives at the new / temporary address (fulfilment of re-forwarding service). The percentage of successful delivery can be calculated if one knows the total number of items that should have been re-forwarded, and thereby find out whether any one is missing. Therefore one has to control the number of items that are sent to the test receiver and have to be taken into account for the monitoring result calculation, which is achieved by the use of test items. Other (real) mail items that arrive during that period of observation are not measured.

NOTE 1 The simple approach of just reporting the real mail that was successfully re-forwarded does not give more than an indicator whether the re-forwarding works at all. Even if it was possible to determine the number of items gone to the wrong address (e.g. finding them at home after the end of holidays or collected by persons with access to the old/not valid letterbox), it does not produce the number of items that might have been lost in transit, if one is not aware they were on their way.

The test letters shall have an outward appearance that shows no obvious difference from typical regular mail in format, weight, colour, print, and franking. The address on the envelope shall be in conformity with typical addressing.

The address shall be written correctly and legibly. Therefore it might be useful to fabricate all items and provide them to the sender(s) to prevent individual errors in addressing. It should be verified that the addressing was correct and enabled the PO to deliver the letter.

The test letters' address shall match exactly the one given in the re-forwarding contract which is verified by most postal operators. Verifying the new address as well avoids delays in the re-forwarded delivery.

NOTE 2 It might be possible to set up a test design that makes use of real mail between the test person with a re-forwarding contract and one or some of his regular correspondents. As the letters under observation are selected for the test period they are also referred to as "test items".

5 Test customers

For setting up the test customer network, the monitoring agency needs to recruit customers that have the intention to use a re-forwarding contract, in time to measure its start date.

NOTE Some PO might dispose of a database that allows for monitoring the QoS of re-forwarded real mail by data-analysis, e.g. counting all items that should be re-forwarded and calculating the share of those that were successfully delivered vs. those who were not. If this can be reliably identified by the data, a special test monitor may not be required.

Although monitoring companies may use various sources to get hold of participants who plan a move or absence with the use of re-forwarding (e.g. as a by-result of the domestic J+1 monitor), the most effective source usually is the PO's own database of re-forwarding contracts. This may contain customers who are just signing the contract, or regular re-forwarding customers (e.g. because they have a summer house).

While participants with the intention to get a re-forwarding contract may be found well in advance, the re-forwarding contract is typically signed only a few days before the start date with respect to the minimum delay required by the operator to implement the information. This leaves little time to approach the customer and recruit him for the test. Therefore a smooth procedure between the PO and the monitoring agency of providing the contact information is required that complies with the respective data privacy regulation.

The test customers who join the measurement shall not be known to the staff of the POs. If a PO unit provides contact data of persons who have a re-forwarding contract for recruitment purposes this unit shall not make the selection and shall not know which persons have been selected.

This requirement shall ensure that a PO cannot influence either the behaviour or reporting of the panellists, or the QoS provided specifically to them, thus introducing bias. If their identity is kept secret, there can be no opportunity for influencing behaviour.

These test customers function as receivers of the test items. The same or other persons (independent from a re-forwarding contract) are selected as senders who post the test items on prescribed days and confirm the (date of) sending. The test receivers register the delivery, e.g. by date, or non-delivery.

If the geographical spread of the induction is relevant (a discriminant mail characteristic) a network of senders should be established similar to an end-to-end measurement. If geography has no importance, e.g. because all mail is sorted and checked for re-forwarding contracts in one country hub or because this mail is identified only at their destination address by the postman, the test mail may be inducted at only one point of origin by just one sender. It shall be ascertained that the integrity of the measurement is not compromised, e.g. the name of the sender (in case a sender address appears on the envelope) may be changed several times to keep the test less discoverable.

Recording the dates of sending and receiving is recommended although they are not really required when fulfilment of the re-forwarding service is measured. However, they are easily added by the participant and help verifying the information. Another support to identify the test item is by enumeration: the sending is done in numeric sequence (e.g. 1 to 20), the sender is able to determine whether all items have arrived or one of the sequence is missing.

In case of a missing item the receiver should actively confirm that it did not arrive and was not just overlooked, or received and discarded by another member of the household.

Any method of data capturing can be applied, from paper-and-pencil lists to phone, online or mobile device formats. The sending shall be monitored in a timely manner: in case an item gets forgotten it has to be cancelled from the reception list and removed from the performance indicator calculation.

The receiver may confirm each item on a list, or individually by phone. They also may collect and return all test items to the monitoring agency for verification, in case of a relatively short temporary absence at the end, or during longer test periods in intervals by prepaid return envelope.

The participants shall be able to report the sending and receiving accurately and to be relied on to confess if they have not sent an item, or if they could have received it but mislaid it. To ensure proper and correct conduct of each action agreed in the survey, individual survey instructions shall be provided to all panellists in writing.

6 Performance indicator

The QoSresult will be defined as the percentage of items that were re-forwarded to the new address vs. the number of items that have been sent to this receiver. The measurement unit is the number of items under re-forwarding contract: The re-forwarding is considered as fulfilled successfully if the test items are correctly delivered to the re-forwarding address by the PO. "Correct delivery" is specified by the PO's service level specification, which may be delivery to the address or to the person or household. Items are not counted as fulfilling the service if the panellist received them by interference of others, or not at the new address.

EXAMPLE 1 The panellist gets the item after a temporary absence in his home mailbox at the old address. The PO did not forward it.

NOTE 1 There may be exceptions to the rule, e.g. if the letter was sent on the last day(s) of a temporary re-forwarding contract and would not have reached the new address within the contracted time.

EXAMPLE 2 People living at the old address of the panellist, e.g. relatives, put his new address on the envelope and forward it to him. The PO did not forward it.

The performance indicator basically consists of “item has been correctly re-forwarded by the PO – YES or NO”.

However, other options might be of interest to the PO that qualify what happened to an item that was not re-forwarded, e.g. the item

- is delivered to the old/non-valid address;
- is delivered to family members who forward / offered to forward;
- is stored and delivered on return of the addressee (by contract or error);
- is returned to sender;
- is lost (which may either have happened in transit, or be caused by one of the other options but the receiver does not know about).

In general, these items are not considered as “successfully re-forwarded by the PO” unless otherwise specified in the re-forwarding contract.

NOTE 2 To register these options, a receiver might need to correct earlier non-receipt data at a later stage, e.g. when finding items on his return or after a third party handed them over.

7 Sample design

The estimated base of re-forwarded letters within a country is often lower than 1 % of the domestic mail. In many countries the volume of re-forwarded mail will be in the category of below 1,5 million pieces per year. Therefore test mail volumes are recommended that do not increase the real mail volume by more than 0,25 %.

Monitoring a sample of 1000 test items will yield results with a very satisfactory statistical accuracy, a sample of 500 items should be considered as the minimum test volume.

It is recommended to send several items to each customer during the duration of a re-forwarding contract, spread over time, but not more than 3 per week. The number of contracts that are monitored is linked to the item volume and the duration of the contract. It should be taken care that an individual customer does not have too much weight within the entire measurement, i.e. one customer shall not contribute more than 4 % to the measurement.

A measurement of 500 items may be designed as

- 25 customers with 20 items, distributed as 1 to 3 items per week for a test period that lasts several months;
- 80 customers with 6 to 8 items during absences of just a few holiday weeks;
- a mix of long-term and short-term customers in any other suitable split.

Such small samples cannot be fully representative of the structure of re-forwarded real mail but should reflect the major type(s) of contract and duration.

The old/invalid addresses of the panelists to which the test letters are addressed, and the new/valid addresses to which the test letters are re-forwarded, shall be spread to represent various postal areas and operator’s units even if a representation of all real mail flows cannot be achieved within the sample volumes.

The measurement shall provide one annual figure. This figure may be obtained by either continuous or temporary measurement depending on the size of the sample. A temporary measurement should include samples of especially "busy" times as well as "normal" phases. It shall include all collection days of the week.

NOTE "Busy" times may be typical relocation dates like the beginning of a month or quarter, when apartment leases start, or summer holidays for temporary re-forwarding. "Normal" times are those in between.

8 Report

The re-forwarding measurement system implemented by the PO should run continuously and provide annual results.

The measurement company analyses the mails with the date of reception and controls some indicators: has the contract begun on the right day (no letters in the old/invalid letterbox after this date), has a temporary contract ended on the right day (the letters are received in the first letter box), is the send date credible, is non-receipt rate credible etc.

Then the QoS result for the re-forwarding service is calculated as the percentage of successfully re-forwarded items within the test period.

Single-item results which may be used for quality improvement procedures by the operator shall omit any information on the exact location of the induction and delivery points.

It shall not be possible to identify any sender or receiver.

It shall not be possible to identify individual employees processing a single item.

9 Scalability

The current document describes minimum requirements for a measurement of the re-forwarding service. If additional insights into the QoS are desired, the design can be extended to include more features if sufficient mail volumes are used.

Such features may be

- 1) measuring the transit time of re-forwarded letters;
- 2) represent geographical / organisational structures;
- 3) control discriminant factors.

One type of characteristic may be highly discriminant for re-forwarding and should be considered at any extension of a basic approach: the geographical demand on the service by the modes

- postal area of old address;
- postal area of new address;
- distance between old and new address;
- catchment area / postal unit of old and new address.

EXAMPLES

- If the customer moved house to "just around the corner" the same postman could be obliged to "re-forward" the letters into just another box on his round.

- If the customer moved house within the postal area the postman re-forwards the letters to a colleague at the same delivery unit / next desk.
- If the customer moved farther away, the postman may have to re-forward the letters to the new address or to a postal unit dedicated to do the re-forwarding.
- There may be clusters of real re-forwarded mail flows if typically more people move out of a city into the country or the other way round.

The induction of the test letters is typically done independent from these postal areas at a third geographical point. The induction points shall be geographically spread if the collection is a discriminant characteristic in the process of re-forwarding. In other cases the posting may be done at one induction point by a very reliable, e.g. professional, sender.

The sampling design and calculation for these extended measurements is not described in this document but can be taken from other standards such EN 13850.

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- [1] EN 13850, *Postal Services - Quality of Services - Measurement of the transit time of end-to-end services for single piece priority mail and first class mail*

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