

The UPU's 2004 Bucharest Congress took the first step in extending postal service provision into the internet. Major new developments will allow posts worldwide to establish a global infrastructure and provide services that are classified as postal services in all three service areas as stated by the contracts and conventions of the UPU. In 2009 the UPU successfully negotiated with ICANN to sponsor a new top-level domain – .post. It will allow postal operators designated by the member countries of the UPU worldwide to offer new services including hybrid mail, secured

electronic postal services provision of an infrastructure in which the integrity of the document (whether digital or physical), the authenticity of the parties involved (sender and recipient) and the privacy of the communication are secured. All this takes place in an exclusive, regulated environment, provided by postal services globally.

The fundamentals for extending postal service provision into the internet are well documented. Problems that remain to be solved include:

- Limiting the extension of the postal service provision to a pre-selected group of postal services designated by the member states of the UPU would lead to the formation of a reserved postal service area. This would contravene policies and regulations. Postal service providers who are not members of the UPU must be provided with equal access on a non-discriminatory basis.

- The legal and regulatory framework for the extension of the postal service provision into the internet needs to be studied and implemented in Europe parallel with the policies drafted by UPU at the global level.
- Access to an exclusive area of the internet needs to be regulated so that all postal services, whether designated by one country, or non-designated in another, are given equal access according to clear and transparent status, standards and principles.

- The UPU is going through a major transition period. The 2004 and 2008 Congresses have led the way into new services. The role of the UPU as an intergovernmental organisation driving the extension of postal service provision will lead to a structural adaptation. Safeguarding the principles, policies and standards of the UPU will require the involvement of those postal services providers who are not currently members of the UPU. It will also include the future involvement of technology organisations and customer organisations in order to play a much more active role in the reshaping of a global infrastructure that is qualified to serve everyone in the field of secured communication services.

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The end is nigh?

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WONDERS IF EXTENDING
POSTAL SERVICE
PROVISION INTO THE
INTERNET WILL BE THE END
OF THE POST AS WE
KNOW IT

electronic postal services, postal registered email, yellow-page services and electronic postal certification marks to their customers, thereby extending the postal universal service into the internet and creating a global electronic universal service.

One might argue that postal services are not qualified to provide services in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT). Postal service provision is based on trust. The integrity and privacy of correspondence is a fundamental and universal right that is safeguarded by postal services globally. National, regional and global postal networks follow highly regulated and standardised principles. The sole purpose of a postal service is to provide an infrastructure that enables global communication.

With the advent of ICT, the extension of the postal value chain into the upstream and downstream markets, and the provision of new services, makes the extension of postal services into the internet unavoidable.

Are postal services well placed to provide the infrastructure for an electronic universal service? Without any doubt, postal services offer global infrastructure in the world of communication. Applying the same fundamental structures and principles to extend this infrastructure into the digital age appears to be the way forward for the UPU, taking as its starting point the resolutions and policies underwritten by its member states.

Those principles and policies foresee



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