IMB switching made easy

In today's automation of the USPS several barcodes are utilized to drive various internal processes. Barcodes such as the POSTNET barcode have been in wide use since the 1980s. The USPS is mandating the use of a new barcode called the "Intelligent Mail Barcode" or IMB.

Changing existing print applications to switch to the new barcode format usually involves a change in the upstream composition and/or post-composition applications. For an organization with a large number of jobs and applications, this activity could be a tremendous strain on the already stretched IT resources. Besides, the current USPS mandated deadlines make it even more difficult to accomplish this change in a seamless and timely manner.

Zen Systems along with it's business partners have devised an ingenious process where the existing POSTNET barcodes can be switched to an Intelligent Mail Barcode without changing the actual application that generates the original printstream. This process can be applied to PDF, Postscript, AFP and Metacode print streams. The process identifies the existing barcode on a page intelligently and replaces it with the new IMB barcode in it's place – operating only on the final print stream, thereby avoiding the need to change the upstream application that generated the print stream. The process is completely configurable and can be automated for a hands-off implementation in production. We envision that this process will be integrated into an existing workflow (for example at the output management system).

At the core of the process is a Java application that can be executed on any modern operating system with a recent version of Java run time. In the first phase of the application use (the design phase), a configuration file is generated that specifies the location of one or more existing POSTNET barcodes on a page. The identification and determination of the POSTNET barcodes is facilitated by a graphical user interface program, and is a one-time setup activity. The configuration file is then utilized in the second phase of the process – and actions are performed in the second phase. Actions such as deleting the existing POSTNET barcode, modifying it to a new barcode format such as the "Intelligent Mail Barcode" can be accomplished in this phase. The second phase of the process can be incorporated into an existing workflow. The end result is that the existing barcodes are changed to the new IMB format merely by operating on the output print streams, and not touching the original application that generated the print streams. This process when integrated into a customer's environment will result in large savings in programming and testing time, not to mention enabling them to comply with USPS's mandate in a timely manner.

For more information contact Peter Somu of Zen Systems Inc. at (908) 500 5902 or email somup@zensys.com. More details on the process can be found on our website at www.zensys.com For a live demo of this process, visit us at booth number 3095 of Graph Expo 2008 in Chicago.