

## US Post Office Wreaking Havoc to Privacy for Customers Who Signed Up for Informed Delivery

February 25, 2016 – Just when you think the federal government’s abysmal record for data protection couldn’t possibly any worse, something new comes along. In this case, it is a program called Informed Delivery which provides registered customers with emailed pictures of the snail mail that they can expect to see in their mailbox later on that same day. But there happens to be a big privacy problem with the program. It turns out that if you live in an apartment building or a condominium where all of the residents share a single street address, Informed Delivery will provide pictures of you neighbors mail as well as yours.

Tweet

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
```

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(function() {
var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
```

Apparently the USPS has been photographing every piece of mail since 2013. They claim that it assists them with sorting. My guess is that it also assists with government privacy invasions without a warrant, but that’s another story entirely. The postal service claims that the pictures are deleted after 30 days, but who really knows if that’s the case.

Since they have the pictures on hand anyway, some marketing genius at the post office decided that they could use them to roll out this new service.

Since virtually everyone knows what it is like to be expecting a letter that winds up getting lost in the mail, I can see a use for the service. Anyone who signs up for it can find out immediately if something is missing from their mail. And why wouldn’t you sign up? USPS is offering the service for free.

Unfortunately, nobody at USPS appears to have tested the service before rolling it out. So when an employee at Fox News signed up for it, it was discovered that every single piece of mail delivered to that street address was photographed and sent via email. That's frightening.

If you have someone living in your building who is a crook, that person can find out if your social security check is being delivered. Or when your bank statements are being delivered; giving him access to your account numbers and other highly personal information.

Fortunately, Informed Delivery is only available in limited release in the north eastern US. Unfortunately, the area that it is available covers millions of addresses for multifamily dwellings. If you live in that area, you may want to consider signing up. It may be the only way to find out if one of your neighbors is stealing your mail.

Hopefully the USPS will fix the service before rolling it out to the rest of the country! but we're not counting on it.

by Jim Malmberg

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