

Designing a more ergonomic and efficient routing label for Royal Mail

Labels applied to mail containers are crucial to Royal Mail's ability to route mail accurately and efficiently through its network. Royal Mail was aware that its current system of label design was sometimes confusing to staff *and* that cost saving opportunities lay in creating a simpler, black-and-white design. Royal Mail came to *new experience* for our expertise in user research and information design asking us to develop and test a new design.

Legacy label offering potential for savings and efficiencies



Royal Mail was using over 100 different paper stocks for bag labels alone. The system had developed over many years with new features added typically in response to a particular, local problem in routing mail. The result was a morass of different designs with little or no system logic and legacy features that no longer served a purpose.

Concept design and testing



We started by developing prototypes for a simplified system of labels based on a mapping of the routing processes. We stripped out legacy features and focused on a minimum number of indications that would support key routing decisions. Although the new system worked in black and white we created a yellow version as an option for highlighting mechanically sortable mail – the most critical factor in efficient routing. We then conducted testing with dummy labels in a sorting office with postmen and women, and in a lab setting with administrative staff. This allowed

us to benefit from the knowledge of expert users working in a natural setting on one hand while also replicating the experience of novice users with no knowledge of the routing processes on the other. In the lab setting we could also quantify and compare performance of the black and white and colour designs.

Findings and final design

The findings from the testing informed some important refinements to the label design and underlined the importance of retaining colour for important distinction between manual and mechanically-sortable mail. Perhaps the most interesting finding was that even the most expert of users appreciated a simple design that reduced the need for conscious decision making in routing, allowing them to listen to the radio or chat with each other – while also sorting more efficiently.



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What Royal Mail had to say about the design and testing process

“Working with *new experience* has exposed us to a rigorous approach combining user research and testing with information design. The value to Royal Mail of working with *new experience* throughout the user-centred design process is that we have achieved excellent solutions more quickly and cost effectively.” *Jane Dillon, Head of Ergonomics, Royal Mail*