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Harry Stevens on Technocrats, Mike Porter on FlashForward

NEWS HIGHLIGHT

- **The Coming of Age of the "Textocrats" - by Harry Stephens**
 - **2010 Xplor Global Document Conference & Vendor Forum Call for Speakers**
 - **Flash Forward – A New World of Communications - by Mike Porter**
- More in this Issue ---

Harry's corner

The Coming of Age of the "Textocrats" - by Harry Stephens

In my last column, I wrote that USPS is currently reaching out to many interested groups for ideas and solutions that might help to alleviate its financial burden. In fact, I just returned from making a presentation on behalf of the National Postal Policy Council (NPPC) to the Executive Team of the USPS, including Postmaster General Jack Potter. I represented the Mailing Services industry. An executive from Citibank represented the Financial Services sector, CIGNA was there for the interest of Healthcare, a State Farm executive spoke for Property and Casualty insurers, and an executive from AT&T represented the Telecom industry. While each presentation had an industry focus, the core message was the same throughout: times are changing and high volume mailers—and the USPS—have to find ways to change with them.

If you've been in business for over a decade, you may remember the term "managing by walking around." It was a leadership technique that encouraged managers to walk around the company in an effort to generate spontaneous, creative communication, and foster the exchange of ideas.

Today, it appears managing by walking might have another whole definition. This week I looked around my neighborhood and noticed a boy riding his bike with one hand and talking on his cell with another, a young man on the high school track team jogging by reading a digital reader, and two teenage girls strolling down the street looking intensely at a computer. This is the upcoming generation—the people I call the "Textocrats." They are involved with creative communication and the exchange of ideas, but they would rather text than call on the phone, get their information electronically, and not even waste the time to type a complete sentence. In fact, a form of shorthand known as "text lingo" or "chat lingo" has developed because of that. Think of it, a whole new language has developed around this group.

The Textocrats will come of age sooner than we think. And they will be the ones who will be our employees and our customers tomorrow. They are used to doing everything on a device. They are used to instantaneous response. They are not waiting at the mailbox for a letter because their mailbox is in their hand. Our businesses need to understand them, and our businesses have to be prepared for them.

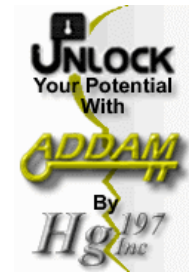
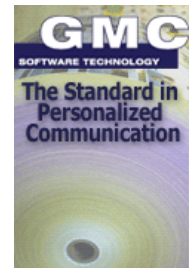
For a demographic used to convenience and a concern for the environment, consumer expectations will most assuredly change. There will be an increasing demand for electronic bill presentment, and it will need to be available via the Internet, mobile phones, or some new type of PDA we may not even know about yet. Electronic payment options that meet the needs of the customer will need to be in place, because checks are going the way of the horse and buggy. Privacy and security assurance will be of high importance, making it even more important for companies to have control over customer data. All of this requires an investment in the future that makes such ways of doing business possible.

I have said it before, and I will say it now: We need to be part of the solution and support the USPS as it searches for ways to stay viable. The NPPC suggestions to the USPS Executive Committee on how we can best meet this evolving world were many, and I will share some of my own ideas in a future column. The important thing is to have an action plan for the future. Because the Textocrats are coming.

Until next time,

Harry

Harry Stephens is President/CEO, and founder of DATAMATX, one of the nation's largest privately held, full-service providers of printed and electronic billing solutions. As an advocate for business mailers across the country, Stephens is





actively involved in several postal trade associations. He serves on the Executive Board of the Greater Atlanta Postal Customer Council, Major Mailers Association (MMA), PCC Advisory Committee (PCCAC), and National Postal Policy Council (NPPC). He is also president of The Imaging Network Group (ING), an association for electronic service bureaus. As an expert on high-volume print and mail, he has frequently been asked to speak to various USPS groups, including the Board of Governors, about postal reform and other issues affecting business mailers. Find DATAMATX at <http://www.datamatx.com>

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