

# Current Comments

## High Postal Rates Impede the Flow of Information Across International Boundaries

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It costs \$0.31 to air-mail a half-ounce letter from New York City to London. If you do a quick calculation, you find that this comes to \$9.92 per pound. To fly a 200-pound live human being to London, Laker Airlines charges about \$135 or about \$0.68 per pound. When contemplating international postal rates, I often wonder what happens to that \$9.24 per pound price difference.

One might argue that 15 cents is required to get the letter to the airport. After all, that is the cost to mail a one ounce letter from Los Angeles to New York. Even so, once the mail sack arrives in New York, the post office can deliver it to London for a fraction of the 50 cents per ounce they are charging.

Postal rates are a major concern at ISI<sup>®</sup>, as with any organization which disseminates information. They affect the cost and timeliness of our products. Recently I told you about our six-year legal battle with the US Postal Service (USPS).<sup>1</sup> In that precedent-setting case, ISI was the first producer of information services to seriously challenge the USPS's contention that information services like *Current Contents*<sup>®</sup> (*CC*<sup>®</sup>) are not eligible for the lower

mailing rates for periodicals. The USPS tried to argue that *CC* was not a periodical and must therefore pay more expensive first class mailing rates.

ISI won that case. However, the USPS's cheaper rates for periodicals only affect our delivery costs in the US. The Postal Service does not yet have a special periodical rate for air delivery outside the US. Since about half of ISI's customers work outside the US, *international* postal rates are also a problem.

Obviously, we want customers in all countries to receive *CC* as quickly as possible. On the other hand, we want to keep subscription rates down. Doing both is not easy. Though international air mail is relatively fast, current rates are high, as I tried to dramatize above. There is a USPS air-mail rate for printed matter. For example, depending upon its weight, it costs up to \$1.30 to mail a copy of *CC/Life Sciences* to Europe. To Japan, New Zealand, or Australia, the cost would be \$1.70 per copy.

As a result of this high cost, we offer air mail delivery as an *optional* service in many countries. However, to keep our subscription

rates down and assure timely delivery, we have bypassed the US Postal Service in many cases. In fact, we have found alternative means for delivering *CC* to subscribers in most other countries.

One method we use involves the Netherlands-based KLM Royal Dutch Airlines. *CC* is loaded on KLM planes and shipped as freight (not mail) to Amsterdam. From there *CC* is delivered by surface mail to subscribers throughout Europe and parts of the Middle East. On the average, it costs \$0.65 to send a copy of *CC/Life Sciences* this way. This is about half the cost of USPS rates. Using KLM, we can send *CC* to Europe in two to four days.

We also ship *CC* to Japan via KLM. The huge containers are flown to Amsterdam and then on to Tokyo. In Japan *CC* is mailed at surface rates to locations within the country. It costs about \$1.00 to send a copy of *CC/LS* to Japanese readers by this method—about \$0.70 less than the USPS rate.

Our KLM method can deliver *CC* relatively cheaply and quickly from the US to Europe. But KLM mail travels from Amsterdam to its final destination by surface mail (rather than air mail). This meant that many subscribers, such as those living in Africa, had to wait up to a month for their issues to arrive.

In response to these subscribers' needs for more timely delivery, we recently started using a new method for delivery to more than 100 countries. (See Figure 1).

Since January 1, 1979, copies of *Current Contents* destined for these

countries are sent by air-cargo to the United Kingdom. From there they are also dispatched *by air* to the destination country. At that point, as in Japan, they are dispatched by surface mail. The new service, Accelerated Surface Post (ASP), is offered by the British Post Office and combines the speed of air mail with the low cost of surface post. It would take *CC* 25 to 40 days to reach South Africa by KLM, but by ASP it takes eight to ten days.

Although I have discussed these various delivery methods in terms of *CC*, I must add that the slow delivery to other countries of other ISI publications—*Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup>, *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>™</sup>, *Index to Scientific Reviews*<sup>™</sup>, to name a few—has also been a problem.

These publications are much larger and heavier than *Current Contents*. The use of faster delivery methods to some countries would increase their subscription costs significantly. Beginning this year, therefore, we are offering *optional* accelerated air delivery of these products to subscribers in over 100 countries. Rates for this delivery method appear in Figure 2.

This service, using ASP again, bypasses the United States Postal Service and is therefore cheaper than air-mailing publications directly through the Philadelphia post office.

The USPS's high rates for international mail are forcing many international mailers to take their business elsewhere. As a consequence, the USPS is now studying the possibility of offering a special

**Figure 1:** Countries to which *Current Contents\** is sent through Accelerated Surface Post (ASP).

Algeria	Greenland	Papua New Guinea
American Samoa	Grenada	Peru
Andorra	Guam	Philippines
Angola	Guinea	Pitcairn Islands
Antarctica	Guinea Bissau	Portuguese Timor
Antigua	Heard and McDonald Islands	Reunion
Australia	Hong Kong	St. Helena
Bangladesh	India	St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla
Belize	Indonesia	St. Lucia
Bermuda	Israel	St. Pierre & Miquelon
Bhutan	Ivory Coast	St. Vincent
Botswana	Johnston Island	San Marino
Bouvet Island	Kenya	Sao Tome & Principe
British Antarc. Territ.	Khmer Republic	Seycelles
British Solomon Islands	Korea	Sierra Leone
Brunei	Laos	Sikkim
Burma	Lesotho	Singapore
Byelorussian SSR	Liberia	Somalia
Canton & Enderbury Islands	Libyan Arab Republic	South Africa
Cape Verde Islands	Macao	Southern Rhodesia
Christmas Island	Malawi	Spanish Sahara
Cocos (Keeling) Islands	Malaysia	Sri Lanka
Comoro Islands	Maldives	Sudan
Cook Islands	Mali	Surinam
Dahomey	Malta	Svalbard & Jan Mayen Islands
Dominica	Martinique	Swaziland
Dronning Maud Land	Mauritania	Taiwan
Egypt	Midway Islands	Tanzania
Equatorial Guinea	Mongolia	Thailand
Ethiopia	Montserrat	Tokelau Islands
Faeroe Islands	Morocco	Tonga
Falkland Islands (Malvinas)	Mozambique	Tunisia
Fiji	Namibia	Turks & Caicos Islands
French Afars & Issas	Nauru	Uganda
French Guiana	Netherlands Antilles	Ukrainian SSR
French Polynesia	New Hebrides	Vatican City State (Holy See)
French South. & Antar. Terr.	New Zealand	Wake Island
Gabon	Nigeria	Wallis and Futuna Islands
Gambia	Nile Island	Western Samoa
Ghana	Norfolk Island	Zaire
Gibraltar	Pakistan	Zambia
Gilbert & Ellice Islands		

international rate for mailing periodicals. The new service could begin as early as this year. We hope that the USPS is finally responding to international competition.

The USPS also faces competition from domestic private mail delivery

services, such as Inland Carriers, Inc. of California. Several major periodicals, such as *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, and the *Wall Street Journal* are experimenting with private mail delivery, either through companies like Inland or by hiring carriers of

their own. Private delivery of magazines poses a threat to the USPS. Unlike first class mail, the USPS does not have a monopoly on delivery of periodicals or books.<sup>2</sup>

Partly as a result of competition from private mail deliverers, the USPS is taking steps to improve its service. Within five years, longer zip codes should make it possible to fully automate the sorting of mail. Rate cuts for parcels are being proposed to allow the USPS to compete with the private United Parcel Service. The USPS was planning to start, in December 1978, an electronic mail system for businesses. A test of an international computer mail system is scheduled for March, and the USPS is also studying an electronic mail system for individual citizens.<sup>3</sup>

"Electronic mail" is also available in the UK on an experimental basis.<sup>4</sup> It is being offered to some consumers as part of the market

trial of the British Post Office's electronic information system, "Prestel" (formerly "Viewdata").<sup>5</sup> All existing systems may eventually be replaced by electronic information transfer systems. Many observers foresee the day when personal messages will be delivered from one home computer terminal to another.

Unfortunately, it will be some time before we are able to deliver CC to our subscribers by such methods. It is ironic that when many political and cultural barriers to the transfer of information between nations are being eroded, postal rates remain a major stumbling block. High postal rates impede the flow of information across international boundaries. It would be unfortunate if we had to wait for a replacement for the current postal system for this situation to be corrected.

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## REFERENCES

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4. **Cawkell A E.** The paperless revolution-2. *Wireless World* 84:69-74, 1978.
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**Figure 2:** The rates for optional accelerated air delivery of ISI\* products to Europe, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

PRODUCT	ACCELERATED AIR DELIVERY *
<b>1979 SCIENCE CITATION INDEX ®</b>	\$ 350
Citation & Source Index	\$ 125/year
1978 1974 1970 1966 1962	
1977 1973 1969 1965 1961	
1976 1972 1968 1964	
1975 1971 1967 1963	
Permuterm® Subject Index	\$ 100/year
1978 1975 1972 1969 1966	
1977 1974 1971 1968	
1976 1973 1970 1967	
<b>CUMULATIONS</b>	
1970-74 Citation & Source Index	\$ 250
1970-74 Permuterm Subject Index	\$ 175
1965-69 Citation & Source Index	\$ 250
1965-69 Permuterm Subject Index	\$ 175
<b>1979 SOCIAL SCIENCES CITATION INDEX™</b>	\$ 125
1978 1976 1974 1972 1970	\$ 50/year
1977 1975 1973 1971 1969	
<b>1979 ARTS &amp; HUMANITIES CITATION INDEX™</b>	\$ 60
1978 1977	\$ 50/year
<b>1979 INDEX TO SCIENTIFIC &amp; TECHNICAL™ PROCEEDINGS</b>	\$ 60
1978	\$ 50
<b>1979 INDEX TO SCIENTIFIC REVIEWS™</b>	\$ 50
1978 1976 1974	\$ 50/year
1977 1975	
<b>1978 CURRENT BIBLIOGRAPHIC DIRECTORY OF THE ARTS &amp; SCIENCES™ †</b>	\$ 25
(Formerly <i>WIPIS</i> ) †† (Formerly <i>IDR&amp;DS</i> ®) †	
1978 1975 1972 1969	
1977 1974 1971 1968	\$ 20/year
1976 1973 1967	
† Lists authors publishing in year given	
†† Lists authors publishing in previous year	
<b>1979 REQUEST-A-PRINT®</b>	\$ 20/1,000
Number Ordered _____	
<b>1979 INDEX TO SOCIAL SCIENCES &amp; HUMANITIES PROCEEDINGS™</b>	\$ 25

\*ACCELERATED AIR DELIVERY NOT AVAILABLE IN THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES: Afghanistan, Bolivia, Burundi, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Canada, Cayman Islands, Chad, Peoples Republic of China, Congo, Cuba, Guadalupe, Honduras, Ireland, Japan, Lichtenstein, Madagascar, Mexico, Monaco, Nepal, New Caledonia, Nicaragua, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo, United States, Upper Volta, Viet Nam.