

US Postal Service Online Resources and Apps

This is one of a series of articles provided by the Oakmont Technology Learning Center on the use of technology by seniors.

Tina Nerat

USPS.com has more services online these days than you might imagine. While the PO in Kenwood is usually not busy, with the current cost of gasoline, why drive if you can do more online? All the online services require is opening a free online account with login/password.

Basic USPS services include finding out zip codes, putting a vacation hold in place, doing a change of address, tracking packages you are expecting, and finding out mailbox guidelines if you're considering purchasing a new home mailbox.

Click-N-ship has more services available than in the past: buying stamps to be shipped directly to you, printing shipping labels (up to 20 identical labels to multiple addresses), scheduling package pickups, estimating shipping costs, and ordering personalized stamped envelopes with return address and stamp printed on them. Options include setting up an address book for those to whom you often ship. Seasonally themed stamps, greeting cards, and shipping supplies may also be ordered.

One of the best services is "informed delivery," a free app that will begin your day with an e-mail digitally showing the letters and packages on the way to your mailbox that day. This writer finds that it doesn't have everything that will be delivered (e.g. some junk mail), but it does show a scan of the front of most envelopes and packages that will be delivered. Logging into your account will show delivery history with the option of giving feedback on what was not delivered.

Many of us have our bank statements and bills delivered electronically, have the bills paid automatically by credit or debit card, then have the credit card payment deducted automatically, which cuts down on "paper" mail that just eventually has to be shredded anyway. Mailbox theft is an issue. The Bloomberg Business April 4 issue noted that California had 396 checks stolen and posted for sale on the "dark web" just in January this year. The USPS reports that mailbox-related check theft is becoming more common. Consider direct deposit of all checks.

One of the bonuses of some houses in Oakmont is that mail slots drop into the garage or front door, making mail theft almost impossible. If you don't have a mail slot going directly into your house, you should consider purchasing a locking mailbox. On daily walks around Oakmont, this writer notices many people have outgoing mail clothespinned to mailboxes. USPS warns against this practice; a better option is to hand outgoing mail to the mail carrier or to put the mail in one of the big blue mailboxes before their pickup, usually around 2 p.m. in Oakmont.

If you haven't gone to the USPS web site in a while, give it a try. For an electronic copy of this article, visit the OTLC web site at www.oakmont-learning.org.