Office of Inspector General | United States Postal Service

Audit Report

U.S. Postal Service Customer Service for Non-English Speaking Customers

Report Number MS-AR-19-001 | November 2, 2018

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Highlights

Objective

Our objective was to evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's customer service to non-English speaking customers.

The Postal Service, established in 1775, has as its basic function the obligation to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people. In addition, it shall provide prompt, reliable, and efficient postal services to patrons in all areas and communities.

U.S. census data shows that the percent of the U.S. population who speak a language other than English grew annually from 19.6 to 21.1 percent between 2009 and 2016. Spanish, which represents the largest non-English language group, more than quadrupled since 1970, increasing from 9.6 million to 39.1 million in 2016 and accounted for 13 percent of the nation's population.

Other non-English languages spoken in the home include: Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, and Korean.

To provide its basic function and efficient services, the Postal Service has had to adjust to changes related to technology, community growth, and population mix.

What the OIG Found

The Postal Service has established ways to communicate with non-English speaking customers, including adding Spanish and Chinese websites and Spanish language options in self-service kiosks (kiosks). However, some improvements could be made to better serve non-English speaking customers. Specifically, the Postal Service could make improvements in the following areas:

- Retail Offices: Retail clerks at 20 of 40 sites (50 percent) we visited in the continental U.S. were not able to assist us when we approached them as Spanish speaking customers.

U.S. Census Data Shows...

The percentage of the U.S. population that speaks a language other than English grew annually from

19.6 % to **21.1 %**

between 2009 and 2016

The percentage of the U.S. population who speaks Spanish, which is the most common non-English language spoken in the U.S., has more than quadrupled since 1970

increasing from 9.6 million (1970) to 39.1 million (2016)

This accounts for **13 %** of the nation's population

Other non-English languages spoken include:

- Chinese
- Tagalog
- Vietnamese
- Arabic
- French
- Korean

- Signs and Forms: Price boards and forms at all 69 offices we visited in the continental U.S. and Puerto Rico were only in English, even in Puerto Rico where, according to the Census Bureau, 83 percent of the population "Speaks English less than 'very well.' " With few exceptions, informational signs and marketing posters were also only in English.
- Webpages: The Postal Service website was only available in three languages including English, compared to 20 and 30 languages for two Postal Service competitors. Additionally, 27 percent of the links we tested on the Postal Service' Spanish website reverted to English when activated.
- Self-Service Kiosks: Kiosks were not used to bridge the non-English communication gap. Kiosk languages were only available in English and Spanish, and clerks unable to assist us in Spanish did not direct us to use available kiosks. Eight of the 20 post offices (40 percent) unable to assist us in Spanish had a kiosk, but did not direct us to use them. In addition, some kiosk product information was written in English without a Spanish translation or product description.
- Call Center: A customer care call center automated Spanish message was distorted. Also, when we opted to speak to a live agent in Spanish we were transferred to an English-speaking agent and put on hold without an explanation in Spanish.
- Point of Sale (POS) Survey: The POS register receipt invitation to take the survey was only in English, even in Puerto Rico. In addition, parts of the surveys were poorly translated into Spanish or not translated at all.

These conditions occurred because the Postal Service:

- Retail customer service clerks did not use available tools and resources to facilitate communication with non-English speaking customers.
- Does not have a centralized outreach program that proactively seeks to identify and meet the signage needs, based on demographic data, of non-English speaking customers.
- Does not have centralized oversight to improve the functionality of its non-English language webpages.
- Has not utilized industry best practices to promote kiosks to service non-English speaking customers.
- Overlooked a distorted message and communication gap when programing the customer care call center's Interactive Voice Response system.
- Did not provide sufficient oversight to the work performed by contractors to maintain and update translations of POS surveys.

As a result, non-English speaking customers may opt to use competitors' products, negatively affecting revenue, customer satisfaction, and the Postal Service.

What the OIG Recommended

We recommended management develop:

- New ways to overcome communication barriers based on industry best practices and train managers and retail customer service clerks to use existing tools and resources to assist non-English speaking customers.
- Proactive policies and procedures including use of demographic data to create and display signs, posters and product displays.
- A plan to integrate translations among the web links that revert to English.

We also made recommendations related to kiosks, the Interactive Voice Response, and POS surveys.

Transmittal Letter

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

November 2, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: KEVIN L. MCADAMS
VICE PRESIDENT, DELIVERY OPERATIONS

STEVEN MONTEITH
VICE PRESIDENT, MARKETING

KELLY SIGMON
VICE PRESIDENT, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

E-Signed by Janet Sorensen
ERIFY authenticity with eSign Deskt

FROM: Janet M. Sorensen
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Retail, Delivery and Marketing

SUBJECT: Audit Report – U.S. Postal Service Customer Service to Non-English Speaking Customers (Report Number MS-AR-19-001)

This report presents the results of our audit of the U.S. Postal Service Customer Service for Non-English Speaking Customers (Project Number 18RG009MS000).

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Joe Wolski, Director, Sales, Marketing and International, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Corporate Audit Response Management

Results

Introduction/Objective

This report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of the U.S. Postal Service's Customer Service to Non-English Speaking Customers (Project Number 18RG009MS000). Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's customer service to non-English speaking customers.

Background

The Postal Service, established in 1775, has as its basic function the obligation to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people. In addition, it shall provide prompt, reliable, and efficient postal services to patrons in all areas and communities.

U.S. census data[1] shows that the percent of the U.S. population who speak a language other than English grew annually from 19.6 to 21.1 percent between 2009 and 2016. Spanish, which represents the largest non-English language group, more than quadrupled since 1970, increasing from 9.6 million to 39.1 million in 2016 and accounted for 13.1 percent of the nation's population. Other non-English languages spoken widely across the U.S. include: Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, and Korean.

"To provide its basic function and offer efficient services, the Postal Service must adjust to changes related to technology, community growth, and population mix."

To provide its basic function and offer efficient services, the Postal Service must adjust to changes related to technology, community growth, and population mix. The population mix impacts the non-English languages spoken in the U.S. Table 1 shows population size for the top seven non-English languages[2] spoken in the U.S.

Table 1. Top Seven Non-English Languages and Percentage of U.S. population as of 2016

Language	Population	
	(In Millions)	Percentage of Nation
Spanish	39.1	13.1%
Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese)	3.2	1.1%
Tagalog (including Filipino)	1.7	0.6%
Vietnamese	1.5	0.5%
French	1.2	0.4%
Arabic	1.1	0.4%
Korean	1.1	0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2016.

The Hispanic[3] population more than quadrupled since 1970, increasing from 9.6 million individuals to 39.1 million in 2016 and accounted for 13 percent of the nation's population. In 2016, there were almost as many Hispanics in the U.S. (39.1 million) as there were residents of Spain (46.6 million). The number of Hispanics five years and older who speak Spanish at home is at a record high. Table 2 shows the top eight states[4] and U.S. territories with the highest Hispanic population, and how many of the residents "speak English less than 'very well' " according to the Census Bureau.[5]

1 2016 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey – Language Spoken at Home. Census data includes the population that is 5 years and over. 2016 is the latest nationwide census conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.
2 We chose to include only languages with a population of one million or higher.
3 Used in this report to refer to a Spanish-Speaking person living the U.S.
4 Spanish speaking population of one million or higher.
5 2016 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey – *Selected Social Characteristics in the United States.*

Table 2. Top Hispanic Populations as of 2016

State or Territory	Hispanic Population (in Millions)	Do not Speak English Very Well (in Millions)	Do not Speak English Very Well Percent[6]
California	10.4	4.4	42%
Texas	7.4	3.0	41%
Florida	3.9	1.7	43%
Puerto Rico	3.2	2.6	83%
New York	2.8	1.2	45%
Illinois	1.6	0.7	41%
Arizona	1.3	0.5	35%
New Jersey	1.3	0.6	44%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2016.

There are several ways through which the Postal Service communicates with customers. These include:

Post Office Employees – Window clerks are responsible for serving customers at post offices and they offer the most personal interaction between a post office and a customer. Their duties include, but are not limited to, selling stamps and mailing envelopes, calculating various rates of postage and insurance, accepting payment from customers, assisting customers with passport issues, and addressing customer issues.

Signage – Signage is the design or use of signs and symbols to communicate a message to a specific group, usually for the purpose of marketing or to convey instructions.

Postal Service Website – A website's purpose is to establish credentials, generate business, and provide customers information they are in search of to sell its products and services. Some of the information that can be found in the USPS website includes, but is not limited to, Post Office locations and hours of operations, products and services offered and costs, mail tracking, and PO Box rentals to name a few. The Postal Service revamped the USPS.com site in 2011 and included translation of the site into Spanish and simplified Chinese. The non-English sites launched in 2012.

Self-Service Kiosks (kiosks) – Kiosks are in about 2,846 post offices nationwide. Most kiosks are accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Kiosks enable customers to buy stamps and postal products, and to process about 80 percent of the types of transactions normally handled by retail window clerks. The intent of Kiosks is to improve wait-time-in-line by freeing up clerks and allowing customers to handle common transactions independently.

Call Centers – Customer care call centers are answered by Interactive Voice Response, an automated phone system that interacts with callers, gathers information, and routes calls to the appropriate agent. Call center agents typically either immediately respond to customer requests or route the calls to local operations staff.

Point-of-Sale (POS) Survey – The vision of the POS survey is to provide customers, retail associates, and Postal Service management with the most effective retail sales, service, reporting, and decision support functionality that conveys value to our customers and enables a service orientation for our employees. In FY 2017, 1.542 million POS surveys were taken in English and 40,331 in Spanish.

Finding #1: Postal Service Staffing

Retail clerks at 20 of 40 (50 percent) sites we visited in the continental U.S. were not able to assist us when we approached the retail customer service clerk as Spanish-speaking customers. See Appendix B for a table of the sites visited.

6 Differences in percentage calculations are due to rounding.

Overall, the retail clerks were polite, but unable to assist us. For example, when we requested assistance in Spanish:

- One retail customer service clerk could not assist us and did not call the supervisor who spoke Spanish to assist us.
- We were left waiting for 25 minutes at one post office after being told to wait for someone to assist us. No one ultimately came.
- At eight of the 20 sites (40 percent) that did not assist us there were kiosks that allowed customers to conduct transactions in Spanish. However, the retail customer service clerks did not direct us to use these kiosks.

Postal Service retail clerks were unable to assist us because they did not use available tools and resources to facilitate communication with non-English speaking customers. The Postal Service developed a four-page *Products & Services Translator* sheet, available in 12 languages[7] including Spanish, which highlights major products and services, and provides responses to common questions asked at the retail counter. See Figure 1 for a screenshot of the Product and Services Translator Sheet in Spanish. According to Postal Service management, retail clerks should be aware of this tool. Nevertheless, none of the retail clerks at the sites we visited used the translation information sheets to assist us.

Figure 1. *Product & Services Translator* sample Sheet for Spanish

Postal Products & Services Translator–Spanish

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE.

Hello, how may I help you today?	Hola, ¿en qué puedo ayudarle?
Buy stamps *(how many)*	Comprar estampillas *(cuántas)*
Purchase a Money Order *(see page 4)*	Comprar un giro postal *(ver página 4)*
Purchase Sure Money™ *(how much)* *(international money transfer)*	Comprar Sure Money™ (Dinero Seguro) *(suma)* *(transferencia internacional de dinero)*
Apply for a U.S. passport	Solicitar un pasaporte de EE.UU.
Apply for Post Office™ Box Service	Solicitar un servicio de Post Office™ Box (apartado postal)

Source: USPS Blue Pages.

It is important that the Postal Service look for ways to bridge communication barriers. Doing so could enhance the customer service experience and assist the Postal Service in competing for customers (9 percent of the population) who do not speak English well or at all. We noted that 14 out of 19 locations of competitors and banks near the post offices we visited had employees who spoke Spanish. At one of the competitors' sites the employee we spoke with informed us that they could call their customer care call center for assistance in translating for us.

> *"It is important that the Postal Service look for ways to bridge communication barriers."*

Recommendation #1

Vice President, Delivery Operations, develop new ways to overcome communication barriers based on best practices in the industry and train managers and retail customer service clerks to use existing tools and resources available to assist non-English speaking customers.

Finding #2: Signage and Forms at Retail Units

At the Post Offices we visited, all sign price boards and forms were written in English, even in Puerto Rico where, according to the Census Bureau, 83 percent of the population "speak English less than 'very well.' " With a few exceptions, informational signs and marketing posters were also only in English. In contrast, we visited 28 competitors and banks near the 69 post offices we visited and 10 of 28 had signs and posters in Spanish as a best practice. We observed the signage at 40 post offices in New Jersey, California, and Texas (Appendix B), and 29 post offices in Puerto Rico (Appendix C).[8] We found that:

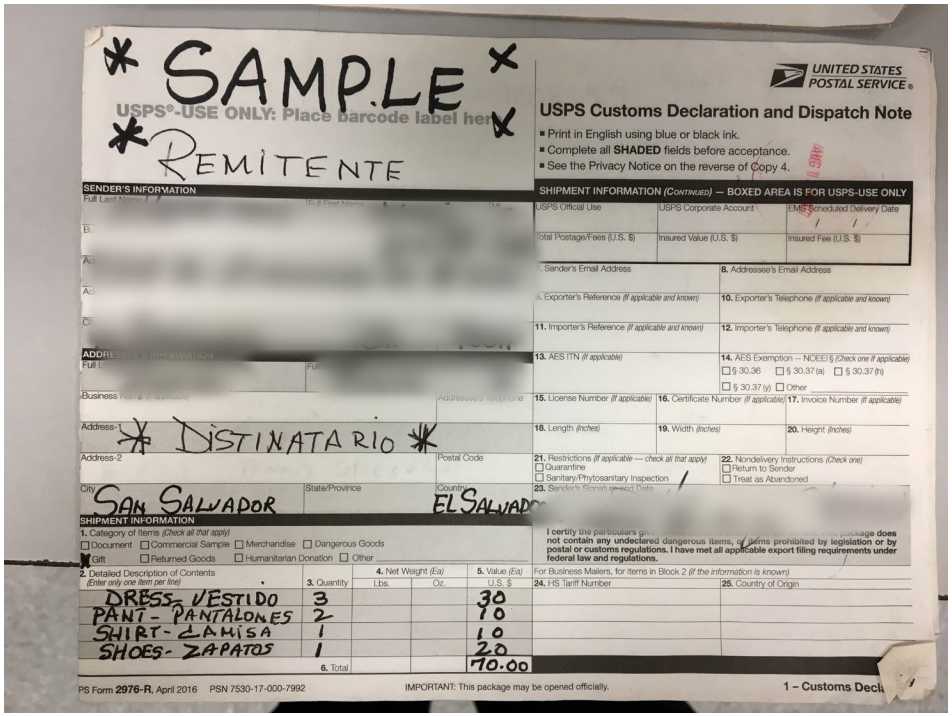
- *Price Boards* – Price boards at all 69 locations were only in English. According to Caribbean Region management, they felt it would be helpful if at least the

7 The 12 languages are Arabic, Chinese, Chinese Traditional, French, German, Hindi, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.
8 English is the predominant language in the continental U.S. and Spanish is the predominant language in Puerto Rico.

Extra Services price board information, such as insurance, tracking, return receipt, and signature confirmation, was displayed in Spanish.

- Forms – Postal Service forms were only available in English. To assist non-English speaking customers, some locations developed templates or posters. For example, at one location in California, a lobby assistant created and laminated instructions in Spanish on how to address correspondence, fill out a money order, and how to fill out a Postal Service customs form (see Figure 2). The lobby assistant stated that many customers do not understand what the forms say, so she lends them the translated samples while they are in the lobby.

Figure 2. Form Translated to Spanish

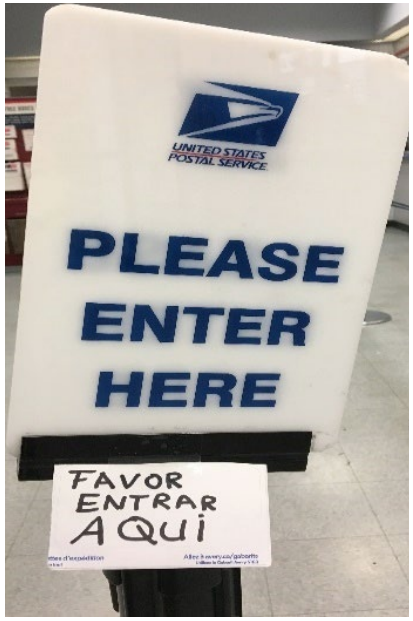


Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) photo.

- *Informational Signs* – Most official informational signs were only in English. For example, a post office in California taped a Spanish translation to a sign because many customers did not understand it (see Figure 3). Retail hours of operation posted on the doors were only in English at all 69 facilities, including Puerto Rico. All the other local businesses we visited in Puerto Rico that posted their hours did so in Spanish and English, or just Spanish.

- Posters – Most informational and marketing posters were only in English. For example, facilities in Puerto Rico displayed a poster encouraging customers to sign up for Informed Delivery®. However, the posters were only in English. We also noted signs in Puerto Rico advising customers of dangerous items that could not be mailed were only in English. Only posters promoting passport applications were in Spanish at all post offices with passport services in Puerto Rico. Other non-Postal Service businesses we visited in Puerto Rico and the continental U.S. had posters promoting their products in English and other languages.

Figure 3. Sign



Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) photo.

"Signs in Puerto Rico advising customers of dangerous items that could not be mailed were only in English."

The Postal Service Brand Marketing group is responsible for developing and executing corporate Brand Marketing strategy to reach all potential customers, including development of signage. However, the Postal Service has limited non-English signage because the Brand Marketing Group does not have a centralized outreach program that proactively uses demographic data to identify and meet the signage needs of non-English speaking customers. Instead, the Postal Service relies on functional departments to initiate requests. The Brand Marketing Group then assesses whether those requests meet a number of factors, including potential for revenue generation, before granting approval. For example, when the Passport team requested a Spanish sign promoting passport services, the Brand Marketing Group determined that the potential benefit exceeded the related cost and effort, obtained approval from the U.S. Department of State, and facilitated the printing and distribution of the signs. Our team saw copies of the Spanish passport promotional poster at several Post Offices in the continental U.S. and in Puerto Rico.

A more proactive signage program that includes non-English languages can better ensure the local needs of the non-English speaking customers will be met and customers who do not speak English will be informed about Postal Service products, services, and operating policies.

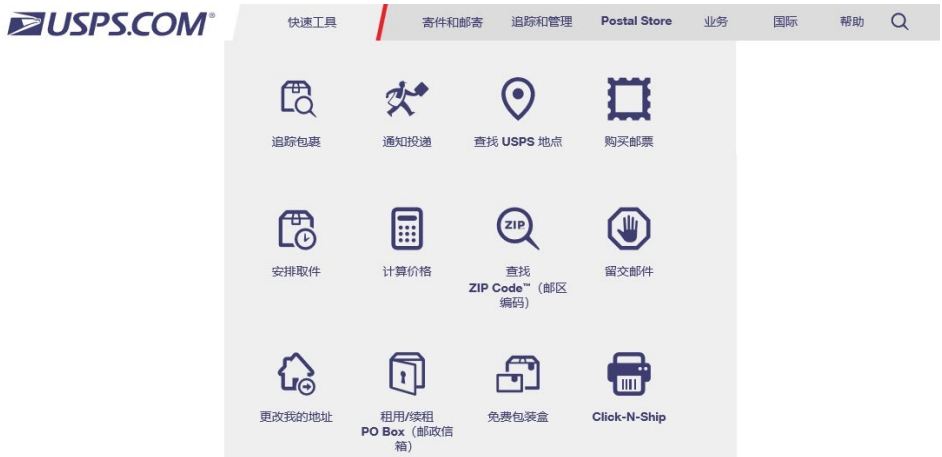
Recommendation #2

Vice President of Marketing, develop proactive policies and procedures, including the use of demographic data, to create and display non-English signs, posters, and product displays.

Finding #3: Postal Service Website

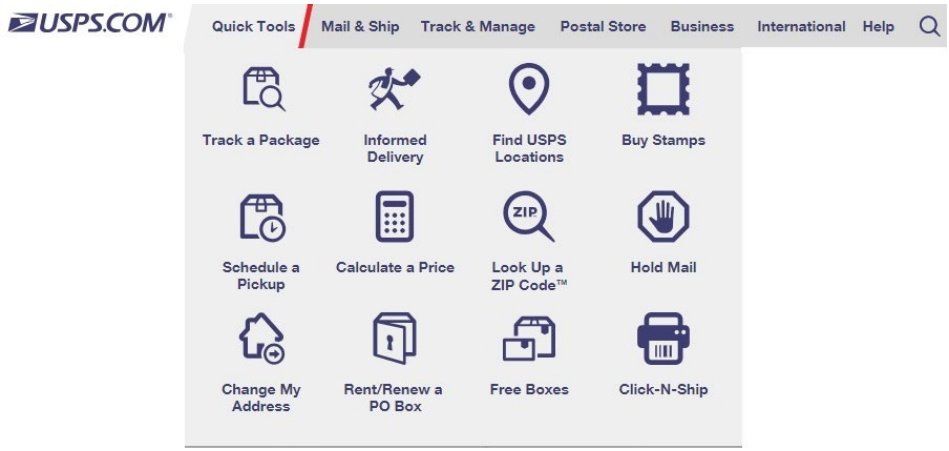
The Postal Service website was only available in three languages (English, Spanish, and Simplified Chinese) compared to 20 and 30 languages for two Postal Service competitors. Additionally, about 27 percent of the links we tested on the Postal Service' non-English websites reverted to English when activated. We reviewed 83 links that appeared on the top navigation bar located next to the USPS.com logo (see Figure 4 for Chinese website and Figure 5 for English Website) and 22 of the 83 links reverted to English for the Spanish and Chinese websites. For example, when we selected *Calculate a Price*, the Postal Service website reverted to English. We tested the same features on the competitors' websites and the queried results did not revert to English.

Figure 4. Chinese Navigation Bar Located Next to the USPS.com Logo



Source: OIG screenshot.

Figure 5. English Navigation Bar Located Next to the USPS.com Logo



Source: OIG screenshot.

The Postal Service has millions of non-English speaking customers and international mail volume is growing. By ensuring that its website translation is complete and by expanding language options, the Postal Service will be able to provide better customer service and be more competitive in international commerce.

The USPS.com non-English website links reverted to English because the Postal Service does not have a plan with centralized oversight to improve the functionality of its non-English websites. Rather, the landing page links to individual applications that are managed by different Postal Service groups. The initiative and funding to add non-English guided user interfaces are fragmented and must come from the group that owns the linked application. Employees within these groups may not be aware of the need for non-English translations.

Best practices recommend agencies integrate their multilingual website initiatives with their internal infrastructure, overall operations, and online-offline strategy. The General Services Administration (GSA) suggests maximizing an agency's web presence — including its web pages — to maximize sales. Based on our research, competitors' websites offered more languages. We reviewed two competitors' websites and determined they were available in 20 and 30 additional languages (see Appendix D), respectively.

While it is reasonable for competitors' websites to offer more language options than USPS.com because they conduct business overseas, developing a more robust website to reach non-English speaking customers could increase customer use revenue. It could also improve customer service and satisfaction by providing underserved customers information in their native tongues, which promotes the company brand.

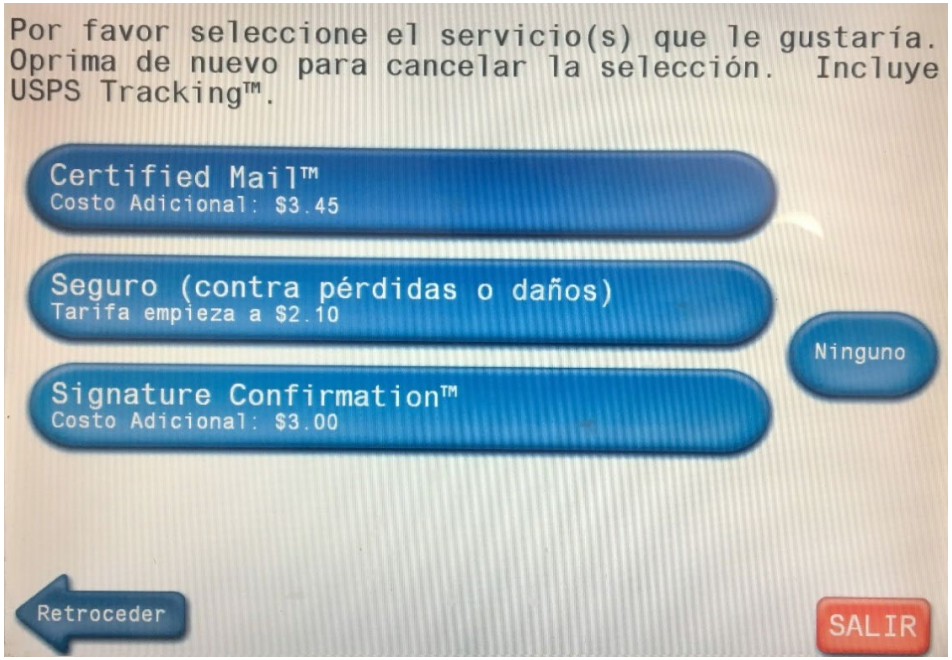
Recommendation #3

Vice President of Marketing, develop a plan to integrate translations among the web links that revert to English to ensure consistency and continued oversight.

Finding #4: Self-Service Kiosks

Kiosks were not used to bridge the non-English communication gap. Eight of the 20 (40 percent) post offices unable to assist us in Spanish had kiosks, but did not direct us to use them. Overall, we found that kiosk Spanish options were robust, but some kiosk product information was written in English without a Spanish translation or product description. For example, "Certified Mail" and "Signature confirmation" is written in English without a Spanish translation or product description (see Figure 6). In addition, kiosks' languages were only available in English and Spanish.

Figure 6. Kiosk Products and Services Not Translated into Spanish



Source: OIG photograph.

Automated self-service machines are common in many retail businesses. Self-service machines with non-English language choices and well-translated interfaces expand a businesses' ability to service non-English speaking

customers and allow customers to successfully conduct transactions even when local retail clerks do not speak the customer's language. Since Postal Service competitors do not use self-service machines, we compared kiosks' available languages to automated teller machines at banks and retail self-checkout machines. The languages offered by these automated self-service machines varied by industry from two to 15. Bank branches offered three to 15 languages and general merchandise retailers and supermarkets offered two languages. As such, the Postal Service could expand kiosk language options to better serve non-English speaking customers.

Recommendation #4

Vice President, Delivery Operations, instruct retail managers and clerks to use Self-Service Kiosks to assist Spanish-speaking customers.

Recommendation #5

Vice President, Delivery Operations, coordinate with the appropriate Postal Service groups to utilize industry best practices for automated self-service machines to expand the available kiosk language content and ensure all included product information is available in Spanish.

Finding #5: Customer Care Call Centers

Overall, the Customer Care call center's Spanish Interactive Voice Response system worked well, but two options needed improvement. When we contacted the customer care call center at (800) 275-8777, an Interactive Voice Response system answered the call and provided the option to proceed in English or Spanish. All Spanish Interactive Voice Response options we tested were answered in Spanish. However, the initial Spanish message inviting callers to press 1 to hear the privacy policy was distorted and could not be understood. Also, when we opted to speak with a Spanish-speaking customer service representative, we were put on hold and waited about 15 minutes before the call was answered by an English-speaking person. When we spoke in Spanish, the phone agent told us in English to "hold on." While the phone agent made the three-way call to connect with a translator, there was a five-minute period of silence which left us wondering if they understood our request to speak with someone in Spanish. These conditions occurred because Postal Service management overlooked the distorted message and the communication gap when programing the customer care call center's Interactive Voice Response system.

When we called the customer care call centers of two Postal Service competitors and five large businesses, all seven automated Interactive Voice Response systems offered the options to proceed in English or Spanish. When we selected to speak with a live agent, the competitors and three of the five businesses re-routed our call to Spanish speaking representatives. The other two businesses re-routed our call to an English-speaking agent.

Customers normally call customer care call centers to inquire about a product or to resolve a problem. Thus, customer care call centers provide companies an opportunity to gain or keep customers. By providing good call center customer support to non-English speaking customers, the Postal Service is more likely to attract and keep those customers.

Recommendation #6

Vice President, Customer Experience, ensure that the distorted message is corrected and improve the communication when a customer selects the option to speak with a Spanish speaking agent in the Interactive Voice Response system.

Recommendation #7

Vice President, Customer Experience, add other languages to the automated Interactive Voice Response system.

Finding #6: Point-of-Sale Survey

The POS register receipt invitation to take the customer survey was only in English, even in Puerto Rico. In addition, even though the on-line survey itself is in Spanish, parts of the survey were poorly translated into Spanish or not translated at all. For example, the word "office" was misspelled in Spanish, the

word "ZIP Code" was only partially translated, and the selection "None of the above" was written in English in the Spanish survey. The Postal Service was unaware of the issues because it relied on contractors to maintain and update the Spanish translation and did not provide sufficient oversight.

The Postal Service can improve its POS surveys by considering the best practices of other businesses. For example, we reviewed customer service surveys from two large retail companies and determined they were well-translated, thorough, and easy to use. We also obtained sales register receipts from a national pharmacy and a national fast food retailer in Puerto Rico. Invitations for customers to take their surveys were printed on the receipts in English and Spanish on one and only in Spanish on the other. In addition, a government agency guide[9] recommends that government agencies have translations reviewed by a qualified language professional to ensure the correct communication in a culturally relevant manner. Further, it states that the online experience must be culturally relevant to achieve an emotional connection with the audience.

The purpose of the POS surveys is to obtain the customers' sentiments and their satisfaction with the Postal Service after their transactions. The Postal Service's specific goal with the POS survey is to capture the customer's overall satisfaction and determine the likelihood of the customers' intent to recommend the Postal Service to their friends, family or colleagues. However, if the survey is improperly translated and advertised only in English, Spanish speaking customers could either not understand the survey or not take the survey at all. Thus, the Postal Service could lose critical customer feedback related to the services they received affecting customer satisfaction, loyalty and the Postal Service brand.

Recommendation #8

Vice President, Customer Experience, review and update the Spanish survey to ensure questions are completely and accurately translated, and increase oversight of the contractor maintaining and updating the Spanish translation.

Recommendation #9

Vice President, Delivery Operations, add a Point of Sale receipt invitation in Spanish for customers to take the survey, at least in Puerto Rico.

Management's Comments

Postal Service management agreed with recommendations 2 through 4 and 6 through 9, partially agreed with recommendation 1, and disagreed with recommendation 5.

Management stated that while no business could support all languages and English is the primary language used in the U.S., they are committed to meeting its universal oblation[10] and ensuring that English and non-English speaking customers have access to postal products and services.

Regarding recommendation 1, management explained in subsequent correspondence that they partially disagreed because the recommendation inferred that the Postal Service had not actively pursued "new ways" to overcome communication barriers with its non-English speaking customers. Management stated that it developed and implemented the four-page information sheet that highlights USPS products/Services (Figure 1) in 12 languages, a product FACT sheet in nine languages, and is in the early stages of developing a counter mat that displays iconography associated with transaction entities. The Postal Service agreed to train managers and retail customers service clerks on the use of existing tools and upcoming resources. They also stated that they will create a Standard Work Instruction and Service Talk that provides additional direction to employees on the use and location of available tools meant to maximize interaction with non-English speaking customers. The planned implementation date is November 30, 2018.

9 DigitalGov – Building the 21st Century Digital Government, dated December 14, 2017.
10 The Mission of the Postal Service is to provide the American public with trusted, affordable, universal service.

Regarding recommendation 2, management stated they will consider developing policies and procedures for non-English content, adding that decisions will be based on Return on Investment (ROI). They are testing non-English content and some items like bi-lingual price boards had no impact on revenue, while others such as bilingual passport kits were successful. The planned implementation date is September 30, 2019.

Regarding recommendation 3, management stated that it will develop a plan to continue their progress in translations for web links. The Postal Service uses a third-party vendor that automatically adapts its website to the language and culture of target non-English language markets. However, not every application is translated. The vendor has also provided manual translations, which is costly. When marketing completes its ongoing review of translation issues, the Postal Service will ask the vendor to investigate why some website content is not being translated. The planned implementation date is September 30, 2019.

Regarding recommendation 4, management stated that it will use Service Talks and Standard Work Instructions to alert Sales and Service Associates, lobby assistants and supervisors to advise Spanish speaking customers to the kiosk's Spanish option. The planned implementation date is November 30, 2018.

Regarding recommendation 5, management disagreed and stated that the screens in Figure 6 of the OIG report are being phased out with the launch of new Retail Systems Software Self Service Kiosks that incorporates industry best practices and Spanish translation. Management also stated that some Trademarked product names would not be translated.

Regarding recommendation 6, management stated that they are in the process of having the distorted message and other Spanish prompts professionally recorded, and that new messaging will advise customers to hold while a translator is conferenced into the call. The planned implementation date is October 31, 2018.

Regarding recommendation 7, management stated that they will investigate if there is a business case to justify adding additional languages to the Interactive Voice Response System. The planned implementation date is March 31, 2019.

Regarding recommendation 8, management stated that they will review and update the Spanish POS receipt survey to ensure questions are completely and accurately translated, and increase oversight of the contractor maintaining and updating the Spanish translations. The planned implementation date is March 31, 2019.

Regarding recommendation 9, management stated that they will add a POS receipt invitation in Spanish for customers to take the survey, at least in Puerto Rico. Area Marketing managers will have the option to request that specified districts be added. The planned implementation date is November 30, 2018.

See Appendix E for management's comments in their entirety.

Evaluation of Management's Comments

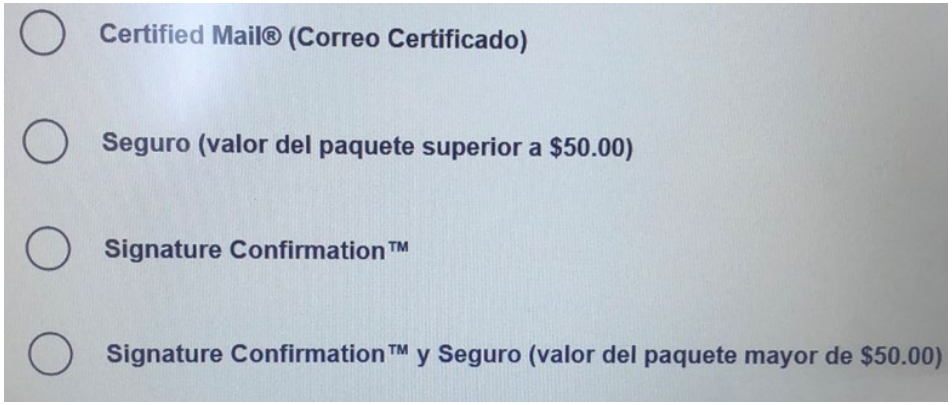
The OIG considers management's comments responsive to the recommendations, except for recommendation 5. Implementation of the corrective actions for recommendations 1 through 4, and 6 through 9, should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Regarding recommendation 1, we agree the Postal Service has created a tool to bridge the communication gap and continues to do so. We encourage the Postal Service to continue developing additional tools, and believe the planned actions to reinforce the use of existing tools will address the issue.

Regarding recommendation 2, the Postal Service stated they agreed with the recommendation, but would implement based on ROI. We continue to encourage the Postal Service to better service non-English speaking customers by establishing policies and procedures that proactively seek to identify language barrier issues and solutions, rather than passively relying on functional departments to initiate requests. We also caution the Postal Service that although ROI is important, it should not be the only consideration. For example, safety is a primary consideration in warning signs such as a poster listing items that are dangerous to mail. We believe that implementation of corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Regarding recommendation 5, the new Kiosks the Postal Service is deploying do not resolve the issues in our report. The kiosks did not increase the number of languages offered and some words are still not translated or explained in Spanish. For example, the product name "Certified Mail" is now translated to Spanish, but "Signature Confirmation" is not (see Figure 7). Both are Postal Service trademarked product names, which Spanish speaking customers may not recognize or purchase without a Spanish translation or explanation.

Figure 7. Screenshot of new Retail Systems Software Self Service Kiosk



Source: OIG photo.

We view the disagreement with recommendation 5 as unresolved until we coordinate a solution with management. All recommendations require OIG concurrence before closure. The OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. All recommendations should not be closed in the Postal Service's follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendations can be closed.

Appendices

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Appendix A: Additional Information

Scope and Methodology

Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's customer service to non-English speaking customers. The scope of this audit was Postal Service's customer services to non-English speaking customers. For the purposes of this audit, we considered someone a non-English speaker if English was not their first language.

To accomplish our objective, we reviewed Postal Service policies and procedures. We used the Retail Customer Service risk model to familiarize ourselves with the trend in the Postal Service's customer service. We also judgmentally selected 69 Post offices, 40 post offices in the continental U.S. and 29 post offices in Puerto Rico[11]. We visited areas that either had a large Hispanic presence or that were located near a competitor. We also visited 18 Postal Service competitors' retail locations, 16 bank branches, and five other retail businesses.

During our site visits we:

- Approached retail clerks at 40 post offices we visited in the continental U.S., posing as Spanish-speaking customers and assessing the retail clerk's ability and willingness to assist us.
- Inspected the retail lobby at all 69 post offices (40 in the Continental U.S. and 29 in Puerto Rico) to determine if there were any signs and forms were available in non-English languages.
- Visited 28 non-USPS locations – 18 competitors' retail stores and 10 bank branches – to determine if these locations had signs in Spanish and employees who spoke other languages.
- Visited six bank automated teller machines to identify the languages available.
- Visited five retail businesses to identify the languages available at their self-checkout machines.

We reviewed and assessed:

- The Postal Service's and competitor's websites available in Spanish.
- The correctness and accuracy of the kiosks information available in Spanish.
- The language options of Postal Service kiosks.
- Customer care call centers information available through the automated Interactive Voice Response system and the customer care representative in Spanish.
- The correctness and accuracy of the questions established in the POS survey.

To identify best business practices, we assessed other businesses' ability to address non-English speaking customers and other resources such as signs, websites, bank automated teller machines, retail self-checkout machines, customer care call centers, and automated customer service surveys.

We conducted this performance audit from March through November 2018, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on September 10, 2018, and included their comments where appropriate.

11 English is the predominant language in the continental U.S. and Spanish is the predominant language in Puerto Rico.

We reviewed POS source document survey in Spanish to determine the accuracy and usefulness of the survey provided to Spanish-speaking customers. Additionally, we used the source document from the enterprise Customer Care to review related to Spanish speaking customers. We also reviewed the source document from Genesys Interactive Insights. For the purposes of obtaining background information and research on Spanish-speaking customers we concluded the data is sufficiently reliable.

Prior Audit Coverage

The OIG did not identify any prior audits or reviews related to the objective of this audit.

Appendix B: Forty Post Offices Visited in the Continental U.S.

State	Post Office Name	Clerks did not Assist Auditors Posing as Non-English Speaking Customers	Clerks did not Direct Auditors to use the Spanish Option in Available Kiosks
New Jersey	Springfield Avenue Station		
	Vailsburg Station		
	Ironbound Station		
	North Station		
	Newark Main Post Office		
	Newark Mid-Town Post Office		
	South Station		
	Roseville Station	X	
	Hudson City Post Office	X	
	Journal Square Post Office	X	
	Jersey City Post Office	X	X
	Five Corners Post Office	X	
	Bergen North Post Office	X	
	Bergen South Post Office	X	
	Greenville Post Office	X	
	West Side Jersey		

State	Post Office Name	Clerks did not Assist Auditors Posing as Non-English Speaking Customers	Clerks did not Direct Auditors to use the Spanish Option in Available Kiosks
	Sierra Mesa Annex		
	Tierrasanta Postal Store		
	William Taft Post Office		
	John Adams Post Office		
California	Linda Vista Station		
	Hillcrest Station*	X	X
	Astrodome Post Office	X	
	Civic Center Post Office	X	
	Mission Valley Postal Store	X	

State	Post Office Name	Clerks did not Assist Auditors Posing as Non-English Speaking Customers	Clerks did not Direct Auditors to use the Spanish Option in Available Kiosks
Texas	De Moss Post Office	X	
	Julius Melcher Post Office	X	X
	River Oaks Post Office	X	X
	Sam Houston Post Office		
	Southmore Post Office		
	University Post Office	X	X
	Westbury Post Office	X	X
	Downtown Dallas Post Office	X	
	Spring Valley Post Office		
	Preston Royal Post Office	X	X
	Northwest Dallas Post Office		
	Beverly Hills Post Office		
Totals		**20**	**8**

Source: OIG-generated list.

Appendix C: Twenty-Nine Post Offices Visited in Puerto Rico

Post Office Name
Aguirre Post Office
Bayamon Post Office
Cataño Post Office
Cayey Post Office
Dorado Post Office
Juncos Post Office
Old San Juan Post Office
Sabana Seca Post Office
Salinas Post Office
Santurce Post Office
Fernandez Juncos Post Office
Loiza Street Post Office
Hato Rey Station
Rio Piedras Post Office
San Juan Post Office
San Lorenzo
Toa Baja Post Office
San Antonio Post Office
Caguas Post Office
Aguadilla Post Office
Cabo Rojo Post Office

Post Office Name
Peñuelas Post Office
Manati Post Office
Isabela Post Office
Sabana Grande Post Office
Ponce Post Office
Arecibo Post Office
Villalba Post Office
Juana Diaz Post Office

Source: OIG generated.

Appendix D: Languages Available on USPS and Competitor Websites

Language	USPS	Competitor 1	Competitor 2
Bulgarian			X
Chinese	X	X	X
Czech		X	X
Danish		X	X
Dutch		X	X
English	X	X	X
Estonian			X
Finnish		X	X
French		X	X
German		X	X
Greek			X
Hebrew			X
Hungarian		X	X
Italian		X	X
Japanese		X	X
Korean		X	X
Latvian			X
Lithuanian			X
Norwegian		X	X
Polish		X	X

Language	USPS	Competitor 1	Competitor 2
Portuguese		X	X
Romanian			X
Russian		X	X
Slavic			X
Slovak		X	X
Spanish	X	X	X
Swedish		X	X
Turkish		X	X
Ukraine			X
Vietnamese			X
Totals	**3**	**20**	**30**

Sources: USPS.Com and competitors' websites.

Appendix E: Management's Comments

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

October 9, 2018

MONIQUE COLTER
DIRECTOR, AUDIT OPERATIONS

SUBJECT: U.S. Postal Service Customer Service for Non-English Speaking Customers (Report Number MS-AR-18-DRAFT)

There are over 350 languages integrated into the U.S. population mix today. Of those, English is the most commonly used in schools, both public and private, and continues to be the primary language source for US legislation, regulations, executive orders, treaties, federal court rulings, and all other official pronouncements.

While no business entity could support all dialects equally, the Postal Service acknowledges there is a percentage of the population that does not use English as its primary language and is committed to meeting its universal obligation and ensuring that both English and non-English speaking customers have access to postal products and services.

Postal Service has made numerous changes in both technology and in practice to address existing communication barriers and acknowledges that as technology advances opportunities will exist for continual improvement to address language barriers.

Recommendation 1:
The Vice President, Delivery, Customer Service and Retail Operations, develop new ways to overcome communication barriers based on best practices in the industry and train managers and retail customer service clerks to use existing tools and resources available to assist non-English speaking customers.

Management Response/Action Plan: Management Agrees In Part
The Postal Service currently uses a variety of multilingual tools to assist in the promotion of USPS products and services to non-English speaking customers. The Postal Translator is a four-page information sheet that highlights USPS products/services and provides responses to some of the most common questions asked at the retail counter. It is available in 12 languages. The Product Fact Sheet is another tool that supports non-English speaking customers and comes in nine different dialects. An industry best practice being embraced by the USPS and in early development is a counter mat that displays iconography associated with

transaction entities. In support of these existing tools and additional upcoming resources, Management will create a Standard Work Instruction and Service Talk that provides additional direction to employees on the use and location of available tools meant to maximize interaction with non-English speaking customers.

Target Implementation Date:
November, 2018

Responsible Official:
Vice President, Delivery, Customer Service and Retail Operations

Recommendation 2:
The Vice President, Marketing, develop proactive policies and procedures, including the use of demographic data, to create and display non-English signs, posters, and product displays.

Management Response/Action Plan: Management Agrees
Management agrees to consider developing policies and procedures for non-English content, however those will be developed based on ROI of said content. The Postal Service has tested non-English concepts in the past and the response has not tested well overall. However, given the OIG's findings with respect to the 29 Puerto Rico Post Offices visited, we will evaluate whether additional Spanish-language posters and marketing materials will be deployed in those locations.

We will continue to test non-English content as part of our brand work. For instance, we tested bilingual menu boards but found that there was no impact to revenue. Alternatively we have found success and continue to offer bilingual Passport kits and greeting cards offered in Puerto Rico's retail unit's which are in Spanish. The Spanish cards are not offered in other locations because when the cards were tested in other markets based on demographics of the Latino population they did not sell as well as the English offered card options. We will continue to work with the Area Marketing Managers to review opportunities to use signage and products to optimize the customer experience.

Target Implementation Date:
September 2019

Responsible Official:
Christopher J. Karpenko Executive Director Brand Marketing

Recommendation 3:
The Vice President, Marketing, develop a plan to integrate translations among the web links that revert to English to ensure consistency and continued oversight.

Management Response/Action Plan: Management Agrees

Management agrees to develop a plan of activities to continue our progress in the area of translations for web links. The Spanish Traffic overview can be found at this link:

[redacted]

The URL is "spidered" or "crawled" on a weekly basis. This technology has allowed USPS.com to develop a library of words that are used frequently allowing for immediate translation once the new content is on the site. However, based on our Google analytic report, adoption to utilize other language translations are still low.

While our competitors have a physical presence in other countries, the USPS does not. Therefore, it may be misleading to customers that we will be able to provide full service in other countries when we actually are not able to provide full tracking for packages shipped internationally. Financially, to provide content in languages for this number of counties would be of considerable expense to USPS as the translations would all need to be handled manually.

To prepare for future needs, the USPS currently has technology in place through a third party vendor (Translations.com) that handles language translations and builds a library of the website localization process automatically. This technology has allowed USPS.com to develop a library of words that are used frequently which allows for immediate translation once the new content is available on the site. This library is updated as part of the weekly push. Translations.com has also provided manual translations for ad hoc projects such as the new screens for the Self Service Kiosks (SSKs) and sell sheets for the Global team.

Currently no elements of the customer's journey provides translated applications on the website, due to several factors:

- The ability to stay in language for the duration of the customer experience. Examples of applications where the full user experience is not in language includes Click-N-Ship, Informed Delivery.
- Not having the funding to have each application translated through the full user experience, which requires a manual translation and is currently cost prohibitive.

Finally, in reference to the content reverting back to English, Marketing has been conducting a review of the static pages as well as the reskinned applications to ensure there is not an English language bleed. This audit will be completed by the end of September and the action from the audit will be to open JIRA tickets with Translations.com to investigate the cause of why the bleed continues—even though the page is spidered and we have the pages updated to reflect the in language content. Examples of issues as to why this could be occurring have to

do with the JSON (JavaScript object notation) data format which can be different for the various applications.

Target Implementation Date:
September 2019

Responsible Official:
Christopher J. Karpenko Executive Director Brand Marketing

Recommendation 4:
The Vice President, Delivery, Customer Service and Retail Operations, instruct retail managers and clerks to use Self-Service Kiosks to assist Spanish-speaking customers.

Management Response/Action Plan: Management Agrees
The Self-Service Kiosk (SSK) already offers Spanish for all eligible SSK transactions including stamp sales, domestic shipping and PO Box renewal. A Service Talk and Standard Work Instructions will further support lobby assistants and provide them with instructions to direct customers to the SSK's for instances where customers have SSK-eligible transactions. SSAs and supervisors will also be made aware to advise customers of the Spanish option for eligible transactions at the SSK.

Target Implementation Date:
November, 2018

Responsible Official:
Vice President, Delivery, Customer Service and Retail Operations

Recommendation 5:
The Vice President, Delivery, Customer Service and Retail Operations, coordinate with the appropriate Postal Service groups to utilize industry best practices for automated self-service machines to expand the available kiosk language content and ensure all included product information is available in Spanish.

Management Response/Action Plan: Management Disagrees
The screens views shown in Figure 6 of the OIG report are dated images from old IBM software. This technology is being phased out with the launch of the new RSS SSKs. The updated software incorporates industry best practices and includes a Spanish translation for all eligible SSK transactions. There may be some instances where a Trademarked product name would not be translated - such as "Certified Mail™" These would not normally be translated.

Recommendation 6:
The Vice President, Customer Experience, ensure that the distorted message is corrected and improve the communication when a customer selects the option to speak with a Spanish speaking agent in the Interactive Voice Response system.

Management Response: Agrees
The Enterprise Customer Care team is in the process of having the distorted messaged, as well as other Spanish prompts professionally recorded. New messaging will be added advising customers to hold while a translator is conferenced into the call.

Target Implementation Date: October 2018

Responsible Official: Joseph Craig, Manager, Customer Contact Tools and Applications

Recommendation 7:
The Vice President, Customer Experience, add other languages to the automated Interactive Voice Response system.

Managements Response: Agrees
We agree to investigate and determine if there is a business case to justify adding additional languages to the IVR.

Target Implementation Date: March 2019

Responsible Official: Maryellen Clarke, Mgr., CC Internal and Contract Operations

Recommendation 8:
The Vice President, Customer Experience, review and update the Spanish survey to ensure questions are completely and accurately translated, and increase oversight of the contractor maintaining and updating the Spanish translation.

Managements Response: Agrees
We agree to review and modify the Spanish Survey to ensure questions are completely and accurately translated. All reviews and revisions will be completed by a certified translator and we will maintain documentation of verification.

Target Implementation Date: March 2019

Responsible Official: Maryellen Clarke, Mgr., CC Internal and Contract Operations

Recommendation 9:
The Vice President, Delivery, Customer Service and Retail Operations, add a Point-of-Sale receipt invitation in Spanish for customers to take the survey, at least in Puerto Rico.

Management Response/Action Plan: Management Agrees
The POS Survey receipt will be updated to provide Point of Sale (POS) Survey invitation in Spanish. Due to paper receipt length and thermal paper costs, this Spanish invitation will be added only to Puerto Rico, with an option for other specified districts to be included upon the Area Marketing Manager's request.

Target Implementation Date:
November, 2018

Responsible Official:
Vice President, Delivery, Customer Service and Retail Operations

Kevin L. McAdams
Vice President
Delivery, Customer Service and
Retail Operations

for Kelly M. Sigmon
Vice President
Customer Experience

Steven W. Monteith
Vice President
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cc: David E. Williams
Maryellen J. Clarke
Joseph E. Craig
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