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USPS and Hongkong Post launch ePacket tracking service for e-commerce consumers

The United States Postal Service (USPS) and Hongkong Post are cooperating to provide a new e-commerce service called ePacket.

The ePacket shipping solution offers tracking and delivery confirmation for lightweight shipments weighing up to 2kg ordered by US consumers from e-retailers in Hong Kong. The Postal Service said ePacket expands the options available to Hong Kong e-retailers wanting to reach consumers in the US.

E-retailers selecting ePacket through Hongkong Post will ship to the US using co-branded labels. These are integrated with barcoding technology that can be read by both Hongkong Post and the US Postal Service and with logistics planning and EDI information exchanges.

Paul Vogel, president and chief marketing/sales officer at the US Postal Service, said the agreement demonstrated the Postal Service's flexibility to develop service options that meet market demand from businesses around the world.

The ceremony to formalise the agreement was attended by Jeff Liao, chief executive of eBay Greater China, South East Asia and Japan as well as Mr Vogel and Eddie Mak, deputy Postmaster General of Hongkong Post.



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US Postal Service launches B2C e-commerce solution

The United States Postal Service has launched a business-to-consumer service aimed at high-volume shippers in the e-commerce sector. The service, called Parcel Select Regional Ground, offers businesses competitive prices for the delivery of small packages over shorter distances.

The service offers delivery confirmation at no extra cost and can include signature confirmation, insurance and Hold for Pickup services.

“This new service is designed as a solution for e-commerce merchants looking to boost sales by offering free or discounted shipping charges for online purchases”, said Gary Reblin, vice president, domestic products, Parcel Select Regional Ground.

It is only available to shippers with a customer commitment agreement with the Postal Service who meet annual volume commitments of 10,000 mailpieces. Packages must weigh five pounds (2.27kg) or less and measure no more than 0.35cu ft (9,910cm³). They must be capable of machine sorting and use either an Intelligent Mail package barcode or a Confirmation Service barcode.

Canada Post talks with workers’ union continue under threat of strike

Talks on pay and conditions between Canada Post and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) continue following a vote in favour of a national strike by a strong majority of CUPW members.

Canada Post stated that the earliest date that CUPW members could go on strike is 25 May. Meetings aimed at reaching a new collective agreement between the company and the union were continuing with the help of a conciliator.

“We hope the sky-high strike vote and the record turnout of our members will put pressure on Canada Post to negotiate”, said Denis Lemelin, CUPW national president and chief negotiator.

The new collective agreement proposed by Canada Post would give employees annual wage increases, a secure pension and continued job security. New employees, however, would have different terms, conditions and sick leave arrangements from existing employees.

“These changes are needed to keep Canada Post financially viable and to secure the future of the postal system in this country”, the company said. “Competition and electronic substitutions of traditional mail are growing and putting a strain on our business.”

Mr Lemelin said Canada Post was about to announce its 16th consecutive year of profits and had plans to make “huge productivity gains” through modernisation. “Postal workers are saying they deserve a share of the benefits”, he said.



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Canada Post expands mobile apps to BlackBerry

Canada Post has launched a BlackBerry version of its mobile apps and plans an Android version this spring.

The company's mobile apps suite, first launched for iPad, iPhone and iPod touch, provides new ways for consumers and small businesses to track their packages or locate the nearest post office. Within two months, a postcode-finding tool will be added to mobile applications on all three platforms.

UPS delivers strong first quarter results

UPS has announced a 21.1% increase in its adjusted operating profit for the first quarter of 2011 at US\$1.43bn. The figure was 37% higher than last year's first quarter reported figure of US\$1.04bn.

Global revenue increased by 7.3% to US\$12.58bn compared with last year, and average daily volume rose slightly to 15m packages from 14.9m.

The United States domestic package business grew well thanks to higher prices and surcharges and increased sales of premium products, the company said. US domestic operating profit was up 29% to US\$849m on revenue that increased by 6.2% to US\$7.54bn, even though average daily volume fell from 12.73m packages to 12.67m.

Business outside the US increased operating profit by 4.4% year-on-year to US\$446m on revenue 10% higher at US\$2.9bn. Europe led the way with strong export growth to all regions.

UPS expands in Colombia with new alliance

UPS is to expand in Colombia, one of the company's strategic growth markets, through an alliance with Deprisa, the courier, parcels and cargo business of the national airline, AviancaTaca.

Deprisa will market UPS products and services to its own customer base, offering international express services worldwide, and will be the exclusive distribution partner for UPS in Colombia. Deprisa has access to aircraft and its own fleet of 165 trucks as well as 370 couriers across the country.

UPS has offered services in Colombia since 1989 and currently has 32 outlets in the country.

Besides offering global coverage, the joint Deprisa-UPS operation will aim to offer customers greater reliability, quality and new international products. The objective of the two companies is to obtain leadership of the Colombian international express market.



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New parcels carrier to offer high-volume SMEs low rates in the US

A start-up company in the United States will focus on winning business from high-volume small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) by offering rates that match discounted prices offered by other major carriers.

Seattle-based EquaShip said it will use reliable carriers with lower rates than UPS or FedEx. The company will consolidate parcels from a large number of SMEs to secure capacity with regional and local carriers, offering "profitable, incremental volume from customers they would otherwise have no way of reaching".

The company said it was also building an extensive national network of drop-off locations with major retailers.

The EquaShip service will be available for shippers to use via its website as well as inside electronic storefront software and order management platforms used by e-tailers, including small traders on e-Bay and Amazon.

Bethia plans national express operation for Chile

Chilean investment firm Bethia has acquired Blue Express and Blue Express International, LAN Airlines' courier businesses, for US\$54m. Bethia will combine its newly acquired businesses with its subsidiary, Sotraser, to create a national express transport and delivery company in Chile.

Blue Express offers time-definite and value-added services within Chile and worldwide through the international SkyNet alliance. Sotraser is a road transport company providing national services to some 200 major customers. It also offers business-to-business and business-to-consumer warehousing and distribution services.



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Companies in Japan sign up for DHL e-Bill

DHL Japan says that more than 3,000 companies have registered for its new e-commerce tool, DHL e-Bill, which offers customers real-time access to account and billing information, enabling them to view shipping fees online prior to the date of issuing the invoice. The service also offers downloadable invoices and waybills, as well as searches of fees and shipment details.

The launch of DHL e-Bill six months ago was part of a series of e-commerce tools to simplify and accelerate processes related to international transport. DHL e-Bill users can manage invoice data from multiple accounts with the same user ID.

Australia Post ranks second in national reputation table, up three places since last year

Australian consumers have ranked Australia Post second out of 60 of the country's largest companies in the 2011 AMR Reprtrak brand reputation study, moving it three places higher than last year's ranking.

The study measures the reputation of companies by surveying more than 5,000 consumers who give ratings across seven areas: leadership, performance, products/services, innovation, workplace and citizenship.

Australia Post's managing director and chief executive, Ahmed Fahour, said the result showed that the Future Ready business renewal programme was working. The second place ranking was partly recognition that Australia Post was meeting consumers' changing needs by offering services that made it easier to send and receive parcels

TNT Australia launches more delivery options

TNT Express has launched a range of time-definite services in Australia under the slogan: "We own the morning".

Three new services: 9.00 Express; 10.00 Express and 12.00 Express complement the company's fastest, Sameday service, its more economical Overnight Express option and the cheaper but slower overland Road Express service.

"Our new products will provide our customers with the broadest and most comprehensive range of time-definite delivery services giving them greater flexibility when it comes to meeting important deadlines", said the company.

TNT Express is engaged in a nationwide modernisation and expansion programme in Australia. It is investing in larger premises with greater capacity in Sydney. Its priority and international depot will be expanded and its operating systems upgraded to automated sorting.



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GLS Denmark enjoys growth from ShopDelivery



European parcels operator GLS has reported strong growth in the Danish business-to-consumer market for its ShopDelivery service which enables customers to collect their e-commerce orders from a network of 575 shops.

GLS Denmark said the number of parcels delivered to its parcel shops located within chain stores such as Blockbuster and Coop rose by about 240% in the financial year 2010-2011.

Internet shoppers can choose the parcel shop they wish to pick up from when ordering from more than 400 e-retailers that have so far incorporated ShopDelivery into their websites and shoppers are notified by email or SMS when their parcel is ready for collection.

Business-to-business parcels remain the principal market for GLS Denmark but the business-to-consumer sector is becoming increasingly important, now accounting for one in five deliveries.

Aramex and MasterCard team up to enable cross-border e-commerce in Middle East

Transport company Aramex has teamed up with MasterCard to make cross-border e-commerce more efficient for consumers in the Middle East.

MasterCard holders in the Middle East will receive exclusive benefits when they use Aramex's Shop and Ship e-commerce delivery service in order to purchase from e-retailers in Europe and the United States.

Hussein Hachem, Aramex chief executive for the Middle East and Africa, said consumers no longer needed to be concerned about whether e-retailers in other countries offered international shipping options or charged high shipping rates.

Commenting on the cooperation, MasterCard Worldwide's general manager, Middle East, Raghu Malhotra, said his company's initiative with Aramex would further boost e-commerce in the Middle East and would create opportunities to build business for MasterCard's financial sector customers."

A survey by MasterCard revealed that 42% of respondents in the United Arab Emirates shopped online in 2010 compared with 29% in 2009.

UK e-commerce sales up 14% against falling general retail trend

E-commerce sales in the United Kingdom grew by 14% to GB£5.1bn in March this year compared with the same month last year while general retail sales in the UK suffered their worst drop for 15 years.

The IMRG Capgemini e-Retail Sales Index also revealed that e-commerce grew by 18% in the first quarter compared with last year.

"The 18% growth in the index during quarter one is indicative of a new trend. Consumers are indeed tightening belts but they are still shopping and have simply become more strategic in their buying habits", said Chris Webster, head of retail consulting and technology at Capgemini.

The gap between multi-channel and online-only retailers continued to increase in March. Businesses with both a physical retail and an online presence saw 19% year-on-year growth in March on average while purely online traders experienced 6% growth.

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Savings help Spain's Grupo Correos double net profits

Grupo Correos of Spain has reported it doubled net profits in 2010 to €6.3m owing mainly to cost-saving measures that produced reductions of 3.2% in staff costs and 4.3% in external costs, including transport.

Revenue declined by 3.4% to €2.1bn. The group's postal business, Correos, which generates 93% of total revenue, experienced a 3.6% drop in sales in 2010 to €1.97bn. No sales figures were released for the group's other three businesses: express parcels subsidiary Chronoexpres; document management business Nexea and Correos Telecom.

Mail volume fell by 4.7% to 4.4bn items owing to the economic crisis in Spain, electronic substitution and increasing competition in the run-up to full market opening in January 2011, according to Grupo Correos. Some products, however, achieved higher volumes in 2010, including international parcels and the Postal Exprés service.

The group's four-year 2011-2014 strategy aims to increase revenue through diversification, higher market shares in parcels and direct marketing and business development in emerging sectors such as e-commerce.

In April, Grupo Correos reached a four-year agreement with unions representing 92% of its employees. The company said the agreement would improve working conditions, increase pay for rural staff by 2.3% and reduce the number of temporary jobs. It will also seek 200 voluntary redundancies.



Posten Norden to strengthen position in advertising and e-commerce in coming year

At its annual general meeting on 15 April 2011 Posten Norden president and chief executive Lars Idermark stated that although the environment remains competitive the company would focus on opportunities such as strengthening its position in the advertising market and e-commerce and bring its logistics business in line with the market.

"With a host of services that simplify things daily for e-shoppers, we are also positioned as the strongest business partner for e-commerce in the Nordic Region", he said. "We can further strengthen this position by standardising products and services that make us the simpler, more cost-effective choice for customers."

Mr Idermark warned that strict cost management would continue, accompanied by further adjustments to production and administration. He said the group had to increase its capital efficiency, flexibility and scalability in terms of expenses.

The annual general meeting established financial targets for PostNord through to 2013, including a 10% return and a minimum equity-to-assets ratio of 35%. At least 40% of net profit will be distributed to shareholders.

The meeting agreed to the board and president's proposal for a dividend of SEK0.50 per share, representing a total of SEK1bn, of which SEK400m is an extra dividend.

The annual general meeting also saw a vote in favour of Posten Norden changing its name to PostNord AB.

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More protection for the universal service in UK Bill

The United Kingdom Government has amended its Postal Services Bill to provide more protection for the universal service following feedback on the terms of the bill from parliament, Royal Mail, other postal operators and the Communication Workers Union.

Under changes being considered by the House of Lords, Royal Mail will remain the sole provider of the universal service for at least the next ten years.

The postal regulator will gain new powers to monitor any potential threats to the universal service arising from competitors offering a full, posting-to-delivery, end-to-end service. It will be required to take account of the universal service provider's need to earn a reasonable commercial return on the universal service.

The key elements of the Postal Services Bill are the sale of up to a 90% stake in the mail delivery business, Royal Mail, in order to generate urgently needed capital; separation of Post Office Ltd, the retail network, to form a mutually-owned organisation; transfer of Royal Mail's pension deficit to the government and "lighter" regulation by communications regulator Ofcom, which will absorb the existing postal regulator, Postcomm.

The government said the amendments to the Bill would clarify the regulatory regime and enable Ofcom to strike a balance between competition and safeguarding the universal service.

Other changes ensure that the government reports to parliament on the continuing commercial relationship between Royal Mail and the Post Office, and that parliament has the opportunity to scrutinise and vote on future proposals for the mutualisation of the Post Office.

The minister for postal affairs, Edward Davey, said Royal Mail was facing "huge challenges" from falling mail volume, a vast pension deficit, less efficiency than its competitors and an urgent need for more capital. The main reason for taking action was to protect the universal service.

The Communications Workers Union welcomed the amendments as "going some way" towards protecting the universal service and the future of post offices.

New terminal in Sweden speeds up DHL's handling time

DHL Express has improved its parcel handling efficiency in southern Sweden with the opening of a 4,000m² terminal in Malmö to replace an old facility in Limhamn.

The new, larger terminal provides direct loading from its automated sorting system into distribution trucks to speed up overall handling time by about 30 minutes.

The terminal, situated close to the Oresund bridge linking Denmark and Sweden, will process all DHL Express air shipments arriving at and departing from Copenhagen Airport and will be the gateway for southern Sweden.



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TNT Innight increases shipment volume in 2010

TNT Innight last year increased its volume in Europe by 5.2% to 20.1m shipments and by 11.1% to 14.21m shipments in its core German market compared with 2009.

Revenue generated by the overnight express operator rose in 2010 by 7%, according to managing director Philip Alliet, who said that positive growth was due to investment in staff and quality improvements. Last year the company invested in IT systems, returns management and environmentally-friendly reusable boxes and this year it is due to open a new, €6m depot near Hamburg.

TNT Innight currently has 23 depots and a fleet of 1,600 vehicles in Germany. Its European network of subsidiaries covers Austria, Benelux, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary and Slovakia.

The company specialises in overnight delivery of time-critical replacement parts.

DPD builds new facilities in Germany and Estonia

DPD Germany has started construction of a 27,000m², €9m parcel hub for its central region while DPD Estonia is due to start construction of a 2,300m² distribution centre in Tallinn this spring.

The German hub in Föhren, Trier, will replace a facility in Sehlem to double sorting capacity to 7,500 packages an hour.

The Tallinn distribution centre, located on the Jüri Industrial Park, is due to be completed in early 2012. The company said the centre would handle a higher volume of shipments quicker, more securely and accurately.

Nightline partners with GFS to boost inbound parcel delivery to Ireland

Irish parcel company Nightline has announced a partnership with Global Freight Solutions (GFS) to deliver parcels inbound from the United Kingdom.

GFS brings together parcel shipments and a range of carriers through a single despatch and tracking platform. By partnering GFS, Nightline aims to increase its share of parcel volume shipped from the UK to Ireland. "We know we need to capitalise on the momentum of firms like GFS", said Jeremy Ruffin, Nightline's UK managing director.

The partnership has already led to Nightline securing new contracts for delivery in Ireland with British retailers.



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Lufthansa's time:matters generates record revenue in 2010

Lufthansa's high-speed logistics subsidiary time:matters generated a record €78m in revenue in 2010 and said profits also improved although no figure was disclosed.

The company said that positive development of its European facilities and strong growth out of Asia had reaffirmed its expansion strategy.

Its services, based on flexibility and speed, offered customers customised and short-term solutions to problems that had proved to be particularly effective against the background of a volatile economy, strikes and the volcanic ash cloud in 2010.

"We are continuing to ready ourselves to set up and implement customer-specific solutions as rapidly as possible", said managing director Franz-Joseph Miller.

Sernam gains listing on French price comparison portal

French parcels company Sernam is to be listed as a national express delivery partner by EnvoiMoinsCher (EMC), an online price comparison portal.

EMC offers users price and service comparisons and online booking with transport companies at rates available only through its portal that are not dependent on volume shipped.

EMC users can select Sernam online through the portal, pay electronically, print package labels and drop off their parcels at one of the company's 52 depots for next day delivery.

UPS offers UAE customers Import Control service

UPS is now offering importers and international shippers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) its UPS Import Control service.

The service allows companies in the UAE to initiate shipments in any country for delivery to more than 100 other countries and territories, either to their own address or to a third party.

Users of UPS Import Control can generate shipping labels, commercial invoices and billing information through UPS's WorldShip shipping software. Customers in the UAE organising shipments to third parties can keep the value of goods confidential by using the Commercial Invoice Removal option within the UPS Import Control service.

"With fewer paperwork errors, less time in transit and enhanced shipment visibility through UPS Quantum View, UAE businesses can increase their reach in a global marketplace while reducing their bottom line costs", said John Tansey, general manager, UPS UAE LLC.



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Express firms oppose new rules on toll charges in Europe

The European Express Association (EEA) has warned that planned changes to the European Union's Eurovignette scheme for road tolls on trucks, recently approved by the European Parliament's transport committee, could increase express industry operating costs considerably.

The new rules allow EU member states to charge up to 200% of standard tolls over an extended peak period of eight hours a day.

The EEA said express companies would face significantly higher charges for demand-driven deliveries at the most congested times without being able to shift operations to off-peak hours. "The variation is in fact a congestion charge in disguise which fails to tackle the source of congestion and provide credible alternative solutions", EEA said.

The transport committee intends that tolls will be revenue-neutral overall, with reduced toll charges at off-peak times compensating for higher tolls during peak periods. The committee wants tolls to cover costs for noise and pollution in future through the introduction of a "polluter pays" principle. It also believes that toll revenue should be reinvested in transport infrastructure.

The Council of Ministers, representing member states' governments, wants a maximum toll charge at 175% of the standard rate for a maximum of five hours a day and is opposed to reserving toll revenue exclusively for spending on infrastructure.

The European Parliament and member states will now hold talks aimed at securing a compromise agreement by June.

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German postage rates are average for Europe

Deutsche Post says its domestic postage rates for standard letters match the European average exactly. It claims that its rates have reduced by 17% in the past 10 years if inflation is taken into account. Standard letter rates in Germany have remained the same for the past 14 years.

PostBus Switzerland increases sales and reach

Swiss Post's passenger transport subsidiary PostBus increased its sales by 4.6% in 2010 to CHF621.3m. For the first time, the company exceeded 100m kilometres travelled over 12 months, increasing by 5.4% year-on-year to 103.6m kilometres. New services in 2010 included the provision of real-time passenger information via smartphones and a phone application offering excursion tips. The company also tested on-board WiFi for passengers.

TNT welcomes anti-mafia investigation in Italy

TNT Express is cooperating fully with the Italian authorities investigating mafia involvement with sub-contractors working for the company in and around Milan. Four facilities are under legal administration under anti-mafia laws, while a judicial administra-

tor looks into TNT's relationships with sub-contractors. "This is the most efficient and the safest way for us to deal with this issue", the company said.

CitySprint makes regional acquisitions in UK

United Kingdom same day delivery operator CitySprint has acquired a regional logistics company, TnM, to strengthen its coverage in north-west England. Earlier this year, the company acquired Mainlink Courier Services and its sister business, Airlink Worldwide, in the Swindon area of southern England.

Speculation on Yodel's integration plans in UK

Press reports in the United Kingdom are speculating that home delivery operator Yodel will close up to half its 120 depots in order to integrate its operations. The company was formed last year after DHL Express sold its UK domestic parcels business to Parcelpoint, a subsidiary of Home Delivery Network Limited.

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