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Our 32,000 post offices offer a variety of products and services for consumers. In addition to core products (e.g., stamps, Express Mail, Priority Mail, etc.), we accept passport applications and sell shipping supplies, money orders, licensed products, and phone cards. These services generate more than $17 billion annual retail sales. However, our retail revenue has been threatened by the increased usage of email and electronic funds transfers and the decline in First-Class stamp sales.

My area is responsible for the “look and feel” of the retail space and the elements in that space that communicate with our customers. To improve our customers’ experiences and increase our retail revenues, we are now expanding the use of in-store retail merchandising principles in our business. Two projects I am working on are standardizing the appearance of the retail space in our Post Offices and using digital signage to improve customer service.

Traditionally, the postmasters, our store managers, have focused more attention on mail delivery operations and not as much on the retail space. Thus, the retail space was often not consistently maintained and there was no standard for merchandising some of our products in Post Offices.

In our standardization program, we use Starbucks as a role model. Most Starbucks stores have different foot prints, but each Starbucks store has a well-defined set of design elements – signage with the menu, a POS counter for placing orders, a pickup counter, displays of other merchandise for sale, tables and chairs, etc. When customers walk into any Starbucks around the world, they encounter a similar environment. Like Starbucks, our Post Offices do not have a standard foot print, but, through our standardization efforts, our customers, just like Starbucks’ customers, will also encounter a familiar environment when they walk into our Post Offices. They will see the same design elements – service counters, point-of-sale displays, etc. – and the offices will be a consistent, reliable retail environment.

The key benefit of digital signage in our environment is message flexibility. With digital signage, we can economically tailor the information we provide our customers in different Post Offices and at different times during the day. For example, the messaging displayed when the retail area is operating informs customers about the services we offer and helps them make purchase decisions before they get to the counter. When the retail space is closed, we can switch the messaging to inform customers about nearby offices with extended retail hours or to recommend usps.com as an alternate retail channel.

Before taking my present position, I worked for the Postal Service in public affairs and communications. While retail marketing is a different context, the principles of effectively communicating with customers through POP and store design are similar to those I used in my prior positions to communicate with the media and our employees.