

Portland Tribune
November 13, 2001
by Andy Giegerich

The best way to guarantee germ-free mail is to ensure that no one, save for the mail carrier, lays a finger on it. It's a convoluted piece of logic that, while perhaps fitting in today's terror-conscious world, could actually help a startup Portland direct mail service begin to turn a profit.

Zairmail, a direct mailer that uses its proprietary Internet software to dispatch quick-moving missives, is touting ways to assure customers that their messages will reach their destinations loudly and cleanly.

Wilson Zehr, the company's chief executive officer, says the company's methods meet FBI guidelines for safe mail delivery. "The sender's name is identifiable, it's in a standard envelope, the production and mailing of it is automated," Zehr said. "It's an interesting side effect of our company that mail sent from here is safer. The reason is that the sender never actually touches it."

Zehr believes that his systems can reassure companies mailing bulk commercial materials that their letters will be opened, not discarded as potential anthrax-ridden agents. While many direct mailers fear that corporate customers will cut back on their use of the mail for marketing their wares, Zehr believes he can actually win over enough customers to help the 2-year-old company turn its first profits next year.

The software, in one usage, helped workers on a school voucher initiative in California to quickly remit campaign literature and fund-raising requests to voters.

One of Zairmail's facilities is in Hillsboro. "You need a keycard to get in, and the security people have all gone through background checks," Zehr says. "Even before the recent scares, they wouldn't just let someone walk into that building."

Karen TamBurina, an account executive with Portland's First American Real Estate Solutions, says she has used Zairmail to send many solicitation letters. TamBurina's company sells property data to lenders. "Their service is great," she says. "We just send them the mailing list and the flier, and they'll mail-merge it for us. The turnaround time for me has been just a day."

Contact Andy Giegerich at agiegerich@portlandtribune.com