

ePost-New Generation Post with new dimensions

By: Prashant H. Pandya



There is no branch of the Public Service that comes into such close contact with the people as the Post Office. Though Postal Service is accepted as a routine convenience, the posting and receiving of letters has now become old fashioned for those who are trapped in World Wide Web. The advent of Internet has changed the way in which we communicate. “*Nam et ipsa scientia potestas est. - Knowledge itself is power.*” - F. Bacon. If Bacon’s observation is true, then the Internet’s vast growing web of knowledge is a tremendously powerful resource, and computers are rapidly becoming the power brokers of our future. The first step on the Information Highway is an e-mail. As you know e-mail, is an electronic

typewritten form of letter writing, that can be transmitted anywhere in the world, to single or multiple other email addresses, in seconds, and at a cost of pennies. It is a unique and powerful form of communication that is growing rapidly, and has several valuable features.

“Ray Tomlinson” an inventor of e-mail, would have never thought of delivering email at doorstep instead of Desktop. Donal O’Mahony, a computer scientist of Dublin dreamed up the idea of delivering an email through post office and Anshe Limited, the e-commerce division of a Postal Solutions Company based in Dublin, Ireland launched Letterpost (www.letterpost.com) in February 1999. Go to Letterpost.com, type a letter (don’t get nervous; it seems just like E-mail), and the kind folks at the other end will print it out, put it in an envelope and plop it in a mailbox.

The efforts for making the Indian postal services ‘techno-savvy’ began in the early 90s. Two years back Indian Postal department launched a major innovative system of bridging “email” and “snail mail” under the brand name of “*ePost*”. “*ePost*” combined modern Internet technologies and the conventional postal system which enabled to send messages straight from once desktop to a recipient who doesn’t have email.

A pilot project of “*ePost*” was launched in 205 Post Offices in five States, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa and Kerala as a joint venture with M/s Nettlinx Ltd. of Hyderabad.

Individuals who wanted to use this service had to register themselves at the web site www.indianpostoffice.net where free registration was available. The user was allotted unique *ePost* id (eg. prashant@indianpostoffice.net). From this account user could send and receive email (only email) free of cost like any other email services. However using *ePost* was chargeable and user had to make pre payment for the same. Same kind of service was made available at the *ePost* centres opened at main post offices where customer who donot posses internet facility could hand over their messages including scanned messages for transmission to the addressee served by the designated *ePost* Centre. Messages handed over at the *ePost* Centre addressed to email addresses were also sent by the *ePost* Centre.

Every *ePost* centre in the five states was given an individual email id. This id was based on the Pin Code of that post office. The e-mail ID for each delivery post office was *ePost* (PinCode)@indianpostoffice.net. Thus email ID of Mumbai GPO was *ePost* 400001@indianpostoffice.net. Like snail mail, the *ePost* messages were to be addressed following the

prescribed Pin Code number. However they were transmitted to the ID of the *ePost* Centre under whose jurisdiction PIN Code of the delivery offices has been placed. For example message for T. B. Sanatorium S.O., Vadodara 390021 was transmitted to the *ePost* ID of Fateganj H.O. 390 002 at *ePost* 390002@indianpostoffice.net. At identified *ePost* Centres the mails were downloaded, printed and sent out for delivery through itself as well as all other delivery sub-offices under its jurisdiction. The messages were printed on A4 size computer stationery and enclosed in specially printed envelopes. *ePost* messages were delivered at the addressed premises as well as through Post Box where P. O. Box was mentioned.

Tariff for *ePost* was Rs. 10 per page of A4 size for the messages presented at ePost Centre for transmission or for the despatch from any Computer System to ePost Centre. Prescribed charges were to be paid at the ePost center for sending message through ePost centers and a facility of making prepayment by pre-paid cards was available online at the site www.indianpostoffice.net. Pre-paid cards containing secret code numbers were available at all districts Head Quarters/Head Post Offices throughout the country in the denominations of Rs. 250, Rs. 500, Rs. 2000, Rs. 5000 and Rs. 10,000. Balance of amount, number of messages sent, tracking of the message history including date of printing of message, date of delivery etc. was available online at the website. An Address Book service was also provided for the convenience of the customer.

In the wake of the experience gained, a tie up has been established with National Informatics Centre (NIC) who have developed the software, and the service is extended to the rest of the Country with effect from 30th January 2004. Now the ePost service enables people to send printed or even handwritten messages through email in all 1,56,000 post offices through out India. 'The advent of ePost is a turning point in the transformation of the Department of Posts in to a modern, technology driven provider of communication services to the people of India.' says Shri Vijay Bhusan, D. G., India Post.

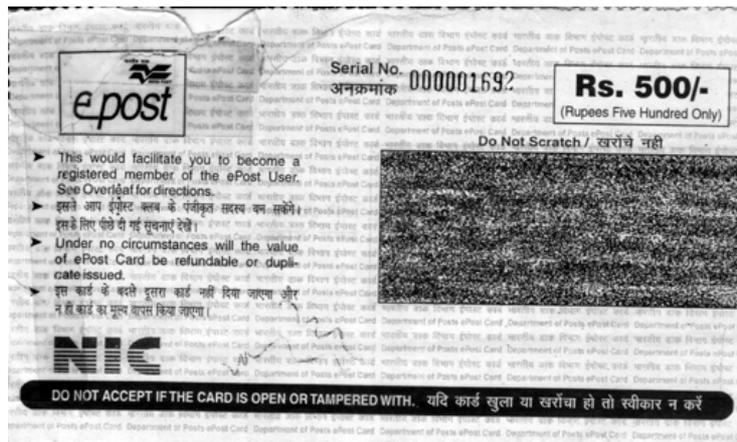
At the destination offices, these messages are printed, enveloped and delivered through postmen like other letters at the postal addresses. For this purpose, about 650 Post Offices have been designated as ePost Centres covering all districts and major towns. These *ePost* Centres are provided with Internet connection, computers, printers and other necessary equipment.



With the introduction of new *ePost* service the services on the portal www.indianpostoffice.net was closed and facility for new registration at this site was closed.

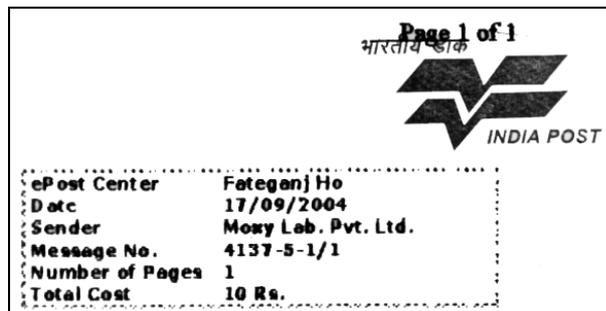
An announcement was made available to the public about the new portal. A message displayed on the site was "ePost Service is now available on www.indiapost.nic.in on a nation wide basis. The Department of Posts, India will refund the unused amount of all prepaid cards bought by customers earlier. Details about this to be communicated shortly".

Internet users have to re-register at the new *ePost* portal indiapost.nic.in, following the instructions. User will be allotted new ePost id with extension indiapost.nic.in (e.g. prashantpandya@indiapost.nic.in) Payment of ePost messages can be made through pre paid card that is available in denominations of Rs. 500/- with validity of six months and Rs. 1000/- with validity of twelve months, from selected post offices. Validity of the pre paid card is treated from the date of activation.



ePost service is not limited to the internet users. It can be availed of from any post office. Irrespective of whether a customer is in a metropolis or in a remote village, he can send and receive **ePost** messages. The messages booked at post offices which are not the **ePost** centres, are sent to **ePost** centres for scanning and dispatch. Since **ePost** messages are scanned and sent, they can be in any language and can even be handwritten. They could also contain pictures and graphics and can be sent to multiple addresses.

Similarly, messages received at **ePost** centres for areas beyond their delivery jurisdiction are printed and sent to concerned post offices for delivery. **ePost** messages are delivered by the postman as unregistered mail as he goes on his beat. **ePost** message can also be delivered through post box/post bag hired by the recipient or at window of receiving post office. Undelivered ePost messages are physically returned back to the sender by unregistered post. There is no time bound delivery and no compensation is given in case the sender reports delay in delivery or non-delivery of **ePost**. **ePost** messages are treated on par with the unregistered letters under the Indian Post Office Act, 1898.



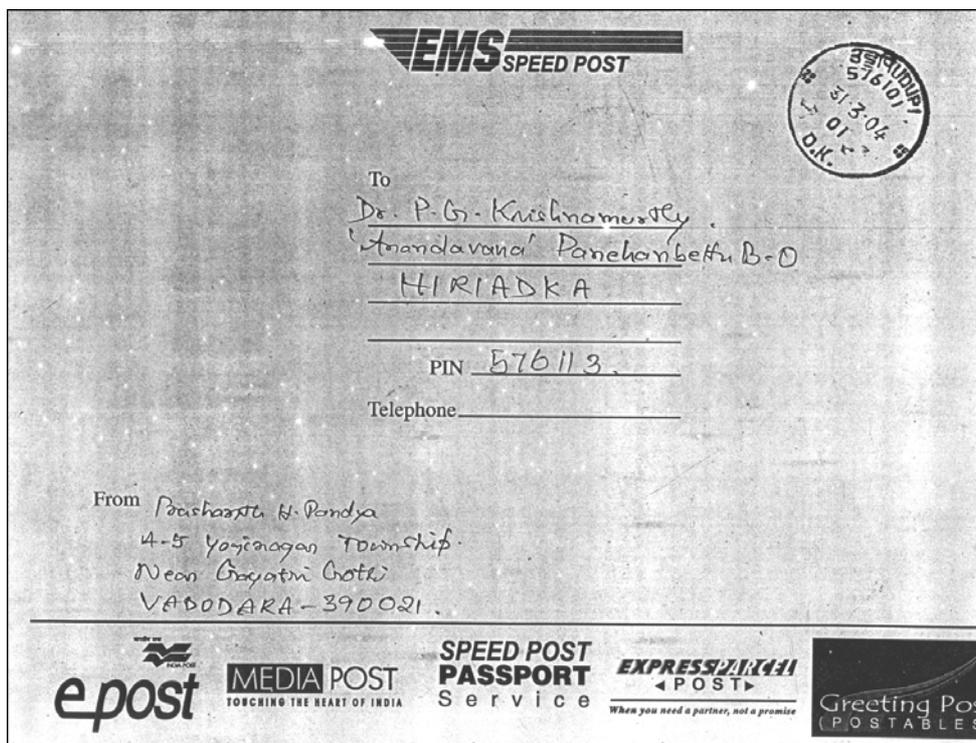
The current rates for the **ePost** service are Rs. 10 per page of A4 size paper and per addressee. There is no limit on the number of pages that can be sent. When booking the **ePost** message at post office or **ePost** center a sender is given a receipt for the booking of an **ePost**.

If the customer is using internet portal www.indiapost.nic.in for sending ePost messages, he has to login using his user id. He has to write

the address of recipient with a pin code number and message in boxes provided on the website. The pin codes selector selects the **ePost** center from where the delivery of **ePost** will be made. Currently only text messages can be sent in this mode. Typed message can be previewed before sending the message. Charges for **ePost** message are deducted from the balance amount of pre paid card credited at the time of registration. Amount can be recharged using recharge coupons as and when required. Users can also send e-messages using **ePost** id of recipients.

Like old system user can not avail free service of sending and receiving email at new portal. Checking of revenue usage, balance amount and message history including date of printing of message and pin code locator is available online at the website. An Address Book service is also provided which is convenient for sending messages to multiple recipients. The site also provides a facility to retrieve the forgotten password for login to the site.

Indeed, keeping pace with the changing technology and time Indian Post Office has come a long way from the Bullock tram carrying snail mails to *ePost* service. The adaptability of the post office with the modern technology has been remarkable. "People says letter-writing is a lost art." I am sure it will be found again on the Internet with a launch of *ePost*. Have a letter writing experience with logging on to www.indianpostoffice.net. This site will enable your PC to replace the postbox and the franking machine and next generation *ePost* will be at your desktop.



Envelope used for sending ePost message from Udupi *ePost* Centre to Panchanbettu B.O.

A-5, Yoginagar Township, Near Gayatrinagar, Gotri, Vadodara – 390 021. edesk@prashantpandya.com
