

# Surprising conclusion of new USPS inspector general report: 'billions served' at nation's post offices.

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At a time when mail volume continues to drop precariously and stamp sales are slumping, the United States Postal Service's Office of Inspector General has produced a report with a surprising number.

The new report says there are far more people visiting the nation's 30,000 post offices than the Postal Service's official estimates indicate.

In a white paper published Sept. 11, the inspector general says it believes 2.7 billion people visited the Postal Service's retail outlets in fiscal 2016, a number more than triple the USPS official estimate of 877 million.

That's the conclusion of "[Billions Served: Foot Traffic at the Post Office](#)," the new paper pointing out that much of the traffic actually is at what the inspector general describes as the Postal Service's "mega" locations, about 450 large post offices that have "as much foot traffic as Best Buy stores."

They are followed by 7,000 "large" post offices that "have as much traffic as CVS stores."

The next 8,000 are "small/medium" offices with traffic comparable to a branch bank.

The rest are "micro" locations with "significantly less traffic than that of most national retailers."

What's also surprising about the inspector general's review of post office visitors is that "younger Americans visit post offices more frequently than older ones."

Even so, the report quickly qualifies their visits, saying "their relationship with post offices is complicated."

One fifth of Millennials (in general, those born between 1982 and 2004) "are power users," visiting postal facilities "at least once a week" while another fifth "rarely, if ever, go in."

What are all these folks doing in post offices?

Millennials are less likely to have a counter transaction than older customers, the inspector general says.

And here's another shocker — people who have the Postal Service's mobile app on their phones are twice as likely to visit a post office than those who don't. So are self-employed individuals.

The inspector general says the overall problem with the official estimate is that these are only the people who go to a post office for a transaction with either a clerk or post office kiosk.

"In reality, most visits do not include a transaction," the white paper says.

“Instead customers may check a P.O. Box, pick up shipping material or deposit a letter in the slot.”

But to omit them from the count, dramatically underestimates the use of USPS facilities, the paper says.

Post offices still remain the place to buy stamps and postal services despite the aggressive efforts of the USPS to get people to buy stamps online or from retailers.

Postal lobbies and kiosks accounted for 79 percent of postal retail revenues in fiscal 2016, down from 88 percent in 2004, the paper says.

Much of the study is based on measurements the inspector general made at a number of postal facilities in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C.

Why study foot traffic?

“Foot traffic is fundamental to the evaluation of potential retail business opportunities,” the paper says.

“Analysis that looks at visits averaged over all locations sells post offices short.”

The inspector general and others in the past have urged the Postal Service to use its facilities to offer other government services or to allow businesses to offer other services in postal lobbies.

That happens in some overseas postal authorities, and the USPS has been anxious to devise ways of boosting its sagging revenue streams.

Congress has tended to watch the Postal Service closely on such issues, fearing that the nation’s mail service might exercise an unfair advantage over private competitors.