



BUYING TIPS: FOLDER/INSERTERS

By Bart Alvarez

Folder/inserters automate mailings by folding and inserting materials in envelopes for postage processing. These units minimize the amount of time spent by office, department, and mailroom personnel when preparing volumes of outgoing mail. Typical materials handled by folder/inserters include statements/invoices, billing notices, checks, and advertisements.

Folder/inserters are available in various sizes and price ranges. Look for a unit with features that will help you process your mailings even more effectively, and consider the following:

Type of machine folds. Folder/inserters can make various kinds of folds, including a standard business-letter fold (called a c-fold), an accordion fold (a z-fold), double folds, and single folds. Make sure the unit you're interested in can make the folds you need.

Type of paper. Consider the type of paper you'll be using. There are many different types of paper. Paper can be thick, thin, or even glossy. Also, will you be folding mostly letter-size (8 1/2 x 11-inch) sheets or larger, legal-size (8 1/2 x 14-inch) sheets? Take paper size and type into consideration as folder/inserters all have different capabilities. Make sure the folder/insertioner you select can fold and insert the paper you use now and in the future.

Paper handling. Folder/inserters can fold sheets of paper together and include a return envelope or other

additional inserts. However, document feeders usually have trouble handling stapled sheets. This means that you might need to feed stapled sheets through the folder/insertioner by hand. Look for equipment that supports a "Daily Mail" feeder, which allows hand-fed insertion.

Expected frequency and volume. How often will you use the system? This is an important factor. Some folder/inserters are built to be used continuously, whereas others are only meant to be used occasionally. Also, some models are built to handle mass mailings, whereas others are built to fold and insert occasional sheets of paper. Be sure you choose a folder/insertioner that will accommodate your folding frequency and volume.

Type of envelopes. Will you be using 6 3/8 x 9 1/2-inch envelopes or larger, 10 1/2 x 13-inch envelopes? Will you be using machine-quality

envelopes, also known as commercial envelopes? Commercial envelopes are the most common envelopes in business and have many uses, including sending invoices, self-addressed and business-reply cards for payment or order returns, and correspondence. Commercial-quality envelopes meet inserting machine manufacturers' set specifications for size, paper weight, flap length, gum, and type of seam.

Batch counter. A batch counter prevents the machine from folding/inserting more sheets than desired. Look for models that will automatically stop folding once a certain number of sheets have been run. Also look for "total counters" that can indicate how many sheets have already been folded and inserted.

Intelligent Optical Mark Reading (OMR). OMR ensures the appropriate forms are inserted in the right envelope. OMR-equipped models are

particularly useful when sending invoices or statements of different page lengths to clients. Although you might not require this feature now, look for models that can be upgraded to OMR in case you need this in the future. A good dealer can help you evaluate your future needs.

Programmable memory. Companies often find they have many folding and inserting jobs and that a system with programmable memory is essential. Programmable memory allows the user to record as many programs or “jobs” as the equipment supports, custom folding jobs and recurring projects. Look for program memory with multiple memory locations and automatic fold settings.

More to consider

Look for equipment that prevents double documents and double inserts. Some units have the additional ability to measure the final envelope package in the actual insert area.

If your materials need to be folded and inserted in sequential order, look into folding/inserting equipment that will allow you to monitor the contents and the order of the contents.

Think about where you’re going to put your folder/inserter—in your office, mailroom, or production area. This will help you decide whether you need a desktop or floor model.


Check how paper jams are handled and how to clear the equipment. Better-designed machines have open access and release rollers for easier clearing of problematic documents and envelopes. Look for a unit with access and step-by-step instructions (pictured instructions are even better) that tell you how to clear jams and where to look.

Test the equipment with the paper and envelopes you’ll be using. Have the manufacturer test your application. Not all systems are equally profi-

cient at handling different kinds of paper and multiple sizes of envelopes.

If you plan to lease a folder/insert-er, find a dealer who offers a range of low- to high-end models. This will make it easier to obtain upgrades as your needs grow.

Purchasing or upgrading a folder/insert-er is an investment that will provide on-demand productivity.

Choose a manufacture and dealer in your area that has a good reputation for customer service and maintenance. In most cases, local companies that have community investment will provide you with professional and personal attention. 

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