

“Outpatient care typically starts with an appointment letter — and suffers if the letter is late or doesn’t arrive at all. It’s not an exaggeration to say that Xerox is helping us deliver better patient care with its hybrid mail service.”

– Ruby Dey, Programme Management Office (PMO) Manager
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust



Our Challenge

“If appointment letters too often fail to get to patients on time; and if 45 front-line administrative staff have to stop work half an hour early to fill envelopes; then you’d naturally welcome a better way of handling such critical correspondence, wouldn’t you?”

Our attendance figures are directly affected by how quickly and reliably letters get to patients. And the first appointment letter strongly influences a patient’s initial impression of us. We’ve got thousands of these letters going out every day and there’s a lot that can go wrong. We wanted more to go right, and to save staff time and effort.”

Our Solution

“A site visit to Xerox gave our management team confidence that Xerox could handle our current and future requirements. We chose them from approximately 20 providers of off-site hybrid mail services under RM1063, the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) framework agreement for postal goods and services.

Xerox has a really complete set of capabilities, from automated selection of the right inserts to tracking of letter delivery. Uniquely, they can also integrate with the Docman system for sending letters electronically to GPs. And they could tailor their process to work with our patient administration system (PAS), which generates letters in a proprietary format.

The price for such a complete and customised service was very competitive, and came with excellent customer service: we can always talk to someone straight away.”

Our Results

“Our administrative teams like how the hybrid mail service makes them feel more productive and is so easy to use. At the press of a button letters are dispatched, and they have confidence in the process because letters are tracked. They tell us they couldn’t go back to the in-house manual process.”

- >50% savings in direct costs to produce and post outpatient letters
- >22 hours per day (3 FTEs) freed — and redeployed to more fulfilling activities for staff
- Better brand consistency: a result of rationalising and standardising letter templates and leaflet design during service implementation
- Fewer late letters thanks to same- or next-day turnaround from letter creation to dispatch
- Only 2% delivery failure rate, down from 60% because of better data control and tracking
- Fewer missed appointments: resulting in better, more efficient patient care

“With the Xerox® Hybrid Mail Service, ‘did not attend’ numbers are down, administrative staff have more fulfilling jobs, and we’re saving more than 50% annually.”

– Stephanie Pearson, Service Manager
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust

It’s about getting better, after all

It was issues with franking that first brought Ruby Dey’s attention to the manual, time-consuming and error-prone process for dispatching outpatient appointment letters from Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust.

As an Administrative and Clerical Workstream Project Manager in the trust’s programme management office (PMO), Dey sensed that outpatient correspondence could be better all around:

- More cost-effective: saving money for other trust priorities.
- More efficient: freeing administrative staff time for more valuable and fulfilling activities.
- More reliable: resulting in better service and care for patients.

Frustrating for all

As a large acute trust in the south-east of England, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust sends out more than a million outpatient appointment letters and reminders every year to residents of Kent and parts of East Sussex. It’s the trust’s Clinical Administration Unit (CAU) that arranges these appointments

The letter dispatch part of the process was time-consuming legwork that diverted more than 45 CAU staff away from dealing directly with consultants and patients to organise appointments. With thousands of letters to send every day, each of them was spending an average of half an hour daily: preparing and printing letters; finding, printing or photocopying leaflets; folding and putting pages into envelopes for posting.

“We had something like three full-time employee equivalents getting letters ready to go,” says Dey.

For patients there were downsides too. The CAU didn’t have the resources to keep patient address data consistently clean and up-to-date; and pressures of work could delay dispatch. If letters didn’t arrive, the *best* outcome was that the CAU’s time

was taken up with calls from patients who realised they’d not heard from the trust as expected. The worst was that patients simply wouldn’t arrive for appointments.

A pain-free remedy

What about outsourcing to a mail fulfilment house? The problem was that most wanted files in certain formats, and weren’t geared up to handle the diverse range of letters generated by the CAU every day, requiring different inserts depending on the letter.

“With Xerox we’re getting something different,” says Dey. “They’re document management and workflow automation specialists, and the software solution they’re using comes from a partner specialising in mail automation. This isn’t a generic cookie-cutter solution, but a feature-rich service tailored to our needs.”

Those needs included:

- Trust-compliant, secured patient information management.
- Staff continuing to generate letters in the PAS proprietary document format.
- Staff able to generate and send individual letters if required, rather than batches.
- Ability for the provider to add specific standard paragraphs to specific letter types, with the trust able to change these at will.
- Identification and printing of the correct inserts (leaflets, forms, reply envelopes) for different letters.
- Address validation and ongoing database cleaning.
- Alerts back to staff about invalid addresses identified before printing, and any delivery failures.
- End-to-end letter tracking (something the trust didn’t have before), accessible to approved trust staff.
- SLA for same or next-day dispatch of letters after submission from the trust.



“There are other capabilities that we’re not even using yet,” says Dey. These include:

- An alert if an appointment is less than 7 days away when the letter is dispatched (so the trust can call the patient).
- Using email instead of (or in addition to) post.
- Copying patient letters to GPs electronically via the existing Docman system.

Excellent outcomes

The Xerox® Hybrid Mail Service has delivered results in all the ways that Dey expected.

The trust is saving more than 50% every year in direct costs (paper, envelopes, print costs and postage). On top of that are indirect savings: less time taken up with patient complaints about late or missing letters; and three FTEs of resource no longer needed for letter dispatch, deployed instead to improve other patient pathway activities.

For the CAU staff whose time has been freed this has meant greater opportunities in more fulfilling jobs. Some have taken on more challenging combined roles. Some have been promoted.

With letters also getting to patients more quickly and reliably, the trust’s ‘did not attend’ numbers have dropped noticeably: excellent news for patient care.

“It’s a hugely appreciated service,” says Dey. “And we can build on it with features we’re not yet using, or extend it to other outgoing trust correspondence, such as diagnostics or HR. We fully expect to derive even greater benefit in future.”