

# **Fulfillment Centers**

**How They Work and How We Work With Them**

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## How they work and how we work with them

### Some basics.

- **What are fulfillment centers, and what do they do?**

Fulfillment centers provide certain magazine circulation services to publishers of mass circulation magazines. They are used primarily by publishers of general interest or “newsstand” magazines with circulation in the millions. Services they provide, according to instructions from each publisher, include: entering new orders and renewals, producing mailing labels for journal issues, processing claims and implementing cancellations. With fixed expenses spread over many magazine orders, the centers can do this at a lower cost than can individual publishers.

- **Who are they, and how do they operate?**

The fulfillment center concept originated in 1940 when Esquire, Inc. established a division in Boulder, Colo., to handle fulfillment for its publications. Many years and several acquisitions later, this venture became Kable, located in Louisville, Colo., one of five major fulfillment centers in North America. The other four centers, listed in no particular order, are: Communications Data Services (CDS), Des Moines and Harland, Iowa; Kable Fulfillment Services, Mt. Morris, Ill., and Marion, Ohio; Palm Coast Data Limited, Palm Coast, Fla.; and Time Inc., Tampa, Fla.

Communication with fulfillment centers focuses on the mailing label. Each mailing label contains a “keyline” or “match code” created when the original order is received. This code allows the computer to match the renewal, claim, etc. to the existing order. Code development varies between centers, but each one contains the same basic information generated from the subscriber’s surname and address, the expiration date of the order, the publication name and issue, and other information specific to the publisher.

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**The difference FTP order entry can make:** The two labels on the left are samples from two different magazines received by the same institution and processed by the same fulfillment center. Note the lack of consistency. The two labels on the right are from two different magazines being sent to the same institution via orders placed through EBSCO.

## How they work.

- ***Why don't fulfillment centers pay more attention to the needs of libraries?***

Because fulfillment centers work primarily for the publishers of mass circulation magazines, they are geared to serve individual subscribers, not libraries. Libraries usually represent only one to two percent of the orders handled by a fulfillment center but 50 percent or more of their "problems." This is because librarians are required to check-in every magazine and must receive every issue of every volume without fail.

- ***What subscription problems can occur when dealing with fulfillment centers?***

General types of problems experienced by librarians and subscription agents include:

- ▶ ***Order entry errors***

Fulfillment centers often process orders immediately (even when they have instructions to begin with a specific issue) in order to reconcile the publication's "paid circulation" as monitored by the Audit Bureau of Circulation and as guaranteed to advertisers. This is the center's job as directed by the publisher. Sometimes a subscription will start late for the same reason. If multiple orders of one magazine are requested for one address (printed exactly the same on all orders), the center's computer sometimes interprets them as one multi-year subscription paid in advance. Because of this mistake, an incorrect number of copies is processed and sent.

- ▶ ***Renewal errors***

Librarians using agents to renew their entire list, and even librarians ordering direct, often cannot locate and provide the publisher's renewal card containing the match code from the mailing label. If the address on the renewal order doesn't match the center's existing order exactly, a new order is established. This results in duplicates and/or gaps in service to allow time for processing the new order.

► **Claims**

Because of the volume of order processing handled through fulfillment centers and the small percentage of subscribers who file claims, subscriber claims often receive little attention. It's almost imperative for a copy of the address label with the match code to accompany a claim for the center to identify an exact order; claims without the match code aren't given priority because of the difficulty involved in locating the order.

**How EBSCO works with fulfillment centers.**

Acknowledging the growth of fulfillment centers, EBSCO learns as much about them as possible and works with them as closely as possible. Managers from our International Headquarters and our Regional Offices visit the processing offices of major fulfillment centers to see their operations, learn their language and communicate concerns we and our customers have regarding their services to publishers.

The key to decreasing problems with orders, renewals and claims processed through fulfillment centers is providing our customers' orders on FTP (file transfer protocol) rather than hard copy and using the match code for each subscription. By submitting orders through FTP in the same format used by centers (four-line ship-to addresses of no more than 24 characters each), processing time is shortened and inevitable data entry errors are avoided. Also, using FTP for renewals greatly reduces duplicates and gaps in service.

Much has been accomplished through the years by EBSCO's determination to work with fulfillment centers to improve customer service. Today, our FTP order processing program has been expanded to more than 90 fulfillment centers and publishers, including many scientific, technical and medical publishers.