

DAT-MAIL Prep™: A Brand New Mail.dat Preparation Tool

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Those of us in the mailing industry - mail owners, list processors, letter shops, and transportation companies - that use [Mail.dat](#) files to communicate mailing information electronically with the United States Postal Service® (USPS®) and with third parties, rely heavily upon post-presort mailing software to process Mail.dat data. In fact, it is critical to be able to configure the Mail.dat data – view, validate, edit, split, merge, convert – quickly and efficiently to meet production and delivery deadlines.

Typically, these Mail.dat “manipulations” are done by your [post-presort software](#) that has the capability to import and edit Mail.dat files. However, not all post-presort software is programmed to let you work with Mail.dat files quickly and easily. If you don’t have the right tools, it can be very time consuming and resource-intensive to import and validate your Mail.dat data; sometimes you even have to re-start your import every time you encounter a validation error - and it can take a very long time to process these files.

Introducing [DAT-MAIL Prep](#) - A Simple Solution for Complex Processing

DAT-MAIL Prep is a perfect solution for anyone who has to work with Mail.dat data, and is a stand-alone product that mailers can use to do the initial ‘bulk’ processing before they actually import Mail.dat files into their post-presort software.

DAT-MAIL Prep is built on state-of-the-art .Net technology, and is able to provide high-speed pre-processing functions for the following procedures:

- **Mail.dat Viewing** - Quickly display the contents of your Mail.dat file
- **CSA Viewing** - View your FAST Customer/Supplier Agreement (CSA) without changing the original .CSV format
- **Mail.dat Validation** - Know in advance if there are errors in your Mail.dat files – with optional compliance levels including IDEAlliance and *PostalOne!*®
- **Mail.dat Splitting** - Split your Mail.dat files to accommodate production needs
- **Mail.dat Merging** - Combine multiple Mail.dat files into a single mailing
- **Mail.dat Converting** - Two-way converting - convert 09-1 files to 11-1 / 11-2 or vice-versa

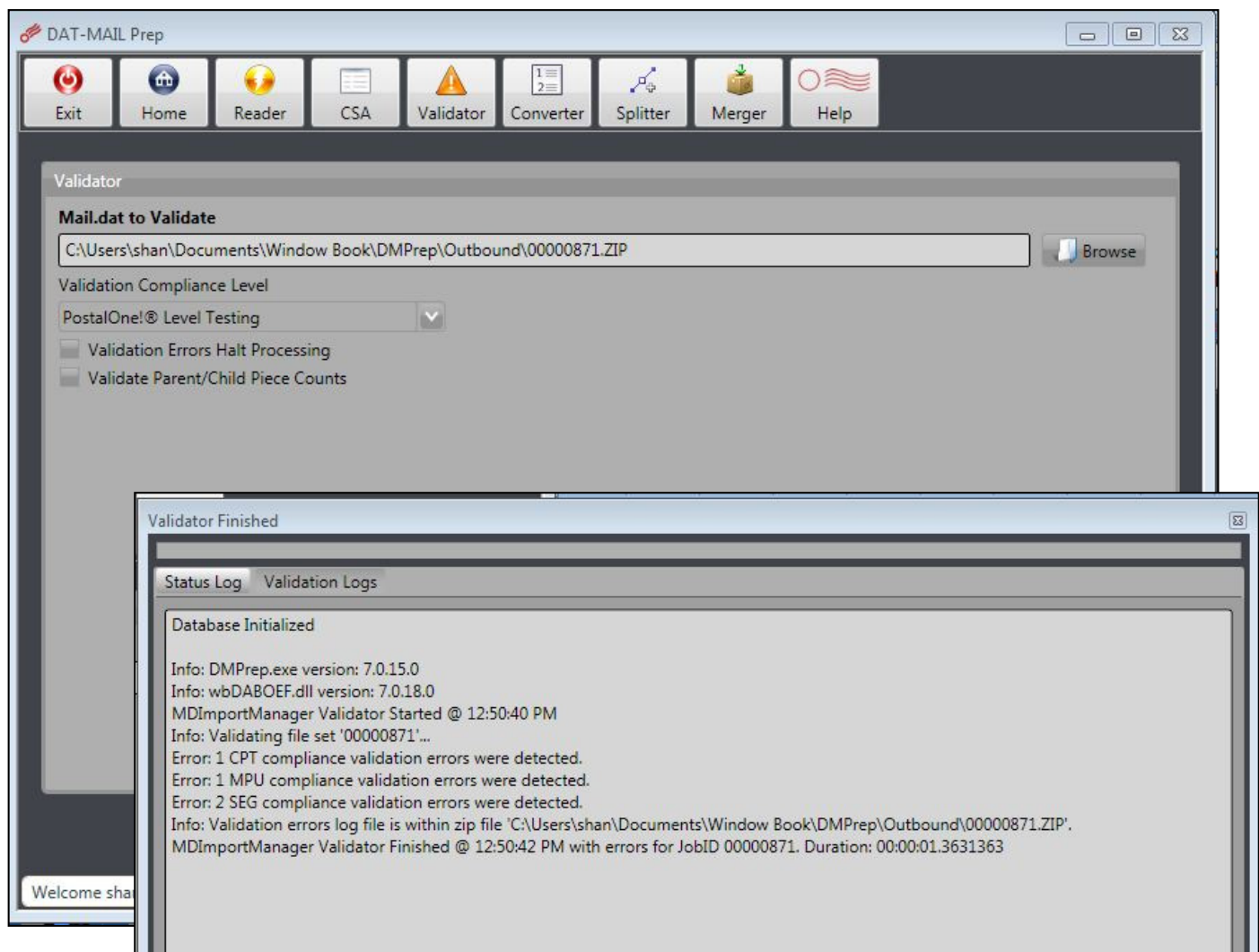
Why Do You Need to Prepare Mail.dat files?

Now let's discuss why you need to configure your Mail.dat files and how DAT-MAIL Prep can help you.

Mail.dat File Validation

When Mail.dat files are created by presort software or mail sorting equipment, they may contain errors or omissions, both of which can cause problems when doing any post-presort processing and/or sharing the data with other members of the mailing supply chain, including the *PostalOne!*[®] system from the USPS. DAT-MAIL Prep can validate Mail.dat data using multiple compliance standards including ones set by IDEAlliance and *PostalOne!*. Basic compliance validations include checks for incorrect formatting, related-field errors and missing data.

Once the validation process is complete, DAT-MAIL Prep provides detailed error reports, which allow the user to research and resolve the errors by locating and making the necessary edits in the Mail.dat file. In fact, it produces one report with all the errors listed so the user can easily correct them all at once; it is extra work to fix one error, re-run the presort or re-validate the files and then have to repeat these steps over and over again until everything is corrected.



Split Mailings

There are many times mailers will run presort jobs combining mail in any number of different ways, i.e., separate batches within one presort run for the different entry drops they plan to make. In doing so they create one Mail.dat file set. When the presort is complete and the mail needs to get physically prepared and processed, the mailer may have several different mailshops or transportation companies they work with to process mail for different areas of the country. It then becomes necessary to split the Mail.dat files by these different batches or “segments”.

Using DAT-MAIL Prep makes it fast and easy for these mailers to split the one large file into several smaller Mail.dat file sets. Examples of ways mailers may split a Mail.dat file include: Segment, Container group, Entry Point and Facility Type, Physical ZIP and Facility Type, Auto/Non Auto, or Custom Tray Level. It can even validate these separate files as they are split!

Merge Mailings

Some mail service providers known as “consolidators” may opt to merge mailings from several jobs into a single, larger mailing by combining the multiple Mail.dat files they receive into one single Mail.dat file set. This is typically done to achieve finer levels of palletization, or “co-palletization” for drop-ship entries and their associated discounts. Since these mailings have been presorted at different times and places by different companies using different presort software, merging these mailings and re-running the presort is, at best, impractical. Most times it’s just downright impossible!

DAT-MAIL Prep allows easy merging of Mail.dat files from multiple sources or from multiple jobs. You can perform validation on the merged file and then export the data as a brand new Mail.dat file. Then use your post-presort software (like DAT-MAIL) to perform the actual co-palletization and entry-planning processes. By merging mailings and co-palletizing, you can convert NDC pallets into SCF pallets or SCF pallets into 3-digit pallets, and benefit from improved delivery-time and additional postage savings.

CSA Viewing

Customer/Supplier Agreement (CSA) files are used by certain mailers who have large volumes of origin-entered mail that is time-sensitive. Once the Mailer and their local USPS BMEU come to an agreement on how to separate their Origin-entered mailings, a CSA file is generated by the USPS that provides details on those separations. The file is in a .CSV format and placed on the USPS Facility Access and Shipment Tracking (FAST) site. The Mailer logs into FAST and downloads the CSA file. Often times, the Mailer will open that file in Excel to review or sort the data and then save it instead of just closing Excel. This jeopardizes the original CSV format of the CSA file, which can cause issues with the data when it is accessed by other systems.

DAT-MAIL Prep lets you view your FAST Customer/Supplier Agreement (CSA) *without* changing the original .CSV format, thereby allowing the user to easily incorporate the CSA file into other post-presort software for processing.

Converting Mail.dat files to a New Version

Mailers sometimes receive Mail.dat data that needs to be converted to an older or newer Mail.dat specification version to meet their software capabilities or USPS regulations. DAT-MAIL Prep gives you the option to convert the files to an older or newer version. It also provides validation options that can be invoked after the conversion to ensure that no errors exist. Depending on your needs you can convert your files in the beginning or at the end of configuration activities.

Conclusion

Using DAT-MAIL Prep can definitely help you save time configuring your Mail.dat files, so you can get your job done faster and easier. This is especially true for mailers whose post-presort software is not user-friendly, making it tedious and time consuming to get their jobs done.

DAT-MAIL Prep is built using .Net technology to provide a high-speed, simple solution for mailers who need to process Mail.dat files. Regardless of what kind of post-presort Mail.dat editing software you are using, you can use DAT-MAIL Prep to do the initial Mail.dat preparation without having to import the files. As with all the software products produced by Window Book, DAT-MAIL Prep includes on-line tech support and free program updates.

For more information on DAT-MAIL Prep, visit www.windowbook.com/DAT-MAILPrep

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About Jeffery Peoples

As Founder and CEO of Window Book, Jeffery Peoples has created many innovations since 1989 that make using the Postal Service easier and more profitable for mailers and shippers, and is continually educating and enabling mailers on Intelligent Mail; eDoc, *PostalOne!*, Mail.XML, Mail.dat, post-presort software, and FAST. He is frequently invited to speak at industry events such as GraphExpo, MAILCOM, the National Postal Forum, Postal Customer Council meetings, and other industry and direct marketing events.

About Window Book, Inc.

Window Book has been helping clients manage their operations more profitably since 1989, and is the leader in mailing and shipping software for Lettershops, Corporate Mailers, Service Bureaus, and Mail Owners. Window Book's best-in-class postal solutions include: Intelligent Mail Full-Service, *PostalOne!*, eDocs, Mail.dat, Mail.XML, FAST, Bound Printed Matter, post-presort data management, entry planning, drop shipping, postage accounting, postal documentation & statements, meter and stamp management, Express Mail[®] and Priority Mail Open and Distribute, New Commercial Plus rates, eVS, Delivery Confirmation[™], and manifesting shipping system.

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