



Save office time with Royal Mail Smartstamp

If you regularly send letters or parcels and have to queue up at a post office, or you're always running out of stamps (how annoying!), the chances are that you've considered using a franking machine.

To many small firms, though, they are a bit of a luxury but the time wasted messing about with postage stamps can be a real burden.

A small franking machine can cost typically £20 per month or more and there is a contract period to think about. However an Internet-enabled alternative is available that smart business owners should consider.

Royal Mail's **Smartstamp** service is a very handy franking machine-style service that's powered over the Internet. It allows smaller users the flexibility of printing franking labels on demand. Like most franking accounts, you prepay a deposit (min £5) into an online Smartstamp account, either as a one-off or on a regular basis.



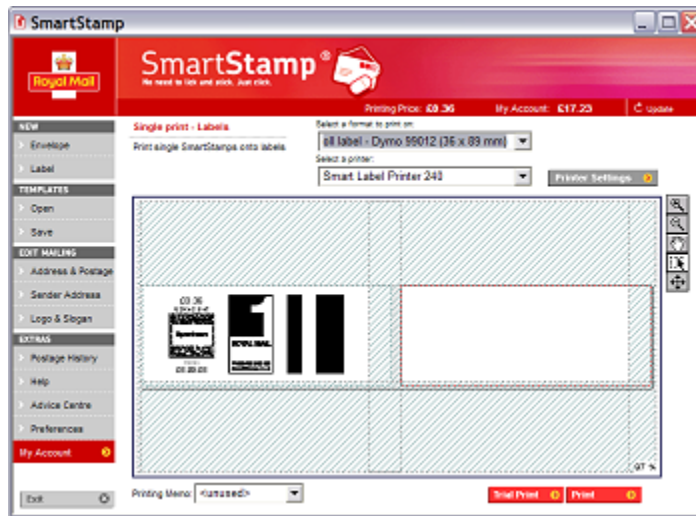
Having topped up your account, the useful Windows-based software lets you calculate the correct postage rate by entering the destination zone, required service and weight. The rates are automatically kept up to date so there is no risk of undercharging.

The Smartstamp service is optimised to produce franking labels using a printer attached to your PC. Printers including Dymo's Labelwriter and Seiko's Smart Label Printer are USB printers that print address labels of the correct size (typically 99 x

38mm) from a roll of adhesive labels. For higher volumes, certain sized sheet-fed labels could be printed on an inkjet or laser printer.

You can include a logo or slogan, if desired, and you can print 'bulk' labels as well – just dial in how many are needed and let the printer do the rest. You can store regular choices as a Favourite. The label contains a unique barcode matrix as well as the Post-By date: you must post your letters either same day or next day or the stamps will be invalidated. Stamps

printed on Fridays or over the weekend, however, may be posted on the following Monday latest. The franking label clearly shows the ‘post by’ date.



Small roll-type label printers use ‘thermal’ heat-sensitive paper, like old-fashioned thermal fax paper, meaning no ink is needed. They are also extremely useful for printing address labels or other one-off adhesive labels. For heavier use, a laser printer with A4 sheets of labels may be a better bet. Care is needed to select the right size,

but Avery, Seiko and Dymo manufacture compatible sizes of label.

One thing to bear in mind is that you **must** ensure the printer is powered up and ready to print when you send the labels to the printer, as stamps **cannot** be reprinted. (The Seiko SII Smart Label Printer will power itself up if it’s not already switched on when you send a print job to it, so there is less risk of losing labels – but it must of course still be plugged into the mains to start with.)



You can pre-print sample labels for free, and send damaged or misprinted labels back to Royal Mail (free) for reimbursement back to your account.

Best of all, we reckon, is the flexibility of being able to easily calculate the correct price for stamps. You no longer have to stock various stamps and you can print labels on demand. You can then hand your mail in at a post office or simply post it in a letter

box – but make sure you hit the collection date in time.

Smartstamp for business use costs £49.99 per year + VAT or £4.99 per month + VAT, excluding postages. A more limited “Home User” service is also available.

More information:

These sites offer more details of the service and also provide suitable printers and labels:

[Royal Mail Smartstamp](#)

[Dymo Labelwriter printers](#)

[Seiko Instruments Smart Label Printers](#)

[Avery UK Label Products](#)

[Staples Office Supplies](#)

[Misco](#) – supplier of IT including Dymo & Seiko printers and labels

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