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**Media website:** <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

## **Flashing Across the Country: Mr. Zip and the ZIP Code Promotional Campaign**

The Smithsonian's National Postal Museum has launched an online microsite celebrating and examining the history and development of Mr. Zip and the ZIP Code campaign. Introduced in 1963, ZIP Codes were not immediately or warmly welcomed by the American public. The notion that people now needed to remember five numbers for their address, and those of anyone they corresponded with, seemed like too much work for many. The new website ([www.npm.si.edu/zipcodecampaign](http://www.npm.si.edu/zipcodecampaign)) chronicles the introduction of ZIP Codes in the U.S. and shows how this popular cartoon figure was used to encourage Americans to use the new system.

ZIP Codes were introduced as part of the burgeoning mechanized mail systems that the Post Office Department was employing across the country. As mail volumes soared in the 1950s and 1960s, postal officials looked for ways to keep the mail moving smoothly. As had other organizations around the world, the POD looked to mechanizing systems such as machines that could move thousands of pieces of mail in the time it took clerks to move a handful. But the machines needed to be able to "read" the mail in order to process it. So the ZIP Code system was introduced, promising Americans that by adding five numbers to each piece of mail, it would travel swiftly through the system to its destination.

Mr. Zip was the face of the new campaign. Posters, television, newspaper and magazine ads featuring his image were commonplace in the mid 1960s. The site addresses how these advertisements were used, the public response to the campaign and ZIP Codes, as well as Mr. Zip's continued appearance in popular culture today. It also includes examples of audio and television spots from the campaign.

"Almost 50 years after he was introduced to the public, and 25 years after the U.S. Postal Service stopped using him, the craggy, oddball figure of Mr. Zip continues to appear on knickknacks

and in popular culture,” said Nancy Pope, historian and curator. “An image that began as part of a bank’s advertising campaign has become an enduring and recognizable figure of the U.S. mail.”

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation’s mail service and showcasing one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C., across from Union Station. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). For more information about the Smithsonian, call (202) 633-1000 or visit the museum website at [www.postalmuseum.si.edu](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu).

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