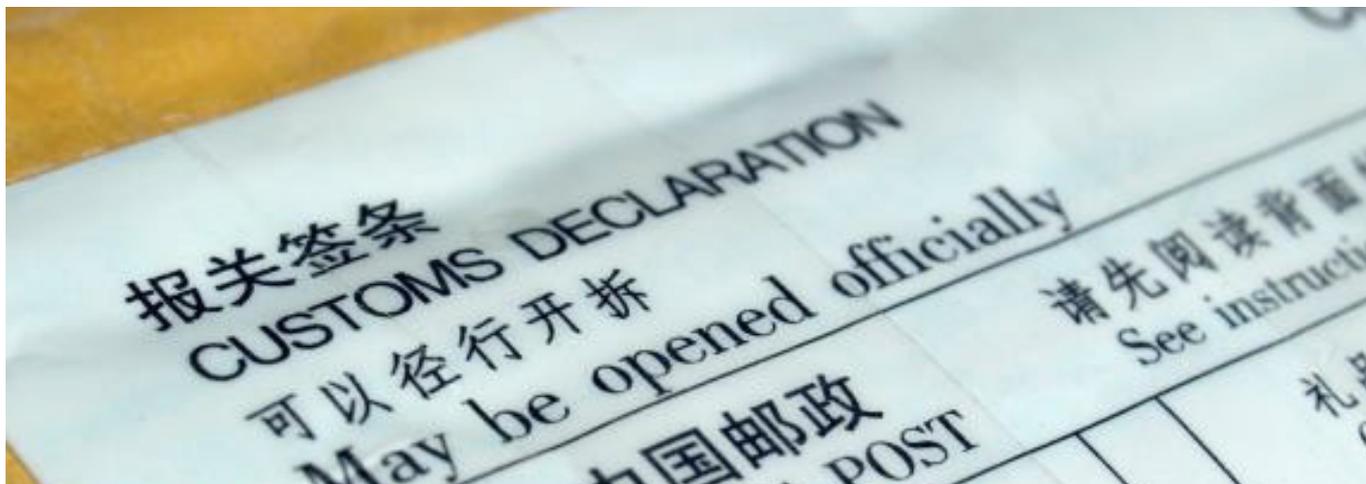

Customs Capture for Cross-border eCommerce

A solution for recognizing, capturing, and transmitting data from customs forms



Millions of packages and parcels move across international borders every day, and everyone involved in moving these goods wants to know what is being transferred from country to country and by whom. Do these parcels contain dangerous, illegal or prohibited goods? What risks are associated with the shipper? Can customs duties and taxes be properly assessed and collected? How can customs clearance be expedited?

The information that answers these questions, of course, is on the customs label that the shipper completes before dropping the parcel or package into the delivery network. Using online systems, the information from the shipper can be captured very effectively and there are various programs available (e.g. from the International Postal Corporation) to assist in the transfer of the data. Where information is not provided online, Optical Character Reader technology may substitute for manual entry. And, as

the effectiveness of these data-capture systems improves, the data transferred becomes more complete and accurate.

But, here is the unfortunate truth; much of the customs data is never captured. As the eCommerce boom drives parcel volumes higher and expands the number of shippers, posts and customs authorities cannot keep pace with the volume of customs labels that are not created through an online system or cannot be automatically read through OCR. The cost of manual entry on these labels is prohibitive, and the packages cross the border without collection of fees or security.

International standardization of customs forms would go a long way toward addressing this challenge, as forms-reading technology could be deployed effectively to capture the information from the labels. We know, however, that each country is free to individually design the forms even if the

content is standard. Conventional forms-reading relies on forms templates and OCR to locate and classify the information on the form. With no standardization, the usual approach to forms-reading can fall short in the face of a myriad of layouts, languages, sizes and presentations.

So, what is a post supposed to do? As any post doing parcel automation has already discovered, simply locating the address label among all the noise on a parcel and then reading address information can be difficult, and the difficulties multiply with reflection, wrinkled pouches, straps and odd shapes. Reading customs forms can be even more problematic and requires a solution that goes beyond the conventional template-based methods.

What the post needs is a game-changing solution. Capturing customs data from images lifted from automated parcel

sorting machines or on hand-addressed packages dropped at the counter requires highly advanced recognition technology. Effective capture necessitates a solution employing sophisticated techniques that can obviate the need for label extraction and

classification and is invariant to translations, transformations and rotations. Unlike the customary prescribed approach to forms-reading, advanced systems will apply image processing, machine learning and complex algorithms to overcome the challenges

inherent in reading parcel and package images. And, this technology must be available on high-speed sorting machines as well as on mobile devices at the counter.



Shahrom Kiani, who has seen 30 years of postal progress and is now General Manager of Atos Postal, has some good news;

“I can tell you that the problems in capturing customs data are readily solvable using recognition capabilities that defy the norm. We offer ground-breaking recognition to obtain complete reliable data for transfer to the destination country, to the receiving country, and to the customs organization on either end of the journey. The posts are already talking to us about our innovative approach and we are excited to partner in their conquest of the eCommerce challenges and opportunities.”

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