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E-Mail Inventor: Use Technology to Overhaul USPS

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It's not too late to save the U.S. Postal Service, the inventor of e-mail told International Business Times.

The solution: use the 50,000 people scheduled to be fired next year and transform the U.S. mail into U.S. e-mail for small- and medium-sized business.

The postal service is an integral part of democracy, V. A. Shiva, who holds the U.S. copyright for e-mail, told IBTimes. It has a trust among the masses that ensures freedom.

Rather than fire people, close down half the nation's 461 mail processing centers, end Saturday delivery and raise postage rates next year, Shiva said the USPS could retrain most

employees for the 21st century, handling e-mail, scanning and processing documents and doing things they already know. The companies and the USPS already own much of the necessary tools, he added.

Shiva, 48, is now a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At 14, as a high school student working at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, a physicist assigned him the task of converting mail into an electronic format.

The teenaged Shiva took the concept, dubbed it High Reliability, Network-Wide, Electronic Mail System and won a Westinghouse Science Competition award for it before entering MIT for college. He won the U.S. copyright for e-mail in 1982 and later founded EchoMail, in Cambridge, Mass.

In 1997, Shiva told IBTimes, he met with USPS representatives and offered the same advice. He was told the post office would survive because at the time, it was bigger than Wal-Mart Stores, the largest U.S. retailer.

We're making a lot of money off delivery of physical mail, Shiva was told. He recounted how in the early days of his administration, aides to President Bill Clinton didn't know how to handle 5,000 daily e-mail messages. They were printed out, analyzed and then responded to -- by snail mail.

India-born Shiva told IBTimes the biggest U.S. companies have already outsourced much of their e-mail handling to India where the

corruption is absolutely insane. An enterprise like American Express has all its e-mails handled by personnel in Gurgaon, India, without any security. The process also takes away U.S. jobs, he added.

By contrast, USPS employees have been trained, imbued by more than 200 years of experience with the mail service in respecting confidentiality and know how to handle the mechanics of sorting, handling and delivery.

For \$1 apiece, Shiva suggested, smaller enterprises could hire USPS people to manage their e-mail systems, analyze responses and send responses based upon pre-determined answers. He noted other research for companies such as Hilton Hotels that showed an 85 percent chance of losing a customer when an e-mail isn't handled well.

The e-mail developer said he's offered to bring USPS personnel to MIT for a short training course. There's no reason why his concept couldn't be deployed into the current mail system, helping businesses transition.

Indeed, Shiva told IBTimes various government officials have been in touch since the USPS downsizing announcement on Dec. 4.

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