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Mainstream Canada

Death, taxes and Canada Post

By Terry O'Shaughnessy

It was an interesting marketing concept.

During the post-Christmas season when many Canadians were enjoying the benefits of Boxing Day shopping sales and bargain-basement prices, the folks at Canada Post came out with a reminder that the price of a first-class stamp was increasing by another cent.

The reminder stated that, as of Jan. 1, 1990, along with the cost of a basic letter stamp rising to 39 cents within Canada, the basic letter rate to the United States will also increase by 1 cent (to 45 cents), and the international rate will be increased by 2 cents to 78 cents per letter.

In Canada, it seems, the old adage that the only thing certain in life is death and taxes can now be taken one step further to include the inevitable price hikes in postal services.

And, at this time next year when the famed Goods and Services Tax is scheduled for implementation, the Canadian public faces the prospect of paying an extra 7 per cent on top of the cost of the basic stamp rate. Translated into numbers, the GST-included stamp will cost, for example, (at current Canada Post rates) an extra 3 cents for every first-class stamp.

And while Canada Post has taken steps to show it can improve service and deliver a

profit, the Canadian public remains sceptical of its ability to deliver the goods.

For example, reports of post offices swamped with undelivered Christmas mail should not surprise anyone. And reports that huge price increases are in store for Canada's northern consumers (as a result of increased costs in Canada Post's food transportation to the Yukon and Northwest Territories) are not likely to help improve the Corporation's beleaguered image. And, of course, the possibility of yet another postal strike is always seen by the postal user as a "not if" but "when" situation.

If Canada Post's trend towards annual increases continues, and if the GST is implemented, it is conceivable that by the year 2000 Canadians will be paying more than half a dollar to mail a letter within Canada. And that cost could go even higher if a worsening economy and the pressures of inflation "force" even larger increases.

Businesses in the private sector, of course, could not afford similar price hikes—the competition would run them out of town. But competition isn't something the post office has ever needed to worry about.

And that's a luxury those in the private sector are not able to afford.

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