SOFTWARE & TECH

How To Ship A Package

Published: November 20, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Introduction: Why Knowing How To Ship A Package Matters More Than Ever

In today's fast-paced digital economy, the ability to send goods across the country or around the world has become an essential skill for individuals and businesses alike. Whether you're a small business owner fulfilling your first customer order, a college student sending care packages home, or someone returning an online purchase, understanding **how to ship a package**properly can save you time, money, and a great deal of frustration. Many people assume that shipping is as simple as dropping a box at the post office, but the reality involves careful planning, proper packaging, accurate labeling, and smart carrier selection. A poorly shipped package can arrive damaged, delayed, or lost altogether, leading to unhappy recipients and unnecessary expenses. This comprehensive guide will walk you through every step of the process, from selecting the right box to tracking your shipment, ensuring that your next package reaches its destination safely and efficiently.

Step 1: Choosing the Right Packaging Materials

Before you can even think about addressing a box, you need to assemble the proper materials. The foundation of successful shipping lies in packaging that protects your items throughout their journey. Different types of items require different approaches, and using the wrong materials is one of the most common mistakes people make when learning **how to ship a package**.

Selecting the Correct Box or Envelope

The outer container is your first line of defense. Whenever possible, use a new corrugated cardboard box that is sturdy and free from punctures or weak spots. While reusing boxes from previous shipments is an option, you must ensure that all old labels, barcodes, and markings are completely removed or covered. These remnants can confuse sorting machines and cause your package to be misrouted. The box should be large enough to accommodate your item plus cushioning material, but not so large that the contents can shift around. A general rule of thumb is to allow at least two inches of space on all sides between your item and the box walls for adequate cushioning.

Essential Cushioning and Protective Materials

Gone are the days of relying on wadded newspaper for protection. Today's carriers handle millions of packages daily, and your items will be subjected to drops, bumps, and stacking pressure. Invest in quality cushioning materials such as:

- Bubble wrap – Ideal for fragile items and electronics, providing excellent shock absorption.
- Packing peanuts – Useful for filling voids in larger boxes, though they can shift during transit.
- Foam inserts or foam sheets – Great for fitting snugly around oddly shaped objects.
- Air pillows – Lightweight and effective for filling empty space without adding significant weight.
- Kraft paper – Suitable for wrapping non-fragile items and providing a barrier against moisture.

For particularly valuable or delicate shipments, consider double-boxing. Place your item in a smaller box with ample cushioning, then place that smaller box inside a larger box with additional padding. This technique is often required for shipping musical instruments, glassware, and expensive electronics.

Selecting the Right Tape

Not all tapes are created equal for shipping purposes. Avoid using masking tape, scotch tape, or duct tape for sealing packages, as these can easily fail during transit. Instead, use **pressure-sensitive plastic tape**(often referred to as packing tape) that is at least two inches wide. Apply the tape along the center seam of the box and extend it several inches down the sides for a secure seal. For heavier boxes, use the H-taping method by running tape along all open seams and flaps.

Step 2: Weighing and Measuring Your Package Accurately

Once your package is properly packed and sealed, you need to determine its weight and dimensions. Carriers base their shipping rates on two factors: actual weight and dimensional weight (also known as DIM weight). Understanding this concept is crucial when learning **how to ship a package** cost-effectively.

Understanding Dimensional Weight

Dimensional weight accounts for the amount of space a package occupies relative to its actual weight. Carriers calculate DIM weight by multiplying the package's length, width, and height and then dividing by a specific divisor (usually 139 for domestic shipments). If the dimensional weight exceeds the actual weight, you will be charged based on the DIM weight. This means that shipping a large, lightweight box can be surprisingly expensive. To minimize costs, always use the smallest box that can safely accommodate your items without compressing them.

Tools You Will Need

Invest in a reliable digital scale that can measure in both pounds and kilograms. Many shipping scales are available at reasonable prices and connect directly to shipping software for automated rate calculation. For measuring dimensions, use a rigid measuring tape and measure the longest points on each side, rounding up to the nearest whole inch. Carriers generally require dimension rounding, so a box that measures 10.2 inches by 8.6 inches should be recorded as 11 inches by 9 inches.

Step 3: Choosing a Carrier and Service Level

With your package prepared and measured, you now face one of the most consequential decisions in **how to ship a package**: selecting the carrier and service speed. The major players in the United States include the United States Postal Service (USPS), UPS, FedEx, and DHL for international shipments. Each has distinct strengths and pricing structures.

USPS: Best for Small and Lightweight Packages

The USPS is often the most affordable option for small, lightweight packages under 10 pounds. Priority Mail provides flat-rate boxes that allow you to ship items at a fixed price regardless of weight (within limits), making it an excellent choice for heavy but compact items. First-Class Package Service is ideal for very small shipments weighing under one pound. However, USPS tracking is not as robust as private carriers, and delivery timelines can vary.

UPS and FedEx: Reliable for Larger and Heavier Items

Both UPS and FedEx offer comprehensive services for packages of all sizes, with superior tracking technology and more reliable delivery windows. UPS Ground and FedEx Ground are cost-effective for heavier shipments that do not require immediate delivery. For time-sensitive packages, options like UPS Next Day Air or FedEx Priority Overnight guarantee delivery by specific times the following morning. These carriers also offer robust insurance options and signature confirmation services.

International Shipping Considerations

When shipping across borders, you must complete customs documentation, including a detailed description of the contents, their value, and their country of origin. Each carrier provides specific forms for international shipping, and you may need to include commercial invoices for business shipments. Research destination country regulations regarding prohibited items and potential duties or taxes that the recipient may need to pay.

Step 4: Properly Addressing and Labeling Your Package

An accurately addressed package is one that arrives on time. The labeling process may seem straightforward, but errors here are among the most common reasons for shipping delays. When learning **how to ship a package**, pay close attention to the details of addressing.

Writing or Printing a Clear Address

Use a legible, permanent marker or, better yet, print your labels directly from the carrier's website or shipping software. Handwritten addresses should be written in capital letters with clear spacing. Always include both the delivery address and the return address. The return address should be placed in the upper left corner of the label side of the package, while the delivery address should be centered. When printing labels, use high-quality adhesive paper to prevent smudging or peeling during transit.

Including Contact Information

Add a phone number for both the sender and the recipient. Carriers use this information to contact the recipient if there is a delivery issue, such as an inaccessible location or an incomplete address. Many shipping services now send text or email notifications to recipients, so including current contact details improves the delivery experience for everyone.

Using Extra Labels and Fragile Markings

If your package contains fragile items, apply "FRAGILE" or "HANDLE WITH CARE" stickers on multiple sides of the box. While these markings do not guarantee gentle handling, they can encourage extra attention from sorting personnel. For large or heavy packages, consider adding "TEAM LIFT" labels to advise handlers that the package requires more than one person to lift safely. Some carriers offer specific labels for hazardous materials, perishable goods, or lithium batteries, so check your carrier's guidelines if your shipment contains any special contents.

Step 5: Calculating Shipping Costs and Purchasing Postage

Shipping costs can vary widely based on distance, weight, dimensions, and service speed. Knowing **how to ship a package** without overpaying requires comparison shopping and understanding the factors that influence pricing.

Comparing Rates Across Carriers

Never assume that one carrier is always cheaper than another. Rates change frequently, and promotional discounts can make a significant difference. Use online shipping calculators available on carrier websites or consolidated platforms like ShipStation, Pirate Ship, or Shippo to compare rates side by side. These platforms often offer discounted rates that are lower than what you would pay at a retail counter, especially for small businesses.

Buying Postage Online vs. at the Counter

Purchasing postage online through a carrier's website or a third-party platform almost always saves money compared to buying at a retail counter. Online rates include discounts for printing labels yourself and scheduling carrier pickups. Additionally, buying online allows you to schedule a pickup or drop off the package at a convenient

location without waiting in line. Many carriers also offer free package pickup when you schedule online, saving you a trip to the post office or shipping store.

Adding Insurance and Extra Services

For valuable items, consider purchasing additional insurance. Carriers typically include basic liability coverage up to a certain amount (often $100), but this may not fully cover expensive electronics, jewelry, or collectibles. You can purchase additional insurance based on the declared value of the contents. Similarly, services like signature confirmation, delivery confirmation, and adult signature required can provide peace of mind for important shipments.

Step 6: Dropping Off or Scheduling a Pickup

With your package labeled and postage paid, you are ready to hand it over to the carrier. The final step in **how to ship a package**involves choosing between dropping off your package at a carrier facility or scheduling a pickup from your home or office.

Drop-Off Locations and Hours

Each carrier maintains a network of drop-off locations, including corporate facilities, authorized shipping outlets, and third-party retailers. USPS accepts packages at any post office or collection box (for smaller items). UPS drop boxes are widely available in urban areas, and FedEx has similar drop-off options. If you need a receipt as proof of shipment, you must hand the package to a counter employee rather than using a drop box. Keep your receipt until the package is delivered as proof of weight and acceptance.

Scheduling a Carrier Pickup

Most carriers offer free pickup services when you purchase postage online. USPS allows you to schedule a pickup during your regular mail delivery time. UPS and FedEx drivers can pick up packages from your home or business during their normal routes. Scheduling a pickup is convenient, especially for businesses that ship regularly or individuals who have difficulty traveling to a drop-off location. Simply place your package in a visible location with the label facing upward, and the driver will handle the rest.

Step 7: Tracking Your Shipment and Handling Issues

After your package is in the hands of the carrier, the waiting game begins. However, modern tracking technology allows you to monitor your shipment's progress every step of the way. Knowing **how to ship a package**also means knowing how to respond when things go wrong.

Using Tracking Numbers Effectively

Your tracking number is your most valuable tool. Enter it into the carrier's website or a consolidated tracking app to see real-time updates. Most carriers provide estimated delivery dates that are updated as the package moves through the sorting network. Sign up for email, text, or app notifications so you are alerted to any changes in delivery status, including delays or delivery attempts.

What To Do If a Package Is Delayed or Lost

Despite everyone's best efforts, packages can be delayed or lost. If your tracking information shows no movement for several days, contact the carrier's customer service department. Start a trace request to locate the package. If the package is confirmed lost, file a claim for the insured value. Keep all documentation, including your original receipt, tracking history, and any communication with the carrier. For undeliverable packages, carriers will attempt

to contact the recipient or return

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