

Ten Considerations in Preparing Your Time-Sensitive Shipments



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Introduction

In an interview for [CBS Sunday Morning](#), Paul Misener, Amazon vice president for global public policy, talked about his company's much-discussed "Prime Air" drone delivery program and noted its goal of delivering packages within 30 minutes of an order being placed at Amazon.com. "The range has to be over 10 miles," he said. "These things will weigh about 55 pounds each, but they'll be able to deliver parcels that weigh up to five pounds."

Misener went on to predict that Amazon's delivery drones will eventually be as common a sight as delivery trucks are today. "I've seen it. It's gonna happen. It's coming."

While delivery drones may be the solution of the future for at least some time-sensitive shipments, present-day businesses must still contend with more conventional options, usually a highway or air solution. But thanks to technology and innovative thinking, time-sensitive shipments can enjoy unprecedented levels of efficiency and precision.



Amazon predicts its delivery drones will eventually be as common a sight as delivery trucks. Source: [CNN](#)

In fact, whereas "time sensitive" used to mean a shipment had no choice but to travel via an urgent and costly expedited solution, shipments can now travel via less urgent, "regular" schedules that meet specific delivery needs. Shipments that previously could only be accommodated via an expedited air solution can often travel via a ground solution. This is because of innovations including route optimization and distribution center bypass, whereby shipments travel via the most direct and expedient route available, eliminating wasted miles and unnecessary stopovers.

As consumers increasingly become accustomed to technology adding efficiency to their own lives, it may seem odd that technology is not "baked into" today's logistics plans. Many providers have been slow to embrace its potential and the "efficiency revolution" that has taken hold in

the logistics industry. It may seem intuitive, for example, that precautions should be taken to protect a time-sensitive shipment—all shipments for that matter—from damage. But for a surprising number of logistics providers, proper packaging is not a top consideration.

Whether a business needs to ship an urgently needed machine part to avert an assembly-line shutdown, inventory to retailers to meet a "launch date," temperature-controlled pharmaceuticals, or even an eCommerce parcel with a guaranteed delivery date, every time-sensitive shipment is important and demands priority care.

But in the world of time-sensitive shipping, not all carriers and logistics providers are alike. A business should make no assumptions about a provider's capabilities and should tread carefully before signing on. Since most time-sensitive shipments leave little margin for error, there is no room for on-the-job training with a logistics provider: It either is up to the job or it is not.

Following is a 10-point "checklist" that a shipper can use to ensure it has covered all its bases in arranging seamless, high-quality service for its shipments. In addition, the list offers discussion about vital considerations in choosing the right logistics partner to handle its shipments.

#1. It All Starts With Your Carrier

It's well understood that time is of the essence when it comes to delivering automotive spare parts, but the urgency is exacerbated when the vehicle in question is a motor coach bus. Removing a bus from service can wreak havoc with a company's schedule, and even worse, a nightmare can ensue if a breakdown occurs while a bus is on the road carrying passengers. One motor coach company thought it had ensured the quality of its spare parts replenishment process when it enlisted an internationally recognized carrier to handle its delivery needs throughout the U.S. and Canada.

But as the bus company soon learned, it was a small fish in the carrier's ocean of larger customers. Among other things, the high levels of attention it received during the recruiting and onboarding processes all but evaporated. And when the company reached out to try and understand why its time-sensitive shipments were arriving late, calls went unanswered.

Fortunately, this bus company was able to find a carrier that actually wanted its business and placed a premium on good customer service. But stories like this are fairly common. Businesses sign on with a logistics provider based on sales campaigns that promise one thing only to be sorely disappointed by poor service.



Choosing the right provider can mean the difference between a shipment that arrives on time and one that doesn't.

With so much at stake, a business must do its due diligence and thoroughly vet a potential logistics partner. Ask questions, do a site visit, and talk to current and previous customers. A business needs to have 100 percent confidence that a logistics provider does the following:

- Understands its business's specific needs
- Has the resources to guarantee consistent on-time deliveries
- Offers innovative solutions to improve efficiency and overcome any obstacles
- Can be flexible in accommodating last-minute changes and glitches
- Has a proven track record of on-time deliveries

- Offers fully integrated technology systems, which ensure high degrees of visibility and tracking capability
- Has a high regard for customer service
- And most important, will value your business and treat you like its most important customer

Finding the right logistics partner will take time. But given the benefits that an experienced, capable provider can have in providing seamless service to your customers, and added efficiency to your supply chain, it will be time well spent.

#2. Ensure Shipments Are Properly Packed—Minimize Risk Of Damage

Regardless of the contents of a time-sensitive shipment, poor packaging can result in in-transit damage, which in turn can result in dissatisfied customers and a need for a costly transit solution to provide a replacement—a replacement for a shipment that was already considered time sensitive.

This is true for all shipments, from small eCommerce parcels right up to heavy industrial equipment. Poor packaging can be a costly and time-consuming detriment for a shipment that has to arrive by a certain date and/or time. “Packaging is often an afterthought, but it shouldn’t be,” Andrew Woodhead, managing director of ASC Direct packaging specialists, said in an interview with PackagingRevolution.net. “Cheap, poor quality packaging significantly affects sales and ends up costing more in the long run. It’s detrimental, especially for smaller businesses,” he added.

Survey findings would seem to support Woodhead’s statement. ASC Direct asked online retailers for input with regard to packaging and found almost 60 percent have had goods returned because of damaged packaging.



One survey found 60 percent of retailers have had shipments returns because of damaged packaging.

“Packaging was never a real priority for my business until I experienced a spate of returns for one item which had unusual dimensions,” noted one survey participant, an online retailer of French-accented furniture and accessories. “The time, not to mention sales, lost as a result of this made me realize I needed to invest a bit more time looking at my packaging requirements. I now consider the packaging as part of my marketing, and I believe it’s helped to build my repeat customer base,” the retailer added.

This retailer raises an important point: Proper packaging and undamaged deliveries are increasingly perceived by consumers as part of the overall experience they have with a retailer. With 40 percent of respondents in the ASC Direct survey indicating that ineffective packaging would discourage them from shopping with a retailer in the future, businesses have a financial interest in prioritizing good packaging.

This is also true for shipments that travel via pallet. Pallets certainly offer advantages to the shipping process, including faster loading and unloading, easier storage, and, presumably, less risk for damage. But unless a pallet is loaded properly, shipments are vulnerable.

This is precisely the experience of one U.S.-based guitar manufacturer when it expanded to the Canadian market. The manufacturer was puzzled by the large number of instruments arriving damaged at its Canadian destinations—mainly retail music stores. The manufacturer was forced to replace each damaged instrument, often having to incur expedited shipping

charges. It wasn't until the manufacturer switched logistics providers that it realized its pallets had been loaded improperly, causing packages to shift during transit and preventing forklifts from properly lifting the load.

A few easy reminders and extra precautions can help prevent damage and avoid a time-sensitive shipment from becoming a critically urgent shipment. In fact, a business can ensure proper packaging by checking the standards established by the [National Motor Freight Classification \(NMFC\)](#), an internationally recognized listing of minimum specifications for proper packaging of goods moving by truck.

NMFC standards provide specifications for virtually every type of packaging and container—bags, crates, drums, and boxes. The standards set specifications for the construction and integrity of each type of packaging. For example, the “Item 222” series of rules lays out requirements for fiberboard boxes, including size and weight limits, and standards for fiberboard strength. A box manufacturer must signal its compliance with NMFC standards by displaying a seal of certification called a Box Maker's Certificate (BMC).



Cartons that meet NMFC standards will display a “Box Maker's Certificate” (BMC).

Similarly, the “Item 265” series specifies requirements for pallet construction and usage, while additional chapters are dedicated to other types of packaging and containers, including crates, drums, buckets, and inner packaging materials (i.e., bubble wrap, foam cushioning, loose fill).

A shipper can ensure the safety of its products by adhering to NMFC standards. Keep in mind though that MNFC specifications are minimal standards, so a business may want to consider using even more durable materials, depending on the nature of a shipment. Some basic rules of the road should include the following:

Fiberboard Cartons

- Make sure to use a carton with a “bursting test strength” of at least 200 pounds per square inch, which will ensure its durability to hold a shipment. Contents should never exceed the gross weight limit as printed on the box maker's certificate.
- Use a strong, water-resistant adhesive to seal the package.
- Choose inner packaging materials that will completely surround the product and fill all empty spaces. This will protect shipments against in-transit shock or movement.
- Carton contents should support the walls of the carton and completely fill it to the top, or the carton should have built-in resistance to compression to prevent collapse when placed in the bottom tier during stacking or in transit.
- Guard against theft by palletizing cartons or packing into consolidation containers or master packs.

Pallets

- Choose a pallet that is large enough so that a shipment does not hang over the edges.
- A pallet should be clean and dry, with no broken boards or protruding nail heads (wooden pallets).

Stacking

- Stack smaller, lighter items on top of heavier items. Do not interlock the cartons! Interlocking can reduce the carton's top-to-bottom compression strength. Column stacking is the preferred method.
- Align boxes in columns, corner to corner, for the greatest stacking strength. Leave no spaces between products.
- Be sure cartons are aligned properly.
- Do NOT "pyramid load" the pallet! It's important that the pallet has a level surface in order to attain maximum stability. Uneven rows of packaging will increase the likelihood of cartons toppling during transit, resulting in shipment damage.
- Secure shipments to the pallet with strong strapping or banding. Draw the straps tightly to the load.
- Stretch wrapping is an effective way to keep all shipment pieces together. The plastic stretch wrap should first be applied around the pallet and continue upward around the load. Overlap the load, and make sure it's wrapped tightly to prevent movement!

Storage

- Long-term storage can result in deterioration of corrugated and other paper-based boxes. Deterioration can also be accelerated if cartons are stored in a humid environment.



Poorly loaded pallet



Properly loaded pallet

Shipment damage is a significant concern for all shippers, but it becomes especially problematic when the damaged shipment is time sensitive. A few precautions can help minimize the risk of damage and the unwelcome scenario

in which a time-sensitive shipment needs to be replaced, usually via high-cost, "critical" logistics services.

#3. Make Sure Packages Are Labeled Properly And Meet Local Requirements

Depending on a shipment's contents, certain information may need to appear on a shipping container/package label.

- Certain pharmaceutical and health-care products traveling by air require an International Air Transport Association (IATA) label that indicates the external transportation temperature range of the shipments.
- Different manufacturers—[Lockheed Martin](#), [Amazon](#), [Bosch](#)—that regularly receive time-sensitive shipments from suppliers maintain strict requirements with regard to label size, placement, and required information, as well as package stampings.
- A shipment leaving the United States must be in compliance with the labeling and shipping requirements of the country to which it is traveling. Canadian shipments, for example, must comply with that country's "[Consumer Packaging and Labeling Act](#)." Among other things, all information must appear in both English and in French, with quantities listed in metric units.



*Care must be taken to ensure proper label placement and content.
Source: Purolator.com*

#4. Have Shipments Ready On Time

One Canadian medical supplies manager was fighting a losing battle to have her team's overnight shipments packed and ready in time to meet her transportation company's daily late-afternoon pickup.

"It would be very helpful if I could get my transportation company to schedule pickups later in the day," she said at an industry conference. "That way we would have more time to process the hundreds of orders that tend to come in during the afternoon."

This individual's business sells medical supplies to hospitals, doctor's offices, and medical clinics all across Canada. Since busy medical staffs often don't get around to placing their orders until later in the day, there is no way for the supplier to get a head start on picking and assembling shipments. Further, since all shipments are sent by next-day courier, the customer explained, very often shipments missed an initial sort and planned connection, and they incurred charges for special handling.

Fortunately, this shipper was able to work out a more favorable pickup schedule with her transportation company. But the example underscores the serious implications of failing to have a shipment ready for a scheduled pickup.

In many instances, a carrier will impose additional charges if a pickup is not ready at the appointed time or if no one is

available to accept a delivery. And with regard to time-sensitive shipments, depending on the mode of transport, failure to have a shipment ready to go could result in a missed flight or a missed connection.

#5. Don't Forget About Special Services

A business should make no assumptions about a logistics provider's capabilities, nor should it assume that its shipping requirements are "obvious" to anyone not intricately involved in its operations. A company called "ABC Fresh Flowers," for example, could be shipping vases, or Mylar balloons, or any number of non-fresh floral products. So when the florist does need to ship its fresh flowers, it might be surprised to learn that its logistics provider does not offer refrigerated services.



Liftgate is a "special service" often needed for heavy or highly fragile shipments.

In other words—communicate! Make clear—both verbally and in written form—precisely what your shipment's needs will be. Logistics providers' capabilities can vary widely, so a business will need to ensure its specific needs can be met. Common special services include:

- **Temperature-Controlled Units.** Pharmaceuticals, food products, fresh flowers, and other perishables need to travel under strict temperature conditions and may require

refrigerated or freezer containers. Or products that could be harmed by cold temperatures may require special handling, such as "blanket wrapping" to prevent freezing.

- **Liftgate Services.** May be required for heavy shipments.
- **Security Services.** Includes door alarms and other types of anti-theft systems.
- **Two-Man Driver Teams.** Assures that a time-sensitive shipment stays in constant motion as one driver takes the wheel while the other rests.
- **Dangerous Goods/Hazardous Materials Capability.**
- **Inside Deliveries.**
- **Residential Deliveries.**
- **Guaranteed, Time-Specific Deliveries.**
- **White-Glove Treatment.** Generally this is used only for shipments that are highly valuable, fragile, perishable, or require assembly or installation. White-Glove Treatment is a specialized service within the time-sensitive industry. White-Glove freight requires all drivers to have special training and travel with specialized equipment, including furniture pads, pallet jacks, specialized tools, hand trucks, dollies, liftgates, and temperature-controlled units. Special security mechanisms usually are in place for White-Glove shipments, and drivers need to be properly trained to perform any necessary assemblage or installation.

#6. Don't Leave "Last Mile" To Chance

A shipment can travel seamlessly across the country or around the globe, but it's the end game—whether or not the shipment makes it to a customer's address on time and in good shape—that will determine the success of a customer transaction. This final stage—last-mile service—is regarded as critical to customer satisfaction and a key determinant in customer retention.

Many logistics companies though outsource final-mile services to local or regional companies and, in the process, lose insight and control of the process. This further distances a retailer from its customers and essentially forces a blind faith in an unknown and untested delivery service.

Keep in mind that the local courier or delivery person who arrives at a customer's doorstep is a reflection of a retailer's brand. If a delivery person is rude, late, or unkempt, or if a package is left out in the rain or ends up in the bushes, chances are good customers will take out their dissatisfaction on the retailer—and not necessarily with the delivery company.

Handled correctly though last-mile service can be an important part of a positive customer experience and a competitive differentiator. Not surprisingly, effective last-mile service begins with the choice of a qualified logistics provider. A few things to keep in mind include the following:

- **Ensure adequate resources.** Choose a logistics provider with resources to manage the delivery

process from start to finish. A top-quality provider will have access to a distribution network that will ensure efficient and seamless delivery—to anywhere in the United States or even Canada. This means a shipment will travel on the logistics provider's vehicles, under the control of its drivers, for the entire trip. This matters for several reasons:

- Customers will be assured of uninterrupted visibility/tracking capability
- Reduced risk of damage
- Documented chain of custody to minimize theft/loss
- Ability for local driver to communicate with regional dispatcher should unexpected delay occur
- Greater accountability
- Local expertise will ensure deliveries arrive on time and, if applicable, that drivers speak the local language and are familiar with roads and potential hazards
- Consistency of service since all deliveries will be made either in recognizable vehicles or by employees wearing logistics provider's uniform
- **Innovative use of technology.** Technology enables tremendous efficiency in last-mile service. A logistics provider with an integrated transportation management system will have full visibility into its entire operation. This insight will allow real-time access to shipment location and proactive scheduling efficiency. If road construction causes a traffic delay,

for example, a driver will be provided an alternative route, thereby minimizing the risk of a delivery delay. In addition, a business will be able to see precisely where inventory is located and schedule transit to a warehouse or retail outlet. Technology also enables high levels of communication with customers. This includes the following:

- Confirmation to a consumer when a delivery is made, including information about where specifically a package was left
- Should a package become damaged while en route, a consumer can be given advance notification and the option to either wait for a replacement or accept the original shipment at a reduced price
- Interaction with consumers so that changes can be made with regard to delivery date or location
- Ability to capture important performance data. A business can gain meaningful insight with regard to on-time deliveries, customer feedback, damage claims, and any number of additional metrics
- **Shipping options.** Last-mile service will also be affected by the type of shipments to be delivered. Small parcels will naturally be handled differently than deliveries of major appliances. But regardless of a shipment's contents, last-mile service priorities must include customer service, flawless execution, and on-time service.

#7. Don't Underestimate The Complexity Of The Customs Process

A cursory glance at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency's website reveals several instances in which shippers are forewarned about the complexity of clearing goods through customs. "[Be aware that the HTS can be very complicated.](#)" the agency warns in describing the process of assigning a harmonized tariff schedule (HTS) code to a shipment. "If you self-classify an item and the classification is incorrect, the mistake can be costly." Similarly, businesses trying to take advantage of the agency's [Duty Drawback](#) program, which allows for refunds of import duties paid on items that are subsequently exported or destroyed, are advised the program "is recognized as the most complex commercial program Customs Border Protection (CBP) administers..."

Despite this, many businesses fail to take into account the complexity of the border clearance process and its potential to derail even the most carefully crafted, time-sensitive shipping strategy. For example, although it may seem obvious that a shipment should arrive at the border with all documentation intact (and in most cases prefiled electronically), CBP officials report the top reason shipments are delayed is due to incomplete, missing, or incorrect documentation.



Incomplete documentation and missing paperwork are the top reasons for shipments being delayed at the border.

A business can prevent border clearance delays by taking a few precautions:

Enlist an expert. An experienced customs broker or logistics provider can help ensure compliance with the complex web of rules and regulations that govern every international transaction. A customs broker will have resources necessary to understand and ensure compliance with documentation, paperwork, and filing requirements for each country. And since customs mandates are constantly changing, a shipper can look to its customs expert for updated guidance.

Depending on the level of service required, a customs expert can ensure a fast clearance via any number of value-added options:

- **Customs Courier:** A dedicated courier will be on the ground to meet a shipment when it arrives at an airport or other customs point of entry and personally oversee the clearance process.
- **Customs Charter:** A charter flight can be arranged that bypasses airports that are known to have highly inefficient

clearance processes in favor of a facility with more personnel or a less onerous clearance process.

Be prepared. Even with a highly qualified logistics provider or customs broker on its team, a business should implement internal best practices so that required documentation is readily available. Customs documentation always requires detailed shipment information and invoices. Rather than scramble to assemble this information at the 11th hour, a business can help itself with internal processes for capturing and storing this information.

Appoint and educate internal personnel. Appoint internal resources to take responsibility for compliance-related records and documentation. Internal personnel should be fully trained and designated to work directly with your third-party customs agent to ensure fast access to required documents.

Take advantage of "Trusted Trader" programs. The U.S. government's [Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism \(C-TPAT\)](#) program allows certain benefits, including expedited clearance, to U.S. businesses that apply for and successfully meet the program's rigid requirements. Through C-TPAT, a business affirms the security of its own supply chain as well as the supply chains of its vendors and suppliers. In addition, a C-TPAT member must undergo rigorous inspection and questioning about the security of its facilities and processes. In exchange, C-TPAT members benefit from expedited clearance upon arrival at the border and access to designated expedited lanes at certain border crossings.

#8. Smart Use Of Technology And High Levels Of Visibility

Tremendous advances in time-sensitive logistics have been largely due to technological innovations. Logistics providers can offer high levels of visibility and shipment tracking, ensure constant communication between drivers/pilots and a central office, and have unprecedented access to route optimization and capacity availability.

Many logistics providers have their own customized technology solutions that allow a bird's-eye view into operations. Often these internal systems will integrate directly with a customer's own network, making it possible to generate reports, billing information, and shipping materials.

One logistics manager told [Inbound Logistics](#) that this customization allows for continual tracking of “every load in our system from origin to destination, and if a driver begins to run behind schedule, we see a warning on the screens in our ops center.” He went on to explain: “You have to have a Plan B when you're moving expedited goods. You can't rely on delivering a shipment in a lane where you can't recover the load if there is mechanical failure or driver illness.” Technology helps ensure that assets are aligned properly and that, should something go awry, a backup solution is nearby.

#9. Make Sure You Have The Service You Need—No More, No Less

Not every time-sensitive shipment is urgent, and therefore not every shipment needs to travel via a high-priced “overnight by air” or “critical transport” solution. For some carriers, “time sensitive” automatically triggers an expensive expedited solution. This can be avoided by ensuring that a logistics provider offers flexibility with regard to scope of service. In other words, make sure you pay only for the services your shipment requires and not a penny more.

#10. Trust And Reliability Matter Most

Trust and reliability are integral to managing time-sensitive shipments. A business entrusts its most valuable or urgent shipments to its logistics provider and must be able to do so with full confidence that all supply chain promises will be kept. There is no tolerance for on-the-job training and no room for mistakes. An expedited supply chain must be perfect the first time and every time.

Building that sense of trust and reliability takes time, which is why it's important to choose a logistics partner that has been around for a while and has an established track record.

But how do you know whom to trust? How can you be sure that the carrier you choose will be able to have a plan in place to guarantee delivery of your time-sensitive shipment? Or that a carrier really does have the access and resources it claims to have?

Building that sense of trust and reliability takes time, which is why it's important to choose a logistics partner that has been around for a while and has an established track record. In an interview with [Inbound Logistics](#), Chuck Jakubchak, transportation sourcing manager for General Electric, commented that he doesn't spend too much time worrying about whether or not his time-sensitive shipments will arrive on time. "We have faith that the carrier will continue to perform because it has done so, on an ongoing basis, for years."

Conclusion

For businesses that regularly ship time-sensitive materials, there is very little margin for error when it comes to meeting a critical deadline. A delivery either arrives on time or it doesn't. And when it doesn't, the consequences can be severe, depending on the shipment's contents. Further, the steps necessary to rectify the fallout from a missed delivery can be fairly dramatic, ranging from "most urgent" delivery costs to dissatisfied customers.

This is why a business manager needs to proceed carefully in planning for time-sensitive shipments. The 10 steps outlined in the preceding discussion will ensure that every consideration is taken into account and nothing is left to chance.

The discussion also reveals a common thread in preparing time-sensitive shipments: the importance of finding the right logistics provider. As the old saying goes: "You have to kiss a lot of frogs until you find your prince." The perfect provider is out there and worth expending the time and resources to identify.

Purolator. We deliver Canada.

Purolator is the best-kept secret among leading U.S. companies who need reliable, efficient, and cost-effective shipping to Canada. We deliver unsurpassed Canadian expertise because of our Canadian roots, U.S. reach, and exclusive focus on cross-border shipping.

Every day, Purolator delivers more than 1,000,000 packages. With the largest dedicated air fleet and ground network, including hybrid vehicles, and more guaranteed delivery points in Canada than anyone else, we are part of the fifth largest postal organization in the world.

But size alone doesn't make Purolator different. We also understand that the needs of no two customers are the same. We can design the right mix of proprietary services that will make your shipments to Canada hassle free at every point in the supply chain.

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