Shopify Online Sales Challenge

SHIPPING GUIDE

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Calculate Your Shipping Costs

Whether you're shipping across the country or around the globe, knowing your item's weight and dimensions is the first step in calculating the cost of postage quickly and accurately. The most straightforward way to determine your item's weight is by using a scale, such as a digital shipping scale or a kitchen scale.

If you don't have access to a scale of your own, don't despair! You can take your items to the post office and use their free postal scales, research the average weight of an item like yours online or estimate the weight of your item in comparison to common household items (such as a bag of flour), rounding up slightly for packaging.

Since many shipping prices are based on "weight tiers," keeping some shipping supplies on hand is also helpful for getting an accurate weight estimate when listing your items. When in doubt, pad your estimate a little. You can refund excess postage, but you can't request more if you didn't weigh it right.

Sometimes shoppers need an item quickly and would prefer to pay more for express shipping. Adding shipping upgrades to your listings makes it easy to offer shoppers a variety of shipping options (and prices).

For sellers in the United States, we recommend ordering flat-rate boxes for free via United States Postal Service, particularly to take advantage of flat-rate padded envelopes and regional-rate boxes that are only available online.

When in doubt make sure to use the Shopify shipping calculator.

Keep Your Customer Informed

Communicating clearly with your customer throughout the order process is arguably as important as how you pack your items. For starters, set clear expectations about how long it will take you to prepare and ship an order. For example, if it takes three days to personalize, package and ship an item, and it takes the postal carrier three to five days to deliver, you'll need to communicate to customers that it will take up to eight business days to receive their purchases.

Make sure your shop policies spell out whether you'll accept returns and exchanges. If so, explain who is responsible for shipping costs and the length of the return window.

On the rare occasion when an order is damaged or lost in transit, don't panic or beat yourself up — every veteran seller has stories of shipping mishaps they've learned from along the way.

When you've set the cost, ask yourself: would I pay that much for this item online? Does it appear to be reasonably priced?

For starters, be understanding and considerate to the buyer, you are in this together. As long as you enter the discussion with an open mind, all sorts of scenarios can work out. Sending a similar or identical product, receiving a return and giving a refund, refunding without return or offering store credit.

Pack Your Order

Once your item sells, it's time to ship the order safely and securely. In addition to packing materials like bubble wrap, adding a few other ingredients will make the package feel more complete and professional. Many sellers like to include a packing slip and a quick thank-you note for the buyer. (If you have a business card or other branded material that includes your shop name, you can include those, too.)

While you're likely familiar with the general packing process, it's important to take additional care when shipping more delicate items. Writing 'Fragile' or 'Do Not Bend' means nothing if a 25-pound box falls off a belt onto your package. We suggest double boxing fragile items in order to leave "crush room," filling the space in between the boxes with packing peanuts mixed with newspaper.

If you're shipping an unusually sized item, consider customizing your own box using cardboard, a knife and packing tape.

The process of building a custom box is akin to wrapping a gift, but in cardboard. A note to the doubtful it's not about perfection, but instead, sturdiness and safety. And packing tape can cover even the gravest of box-making sins.

What You'll Need:
Old boxes or cardboard
Packing tape
Something to score cardboard, like a dinner knife or bone folder
Something to cut cardboard, like a box cutter or X-acto knife

How to Build it:

(a) Deconstruct a cardboard box to lie flat like a piece of wrapping paper. Place your item on the cardboard. Envision where you would fold paper if you were gift wrapping it. (Note: If you plan to put in packing material after you build the box, then place the fold an extra inch or more away from your item, as needed.) Use a dinner knife or bone folder to score along the envisioned fold in the cardboard. Now fold along that line. Congratulations, you just made your first box wall!

Put the wall back down. On an adjacent side of the item, score along the line where you want to fold the cardboard. If you try to fold both walls up at the same time, as you would with wrapping paper, you'll see the corner where they meet might not cooperate. Here, we must depart from the wrapping paper analogy.

(b) Now you have two options:

Option 1: The simplest solution is to cut away the section of cardboard that does not comprise either wall (removing the unnecessary cardboard completely). Now sides will meet when folded.

Option 2: Make a slightly more secure box by cutting a slit to create an edge for one wall. Fold that wall up (toward your item), then fold the adjacent wall. Wrap the free section around the shortened wall, creating a seamless corner with a double layer of cardboard. Does it seem like crazy origami? It won't once you have cardboard in hand.

(c) Proceed to the remaining corners using the same logic.

(d) Depending on your item's shape and your original piece of cardboard, you may have spots with too much cardboard or with none. Boldly cut away excess and patch freely.

(e) Voilà, a custom box! Break out the champagne — or at the very least, the postage.