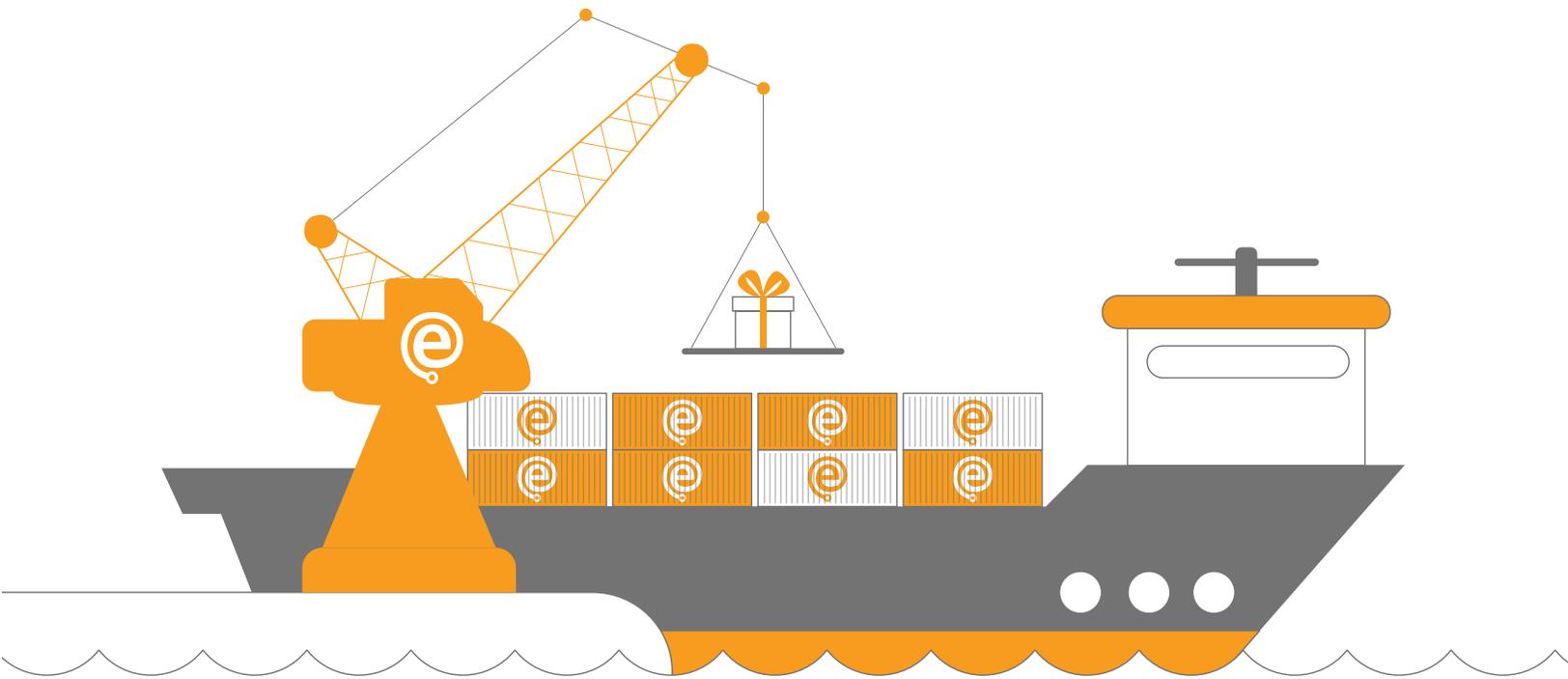




Get Your Ship Together for the Holidays

*The essential shipping and packing
primer for first-time sellers this season*

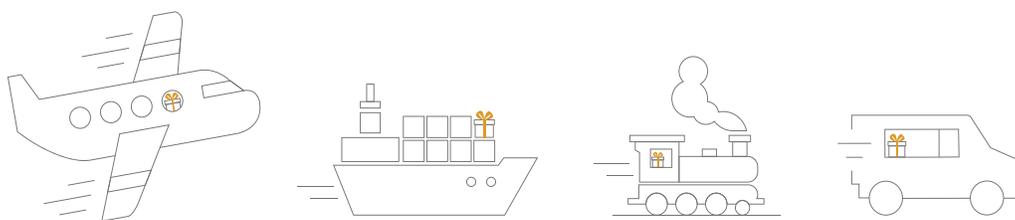


A Guide by

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If you're new to e-commerce, guess what? It's time for holiday sales to start rolling in. Selling stuff online is great, but processing those orders is just a small part of getting the products out the door and safely into the hands of customers. Once those products are paid for, why should you care about their safety? Because protecting your profit margins is all about lowering shipping costs, reducing return rates, and preventing nasty online reviews, all of which come from insufficient planning and packing, especially during the highest volume months.



To help you out, our trusted partner UPS has clued us in on some tips and tricks. For starters, Kyle Blakey, Packaging Engineering Supervisor for UPS Customer Solutions, recommends considering the item's materials, size, shape, fragility, and ability to handle impact. Also keep in mind that your package may travel in planes, trains, trucks, ships, and automobiles, and is likely to be handled by dozens of people. Also on its journey, it is likely to be subjected to shock, vibration, compression, impact, temperature variation, and changes in orientation. These wide-ranging variables mean that proper packaging is essential to getting your products to their destination in perfect condition. Fortunately, Kyle has suggested key elements to consider when setting up your holiday shipping.

The Box

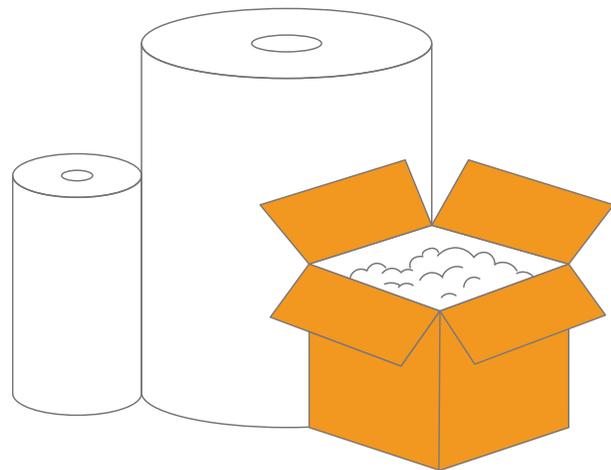
Cardboard has two main components: The smooth outside of the box is called liner board (or facings). The medium (or flutes) makes up is the wavy material sandwiched on the inside of the cardboard. The facings surround the flutes to make a strong, sturdy material that's folded up into the humble cardboard box. But not all cardboard is created equal. It actually goes through rigorous testing to gauge you how strong it is. To see your box strength, size, and weight limits, check out the box's ratings.





Inside the Box

- **Foams—block and brace:** The benefits of block and brace foams? They cushion through multiple impacts and can be customized or molded to meet the needs of your products. Because the die cut and foam can be expensive, only use these for fragile, high-cost items.
- **Wrapping:** You know, bubble wrap and plastic wrap and all their cousins? They're flexible, moldable, and far less expensive than foams, but they don't always perform as well as blocking and at the end of the day, they really don't qualify as a robust cushioning system. Use wrapping for light, semi-rigid items and for protecting surfaces inside your box.
- **Loose fill:** While the wonderful world of packing peanuts and the like is great for playful cats, it does have its downside. Yes, it's a less expensive packaging option and it does contain product when used properly, but it also falls short as a cushioning system and it's messy as all get out. Yes, messiness and organization matters when your fulfillment department is charging full speed ahead. Use loose fill for rigid products and, for goodness sake, only for items under 20 pounds.
- **Paper dunnage:** Papercuts be damned, there are some short-and-long-term benefits to using paper filler in your boxes. Paper is low cost, it doesn't take up tons of room, and it's environmentally friendly. But depending on the physical action the box sees, paper can not guarantee consistent protection because of its ability to crush and flatten. Also, working with it is a learned skill that can be labor intensive, so leave time for the learning curve and be sure to find some work gloves to protect the hands. To make paper work for you, don't use it for fragile items, in fact, use it for items that weigh under 10 pounds.
- **Inflatables:** Inflatable packaging is good for containing products but it can be affected by temperature and pressure, so be mindful of where your package is headed and whether or not it will be flying there. Split seams could lead to a damaged product. Use inflatable packaging in full-on fulfillment operations and only for packages weighing under 20 pounds.





Testing

Having your packaging tested by a pro can be an enormous help to all e-commerce operations big and small. It allows you to simulate real-life conditions in a controlled laboratory where the tests are repeatable, consistent, and controlled. Typically you'll find the root cause of a packaging problem and by reducing breakages and returns, you'll be rewarded mightily with happy customers. A word to the wise: Self-testing can be a fatal mistake because it's not scientific or controlled, and may not accurately replicate real-world conditions. Here are other options:



- Use an independent, professional testing lab when you want to reduce packaging costs, are having packaging problems, or are introducing a new product. They test to industry-accepted standards and offer unbiased recommendations. Independent packaging consultants can help find root cause of issues and also offer unbiased recommendations.
- Packaging suppliers typically will only find solutions and pricing that is available with their packaging material and services. Remember, the smartest business leaders are the ones who know what they *don't* know.
- Find an expert to guide to you toward the right choices for your products and business so you can enjoy maximum holiday profit margins and know your customers will be happy.

To learn more about the shipping solutions and package testing lab at UPS, visit [UPS Connect](#). To learn more about how to unify your multi-channel e-commerce business, visit [Webgility.com](#). Even better, [start a free trial](#) of Webgility's industry-leading Unify software. ☺

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