

Making a List and Checking it Twice:

A Holiday Freight Shipping Guide.



For many, the holiday season means breaking out the decorations, scheduling time to visit family and friends and of course...shopping. While it's widely considered to be the "happiest" time of the year, for small and medium-sized businesses, it's most certainly the busiest.

Being able to purchase items with the click of a button has put consumers in the driver's seat and has also raised their expectations, as shippers are being challenged to complete deliveries faster than ever. On top of that, U.S. retail [e-commerce](#) holiday sales [show](#) no signs of slowing down, with sales expected to grow from \$70 billion in 2014 to \$124 billion in 2018.

For small and mid-sized business owners, it's never too early to start preparing for the holiday shipping rush. A sound shipping game plan will allow your business to meet these rising customer expectations and improve shipping efficiency year after year.

In this holiday freight shipping guide, we will cover:

- Holidays and peak shipping times in the U.S.
- Tips and options to consider.
- Expecting delays and planning in advance.
- Common holiday shipping mistakes.
- Benefits of partnering with an online freight service provider.



Freight holidays and peak shipping times in the U.S.

Having your dates right is a key to shipping during the holidays. It's important to clearly mark freight holidays on your calendar as days in which no services are running. Expect peak shipping times to always fall in the weeks ahead of these dates. In the U.S., common freight

New Year's Day
Memorial Day
4th of July
Labor Day

Thanksgiving Day
Day after Thanksgiving
Christmas Eve
Christmas Day

Stay aware of these dates and take note of which holidays are operated with modified service, such as New Year's Eve or Good Friday (or unofficial consumer holidays like Cyber Monday). Hanukkah is also important to consider, as the date changes every year. While planning to ship out before these dates is crucial, your strategy truly needs to be built around peak shipping times.

While it may vary depending on outside factors such as the weather, the peak holiday shipping season usually begins around December 11th and concludes on December 23rd. Pressure will rise with each passing day of this window, however. In fact, the [U.S. Postal Service](#) predicted a record 850 million packages were out for delivery during the 2017 holiday peak. Prepare for those types of numbers, at a minimum, so you do not fall behind.



Holiday freight shipping tips and options to consider.

At the end of the day, [holiday freight shipping](#) requires a bit of extra guidance. Shippers are faced with tighter capacity, increased competition and higher rates. Here are a few [holiday shipping tips](#) to consider:

Compare and contrast. Whether it's shipping methods or carriers, compare and contrast to ensure you're choosing what is right for you. Leave yourself enough time to scope out the proper solution so that you aren't overspending on hasty and rushed decisions.

Keep communicating. Communication is key to experiencing a successful holiday shipping season. Delays and other stressors are going to get in the way, so talk to your team and determine the best line of communication for everyone involved. This will help streamline the process during the crunch of the [peak season](#).

Utilize all resources. Data and technology are here to help you, so use them. Data can be used to look at past peak seasons and what parts of your strategy succeeded. Technology can help with other crucial factors such as tracking and communication. Don't be afraid to take a step outside of your comfort zone and try something new this year.

Choose quality over quantity. A strong team of well-trained employees will be the backbone of your holiday shipping strategy. Choose the team members you can rely on to face whatever scenario comes their way. Remember, an extra set of hands doesn't necessarily mean extra help.



Expecting delays and planning in advance.

With holiday shipping, you should expect delays. No matter how much you prepare, it's likely that something will get delayed. As always, the best thing you can do in this situation is to plan in advance.

Delays are often due to the day of the week they fall on, the weather and an overall increased volume of shipments. Let's take a closer look at why these factors can lead to freight backup:

The day of the week. A Saturday holiday means that a shipment would ideally need to have arrived at its destination by the Thursday before, which means you need to be accounting for a rush at the beginning of that week. Adjust your week according to the holiday and modified hours of service so that your shipment arrives on time and you aren't stuck with upset customers.

The weather. In many parts of the country, the holidays mean cold and unpredictable weather. Prepare for every outcome possible, from sunshine to snow storms, so that you aren't saddled by the forecast.

The increased volume of shipments. You can always expect there to be an exceptional amount of shipments coming through during the holidays. When paired with [tight capacity](#) and the [driver shortage](#), increased volume will absolutely cause a few issues. Keep communication open and constant with carriers and drivers so that you can easily talk deadlines and delays throughout the process.



Common holiday shipping mistakes.

Before you get started, make sure you are creating a plan that avoids these common holiday shipping mistakes.

Failing to use what you already know. If you have participated in the holiday shipping season in the past, it's critical to look at what has and has not worked before. If you're new to the holiday shipping season, examine your busiest period to date and forecast from there. Either way, this will help you get ahead of your weak spots and plan for your strengths.

Not planning for the worst-case scenario. Preparing for the holiday shipping season is all about accounting for the worst-case scenario. This means accounting for snow storms, delays that take your shipment's arrival past the actual holiday and unexpected costs. If you don't take these types of scenarios into consideration, you are going to be wildly unprepared for the curveballs of the holidays. Re-evaluating your everyday shipping strategy is a great place to start. Just because it's what works today does not necessarily mean it will work during peak times. Take another look at the shipping options available to you to ensure you're forging ahead with the right one.

Being unrealistic about cutoff times. Be upfront about your cutoff times. While plenty of shoppers leave themselves enough time for their package to arrive, there are many who don't. One of the biggest [holiday shipping mistakes](#) you can make is not clearly labeling your shipping cutoff dates, so make them as loud and clear as possible.



Benefits of partnering with an online freight service provider.

Don't feel like you have to overcome all of these challenges on your own, however. Consider partnering with a **freight service provider** to stay in control of costs and smooth out operations.

As mentioned above, having a strong staff is crucial to get through the season. Online freight services train their teams to prepare for the peak season so that you don't have to waste valuable time and resources trying to find new workers. A freight service provider will also monitor the performance of carriers throughout the season, so you will be able to know which are the right fit for future use.

And finally, a freight service will provide you with a freight spend analysis. This will ultimately help lead you to the most efficient and cost-effective network of carriers for your freight and will be helpful to have in place since you are at a heightened risk for unexpected costs.






Conclusion.

If you're a member of a small or medium-sized business that sets out to satisfy customers with on-time deliveries, it's essential to identify shipping inefficiencies and optimize the process. Flaws in shipping during the holiday season will likely result in a loss of sales, unhappy customers and added stress within the company walls.

We hope this holiday freight shipping guide serves as a valuable resource as you embark on the holiday season journey. [Contact us](#) today if you would like to start partnering with professionals or simply get yourself a freight quote fast, free and easy!

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