



Fedex vs. UPS vs. USPS: Who's Best For Shipping?

By Michael X. Heiligenstein on June 26, 2015 | Buyers Guide, Running a Business | Comments (95)

How you choose to ship a product can be just as important as what you ship; to your customer, your reputation, and your bottom line. Here's our comparison of Fedex vs. UPS vs. USPS showing who's best for small business shipping.

Best Postal Service for Small Business Owners: USPS

We chose USPS because they have by far the best rates, free pick up and packaging on Priority Express mail and a good range of urgent and non-urgent delivery options.

Looking for a fulfillment provider? If you regularly ship products to customers, take a look at our guide to the Best Order Fulfillment Services for small businesses.

Want to avoid lines at the Post Office?

With a digital postage meter, you won't need to waste time waiting in line at the Post Office in order to send mail. That way, you can send mail without even having to leave your office. Click here to get 20% off a mailstation 2 from Pitney Bowes, plus \$100 in free postage.

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Best Shipping Options Comparison Table: Fedex vs. UPS vs. USPS

	USPS	UPS	FedEx
Shipping Options	Overnight 2 Day 1 Week	Overnight 2 Day 3 Day 4 Day	Overnight 2 Day 3 Day 4 Day
Cost	Lowest	High	High
Weight Limit	70 lbs	150 lbs	150 lbs
Free Pickup?	Yes, with Priority Mail Express	No, but available for additional charge	Yes, for regular scheduled pick ups
Free Tracking?	Yes, for Priority Mail and First Class deliveries	Yes	Yes
Number of Drop-Off Locations	Delivery address, PO Box, APO, optional hold at a post office	Delivery address or pick-up location	Delivery address or pick-up location
Insurance	\$50 to \$100 depending on delivery	Up to \$100 with additional coverage available	Up to \$99
Bulk Mail Discount	Yes	Yes	Yes



Overall, USPS was our top postal service choice for small business. By far the best option when it comes to price, USPS also offers insured overnight delivery. USPS also delivers to most locations such as post office boxes, has pick-up options, a wide array of packaging (some free), and offers insurance for Priority Express mail and Priority Mail as well as tracking for various services.

Using the flat box rate makes shipping decisions relatively straightforward for any product that is 70 pounds or less. You pay a flat rate no matter what the weight or where the package is going.

Cons of USPS include far less detailed tracking than either UPS or FedEx and insurance for some but not all mail services. Many online complaints focus on packages that are either delivered late or go missing. If you are using insured services, you will be reimbursed but your customers may not be happy when deliveries are late or do not arrive at all. If you are using uninsured USPS services, and something goes wrong, you could be out of luck.

Visit USPS

When to Use UPS or FedEx

While USPS tends to have the best rates, there are a few uncommon scenarios where UPS and FedEx are cheaper. In particular, their rates are better if you want to ship heavier items economy.

As you can see on our charts below, 4-day shipping of a 10 lb package is several dollars cheaper with UPS and FedEx than standard shipping with USPS, which takes up to a week. For short distances, FedEx can ship a 10 lb package overnight cheaper than USPS can in 2 days.

Another benefit to UPS and FedEx is that they can ship packages that weigh up to 150 lbs. The weight limit for USPS is 70 lbs. These are the exceptions, however. By and large USPS rates are more competitive.

Owning a FedEx route can be a great opportunity for a small business owner. For more info, see our ultimate guide to FedEx Routes for Sale.

FedEx vs. UPS vs. USPS In-Depth Review

Pricing

For items up to 70 pounds, USPS offers the best rates. To make an apples to apples comparison, we looked at overnight shipping rates for a variety of distances and package weights. You can view a more detailed cost comparison below, including 2-day and 4-day shipping.

	USPS	UPS	FedEx
Long Haul, 3 lb envelope (New York City to Los Angeles)	\$24.99	\$84.08	\$83.33
Long Haul, 10 lb package (New York City to Los Angeles)	\$49.95	\$123.57	\$121.80
Short Haul,	\$19.99	\$45.14	\$44.50

(Chicago to Detroit)	USPS	UPS	FedEx
Short Haul, 10 lb package (Chicago to Detroit)	\$44.95	\$58.05	\$57.22

Part of the reason USPS is so much cheaper is because they offer flat rate shipping containers: You pay the same regardless of the weight or distance. While there's a downside in that your must fit into the container ($11^{\prime\prime} \times 8-1/2^{\prime\prime} \times 5-1/2^{\prime\prime}$ are the dimensions of one of the flat-rate packages), even if your item doesn't fit, USPS has the best rates. If you use your own packaging, it would cost \$84.85 to ship a 10 lb package overnight from NY to CA (or \$63.24 if you pay online) compared to \$123.57 for UPS and \$121.80 for FedEx.



USPS: On top of giving you the best rates for overnight shipping. Prority Express Mail also offers free packaging, pick-up service, and easy to use flat rate boxes for packages that are up to 70 pounds. Throw in free insurance and tracking, and you have a very economical shipping solution.

The additional mail services, such as First Class Mail and standard Priority Mail are also great middle options, giving you 2-3 day shipping with free tracking. Their more economical methods, like media mail and standard post can also be the well-priced, although sometimes UPS and FedEx ground are cheaper for heavier objects.



Slightly more expensive than FedEx, UPS also has additional fees for services such as pick ups. It does offer economical delivery options for non-urgent deliveries between one to five business days.



FedEx offers urgent delivery as well as insured economy shipping, which you can't find from USPS. FedEx is slightly less expensive than UPS but is not cheap. The more urgent your delivery, the more you have to pay. If your delivery can be made later in the day or in one or two business days, then the price drops significantly. This would be a good option if you want to guaranteed a delivery on time. With FedEx, you can also take advantage of free packaging, insurance and pick-ups.

Convenience



Serving most locations in the United States, USPS has locations everywhere. They will pick up at your location and this is free if you're using Priority Express mail, which also includes free packaging. While USPS has a large selection of packaging to choose from, you can also use your own.



Boasting the most locations worldwide (63,000), it's easy to find aUPS drop-off location. While there are UPS stores and customer service centers, you can also find them at popular business retailers such as Staples and Office Depot. If you can't go to UPS, UPS will come to you but there is an additional charge for a pick-up. They also provide packaging (free for some account holders) though you can use your own.



FedEx: This company doesn't have quite as many locations as UPS, but it does have quite a few at 51,000. There are also drop boxes where you can mail your packages. FedEx offers some free pick-ups, but if you have to schedule one, they are only \$4.

Shipping Options



USPS: You have a lot of options here for short and long term delivery. These range from next day delivery by 10:30 a.m., 1 or 3 business day deliveries, 2-3 business day delivery for envelopes and small packages and to

up to eight business days for packages that are oversized or non-urgent.



A bit of a specialist in the next day delivery, UPS offers best available flight, next business day by 8:00 a.m., next business day by 10:30 a.m., next day by Noon or two business days by end of day. They also have 3-day and 4-day options for longer hauls.



Combining the offerings of USPS and UPS, FedEx offers urgent and non-urgent service. This includes latest flight, one business day by 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 3:00 p.m., two business days by 4:30 p.m., three business days by 4:30 p.m. and one to five business days based on distance to destination.

Tracking and Insurance



USPS: When you use Priority Mail Express, First Class Mail or Priority Mail (up to 12 scans), you can track your packages point by point. If you use other USPS options, the only tracking information that you can see is when your shipment went out.



UPS: Detailed tracking is available for up to 25 packages. You can follow the entire journey of your shipment through email, by tracking history (you can check on 70 of your most recent shipments) and store up to 50



FedEx: Also provides detailed tracking for up to 30 packages. Track the status and even get proof of delivery.

The Bottom Line

Overall, we like USPS for affordable small business shipping. It's affordable, convenient and offers urgent and non-urgent service. It also delivers to post office boxes and other locations like army post offices that are out of reach for UPS and FedEx.

If, however, you need all of your packages insured and tracked in detail, then FedEx and UPS both offer solid solutions. If you handle a lot of shipping, you should also consider using a digital postage meter such as the mailstation 2 from Pitney Bowes.

Special Offer from Pitney Bowes

Detailed Pricing Comparison

3 lb Envelope from New York to California



	USPS	UPS	FedEx
Overnight (8:00am next day)	n/a	\$121.10	\$117.43
Overnight (10:30am next day)	\$24.99 (flat rate envelope)	\$84.08	\$83.33

Overnight	\$19.99	\$76.13	\$75.04
(3:00pm next day)	(flat rate envelope)	UPS	FedEx
2 Day	\$15.50	\$40.68	\$42.13
3 Day	n/a	\$29.03	\$28.33
Other Options	\$12.78	\$14.02	\$13.05
	(1 week)	(4 days)	(4 days)

10 lb Package from New York to California



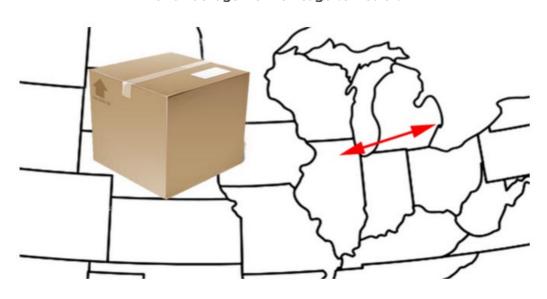
	USPS	UPS	FedEx
Overnight (8:00am next day)	n/a	\$154.92	\$153.73
Overnight (10:30am next day)	\$49.95 (flat rate box)	\$123.57	\$121.80
Overnight (3:00pm next day)	\$44.95 (flat rate box)	\$122.21	\$120.46
2 Day	\$37.10	\$74.09	\$73.03
3 Day	n/a	\$54.15	\$53.41
Other Options	\$29.22 (1 week)	\$23.23 (4 days)	\$19.78 (4 days)

3 lb Envelope from Chicago to Detroit



	USPS	UPS	FedEx
Overnight (8:00am next day)	n/a	\$76.49 (8:30am)	\$76.43
Overnight (10:30am next day)	\$19.99 (12:00pm) (flate rate envelope)	\$45.14	\$44.50
Overnight (3:00pm next day)	\$19.99 (flat rate envelope)	\$38.35	\$37.80
Other Options	\$7.70 (2 day)	\$9.97 (overnight, by end of day)	\$8.86 (overnight, by end of day)

10 lb Package from Chicago to Detroit



	USPS	UPS	FedEx
Overnight (8:00am next day)	n/a	\$89.40 (8:30am)	\$89.15
Overnight (10:30am next day)	\$44.95 (12:00pm) (flat rate box)	\$58.05	\$57.22
Overnight (3:00pm next day)	\$44.95 (flat rate box)	\$54.34	\$53.56
Other Options	\$12.75 (2 day)	\$13.45 (overnight, by end of day)	\$11.96 (overnight, by end of day)
4			▶

About the Author



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Michael manages marketing and communication at Fit Small Business. When he's not busy writing profiles of

himself in the third person, his hobbies include writing, guitar, and hanging out with his dog Oscar.



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Comments (95)

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KIRA November 4, 2016 at 5:38 pm

Thank you! This has been very helpful. I am looking to ship international and domestic.

Reply

November 7, 2016 at 7:04

Jeremy Marsan am

Thanks for reading, Kira! I also recommend checking outParcelMonkey for international shipping.

Reply



November 2, 2016 at 2:34

Celestine DeTrana pm

Very helpful; thank you!

Reply

November 2, 2016 at 5:42

Jeremy Marsan pm

Sure thing, thanks for reading!

Reply



Gregory **Stewart**

September 21, 2016 at 4:01 pm

I need to ship an EBAY purchase back to Bangkok, Thailand.

Which service has the best tracking for overseas parcels? Im going to be nervous (\$600 nervous) every step of the way

Reply

Jeremy Marsan September 22, 2016 at 6:16 pm Hi Gregory, FedEx is likely going to have the best international tracking.

Reply



Mark September 13, 2016 at 4:51 pm

Your analysis is probably accurate and relatively straightforward, but I guess you haven't actually received packages from USPS or you would know their package delivery is an absolute joke, as is their tracking. They leave packages wherever they damn well please and their tracking will often say a package is delivered when it is still with the carrier. As they are union government employees, they do not care one way or another about your customer satisfaction and they are evidently completely immune to complaints. So, if we as a society are happy with shitty service for the cheapest price, then by all means, let's use USPS for mail AND packages and FedEx and UPS can do who knows what.

Any online business that uses USPS will not be getting orders from me unless (like Amazon) they offer noquestions asked, immediate refund or replacement for lost packages.

Reply

Jason Rueger September 13, 2016 at 8:21 pm Mark.

I hear what you are saying. I have actually shipped a lot of packages USPS for my pottery business. I have only had the tracking have issues once or twice (over 100 packages sent) and never had any issues with broken or mishandled items. In almost every case, packages have arrived on-time and in good condition. I'm sure USPS has issues. There is no way they couldn't with as much volume as they send. But, there will be issues with all three services. USPS has worked well for me and are definitely the cheapest and quickest for a variety of applications.

Thanks for stopping by and commenting!

Jason

Reply

October 20, 2016 at 7:28

Nate pm

Mark, I own a large online business and we ship THOUSANDS of packages ever year with USPS Priority Mail and we can count on one hand the amount of boxes lost/missing. Tracking is usually very accurate and the tracking glitches are few and far between. The US Postal shipping for boxes has gotten very much improved since you last used them it seems. And I mean we ship THOUSANDS....if you used UPS or FedEx the rate of lost items would be much much higher. It is a FEDERAL crime to steal a USPS box, but not a FED crime to steal a UPS or FedEx box....that helps deter theft. There are occasional problems, but nothing bad like you say. Half the time, people are idiots and complain prematurely (example: wife picks up package from porch and sets it somewhere and doesn't tell hubby – that one is very common).

Reply



September 7, 2016 at 8:05 Evi pm

Hi Jason.

Do you have any recommendations as which provider to use for shipments from Greece to USA?

Reply

Jeremy Marsan September 9, 2016 at 5:43 pm Hi Evi.

A quick search and it looks like UPS will have the best range of options, including some more affordable ones. I recommend checking estimates on both UPS and FedEx, however, since the better option might depend on your package weight and shipping time.

Best, Jeremy

Reply



lowell stacy June 23, 2016 at 12:30 am

I'm starting an on-line small business using Weebly..com assistance. In determining shipping cost, their s/w criteria recognizes either "price" or "weight" but not distance. As distance is not a factor in determining costs for USPS flat rate shipping and most of my inventory can be shipped in the USPS flat rate packages, I've found a way to use USPS by pre-determining which of the the 3 packages could be used for most of my products and assigning weights 1, 2 or 3 according to which box an item would fit into; i.e., using the three "weights" as USPS package categories. I enter the actual weight within the description of each item. I'm flummoxed as to how to predetermine shipping cost for my larger items that are either too big or too heavy for USPS given the many variables that arise from FEDEX shipping and make them part of the criteria that Weebly software recognizes. Assigning them to weight/category 4, applying the highest shipping cost (Cal to Maine) and stating in the description that I will refund the difference should the shipping cost be less would be a work around but I'm concerned it might turn off potential customers. Any suggestions. Thank you,

Reply

Jason Rueger June 27, 2016 at 3:39 pm Lowell,

I think you have a pretty good handle on it. That's how I would set it up. Your only other options are just to charge the higher rate to cover your butt and not refund, or to pick a midway destination, and trust that you will gain some on shorter shipping that will offset the occasional expensive shipping to somewhere farther away.

Hope that helps!

Jason

Reply



June 3, 2016 at 4:23 Kevin pm

Fed Ex Vs. UPS always go with UPS if timing is critical. UPS may have slightly slower posted ship times, and

may be 5 % more expensive, but they will deliver your package generally on time when it is supposed to be.

UPS hires full time drivers that take pride in their job and take it seriously (as a career). Fex Ex hires low wage "contractors" that couldn't care less about your shipment, the turnover rate is crazy high (I see new drivers picking up packages in our office OFTEN,), therefore many more delivery failures due to indifference or incompetence. I work with both companies extensively. I would go with UPS.

Reply			
Jeremy Marsan	June 7, 2016 at 2:43 pm s for dropping in.		
Best, Jeremy			
Reply			
« Older Comme	ents		
SUBMIT YOUR	COMMENT		
YOUR COMMENT			
YOUR NAME			
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