Shipping & Handling
Best Practices Checklist

Checklists are a major factor in shipping and handling best practices. Efficient inventory handling, packing, and shipping practices become second-nature when based on a good set of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and checklists, like the ones below.

Plan & Set Up Your Warehouse

No shipping operation can function efficiently in a poorly designed space. Make sure yours is ready to handle your workflows by setting up:

Efficient inventory storage
Designate enough space to store and clearly label your goods

Room to pull products and pack orders
Ensure that staging and packing areas aren't cramped

Defined shipping and receiving areas
Separate these areas to prevent pickup mistakes and misplaced receipts

Manage & Monitor Inventory

Three sets of procedures help you manage inventory as it moves throughout your warehouse:

Inventory Storage & Tracking Procedures

Efficient inventory storage and tracking procedures drives a successful shipping operation

Inventory Storage Setup Procedures

1. Set up warehouse storage areas with clearly labeled storage and/or pick locations, such as labeled shelves, bins, or sectioned or whole pallets

2. If applicable, designate overstock storage areas and cross-reference these spots to your pick locations for quick access when pick locations run low

3. Shelf, bin, and pallet labels should include Product SKU, Product Name, any Variations (color/size), and Barcode if using scanners

Inventory Tracking Procedures

1. If using an inventory management system, enter the warehouse location (aisle/shelf/bin) of each product to print stock locations on pick lists and inventory count sheets

2. If using internal barcode labels on all products, upon receipt, affix barcode stickers to goods before moving stock to storage or pick locations

3. Always store received stock in its prescribed location

4. If the prescribed space is full, store overstock in prescribed overstock locations

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5. If storing overstock in a new location, be sure to note the alternate location on or near the main location label and report this up the management chain if needed

6. For a new product, ensure that the storage location is noted or entered into the inventory management system before product is shelved or stored

Inventory Receiving Procedures

1. Upon delivery, count all received boxes, pallets, or shipped units, and note any discrepancies in number of units expected and number delivered

2. Store receive shipments together in a designated receiving area until time to unpack

3. Unpack units (if needed) and organize items by type

4. Count received items against your purchase order -- not the vendor packing slip

5. If received items match your purchase order, update the received item counts in your inventory tracking system

6. If there are discrepancies, contact vendor to resolve and update/adjust counts accordingly in your inventory tracking system

7. Stock received items per your usual product shelving or storage procedures

Inventory Counting Procedures

1. Choose a portion of inventory to count: by product line, category, or storage location

2. Print inventory count sheets from your inventory management system or create your own using our inventory count templates

3. Identify a time for two staff members to count the selected stock without interruption

4. Have one staff member count stock, including any overstock, and the other note the counts on the inventory sheet

5. Once complete, confirm that numbers match on-hand numbers

6. If counts don't match inventory records, follow up to spot and resolve any receiving, storage, or picking errors

Pick Orders

Ecommerce shipping operations can pick products two ways:

Batch Picking Procedures

If you sell just one or a few different items, picking stock in batches then sorting goods into orders is very efficient:

> 1. Print (or create) a pick list that includes the total number of items needed to fill a range of orders
>
> 2. Assign pick lists to pickers based on line or warehouse location
>
> 3. Have pickers pull the total quantity of each product per the pick list
>
> 4. Designate a space by the packing area to stage picked items for sorting
>
> 5. Use printed order packing lists to sort or group picked items into individual orders for final checks prior to packing

Per-Order Picking Procedures

For orders that contain many unique items, per-order picking can be the most efficient option:

> 1. Print order paperwork -- packing slips or invoices
>
> 2. Sort order paperwork by order complexity, and by warehouse location, line, or category, whatever makes the most sense in your operation
>
> 3. Arm pickers with a series of orders and crates, bins, or boxes to sort ordered items into as they pick. For large warehouses, rolling carts or trolleys speed the process
>
> 4. Have pickers bring picked orders to designated staging spots near the packing area for final checks prior to packing

Check & Pack Orders

Order packing is your one chance to make a physical impression on your customer, so make it count by being accurate and tidy in your checking and packing procedures.

Final Checks & Error Resolution Procedures

> 1. Final check picked orders using the best method: barcode scanners or visual checks
>
> 2. If products have variables like size or color, make sure those details are checked
>
> 3. Have staff physically mark line items with a checkmark if needed to ensure accuracy
>
> 4. If an error is found, move that order to a designated spot to be corrected without interrupting the checkers' progress

Final Checks & Error Resolution Procedures

1. If applicable, assemble all needed shipping boxes or mailers for the grouping of orders to be packed. This step may not work if you pack a wide variety of order sizes

2. Move one or a group of checked orders from the staging to packing area, or pack checked orders where they sit if that fits your flow

3. Have packing staff do a final check (visually or via barcode scan) that the items to be packed match the order paperwork

4. Pack items as needed using appropriate, prescribed packing materials

5. Insert or attach the order paperwork to the box and move it to to the shipping area for labeling

6. (Optional) If shipping labels print out on the order paperwork, close and seal the box, affix label, and move parcel on to the shipping area

Label Parcels

Labeling procedures depends on the types and variety of boxes you ship:

Batch or Same-Box Labeling Procedures

Shipments with one or a few box sizes with predictable weights are quickly labeled in batches:

1. Cross-check the shipping label to the order packing slip or other paperwork included in the packed box

2. Close and seal the parcel

3. Move the parcel to the designated shipping cart or pickup area

Single-Parcel Labeling Procedures

Shipments of varying sizes and weights are best weighed and labeled individually:

1. Place the packed parcel on the shipping scale

2. Enter or barcode scan the order number into your shipping system to populate the label information

3. Select or enter the box size of the package

4. Enter the weight and size of the package manually, or if the scale is integrated o your system, double-check that the weight is correct

5. Compare shipping rates among carriers and shipping methods in your shipping software

6. Select the appropriate carrier and shipping method

7. Print label

8. Insert order paperwork, close and seal box (if not done previously) and affix label

9. Move the parcel to the designated shipping cart or pickup area

Ship Parcels

Carriers can pick up parcels on a scheduled or per-call basis, or your can drop off parcels as-needed.

Daily or Scheduled Carrier Pickup Procedures

1. Sort parcels by carrier if needed (better yet, add this step to your labeling process)

2. Move sorted parcels to designated shipment pickup areas

3. Print carrier end-of-day paperwork and shipment barcode labels if your shipping system supports this (not all do)

4. Place end-of-day paperwork with the appropriate parcel stack

5. Have staff meet the carrier driver and assist with package loading if possible (this earns brownie points with your drivers in case you ever need a favor)

Parcel Drop-off Procedures

1. Sort parcels by carrier, and load into bags or bins if using to ease transport

2. Move sorted parcels to a designated area until time to load into vehicle

3. Print carrier end-of-day paperwork and shipment barcode labels if your shipping system supports this (not all do)

4. Place end-of-day paperwork with the appropriate parcel stack

5. Load parcels into vehicle, keeping stacks separate if dropping off to different carriers

6. Drop off parcels at carrier facility

7. Have end-of-day paperwork (if using) scanned by carrier staff