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## 5 tips to ensure customer shipments arrive smoothly

WALTER SCREMIN - Friday, 03 June 2016

Increasing numbers of SMEs are relying on direct shipments to customers, but whether you are sending out the odd parcel via Australia Post or running a fleet of delivery vehicles, customers now expect more. Here's how to satisfy their demands.

Customers expect first-time accuracy, and they expect to be informed. If a delivery doesn't satisfy these needs, you may lose a customer.

How can your business ensure that everything is seamless at the delivery stage? Consider the following five basic factors:

### 1. Using the correct packaging

It's important not to scrimp on packaging. The packaging must be strong enough to be handled on several occasions, through many hands and via automated conveyors.

Ensure the correct size of packaging is being used – a carton that's too big can be as troublesome as one that's too small. Anything remotely fragile must be protected, as broken goods at the point of delivery is a classic deal-breaker, and will cost you.

Can you use second-hand packaging? Using second-hand cartons is common, and is fine provided they are still in good condition.

### 2. Label and wrap items appropriately

On second-hand cartons, you must ensure that all previous address labels are removed; you would be surprised how often this doesn't happen, creating untold confusion.

There is no room for subtlety: any label must be a good size, so it can instantly be seen by an operator during the sorting process.

A return address is essential.

It's also better to slightly overdo it, and go with an extra layer of protection for an item that may be at risk of being damaged in transit.

Try to make packages easy to unwrap, but be careful not to compromise stability or security.

### **3. Inform customers**

Delivery tracking is now commonplace, and no longer the domain of huge freight companies. Smaller business can now access smartphone-based telematics systems cheaply, keeping customers informed about their delivery status. Yet many smaller operators who run their own delivery operations have dropped the ball on this.

There are many tracking systems that both inform customers and protect you from potentially lost or misplaced parcels – for example, QR codes can automatically update customers on their delivery status, and have advantages for managing inventory and proof of delivery.

### **4. Use a reputable/proven carrier**

Many companies that run delivery fleets use some degree of outsourcing, which provides flexibility for adapting to peaks and troughs. But beware of false economy: the cheapest delivery provider may cost your business in the long run. Prioritise service, care and reliability over price.

Remember, in some cases the delivery people will be your only actual contact with the customer – ensure they value your business as their own.

### **5. Understand the true costs**

Delivery transport can be a top-five cost of doing business, yet many organisations cannot accurately determine the true costs incurred – it's essential to do your homework and analysis to find out what your deliveries are really costing you.

Maintaining efficiency is a constant challenge. The companies that do it best measure performance via telematics systems to ensure that drivers aren't doubling up on delivery routes. With constant vigilance, it's possible to keep costs contained.

*Walter Scremin is the general manager of OnTime Group, a national delivery transport business that delivers to a range of clients including SMEs and large listed companies.*

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