



## It's more than a cost center

Some companies regard shipping/fulfillment as an expense and will continuously consider ways to minimize it. Doing the minimum here will eventually catch up to you. Mistakes in late or wrong shipments reflect poorly on your brand and your customer service.

A better way to think about it is this: It's a value-added service, not a cost. Your packaging can boost your brand image. Your shipping speed and accuracy can enhance your trustworthiness. Your friendly shipping representative may do more for your company image than a salesperson. Investing in all of these areas will help build your brand.

*What is necessary for a top-notch logistics operation?*

## Consider these five areas for shipping/fulfillment excellence:



### 1. Warehouses

Choose a location and facility which provide excellent spaces to accommodate your shipping operation. The building needs to be climate-controlled and secure. It also needs to be large enough to store your materials and support your growth.

Structurally, your warehouse needs to receive bulk shipments from delivery docks and support the ability to consolidate shipping from suppliers.



### 2. Tracking and inventory management

A must-have is tracking technology and methodology (ex: barcoding and serial # tracking). And your merchandise must be well organized within your warehouse and online.

You'll want to know that you can rely on detailed reporting for every step in your operation. An example of a helpful report is an auto-refill report, which tells you when to order new inventory.



### 3. Packaging

The prep and packaging for shipping can be extremely important to branding. For instance, an Australian international franchise, T2 Tea, delineates specific packaging for each of its tea products and relies on this for brand reinforcement.

If you are shopping for a brand merchandise partner to help you here, ensure that they have the capacity to source different packaging for best value and that they also have on-site assembly/kitting.



#### 4. Shipping

Find expertise in both domestic and international shipping. Remember that shipping starts with an ordering process, which must employ communication and information nuances, depending on geography.

You'll want to rely on fast turns – regardless of your shipping destination. Some shippers are exploring same-day shipping, also known as “last mile” shipping. These days, customers expect much faster than 3-5 day shipping.

Operationally, you'll want to continue to find ways to save costs in shipping. Could you consolidate shipping from suppliers to warehouses as one solution? Could you leverage your various locations?



#### 5. Quality Control

The workforce powering your shipping and fulfillment operations are critical. They must be dedicated and possess a high level of discipline.

Maintaining quality control is vital. It's recommended that you invest in a program with multiple quality-control steps/inspections to avoid mistakes.

If you can, provide the capability for your shipping staff to talk to customer service 24/7 by different channels (phone and email, etc)

Consider all these facets of shipping/logistics for your branded merchandise program.

If you can't provide them, identify a partner to help you. You'll want to explore costs for custom packaging and kitting, inbound and outbound shipping, receiving costs, storage costs (usually a cost per pallet), and the costs for picking/packing. You'll also need to consider the process and costs of returns, which can get complicated fast when you consider the taxes and costs of shipping across borders.