

Optimizing Shipments During Peak Season: 7 Tips

Did you know that in 2017 alone, UPS shipped 750 million packages for the holiday season? Peak season is when you and your shipping and logistics team need to be on your “A” game. The more efficient and consistent your team is, the less problems you’ll run into down the road.

Here are a few key steps to keep in mind so you experience an optimal shipping season.

1. Pre-book shipments

During regular shipping seasons, your team should always pre-book shipments at least one to two weeks in advance. However, during peak season, pre-booking two to three weeks ahead of time is a best practice. This will keep you from getting squeezed out of a timely delivery when other global supply chain businesses are pre-booking for their busy seasons as well.

2. Arrange a Telex release

A Telex release is usually an email sent for the release of cargo at one port when the original bill of lading has been surrendered at another port. As a best practice, arrange a Telex release prior to the vessel arriving so you don’t have to deal with processing delays.

3. Navigate customs efficiently

The U.S. Customs clearance process is complex to say the least. You’ll need to familiarize yourself with customs procedures for inbound shipments, provide documents such as arrival notices and commercial invoices, and go through common customs exams. Your shipping and logistics team should secure customs clearance three days prior to your shipment’s port arrival to avoid delays.

4. Communicate high priorities

Efficiency during peak shipping season revolves around clear communication with your shipping partners. Let your vendors know in advance about your high-priority shipments so they can also plan accordingly.

5. Clear standard operating procedures

You want all your goods to be delivered on time and in full. That's where standard operating procedures, or SOPs, come in. Create documented best practices for shipping so that both your internal team and your vendors are on the same page. Distribute these documents early and make sure everyone knows when to reference them.

6. Pre-pull containers at night

When your shipping and logistics team pre-pulls a container, that means a trucker will pull a full capacity load (FCL) container from a port and store it in the trucker's yard instead of delivering it right away. Pre-pulling a container at night will ensure that you avoid pier pass fees, and your containers will be ready for delivery the next day. That move's a win-win during peak shipping season.

7. Prepare for overbooked shipments

Brace yourself for overbooked sailings during peak season — even when you plan in advance. Overbooked sailings that can't be switched are “rolled” to the next vessel. You can't always control when your shipment is rolled, but you can add some buffer time in your production plans to make up for such an event. Another alternative? Book on an alternative carrier and expect to incur different costs and different schedules.

Planning ahead and communicating clearly with all the members of your global supply chain is pivotal for a successful peak season. Even when your team encounters setbacks, a solid foundation will keep shipping and logistics humming along.