

The background of the entire page is a photograph of stacked shipping containers. The containers are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with various labels and logos visible. The labels include company names like 'Hapag-Lloyd', 'AMFICON', 'CAPITAL', and 'GATU', along with alphanumeric codes and technical specifications such as 'MAX. GROSS', 'TARE', 'NET CU. CAP.', and 'CAUTION 9'6" HIGH'. The overall color scheme is a monochromatic teal or light blue.

# Sea Freight Forwarding: 36 Ways to Drastically Improve Communication in Your Network

## Late fees. Angry customer tweets. Negative reviews.

We won't mince words — shipping the correct inventory in full and on time is *complicated*.

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Between suppliers, distributors, manufacturers, retailers, and customers, there are many spots in your supply chain where something could break down and go wrong.

*"Leading brands will collaborate closely with logistics providers, communicating frequently and expecting that providers will hold more cards in negotiations." <sup>1</sup>*

*- The State of Fashion 2022, McKinsey & Company*

As someone who runs a business with shipping making up a core part of your business, you likely already understand the complexities, pitfalls, headaches, and great rewards that come with it.

When you're competing with the Amazons of the world, excellence is what will keep your company humming along. So, it's important to understand that when shipments slip through the cracks, there is one foundational reason it happens: **poor communication**.

Poor communication can lead to all kinds of problems in supply chain operations, such as:

- Stagnant or late deliveries
- Lost items
- Demurrage and storage fees, as well as additional chassis fees
- An inability to plan inventory turn
- An inability to forecast supply chain costs
- Unhappy customers
- Bad internet reviews
- A breakdown in work relationships

Of course, the biggest problem is that bringing all these parties together on one page feels like a momentous hurdle in and of itself.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/state%20of%20fashion/2022/the-state-of-fashion-2022.pdf>

Shipping is an old practice, and its system hasn't caught up much with the times. Many companies try to fix these supply chain problems by outsourcing their services or accepting that some items will simply slip through the cracks.

The good news? You can grab your ticket to a high-performing global supply chain with stellar communication.

In this guide, we are going to run through all the different ways you can rapidly increase your company's level of internal and external communications.

Over time, building the communications core of your company will increase employee happiness and performance, reduce lost and late items, and contribute to massive supply chain optimization.

**37%** of retail supply chain executives want to invest more in systems to automate risk identification and issue resolution. - Statista, 2021 <sup>1</sup>

**Ready? Let's dive in.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://financesonline.com/supply-chain-statistics/>

## Build a Solid Company Core

According to a 2022 research by Zippia, engaged employees are **21% more productive**.<sup>1</sup> Your shipping and logistics team needs to collaborate with accounting, operations, sales, and product teams to ensure everything is running smoothly.

In order to do that, start with these first steps to build rock-solid business communication across all internal (and eventually external) teams.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.zippia.com/advice/productivity-statistics/>

## 1. Communicate Your Priorities

The number one way to improve company communication? Share your top priorities clearly and regularly.

The ideal shipping process should allow a business to be efficient in their inventory turn and able to increase visibility and pre-planning capabilities.

You can do this by selecting a few key performance indicators (KPIs) and measuring them on a weekly and monthly basis. For the shipping industry, some of those KPIs could include:

- Customer satisfaction
- Service/on-time delivery
- Safety
- Inventory turn
- Shipping costs, broken down by unit costs
- Revenue in terms of every container's revenue
- Cost per unit/total landed cost
- Product damage/claims

When your team members are all on the same page about what's most important, they'll learn to prioritize KPIs with your vendors and other third parties.

## 2. Share Key Metrics with Your Core Team

Once you've selected KPIs and collected data on them, share those core metrics with your team on a regular basis to improve your company communication.

For example, your shipping and logistics

team may collaborate with business intelligence or other internal tools specialists to build out a digital dashboard that's easy for people to read and access.

Doing so will also help you flag when problems are happening early, communicate those problems to your team, and fix them promptly.

## 3. Have Clearly Defined Responsibilities

As award-winning global business leader Tammy Erickson put it, "Collaboration improves when the roles of individual team members are clearly defined and well understood."

Make sure that when your team members start, and as relationships with third parties shift and evolve, each person is clear on what their role entails.

For example, who manages which specific vendor relationships? Who speaks to whom when something goes wrong, and when? Between managing suppliers, manufacturers, assemblers, and retailers, there are a lot of moving parts to oversee internally. Ensuring internal role clarity will greatly improve your communication across your supply chain.

## 4. Map Out Your Information Flow

Once you've clearly defined roles, map out an information flow that shows the process of your supply chain and who is responsible for reaching out to which parties. Not only will this clear up confusion internally, but it will also offer a more regular and predictable business communication for third parties.

## Make Better Connections with Vendors

Because vendors play a crucial role in the sea freight forwarding process, it's worth your time to invest in reciprocal vendor relationships to everyone's benefit. Doing so will increase productivity, decrease misunderstandings, and keep relationships running smoothly.

A vendor is a general term used to describe someone who supplies goods or services. Vendors can make up multiple parts of a supply chain.

For example, if you run a clothing manufacturing line and shopfront, one vendor may supply your company with textiles, and another vendor may provide your company with the shipping containers to deliver your completed product.

Some vendors also manufacture the goods they provide.

As vendor management expert John W. Henke put it, "All of the major automakers could be making hundreds of millions of dollars more annually if they focused more on improving their supplier relations."

Here are just a few ways you can improve vendor management (and your overall sea freight management) through excellent communication.

## 5. Set Up Vendor Training and Onboarding

That's right — training and onboarding aren't just for your core team. Educate your vendors from the get-go about important processes, communication tools, or other necessary bits of information to help them start off on the right foot. Doing so will decrease miscommunications and help set the right tone for vendor relations.

## 6. Set Expectations from the Start

As they say, first impressions are everything. If you begin working with a vendor and don't share clear expectations, it will be harder down the road to correct faults you never mentioned in the first place.

Your team can draft vendor guidelines to share with every new vendor your company works with. Vendor guidelines can run the gamut from doing quality control to best practices for booking shipments.

While going through the onboarding process, go through those expectations give your vendors room to ask questions if they need clarification.

## 7. Ask for a Production Schedule

Even though a production schedule sits on the periphery of your supply chain, having one in hand can help you plan around your shipments. Ask for a production schedule ahead of time and set up a check-in process so you know that your goods will be delivered on time and in full.

## 8. Hear Out Vendor Recommendations

A savvy relationship manager knows how to use vendor relations to mutual advantage.

Your vendors have specialized knowledge and experience with their end of the supply-chain process that you may have less awareness of. Seek out their thoughts.



## 9. Visit Core Suppliers

It's all well and good to ask your vendors to accomplish something for you, but what if you don't know what that ask entails?

Visiting your core suppliers helps support strong vendor relations because you understand their challenges and come together with creative solutions to solve them.

For example, when Shippabo's CEO Nina Luu worked as a shipper, she always made it a priority to visit her vendors. She did so to put herself in their shoes — and even once tried moving her company's goods with a truck herself, just to learn how hard it is.

## 10. Attend a Supplier Summit

Supplier summits are a great way to network and meet new vendors, all while getting greater insights into supplier interactions!

## 11. Keep Vendors in the Loop with Compliance

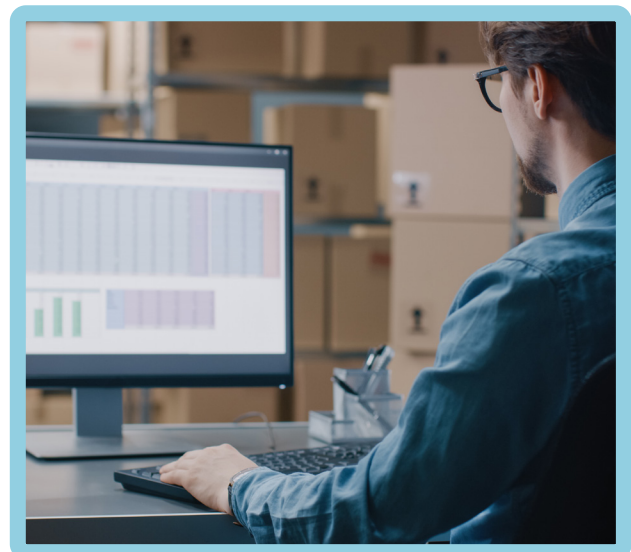
Your industry may have complex and even arcane compliance regulations to keep up with. Don't keep your vendors in the dark. Let them know specific processes and conditions of safe use if you are transporting sensitive materials.

## 12. Forecast and Communicate Needs Ahead of Time

Do you project your spring blowout to be especially popular this year? Or, are you worried about a potential shipment shortage due to a volatile trade market?

As your team forecasts its needs for the coming quarter and beyond, take the opportunity to communicate your projections with your vendors ahead of time. Your vendors may also warn you ahead of time if something may not go as planned.

Using supply models based on anticipated customer demand will help you both keep the supply chain running smoothly.





## Train a Competent Team

Consider your team the lifeblood of your operation. In order for everything to circulate smoothly, you'll need to make sure team communication is operating at its best and that nothing blocks its path.

If your team isn't adequately prepared or trained, the heart of communication between your vendors and other parties managing your sea freight forwarding will quickly collapse.

As you strengthen your team's preparedness and resilience to unexpected events, you'll find that your supply chain is strengthened and more resilient to setbacks as well.

One crucial way to strengthen communication: employee training and development. And according to a study by ClearCompany, 76% of employees are looking for career growth opportunities<sup>1</sup>.

Through processes like team training and employee development, here's how you can boost communication in the workplace and better manage your sea freight forwarding operations.

<sup>1</sup> <https://blog.clearcompany.com/5-surprising-employee-development-statistics-you-dont-know#:~:text=87%25%20of%20millennials%20say%20professional,opportunities%20to%20expand%20their%20careers.>

### 13. Create a Solid Onboarding Program

A solid onboarding program for your employees is crucial to their success and the success of the company as a whole.

In fact, according to SHRM, new employees who attend a well-organized onboarding program are 69% more likely to stay at the company for up to three years.

For your company, that means less re-training and more time learning, retaining, and sharing information on the complex ins and outs of your supply chain.



### 14. Give Team Members Autonomy to Make Decisions

Time-sensitive decisions require a certain degree of autonomy. When you execute employee development well, you can trust team members to act on their discretion.

### 15. Train Employees on Your Communication Plan

Do you have a plan in place when there's a lapse in communication across the supply chain? Train employees on who should be speaking to whom and when. That way, employees can identify when and where something broke down.

For example, say that your freight forwarder picked up your containers, but the container didn't arrive at the port. With a map of the supply chain flow and a communication plan for who to talk to, your employee would be able to figure out on their own that something happened at customs entry and talk to the necessary parties from there.

The better your team communication plan is, the less your employees will have to rely on you when there's a hiccup in the supply chain.

### 16. Gather Regular Employee Feedback

Is your team satisfied with how your supply chain is functioning? Seek out their feedback with quarterly anonymized surveys to get a better idea of what's working and what needs improvement.

## 17. Practice a Simulation (or Two)

Your vendor just went out of business. The shipment you expected will be delayed for two weeks. A boat full of your cargo just sank to the bottom of the ocean. What will you do?! Simulations will help improve employee communication during critical situations.

## 18. Have a Post-Mortem When Something Goes Wrong

We're human, and we all mess up from time to time. When something goes wrong, have team leads hold a no-fault post-mortem that looks at the problems factually and figures out productive ways to prevent them from happening in the future.

Improving communication around accidents will help them from happening again and also help people learn from other team members' mistakes.



## 19. Be Proactive with Feedback

Of course, you don't want to speak with your employees only when something is on fire or there's a huge problem going on. Doing so will set a negative dynamic with your team and may prevent them from coming to you for greater questions about their development in the company.

According to OfficeVibe, 69% of employees say they would work harder if they felt their efforts were better recognized.

Instead of reactive criticism, set up regular 1-1s to give both positive and constructive feedback. By initiating ongoing and honest communication, you'll be able spot problems before they snowball out of control.

## 20. Share Relevant Industry News with The Team

Keeping up on the latest news is a simple but effective way to encourage employee development. Share a few of our favorite shipping and logistics resources with your employees, such as:

- JOC
- FreightWaves
- Supply Chain Management Review
- Global Trade Magazine
- The Loadstar
- Textile Today
- Supply Chain Dive

## Build Out Better Sea Freight Processes

Once you've established a solid company core and trained a highly competent team, building out better company processes is the next logical step.

That's because having best business practices on hand will improve your company's supply chain in more than one way. For example, your team will be capable of making autonomous decisions faster if they already know the protocol.

Your team will also spend less time asking for help, allowing you to focus on the bigger picture tasks that really matter.

Here are five different ways to boost organizational transparency and help your company keep the eye on the ball.

## 21. Communicate Quick Decisions

Did you just make a necessary but last-minute decision about shipping one of your products? Let your teammates know so they can make future decisions with that development in mind.

## 22. Share Plans for Peak Seasons

When you know your peak seasons are coming up, don't wait to inform your internal team and shipping partners about the increased demand.

Every industry is different, but peak seasons for U.S. companies importing from Asia are usually early Fall and around Chinese New Year.

Forecast what your peak seasons look like and facilitate organizational transparency months in advance, so your team won't scramble at the last minute.

## 23. Have Alternative Plans in Place

You already know Murphy's Law: anything that can go wrong will. You can't prevent it all, but you certainly can plan ahead. Have best business practices for common problematic scenarios, and you'll save your team a scramble.

## 24. Make Transparency in Business the Foundation

Knowledge is power. Your team can only make informed decisions if you make a point to inform them. There are plenty of ways to make organizational transparency a company foundation.

Start out with these ideas to promote a free flow of information and improve communication across your supply chain:

- Send out weekly status updates on progress, blockers, and upcoming projects
- Share information in stored communications when incidents occur so everyone on your team is up-to-date
- Share company KPIs and inform all team members of the company's quarterly goals
- Hold weekly or monthly All Hands meetings and allow people to ask questions for clarity
- Arrange interdepartmental activities such as lunches or drinks to further open lines of communication

## 25. Share a Game Plan

Do you have a special order coming up that doesn't call for the usual protocol? Share the best business practices document with your team so they don't accidentally slip up on the process or timeline.

## Use a Centralized Platform

As a sea freight forwarder and a supply chain management solution, we believe that a centralized platform can make a world of difference in your experience — but it can only help if two conditions are met:

Your team has already laid a foundation to communicate and resolve problems together quickly and efficiently.

The freight forwarder and shiny new software you choose help facilitate transparency, predictability and execution even further.

When you have that magic combination, a centralized sea freight management platform can create a noticeable impact. Soon, you'll notice higher levels of communication between all involved parties across the supply chain, less misunderstandings, and more on-time and in-full deliveries.

Here are the most important elements you should look for in a sea freight forwarding software that will take your company's operations from pretty good to absolutely outstanding.

## 26. Research a Sea Freight Management Tool

A quality Sea Freight Management System can give tangible visibility across your sea freight. The one you choose may accomplish a few different tasks:

- Streamline communication
- Track shipments at the SKU level
- Integrate with your existing systems
- Provide data for regular performance metrics
- Pinpoint what went wrong for orders that are not processed on time

## 27. Use the Same Tools

Are you using MailChimp for emails on one team but ConvertKit on another? Trello and Asana? Gmail and Outlook? Bringing your team under one supply chain management tool will similarly streamline your operations and keep everyone on the same page.

## 28. Have a Centralized Hub for Communication

Email, text, Twitter, voicemail, Slack, Gchat — do the different messaging platforms ever end?

When your team is communicating amongst themselves and vendors about a certain shipment, having a record of that discussion in the same place does everybody so many favors.

To address this problem, use a sea freight management tool that helps your team

stay on the same page with in-shipment messaging. With Shippabo, for example, you can chat within each shipment and its respective involved parties. You can also make notes on each shipment for others to reference.

## 29. Share Accessible Documents

With centralized communication, the same needs go for documents. Attaching PDFs in emails or local folders but not having them shared in communal places will cause headaches when someone crucial isn't there to find them.

Using a **sea freight software** to organize and share vital documents across your team will make a world of difference.

## 30. Bring Your Network Together with a Single Source of Truth

Your sea freight management software should also have the power to provide critical shipment updates to your contacts automatically. Setup and schedule reports that have the right data at the right time and send them to specific recipients. No more long emails and spreadsheets to maintain.

## 31. Make It Easy with Shipment Templates

Keep processes consistent by sharing shipment templates with your team and suppliers. Shipping templates help you repurpose a past shipment into a template to use again and again when kicking off new orders.

### 32. Back Up Your Data

Losing all your important documents is a nightmare scenario — and also entirely preventable. Use shared shipment tools and secure cloud backups to keep your company from such disastrous outcomes.

### 33. Go Paperless

Shipping is an old practice, but that doesn't mean you have to operate in the past. Go paperless where you can so that documents are centrally stored, easily shared, and not easily lost.

### 34. Manage Performance Reports

Your sea freight management software should help you continually optimize your processes. Look for a product that easily generates performance reports so you can share them with your team and any other relevant third parties.



### 35. Have a Presence on Social Media

Nowadays, when customers get angry, they tend to vent in one place: Twitter. (Though Facebook is another big outlet.) Customers do this out of frustration, because they want to be heard, and because it puts social pressure on companies to respond.

According to Social Media Today, one in three social media users prefer social media customer care services to telephone or email.

Social media listening tools like HootSuite or Brandwatch will help you stay informed on customer reactions. Designate someone on your team to monitor social media and act as customer support.

This will also provide invaluable real-time feedback on the operations of your supply chain, and allow you to communicate with customers en masse when problems arise.

### 36. React in Real-Time

Social media is one way. Live chat is another. Look into tools like Help-Scout that will help you address customer problems productively and in real-time.



## About Shippabo

We at Shippabo are obsessed with delivering to your organization a first-class technology platform to streamline logistics operations, collect transportation history to propel your growth, and give you SKU-level data to support your sales and purchasing teams.

Our platform provides real-time data on all your products, right down to the SKU. Never worry about where your shipments are and feel confident in your strategizing.

With Shippabo, businesses have total visibility and complete predictability on their supply chain.

**Your shipping solution has arrived.**

**Get a Demo Today!**