

Prepare for Peak: Best Practices for Peak Season Readiness

It's never too early to begin preparing for peak season! By reviewing and improving your processes now, you'll set yourself up for success when the holiday rush begins in just a few short months.

REVIEW DATA FROM PREVIOUS PEAK SEASONS

One of the best ways to prepare for peak season is to review data from previous peak seasons. Looking at sales trends, shipping performance, and operational challenges will help you see what worked well and what you should change this year.

When analyzing your past peak season performance, start with the following metrics:

- ✓ Conversion rate
- ✓ Average order value
- ✓ Cart abandonment rate
- ✓ Return rate
- ✓ Inventory turnover rate
- ✓ On-time delivery rate
- ✓ Shipping costs
- ✓ Number of customer service requests
- ✓ Marketing ROI
- ✓ Labor and overtime costs
- ✓ Staff productivity

Your software will have collected plenty of hard data to dive into, but it's also valuable to hear the perspectives of employees and customers. Ask fulfillment team members what strategies led to greater productivity last year and whether they noticed any issues in the warehouse. Learn more about the customer experience using feedback from surveys, customer service interactions, and social media.

PREPARE FOR DISRUPTIONS

Disruptions can happen any time of the year, but they're especially devastating during peak season. To protect your business from lost revenue, anticipate potential disruptions and come up with backup plans such as setting up integrations with alternative carriers.

Many types of disruptions can impact your shipping and fulfillment processes. Weather events like snowstorms and hurricanes can delay shipments, while geopolitical tensions might affect international shipping routes and customs processing times. Technological dependencies, such as reliance on a single carrier or software system, can also pose risks.

These strategies can help mitigate the impact of supply chain issues:

Distribute your inventory.

Spreading your inventory out across multiple fulfillment centers ensures that products are accessible even if one location faces disruptions. This also allows you to offer quick delivery times for multiple geographic reasons.

Have backup carriers.

Establish relationships with multiple carriers and have backup options ready in case your preferred carrier experiences delays.

Offer package tracking.

Of course, delays may still happen despite your best efforts. To avoid frustrated customers, implement real-time tracking and keep customers informed about their shipment's status.

Invest in shipping insurance.

Invest in shipping insurance to protect your business from financial losses if packages get lost, damaged, or stolen. Shipping insurance allows you to quickly and easily offer refunds or replacements, streamlining the customer experience and taking the load off your customer service team.

Develop contingency plans for your technology.

Consider having backup systems, and regularly maintain and update software and equipment to prevent technical failures.

DIVERSIFY YOUR CARRIER MIX

Relying solely on one carrier is risky because any delays or issues they face can significantly disrupt your shipping schedule. When customers are waiting for holiday gifts to arrive, you really don't want your carrier to be late for a pickup—as you well know. Using multiple carriers allows you to shift your shipping volume as needed and decrease the risk of issues.

Risk management isn't the only benefit of a multi-carrier shipping strategy. Shipping with multiple carriers allows you to find the best deals for every package you send, no matter what shipping method you're using. And we can't forget the benefit of local and regional carriers. These smaller carriers often offer fast, flexible shipping at low costs. When your shipping strategy combines the flexibility of regional carriers with the wide reach of national ones, you'll keep customers (and your wallet) happy.

As part of your multi-carrier strategy, regularly evaluate carrier performance and adjust your mix based on reliability, service levels, and cost.



MANAGE INVENTORY EFFECTIVELY

Effective inventory management is crucial to a successful peak season. Ordering too much stock can lead to excess inventory, increased storage costs, and dead stock, while ordering too little can result in stockouts and missed sales opportunities. To maximize revenue while minimizing waste (and the associated costs), you must balance supply and demand.

To forecast demand, analyze data from last year's peak season. This will give you an idea of what to expect this year. After looking at general metrics like inventory turnover, average order value, and stockout rate, look at individual products. Which products were most popular during peak season? It's likely (though not 100% certain) that these products will be big sellers this year too. In addition to examining your historical

data, research external factors like the economy, current trends in your niche, and broader ecommerce trends.

Leverage an inventory management system or warehouse management system (WMS) to maintain real-time visibility into your stock levels. These tools help you monitor inventory movements, set reorder points, and generate reports to inform your demand forecasting.

If you do end up selling out of a product, make sure to mark it as out of stock on your website. Offer alternatives or allow customers to sign up for restock notifications to maintain engagement and drive future sales.

HAVE A SOLID RETURN POLICY

As the peak season rush slows, your logistics team will face a new challenge: an influx of returns. Even if you take steps to reduce returns, like creating accurate product descriptions and packaging products securely, you'll still likely see more of them than usual. And you need to be prepared to handle them.

First, make sure your return policy is clear, concise, and easy for customers to understand. Clearly outline the steps they need to take, any time limits for returns, and conditions such as the state of the product. Make sure to note whether you charge a restocking fee.

When a customer initiates a return, approve it quickly and provide instructions for how they should ship the item back. For the best customer satisfaction, provide options like no-label or no-box returns (many carriers offer these services). Use return management software to track return requests, process refunds or replacements, and manage inventory updates.

READY FOR A SUCCESSFUL PEAK SEASON?

And there you have it—five best practices to help your business make it through the upcoming peak season. The ideas in this guide will help you optimize stock levels, ship more efficiently, and keep customers satisfied.

Are you ready for a successful peak season? To assess your readiness and access additional resources, **download the EasyPost Peak Season Toolkit [here](#)**. And if you have any questions about peak season shipping, feel free to send us an email at sales@easypost.com.