

International Shipping Checklist: Get It Right the First Time



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Introduction:

If you want your business to grow and become known and beloved around the world, you need to do more than sell just in the United States. You must learn how to ship internationally to reach the most potential customers, and to find the highest level of success. However, you need to do things the right way, or else you could quickly get in over your head.

Over the course of this e-book, we will explore the most important elements of what you need to do if you want to ship internationally and you want to be successful at it. This is not to say that all companies need to ship overseas, of course. In some cases, it might not make sense.

By reading the following checklist, and each of the sections that corresponds to the checklist, you will have a better idea of what you need to do and whether shipping internationally is right for you.

Here's a quick list of the items that need to be on your initial checklist. We'll go into detail with each of these later.

- ❖ **The Right Products**
- ❖ **Learn Country-Specific Regulations, Target the Right Countries, and Clear Customs**
- ❖ **Understand the Cost of Shipping**
- ❖ **Complete the Needed Documents**
- ❖ **Insurance**
- ❖ **Have Professional Help**
- ❖ **Consider a Fulfillment Service**

Now, let's get started.

The Right Products

One of the first and most essential things you need to do when you are starting your international shipping checklist is to look at the products you offer. You might have a vast catalog of items, but that does not mean everything you sell should be available for sale overseas.

When you are considering the products that you can sell, it is important to consider some of the other items that are on this checklist. Namely, you want to think about the cost of shipping and customs. The products you offer need to be able to get through customs and to get into the country where you want to ship.

In some cases, this will not be possible. You might be selling some items that are not allowed to be imported, for example. Naturally, you cannot offer those products for international shipping to those countries.

Even if the product can be shipped to another country, you should think about the size and the weight. What are the logistics of shipping this item? We will discuss this further later in the e-book.

Ideally, the items you will offer are going to be light, relatively small, and easy to ship for you. Keep those things in mind when you are going through your catalog of items. Make a list of the potential items you can ship, and then go through the rest of this book to determine whether they still make good shipping candidates or not.

Learn Country-Specific Regulations, Target the Right Countries, and Clear Customs

We touched on this in the last section, but it is very important to go over further here. Some countries have laws that will not allow you to import certain types of items to them. Sometimes, items that you might think are entirely normal and mundane could cause some serious problems if you were to try to send them to another country.

One of the examples often used is foreign calendars in Vietnam. Those who are trying to import more than 100 calendars for commercial purposes to the country are breaking the law. This might seem strange, but it is the law.

Many countries have similarly strange laws that you might not understand or even know about. Therefore, before you send *anything* overseas, make sure you look up the laws in that country when it comes to imports.

You can look up the laws for countries on the web. In addition, UPS has a tool on their site under the international shipping section that can provide you with regulations for different countries. With this tool, it is much easier to know what you can and can't ship, so you do not run the risk of making a mistake that could cause an incident with another country. You can find this information through other companies that can help with international shipping as well. The US Department of Commerce has this information too.

Target the Right Countries

Given the fact that there are so many countries that have rules and regulations, you need to think about the countries you will be shipping to. This is especially important when you are first starting out with international shipping. For many businesses in the United States, it is easiest to start out with the closest countries – Mexico and Canada – for shipping internationally.

However, if you feel your products may do well in other countries, check those out as well. Understand the shipping costs, the rules and regulations, and then determine whether those nations are a good choice for your shipping.

Clear Customs

Always be aware of the customs regulations, as mentioned. In addition to the “usual suspects” that will have trouble clearing customs, such as food, chemicals, and animal products, they could also affect many other items, including jewelry and electronics.

You need to make sure you fill out all the paperwork properly so the package can get through customs. We will discuss the paperwork further a bit later. If you do not pay attention to customs, it could mean they seize the package. This could cause them to delay delivering the package. In some cases, they might even destroy the package, which is surely the last thing you and your customers want to have happen.

You may have some customers who say that you should just label the package as a gift, so they will not have to pay any of the import taxes. However, this is illegal, which means you will be held liable if you are caught trying to get around the rules in customs.

Understand the Cost of Shipping

When you ship to areas around the United States, it is easy to determine the shipping rates. You can quickly understand how much it costs to ship different items, so you can come up with accurate shipping costs to pass on to the customers. However, when you are sending items across the border and overseas, you need to consider all the other duties and taxes that apply. The term for all these costs is the landed cost.

Items of different size and weight will have different shipping costs, as well, naturally. Therefore, it is so important to think about the items you want to ship and make sure that you are thinking budget-mindedly.

The Right Tools

Many application programming interfaces, as well as the larger shipping carriers, have tools that will allow you to understand the entire landed cost of items you are sending to other countries. In some cases, you could integrate international shipping tools to the ecommerce platform you are using as well.

What's the Cost?

You need to know the cost of shipping to different countries so you know how much to charge the buyers. When you are shipping overseas, it is not generally a good idea to offer free shipping unless you are selling an extremely high-priced item that has a high enough price tag that it can absorb some of the shipping costs.

Think about things from the perspective of a buyer. Would you be willing to pay the additional shipping costs for the item? If they can buy similar products in their own country, you will find that most people are not going to want to pay a premium when it comes to the shipping. It might not be worth your time to add those items from your catalog.

However, when you have desirable items that meet the other requirements – light, easy to ship, small, and legal in the country – it could be worth your while. Therefore, it is so important to refine the list that you made during the first part of your checklist. As you

go through the list, remove items that do not make financial sense to ship due to shipping costs. This might reduce your list, and you might not be selling as many items overseas as you thought, but offering fewer items will still be a better option than losing money on shipping.

Complete the Needed Documents

When shipping, you must complete certain documentation before you can ship your items. The required documents can vary based on the order and what you are shipping. If you have chosen only certain items to ship overseas, then it will help to streamline the process of overseas shipping now and in the future.

Types of Documentation

The most common type of documentation you may need to fill out when you are shipping include the IAWB (International Air Waybill). However, there may be other items as well, including commercial invoices, certificates of origin, the pro forma invoice, and the packing list.

Those who are shipping electronics worth more than \$2,500, or that qualify under the EEI guidelines, will need to fill out an Electronic Export Information form. You will want to check to determine if the electronics items you are selling will need this form.

Learn the various documents you need for the items you ship and for the countries to which you ship. Organize these and make them a permanent part of your checklist. This way, you will never have to worry about forgetting any part of the paperwork, which could cause a delay in the shipping process.

Insurance

Here is something that many who want to ship overseas never even consider. If you are going to be sending pricy items outside of the borders, you want to make sure they reach your customer. You do not want to run the risk of those packages getting lost or stolen, as it means you would have to send out another to the customer, at a loss to yourself.

Therefore, you will want to consider getting insurance for the items you ship. You could also encourage the customers to get insurance as well, stating that you do not take responsibility for the items after they leave your facility.

Regardless of which option you choose, you need to make sure the customers are aware of this when they place the order. Take the time to check out the different insurance options available through the carriers who will be shipping your items. Check the rates for different types of items to get a better idea of what extra you would have to charge for the item if you are going to provide insurance on your end.

Have Professional Help

Throughout, we've referenced companies and sites such as UPS, as they are generally one of the top choices when it comes to shipping domestically as well as internationally. Those who want to get involved with overseas shipping will find that working with large companies such as FedEx and UPS can make a big difference for them. They have sections of their sites dedicated to helping people and companies that need to ship internationally, for starters.

They can provide you with shipping calculators so you know how much you will be charged for shipping to different areas, and what restrictions are for different locations. If you have one of their offices nearby, you can take items to them. Alternatively, you could have them pick up items from you. Those who are selling many items will want to choose this method in most cases.

Reliability and Speed

Two of the main reasons you will want to consider using a professional company such as this for your business shipping is the speed and reliability they can offer. You always want your customers to receive their items as quickly as possible. You also want to make sure they get those items in one piece. Working with a professional company provides you with peace of mind in these areas.

Who to Choose?

You have a number of options available. Look into the pros and cons of each and then choose the seller that makes the most sense to you. Once you have chosen a company to work with, it will become a part of your shipping process.

Consider a Fulfillment Service

This is another consideration. Instead of packing and shipping all the items on your own, you might want to work with a fulfillment service, such as Amazon. Amazon can pick, pack, and ship your orders all around the world. When you use Fulfillment by Amazon, or FBA, you can store your items in the Amazon fulfillment centers. They can take care of the shipping for you.

This is a good option for some businesses, as it allows them to scale their business as they see fit, and it can help them to reach more customers. Domestic and foreign customers alike may be more willing to take a chance ordering your products through Amazon, a trusted brand, than they would ordering directly from you.

This tends to be true *even* for some of the larger brands. When they sell through Amazon, the buyers often see it as easier since they already have an account set up with the online retail giant.

Other Fulfillment Services

While Amazon is popular, you will want to check out some of the other fulfillment services that are available. A number of ecommerce fulfillment services are available, and you might find that one of those fits the needs of your company better.

Streamline the Process

Now that you've spent some time getting your international shipping checklist in order, it is time to start streamlining things. You should know the types of products you want to offer internationally, the price and regulations regarding shipping, the paperwork you need to fill out, and whether you will be offering shipping.

If you have this information, and you have chosen a good shipper, your first international shipment should go off without a hitch. However, that doesn't mean you should simply stick with this checklist and plan. You need to revisit it occasionally to refine and adjust as needed. For example, you might find that some of the items you are offering simply aren't worth the effort it takes to ship internationally. Make those changes in your catalog.

As you become more proficient, you will start to develop a nice, streamlined method of shipping domestically and overseas.

Conclusion:

With the information that you've found here, you should have a much better idea of exactly what you should and should not be shipping overseas. You have the checklist to guide you, so you can make your international shipping a success your first time, and every time that comes after.

When you ship right, your customers will be happy with the results, and you have the potential to get even more clients and customers. Grow your business with smart shipping.

Resources:

<http://resources.storenvy.com/3-tips-for-shipping-internationally/>

http://www.fedex.com/us/international-resource-center/international_shipping_checklist.pdf

<http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/4021-5-Quick-Tips-for-Shipping-Internationally>

<https://services.amazon.com/fulfillment-by-amazon/benefits.htm>