



A Simple Shipping Solution for Retailers

It's time to re-examine your shipping mix!

— By Amine Khechfe —

The U.S. Postal Service continues to provide reliable universal services at affordable prices. For many companies, the Postal Service is often the least costly method of shipping, both domestically and internationally. It offers flat-rate envelopes and boxes that ship anywhere in the world for a low cost, regardless of weight. Their Priority Mail service is oftentimes faster than similar services offered by private carriers. The Postal Service has no hidden fees, such as residential and rural surcharges, address correction fees, fuel surcharges and higher weekend delivery rates. The Postal Service is also the only carrier to ship to Post Office Boxes as well as military addresses (APO/FPO).

With the slowdown in the economy, retailers are re-examining their shipping mixes and shipping costs and focusing on their bottom lines. This means examining everything from fuel surcharges to rural delivery surcharges as well as delivery time and reliability. Sending a package overnight with a private carrier may have been the status quo, but if the package doesn't need

to arrive the following morning, shipping the package Priority Mail with the USPS could be a less expensive option. By comparing the USPS to private carriers, retailers can cut their shipping expenses without losing reliability and speed. Retailers also need to examine their shipping costs by determining if the majority of their shipments are business-to-business or business-to-consumer. As retailers examine their bottom lines, many are searching for cost-effective, reliable solutions for shipping their products to consumers. One solution for online retailers who are shipping business-to-consumer via the Postal Service is a shipping application programming interface (API).

An API is a basic language and message format used by an application to communicate with an operating system. Possible applications for shipping APIs include e-commerce websites, online marketplaces and trading environments acting as a liaison between buyers and sellers. Shipping APIs offer one of the most adaptable and dynamic ways to eliminate the challenges

of processing postal shipments. Take for example, Endicia's shipping API, Label Server, which enables companies/users to determine U.S. Postal Service costs instantly and accurately by validating a customer's address and automatically generating a pre-paid/ramp-ready shipping label. Endicia's product is a web-based system, and all shipments include integrated tracking numbers. By using a shipping API, retailers are able to support most, if not all, of the following USPS services: First Class Letter and Flats (up to 3.5 ounces with CONFIRM Services), First-Class Parcel, Priority Mail, Parcel Post, Media Mail, Library Mail, Express Mail and discounted Priority Mail International and Express Mail International (with integrated customs forms). Shipping APIs are easily incorporated into a number of applications, such as fulfillment/distribution centers, multi-location/multi-user applications, online shopping carts and websites. This allows companies/users to ship packages via the Postal Service within their existing workflows while leveraging all the benefits of Internet Postage, including free or discounted services, discounted international mail and third-party insurance.

Integrators are often able to incorporate a number of APIs into their program, including on-demand address validation. This API provides users with state-of-the-art address verification technology. For those wanting advanced address validation,

store does not have the color shoe the customer is looking for. After entering the customer's address information, an employee at the Bloomsburg store locates the item the customer wants at Olympia Sports' store in Ellsworth, Maine. A salesperson in the Ellsworth, Maine, store then packs the item and prints the prepaid USPS shipping label with the customer's address from their Point-Of-Sale software integrated with a shipping API. The employee then applies the shipping label to the box. The next day, the package is picked up by a postal carrier, and the new pair of shoes is delivered to the customer's doorstep in only two to three days!

This seamless operation allows Olympia Sports to retain customers that may have gone to another store to buy the out-of-stock item. Happy customers are returning customers, and by using a shipping API, Olympia Sports has many happy customers. Paul Fitzpatrick, Director of Operations and Distribution at Olympia Sports, states it best, "The support we have received from the local USPS staff and the employees at Endicia has been outstanding; they have all worked diligently to ensure the system works as we need it to."

Fitzpatrick estimates that they save about 45% on shipping costs using USPS compared to their previous carrier. Plus, no matter how many locations Olympia Sports decides to ship

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additional integration can be done with Endicia's patented Dial-A-Zip API.

Olympia Sports uses a shipping API. With over 155 stores located in the Northeast, Olympia Sports relies on Endicia's Label Server for a key element of their customer service. It's not unusual for a customer to find the perfect pair of running shoes, a baseball glove or hockey jersey at an Olympia Sports location — but that particular store may not always have the right size or color. Like many retailers, Olympia Sports' salespeople have access to an inventory locator system to find the customer's desired product at another store or in their warehouse. Instead of having the other store hold the item or having it shipped from store to store, the customer can buy the item and have it shipped directly to their home with the help of a shipping API. Olympia Sports offers this unique service for free, and the customer doesn't pay for shipping.

Here's how it works: A customer is shopping at Olympia Sports' store in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the Bloomsburg

from, their shipping API allows them to use just one postage account. All 155 stores are sharing a single postage account, which means no more headaches for the hardworking accounts payable department.

Using a shipping API for business-to-consumer shipping saves users time and money by providing them the savings and benefits of the Postal Service with direct integration into their application. Likewise, it provides users the opportunity to fully integrate the USPS in their product without upfront licensing or certification expenses. Additionally, since the shipping APIs are 100% web-based, users can eliminate the challenges of deploying and updating software. A shipping API is the perfect solution for business-to-consumer shipping. ■

AMINE KHECHFE is the General Manager of Endicia. To learn more about shipping APIs, specifically Endicia's Label Server, please visit www.endicia.com/labelserver.