

Green Shipping Options



More e-tail customers want eco-friendly options — do you offer them?

— By Cordelia Baumeister —

In recent years, our collective environmental consciousness seems to have grown exponentially. Consumers are increasingly taking steps in their everyday lives to act in ways that better promote sustainability. Examples include bringing reusable bags to the grocery store, recycling old electronics instead of throwing them away and choosing fair-trade brews at the local coffee shop. This trend will only continue to gain momentum, according to a recent study published by Deutsche Post DHL, parent company of DHL Global Mail, which reports that over the next 10 years, “eco-friendliness and conscientious consumption will determine purchasing behavior to an increasing degree.” As consumers seek additional ways to lessen their environmental impact, one service they are considering more carefully is shipping.

Meeting Customers’ Needs

Many shipping companies have responded to these concerns, whether by introducing greener services or providing more information about the carbon efficiency of their offerings. In turn, a growing number of e-tailers are promoting “go green” shipping options on their websites because they know more consumers are looking for them. When it’s time to select a delivery method at checkout, customers of these companies are finding a new box alongside the traditional ones, allowing them to choose a more eco-friendly shipping alternative. Many of your customers may want a greener option for having their orders shipped, so be sure to make one available. It’s easy to supplement your selection of delivery methods with a choice geared toward eco-conscious consumers, and it may mean the difference between converting shoppers and turning them away.

There are several factors to weigh when you’re seeking a shipping partner to provide a “go green” delivery solution for your customers. First, your provider should offer ground service, since it produces much fewer harmful emissions than air transport. To illustrate this point, consider the example of a company that annually ships 100,000 pieces from Los Angeles to New York. The average weight of each shipment is two pounds per piece. If the company uses air transportation, the shipments will generate a total of about six times more CO₂ than they would traveling by ground. (To perform your own comparison, visit <http://co2.dp-dhl-gogreen.de/frontend/> to use Deutsche

Post DHL’s carbon emissions simulation tool.) For this example, the US Environmental Protection Agency’s Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator (www.epa.gov/RDEE/energy-resources/calculator.html) explains the substantial difference between going ground instead of air in more tangible terms. According to the EPA’s calculator, the difference is comparable to the CO₂ emissions from 28 homes’ electricity usage for one year.

That’s impressive, but chances are, today’s savvy consumer will look beyond the carbon efficiency footprint to ensure the shipping provider is truly committed to acting in an environmentally responsible way. “Going green” isn’t just a strategy for improving sustainability — it’s also become an ubiquitous marketing concept, and consumers are increasingly wary of empty claims of eco-friendliness. For this reason, you should assess the climate protection programs of the shipping companies you are considering, assuming each of them has one in place.

Components of a shipping company’s environmental program can range from local efforts at offices and sorting facilities to global goals for carbon efficiency. Initiatives to look for include recycling mandates, paper-free invoicing and business partnerships with vendors who share an interest in protecting the ecosystem. A workshare partnership with the U.S. Postal Service is also an environmentally sound alliance for a shipping company. The USPS not only operates the country’s largest civilian fleet of alternative fuel vehicles but also performs one-third of their deliveries in the most energy-efficient way possible: on foot.

There will be some trade-offs that accompany a greener shipping option, such as slightly longer transit times for ground service compared with air transport. But consumers have shown they are willing to make minor sacrifices to support sustainability efforts. The same principle applies to shipping, and e-tail customers as a group will only become more discerning about the way they have their orders delivered. Will they find a “go green” box to check on your website? ■

CORDELIA BAUMEISTER is the vice president, business development and environmental strategies, for DHL Global Mail — Americas. For more information about DHL Global Mail, please visit www.dhlglobalmail.com.