

**From the  
Pros Who Know**



**Tips for Successful  
Packaging and Logistics**

There's a delicate balance that has to occur between customer service, cost of shipping and handling, product protection and efficiency in delivery. Finding that balance requires constant adjustments in the logistics and packaging model. Smart businesses continuously re-examine their operations to improve, even if it means looking outside their industry, and outside the box.

Sometimes it's way outside the box.

On a recent weekend, Rick Gehman, president of Keystone Coating in Lititz, PA, — one of the family companies of Paul B. Zimmerman, Inc. — watched his young son play with model foam putty, a sculpting medium made of tiny, colorful polystyrene beads that can be easily shaped and stick to some surfaces. As

his little one formed different objects with the putty, Gehman realized this "toy" just might have a role in his company's logistics plan. The putty could stick to and buffer some

Below: Boxing methods may call for improvisation. To prevent burying some parts underneath others, load the box on its side.

The bottom of the box becomes the side, so that, when upright, products stand next to each other instead of resting on top of each other.



Photos by Daniel Kreider

Above: New packaging supplies are always on the horizon. Here, Rick Gehman, president of Keystone Coating, tosses a ball made of foam modeling clay. He noticed his son playing with the material and became curious about its potential as a packing medium.



of the metal products his company powder coats each day, providing friction to prevent movement, without marring the surface in transport.

"Keystone has the capacity to provide a number of different packaging options, ranging from the basic parts on a pallet with shrink-wrap and banding, to customized palletizing and packaging," Gehman said. His production managers and customer service reps continuously brainstorm to improve the company's logistics and packaging process.

It just might be that the next brainstorming session involves examining model foam putty.

Below: Flexibility and improvisation are key to successful logistics and packaging. If product comes off the line too hot to package, line supervisor Jared Miller has staff cool the items by either using industrial fans or by working the packaging of that line around staff breaks.



**PACKAGING TOOLS:**

**Boxing:**

Stray from the norm if it means better boxing. For instance, after thin-wire animal cages are powder coated, they are arranged in a box that is lifted and turned on its side. That is, the "bottom" of the box becomes its side so the cages aren't stacked on top of each other and the metal isn't bent by its own weight.

Examine how your product arrives. Recycle that box and replicate its original packaging without



Right, Drop-ship logistics offer efficiency. Here, product from Bond Machine is dropped off, powder coated, and then sent directly to customer PA Scale.

compromising shipping quality.

Place a corrugated cardboard pad on each skid to protect product before loading it onto the skid. It prevents any rough surfaces on the wood from damaging product and it also alleviates movement during shipping.

You can find boxes that are anti-static, weather-resistant, insulated, and more. Balance protection with cost-effectiveness.

**Padding/Cushion:**

Cardboard corners or foam squares can buffer layers of product. Combine corrugated cardboard with polypropylene foam sheets in various thickness for extra protection. At Keystone Coating, they use tiles created by their staff to protect layers of product.

Foam sheets protect from scratches and create friction to prevent movement during delivery.

Cro-nel, a combination of foam and paper, is another option.

Below: Manufacturers may benefit from providing their own transportation of the product to the customer which allows flexibility and certainty of intact delivery.



**Sealing**

Shrink wrap can seal items together to prevent movement and also serves to keep dirt out. Seal products individually and then seal an entire skid for optimal protection.

Banding straps around skids prevents movement during shipping. Twine or wrapping tape may be used also.

**Fillers**

Packing peanuts, foam, Bubble Wrap, air-filled pillows or molded pulp may offer ideal protection, however these supplies require a lot of storage space. Some of these options may be more costly than boxing and sheets of polypropylene padding.

**FREIGHT**

Fleet service: The company that provides transportation/delivery

services can save money for the customer/consignee, but being open to a customer's preference for private carrier could be an asset in gaining a client.

Storage and warehousing is a value-added service. If a run takes more than one delivery and the customer prefers to wait a day or two until another truck can be sent, free warehousing is an attractive amenity.

Discuss how freight sizes will be billed and make it a part of your customer service plan to either ensure no adjustments or to allow for adjustments. Make your policy clear. Freight size can be measured by weight or cube (volume of the freight). Sometimes a load might arrive in one truck but, due to protective packaging to avoid exceptions/damage, it might "cube out" when the production run is loaded for delivery. Another truck might be needed because the load now exceeds its volume. Here, weight won't be a concern but cube will be. It can be referred to as a "skid spot" issue.

Nesting -- stacking smaller products inside larger products -- can solve some "cube out" issues in less-than-truckload shipping and make

Left: Sealing your products is necessary to protect your delivery from dirt, movement and disorganization. Shrink-wrap is one of many ways to seal packaging for delivery.

Below: Warehousing is a value-added service. If a run takes more than one delivery, free warehousing is an attractive amenity.



it more cost-effective. Incorporate nesting into your packaging and logistics plan if it does not compromise successful deliverability.

Free warehousing may ameliorate cube-out issue.

Drop-ship logistics are appealing: Instead of warehousing its goods, a retailer sends customer orders to a manufacturer or wholesaler who then delivers the goods to the customer directly. A variation of this is how Keystone Coating picks up product at Bond Machine, coats it, and then delivers to PA Scale each week.

The best tools for your logistics and packaging plan is a flexibility.

Sometimes a product run at Keystone Coating is still hot from curing. Staff will run large fans on the product and schedule breaks around its cooling before any of it gets packaged.

"Packaging and logistics are always a point of discussion," said Gehman, "and they have been ever since this company was founded. The knowledge gained has always been passed down from leadership to leadership. There will always be team discussion and customer feedback will always play a pertinent role in our packaging and logistics plan."