

Use This Simple Two-Step Process to Reduce Shipping Errors

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Shipping orders is arguably the most important part of an online business. No matter how good your marketing is, your business won't work if people never get their stuff. And, even if the order is eventually delivered, shipping errors and delays create bad customer experiences, which create bad reviews for your business.

Unfortunately, customers usually don't care who's truly responsible for shipping problems. They usually blame the seller, even though most of the shipping process is outside the seller's control.

In fact, customers themselves are responsible for a large portion of shipping errors, because they make mistakes when they enter their addresses. Even so, in the customer's mind, it's up to the business to ensure that their order is delivered on time.

Even though the customer experience is important, shipping errors cost money to correct. If you're curious how much shipping errors cost, [calculate the cost of shipping errors](#) in your business. Even a low rate of shipping errors can cost hundreds, even thousands, of dollars every day. That adds up quick.

So, if you rely on mailing addresses for fulfillment—or marketing—taking steps to verify shipping information will save you a lot of money and protect your reputation. Fortunately, improving your shipping accuracy is relatively easy.

Ensuring that you have correct shipping addresses is a two-step process, that's relatively easy to implement:

1. Verify that the address exists and is properly formatted with USPS web tools.
2. Validate the address belongs to the correct customer with a people search API.

Here's how to implement this process and verify mailing addresses to save yourself the headaches and expenses of shipping errors.

Verify mailing addresses at the point of entry

The weak point in the online sales process is data entry. Humans make mistakes. And, at some point, a human has to manually enter shipping information. In most online sales, the customer is responsible for the majority of the manual data entry, if not all of it. Once the address is in your system, it gets handled by computers.

Whether or not a customer enters their address incorrectly is totally out of your control. But, you can catch the error and prompt them to correct the mistake before they complete their order.

You can add address validation to your customer information entry form with the [USPS web tools](#). When the customer enters their information and clicks to go to the next screen, your information capture system will make a quick API call and find out whether or not the address is valid.

This will weed out addresses that are nonexistent or incorrectly formatted. Verifying mailing addresses will improve your shipping accuracy a lot. But, it won't catch mistakes that produce a valid, but incorrect, address.

For example, if the customer enters an address that is a single digit off, it might still be correctly formatted and the post office will clear it as a valid address. But, then the order ships to the customer's neighbor.

Or, a customer who has recently moved may mistakenly enter their previous address.

In these cases you need to validate the address against an external source. Fortunately, there are ways to do that.

Validate mailing addresses before shipping

If the address is valid, your system will walk the customer through completing their order. Once you've got the order, that's when you'll validate the mailing address.

The best way to do this is with a reverse address lookup. This is just a matter of searching for the address, and finding out who's name is associated with that address.

If the reverse address lookup shows that the address belongs to someone other than the customer, you can contact the customer via email or phone to make sure you've got the right address before you ship the order.

You can integrate address validation into your system as well. The most common way is to use a [people search API](#) to connect your CRM to a data aggregator or data reseller's system. Most people search APIs connect using a unique URL and require very little code to implement.

Once the API is integrated, the validation process should be automated. You can even automate the emails to customers with mailing address discrepancies, if your CRM and email infrastructure are capable of sending [triggered emails](#).

A people search API gets you the most recently reported information about who lives at an address. A quality data partner will deliver data with about 85% accuracy.

This step will correct any shipping address issues that made it through the address verification on your customer information form.

Then, there's one last step for companies with more complex data handling.

Check addresses after manual data entry

You should create a system for verifying addresses once they've been entered into the new system if your order fulfillment process requires you to manually transfer addresses from one system to another, like moving addresses from a CRM system to a labeling program.

[Manual data entry](#) is the number one cause of bad data. So, you should verify any manually entered data.

If you're moving data from one system to another, this is pretty easy. You can simply check the manually entered data against the original data. But, make sure the original data was validated.

However, if you're moving data from a paper order form to a computer system, this is impossible. And, there's no way to verify data as people write it down. So, for paper to computer data transfer, you need to validate the data against an external source.

Since moving data from paper to your system creates a new point of entry, you can use the same two-step mailing address verification that you'd use on data from online orders.

1. Verify that the address exists with the [USPS API](#).
2. Validate the address with a [people search API](#).

This will keep customer mailing addresses correct as they move through your fulfillment system, even if your process is complex.

The two-step validation process is a straightforward implementation. And, just adding these two levels of mailing address validation to your shipping process will greatly reduce costly shipping errors caused by customer typos and manual data entry errors.

You'll get a more cost efficient shipping operation, and higher customer satisfaction levels. This means more revenue and better customer retention. The added revenue will easily pay for the cost of the address validation. So, there's no downside to validating your mailing addresses before you ship orders.

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