



SMART SHIPPING

How Manufacturers Can Streamline Costs
and Improve Delivery Performance



INTRODUCTION: The Shipping Challenge

From raw materials to finished goods, the supply chain that powers American manufacturing is under constant pressure. From rising transportation costs to global disruptions, shipping has become a daily challenge—and a strategic opportunity.

Every delay, damage, or inefficiency can mean lost revenue and strained customer relationships. Yet, many manufacturers are still using outdated logistics practices that cost more time and money than they realize.

This eBook brings together proven insights and trusted resources to help manufacturers ship smarter. Drawing on guidance from UPS and the National Association of Manufacturers, you'll learn how to cut costs, reduce risk, and deliver with greater reliability—without adding complexity.

What You'll Learn:

- The new realities reshaping freight and fulfillment
- Common inefficiencies hiding in your shipping process
- Tools and technologies driving better logistics outcomes
- How sustainability and profitability go hand in hand
- Where to find expert resources to optimize your shipping strategy

Take a closer look at what's changing, and how manufacturers can stay ahead of it.

NAM SHIPPING & LOGISTICS 

Small Parcel and Supply Chain Solutions







Chapter 1

➤ The New Realities of Shipping

WHY IT'S TIME TO RETHINK THE WAY YOU MOVE GOODS.

Shipping has become a core part of manufacturers' competitiveness. Rising costs, global disruptions, and shifting customer expectations have made logistics more complex—and more strategic—than ever before.

What's Changing:

- **Customers expect speed and transparency. Orders must be trackable and on time.**
- **Trade routes and costs keep shifting. Tariffs, shortages, and port delays add uncertainty.**
- **Technology is essential. Automation, AI, and data visibility are now key to staying ahead.**

How Manufacturers Are Adapting:

- **Using real-time tracking tools to predict and prevent delays.**
- **Adjusting shipping modes—air, ocean, rail, or intermodal—to balance cost and urgency.**
- **Partnering with logistics experts for dependable delivery performance.**

QUICK WIN:

Review your transportation mix each year. Small shifts—like using rail for non-urgent freight—can lower costs by up to 20%.





Chapter 2

➤ Common Shipping Inefficiencies (and How to Fix Them)

SMALL PROBLEMS THAT QUIETLY DRAIN TIME AND PROFIT.

Even efficient operations can leak money through overlooked details. Identifying and correcting a few common gaps can lead to major savings.

Frequent Pain Points:

- Packaging waste
- Mode mismatch
- Manual processes
- Limited visibility

Quick Fixes:

- Standardize packaging and right-size boxes to reduce volume and damage.
- Review carrier data quarterly to confirm you're using the most cost-effective mode.
- Digitize shipment tracking and invoicing for fewer mistakes and faster adjustments.
- Train staff to spot exceptions early—prevention saves more than correction.

Efficiency is a series of small, smart improvements. Start by tightening what you can control, then build from there.



A male technician with short brown hair, wearing clear safety glasses and a blue long-sleeved shirt, is focused on working on a green printed circuit board (PCB) mounted on a metal frame. He is in a factory or laboratory environment with various pieces of equipment, including a computer monitor displaying data, visible in the background. The scene is brightly lit, and there are some white geometric lines overlaid on the top left of the image.

Chapter 3

➤ Technology & Tools That Make a Difference

TURNING DATA AND AUTOMATION INTO YOUR LOGISTICS ADVANTAGE.

Technology is transforming how manufacturers plan, ship, and deliver. What used to take days of manual coordination now happens in minutes through connected systems and real-time visibility.

Key Benefits of Smarter Tools:

- Automation
- Real-time tracking
- Predictive analytics
- Integrated systems

Where to Start:

- Audit your current tech stack—eliminate duplicate tools and identify integration gaps.
- Train staff to use existing platforms fully before investing in new ones.
- Look for solutions that connect directly with carriers for faster updates and fewer handoffs.

Technology is your fastest route to better margins and stronger customer trust.





Chapter 4

➤ Sustainability and Cost Savings

HOW GREENER CHOICES CREATE LEANER OPERATIONS.

Customers, regulators, and investors now expect proof that your supply chain reduces waste and emissions while staying cost-effective.

Smart Moves That Save Money and Resources:

- **Optimize packaging:** Use recyclable materials and right-size containers to cut both costs and waste.
- **Consolidate shipments:** Fewer trips mean fewer emissions and lower fuel expenses.
- **Route efficiently:** Dynamic routing and load planning minimize miles and idle time.
- **Monitor energy use:** Tracking utilities in your facilities can reveal hidden savings..

QUICK WIN:

Evaluate your top five shipping lanes for underused space or duplicate trips—simple consolidation can reduce freight spend.

Sustainability and efficiency are the same goal. Every greener mile is also a smarter, more profitable one.





Chapter 5

➤ Partnering for Better Shipping Outcomes

WHY COLLABORATION IS THE FASTEST ROUTE TO IMPROVEMENT.

Even the strongest logistics plan can't operate in a vacuum. Manufacturers that build the right partnerships gain the flexibility and visibility they need to stay competitive.

The Power of Collaboration:

- **Shared expertise:** Partners bring specialized knowledge in freight, compliance, and automation.
- **Scalability:** Third-party logistics providers can flex with seasonal demand or rapid growth.
- **Risk reduction:** Trusted partners help anticipate disruptions and create contingency plans.
- **Customer confidence:** Reliable delivery strengthens every downstream relationship.

QUICK WIN:

Schedule quarterly reviews with your logistics or carrier partners. Jointly analyzing performance data can uncover hidden savings and smoother handoffs.





CONCLUSION:

The Path Forward

SMARTER SHIPPING STARTS WITH A SINGLE IMPROVEMENT.

Shipping touches every corner of manufacturing—from customer satisfaction to profit margins. In a landscape defined by disruption and rising expectations, even small logistics wins can add up to major competitive advantage.

By modernizing systems, reviewing carrier data, and embracing collaboration, manufacturers can cut costs, strengthen supply chains, and deliver with greater confidence.

Next Steps:

- Start with one area—packaging, mode selection, or visibility—and build from there.
- Revisit your processes quarterly to identify quick, low-cost improvements.
- Use trusted resources to stay informed, compliant, and ready for change.

Explore the resources, connect with a logistics expert, and start moving smarter today.







Resource Library

EXPLORE MORE TOOLS AND GUIDES TO
STRENGTHEN YOUR SHIPPING STRATEGY:

1. Guides & White Papers: A hub of educational resources offering step-by-step shipping insights, logistics white papers, and emerging trend analyses to help you stay competitive.

EXPLORE >

2. Freight Shipping Guide: A practical breakdown of freight modes, costs, and documentation—ideal for teams looking to optimize carrier selection and minimize delays.

EXPLORE >

3. Download Shipping Documents: Access essential templates and instructions for air, ocean, and customs forms to ensure accuracy and compliance in every shipment.

EXPLORE >

4. So, You're Thinking About Outsourcing?: A deep dive into whether outsourcing fulfillment makes sense for your operation, and how it can improve scalability and performance.

EXPLORE >

5. Why Nearshoring is Reshaping Supply Chains in 2025: Learn how shifting production closer to home reduces risk, cuts costs, and supports sustainability goals.

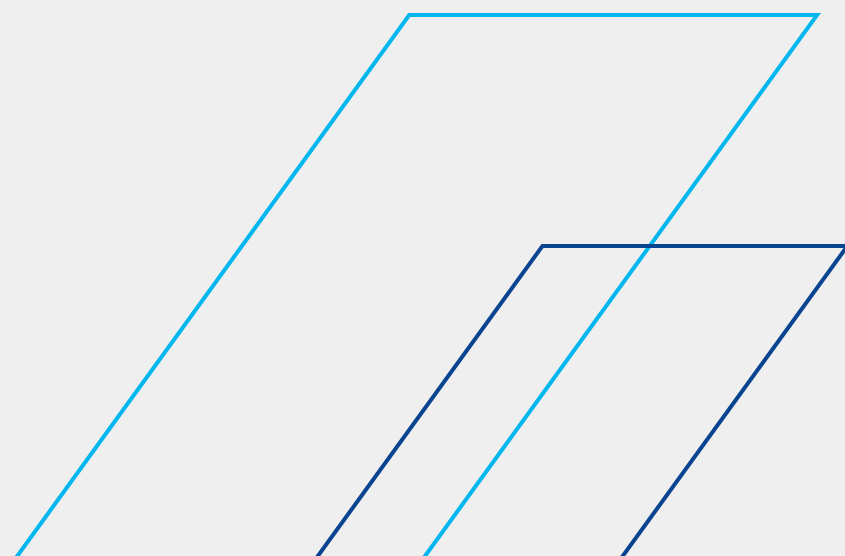
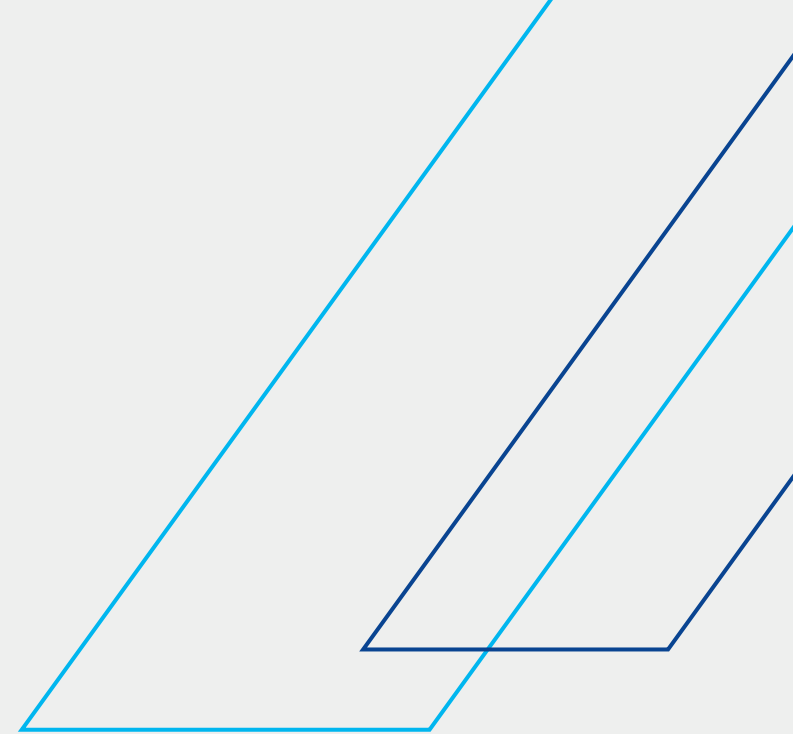
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6. National Impact of a West Coast Port Stoppage: A detailed analysis of how supply chain disruptions affect the national economy—and why proactive planning matters.

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7. New Study: Ports Stoppage Would Be Devastating Hit to Manufacturers' Competitiveness: NAM's latest findings on how port disruptions, inflation, and logistics bottlenecks threaten U.S. manufacturing competitiveness—and what leaders can do to prepare.

EXPLORE >





OPERATIONAL SOLUTIONS

Valued. Trusted. Connected.

Working to help improve manufacturers' bottom line

EXPLORE MEMBERSHIP

NAM CYBER COVER 

Cyber Insurance and Risk Mitigation for Manufacturers

NAM INCENTIVES LOCATOR 

powered by Atlas Insight

NAM MANUFACTURERS RETIREMENT 

401(k) & Savings Plan

NAM SHIPPING & LOGISTICS 

Small Parcel and Supply Chain Solutions

NAM ENERGY 

powered by Environ

NAM SmartBrief

 national association of
Manufacturers

CONNEX
marketplace
Connecting the Manufacturing Supply Chain

Operational Insights

This biweekly newsletter from the NAM focuses specifically on overall operations, ranging from environmental, health and safety regulations to energy efficiency, from benefits for workforce to cybersecurity tactics. Each issue contains articles, downloadable assets and links to additional information, such as webinars and podcasts. Geared toward small and medium-sized companies, any manufacturing leader in operations will find value.

Input

The NAM's morning newsletter delivers exclusive insights while keeping manufacturers informed on policy and business developments as well as the NAM's activities.

Power of Small

The NAM's exclusive resource network for small and medium-sized manufacturers provides access to trusted advisers and delivers intel and analysis on advocacy, workforce development, legal action, operational excellence and news focused on supporting manufacturers' long-term success.

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