2021 State of Holiday Shipping in the U.S.

An unbiased trend analysis and forecast report based on factual observations made about the on-time delivery performance of **UPS & FedEx** in retail parcel shipping, along with actionable strategies to optimize shipping operations for the 2021 holidays, and beyond.
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DATA REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

In order to extract meaningful insights which can be used to better understand and forecast the on-time delivery performance of UPS and FedEx during the upcoming 2021 Holiday season, we analyzed shipment data during the following periods:

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<tr>
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<th>Regular Operating Period 2021</th>
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This report emerges from a trend analysis done on statistically relevant and verifiable shipment data collected from millions of e-commerce packages tracked and monitored by LateShipment.com during the above mentioned period.

WHO CAN USE THIS REPORT

This report is an attempt to bring more transparency to the workings of the autonomous small parcel shipping industry.

Retail Analysts | Media Personnel | Retail & E-commerce Leaders | E-commerce Logistics & Supply Chain Leaders

This report enables retail publications and analysts focusing on Holiday sales and e-commerce logistics with carrier performance metrics for package delays across key regions, carrier service types, and retail categories. Retail merchants can leverage this report to make data-backed decisions to optimize their supply chain during the critical Holiday season and beyond.
In what is expected to be a longer than usual Holiday season, retail sales is set to hit an all time high with rising vaccination rates and eased restrictions in many places. With consumers' behavior and spending power transformed over the last few months, record sales are expected despite growing supply chain, inventory, and fulfillment concerns this Holiday season.

According to this IBM Institute for Business Value report, 87% of consumers say they will shop for the holidays this year, up from 81% in 2020 and 44% of consumers plan to jumpstart holiday shopping before November, weeks earlier than “Black Friday” in the US. The National Retail Federation forecasts holiday sales during November and December will grow between 8.5 percent and 10.5 percent over 2020 to between $843.4 billion and $859 billion.

2021 U.S. HOLIDAY SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

- Holiday retail sales are likely to increase between 7% and 9% in 2021, according to Deloitte’s annual holiday retail forecast.
- National Retail Federation expects that online and other non-store sales, will increase between 11% and 15% to a total of between $218.3 billion and $226.2 billion driven by online purchases. Deloitte also forecasts that e-commerce sales will grow by 11-15%, year-over-year, during the 2021-2022 holiday season.
- According to the IBM Institute for Business Value (IBV) report 87% of consumers say they will shop for the holidays this year, up from 81% in 2020. In addition, 39% of respondents are planning to travel to see family and friends over the holidays.

Undoubtedly, one of the main spurs behind this rise in e-Commerce sales is the widespread adoption of online shopping in the post-pandemic world coupled with the willingness of people to spend and celebrate this holiday season after two pale years.
The pandemic’s disruption of the global supply chain combined with its influence on customer behaviors and the surge in online purchases is adding up to record shipping costs, port congestion and inventory shortage. Supply chain disruptions over the last few months have weighed heavily on the operational efficiency of shipping carriers and their employees alike, raising concerns over package-handling capacity of carriers and their ability to meet on-time delivery promises. Indeed, shoppers will meet with stock-outs and longer delivery timelines from all carriers this Holiday season.

**KEY UPDATES FROM UPS AND FEDEX FOR THE 2021 HOLIDAY SEASON**

- **Package delivery demand during the 2021 peak season is projected to exceed capacity by about 5 million packages per day,** UPS CEO Carol Tomé said. UPS is also flexing up it’s capacity through efforts like hiring 100,000 seasonal employees.

- **FedEx Corp. is forecasting a 10% increase in holiday package deliveries over the previous record peak season in 2020.** The volume will be 100 million more packages compared with pre-pandemic levels in the 2019 peak season. On Cyber Monday, FedEx expects to handle 32 million packages worldwide.

However, retailers are taking extraordinary measures to support the demand for in-store and curbside pickups of online orders. Supply-chain leaders are building strategies to effectively manage procurement, mitigate inventory challenges and reduce the impact of package delays on consumers.

And as e-commerce consumers continue to avoid stores, shipping carriers, who’ve been overwhelmed by demand, are responding with more fulfillment and distribution capacity besides hiring temporary workforce. Carriers are also levying additional surcharges to meet the demands of delivering residential packages amid volume surges.
The following section is the result of a trend analysis conducted on packages shipped between the 2020 Holiday season (Nov 26 - Dec 31) and 2021 Regular Operating Period (Jan 1 - Oct 31). You will find a detailed breakdown of package delays by UPS and FedEx across key States, Cities, Service-types, and Retail Categories in the United States.
KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ANALYSIS

Despite efforts taken by UPS and FedEx to handle the surge in Holiday packages, supply chains remained jammed beyond the 2020 Holiday season and well into 2021. However, packages shipped through FedEx faced 2x more delays than packages shipped through UPS during the 2020 Holiday Season.

For packages shipped during the Regular Operating Period (Jan 1 - Oct 31, 2021), UPS performed better, whereas, parcels shipped through FedEx have been witnessing Holiday-season-like delays.

Amid the Holiday season rush during 2020, packages shipped through UPS to New York faced the highest delay rates at 10.68%. During the months January to October, 2021, packages shipped to Texas through UPS faced the most delays with 10.3% of packages delivered late.

During the 2020 Holiday season, packages shipped through FedEx to California recorded the highest number of package delays with 21.99% of Holiday orders delivered later than expected. During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped to Illinois through FedEx faced the most delays with 15.34% packages delayed.

Among key cities in the U.S, packages shipped through UPS during the 2020 Holiday season, New York and Miami faced the most delays at 8.3%. During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped through UPS to Houston faced the most delays at 8.9%, followed by New York at 8.24% and Los Angeles at 7.7%.

Among key cities in the U.S which witnessed package delays during the 2020 Holiday season, Los Angeles faced the most delays at 17.6%. During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped to Miami, Chicago and Houston through FedEx faced delay rates of 13.8%, 13.6%, and 13.5% respectively.
During the 2020 Holidays, UPS packages headed to the West Coast were delivered with lesser delays than packages shipped to the East Coast and the Central Regions in the U.S. During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped through UPS to the West Coast faced more delays than those delivered to the Central Region and East Coast.

2020 Holiday packages shipped through FedEx to the West Coast faced acute delays. The on-time delivery performance of FedEx during the operating period in 2021, was also very poor, with delay rates similar to what is typically observed during the peak season.

Speed did not really matter. During the 2020 Holiday season, UPS Next Day Air, a popular express shipping service observed a delay rate of 11.2% while, FedEx Overnight service recorded a delay rate of 25.2%, twice as much as UPS.

Packages shipped through the ground service-type, the most popular e-commerce shipping service of UPS and FedEx observed delays during the 2020 Holiday season. The delay rate of UPS Ground services was 7.18%, whereas FedEx Ground Services recorded a delay rate of 18%.

During the regular operating period in 2021, UPS packages shipped through their Ground services recorded a delay rate of 10.36% and FedEx Ground services faced a package delay rate of very similar to the 2020 Holiday season at 19%.

For packages shipped through UPS during the 2020 Holiday season, both Health and Fitness & Apparel retailers observed the most package delays at 8.2% and 8% respectively.

For packages shipped through FedEx during the 2020 Holiday season, retailers dealing with Jewelry items observed the most package delays at 15.5% while the Apparel category saw a delay rate of 14.9%.
Amid the Holiday season rush during 2020, the package delay rate in New York was the highest with 10.68%. During the months January to October, 2021, packages shipped to Texas faced most delays with 10.3% of packages delivered late.

California witnessed the lowest package delay rate at 4.77% during 2020 Holidays, while only 5.5% of packages shipped to Florida during the 2021 regular operating period were delayed.
During the 2020 Holiday season, California recorded the highest number of package delays with 21.99% of Holiday orders delivered later than expected. During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped to Illinois faced the most delays with 15.34% packages delayed.

And during the 2020 Holidays, only 6.78% of packages shipped to Florida were delayed, whereas during the regular operating period of 2021, packages shipped through FedEx to most key states faced delay rates that were similar to delays seen during the 2020 Holiday season.
Delivery Delays Across Key U.S. Cities

UPS PACKAGE DELAYS IN TOP CITIES

Amid key cities in the U.S which witnessed package delays during the 2020 Holiday season, New York and Miami faced the most delays at 8.3%.

During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped through UPS to Houston faced the most delays at 8.9%, followed by New York at 8.24% and Los Angeles at 7.7%.
Among key cities in the U.S which witnessed package delays during the 2020 Holiday season, **Los Angeles** faced the most delays at 17.6%. **During the regular operating period in 2021**, packages shipped to **Miami**, **Chicago** and **Houston** through FedEx faced delay rates of 13.8%, 13.6%, and 13.5% respectively.
Delivery Delays Across West Coast, Central Region and East Coast

UPS PACKAGE DELAYS ON THE WEST COAST

Among states on the West Coast which witnessed Holiday package delays during 2020, State of Washington faced the most delays at 6.35%, followed closely by Oregon at 6.1%. During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped through UPS to the State of Washington faced the most delays at 13.64%.

Washington
- 6.35%
- 13.64%

Oregon
- 6.1%
- 11.43%

Nevada
- 4.58%
- 7.21%

California
- 4.77%
- 8.11%

Holiday Period 2020
(Nov 26 – Dec 31, 2020)

Regular Operating Period 2021
(Jan 1 – Oct 31, 2021)
In the Central Region, during the 2020 Holidays, packages shipped to Nebraska through UPS faced the most delays at 14.51%. During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped to Arkansas and Louisiana through UPS recorded the highest package delay rate at 10.49% and 9.27%.
Among the states on the East Coast in the U.S, two states witnessed the most package delays during the 2020 Holidays, and they are South Carolina at 11.3% and New York at 10.7%.

During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped to South Carolina through UPS faced the most package delays, recording a delay rate of 8.2%.
FEDEX PACKAGE DELAYS ON THE WEST COAST

Amid states on the West Coast which witnessed Holiday package delays during 2020, Oregon faced the most delays at 26.25%, followed closely by Washington and California at 24.62% and 22% respectively.

During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped through FedEx to Oregon faced the most delays at 25.66% followed closely by Washington at 23%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Holiday Period 2020</th>
<th>Regular Operating Period 2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>26.25%</td>
<td>25.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>24.62%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>11.18%</td>
<td>13.67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Holiday Period 2020 (Nov 26 – Dec 31, 2020)  
Regular Operating Period 2021 (Jan 1 – Oct 31, 2021)
FEDEX PACKAGE DELAYS IN THE CENTRAL REGION

In the Central Region, Holiday packages shipped to Nebraska through FedEx faced the most delays during 2020 at 10.97%.

During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped to Louisiana and Arkansas through FedEx faced high delay rates of 25.65% and 25.48% respectively.
FEDEX PACKAGE DELAYS ON THE EAST COAST

On the East Coast, states in the U.S which witnessed the most package delays during the 2020 Holidays, are Massachusetts at 14.19% and Georgia at 12.96%.

During the regular operating period in 2021, packages shipped to Maine through FedEx faced the most package delays, recording a delay rate of 19.88% followed closely by Georgia at 19.19%.
Delivery Delays Across Key Carrier Service Types

**UPS GROUND SERVICE PACKAGE DELAYS**

Surge in Holiday shipments during 2020, and straining UPS Ground networks resulted in a package delay rate of **7.18%**. During the *regular operating period in 2021*, UPS packages shipped through their Ground services recorded a delay rate of **10.36%**.

![Graph showing UPS Ground service package delays]

**Holiday Period 2020**
(Nov 26 - Dec 31, 2020)

**Regular Operating Period 2021**
(Jan 1 - Oct 31, 2021)

**FEDEX GROUND SERVICE PACKAGE DELAYS**

Packages shipped through FedEx Ground service, the most popular e-commerce shipping service, recorded a delay rate of **18%** during the 2020 Holidays. During the *regular operating period in 2021*, FedEx Ground services faced a package delay rate of very similar to the 2020 Holiday season at **19%**.

![Graph showing FedEx Ground service package delays]

**Holiday Period 2020**
(Nov 26 - Dec 31, 2020)

**Regular Operating Period 2021**
(Jan 1 - Oct 31, 2021)
During the 2020 Holiday season, **UPS Next Day Air**, a popular express shipping service observed the highest delay rate at **11.2%**. And during the **regular operating period in 2021**, with UPS straining to manage the unexpected demand for essential deliveries and broken air networks contributing to service disruptions, a record **9.9%** of packages shipped through **UPS Next Day Air service** were delayed.

During the 2020 Holidays, **FedEx Overnight** service recorded a delay rate of **25.2%**, while the same service recorded a package delay rate of **11.8%** during the **regular operating period in 2021**. **FedEx 2 Day** service recorded a package delay rate of **8.1%** during the 2020 Holiday season and during the **regular operating period in 2021**, **14.6%** of packages delivered through the same service type were delayed.
Delivery Delays Across Key Retail Categories

UPS PACKAGE DELAYS ACROSS RETAIL CATEGORIES

Parcel carriers such as UPS expect another busy peak season after the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the growth of e-commerce.

During the 2020 Holiday season, both Health and Fitness & Apparel retailers observed the most package delays at 8.2% and 8% respectively. And during the regular operating period in 2021, Electronics category saw a delay rate of 14.44%, while Sports and Health and Fitness categories witnessed package delay rates of 10.5% and 10.7% respectively.
With FedEx struggling to cope with the post pandemic surge in online shopping, combined with disruptions in shipping networks, a broad range of products in various categories shipped through FedEx faced delays.

During the 2020 Holiday season, retailers dealing with Jewelry items observed the most package delays at 15.5% while the Apparel category saw a delay rate of 14.9%.

And during the regular operating period in 2021, the Jewelry category observed a delay rate of 14.4% while the Sports and Apparel categories witnessed package delay rates of 13% and 11.3% respectively.
The 2021 Holidays will be an extended shopping season and an extraordinary year for retail shipping. Holiday forecasts from three different firms have predicted a sharp jump in year-over-year spending. Sales in November and December are expected to grow 7% compared with a year ago and reach $800 billion, according to Bain. Deloitte sees holiday retail sales climbing 7% to 9%. A forecast by Mastercard SpendingPulse said holiday retail sales should rise 7.4% from a year earlier, fueled by a rebound in in-store shopping and persistent consumer demand.

Clearly, the traditional peak season challenges compounded with the pandemic-induced surge in online order volumes and supply chain constraints will result in an unprecedented spike in delivery disruptions. The Supply chain will remain top of mind for retailers in order to ensure timely dispatch and delivery of Holiday orders, besides sweating over peak season surcharges which will escalate shipping costs to fulfill Holiday orders. Undoubtedly, shipping carriers like UPS and FedEx will be stretched to the limits in order to meet on-time delivery promises this Holiday season.
Online retailers, as well as shoppers, should brace themselves for a Holiday shopping season that will be troubled with package delays due to shipping network congestion, labor shortage and COVID-19 outbreaks in some parts. There will also be stock availability issues.

Average package delay rates during the 2021 Holiday season to be between the range of 16% to 20%.

Densely populated urban cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago etc. to face record package delays, even as high as 25% to 30% during the 2021 Holidays.

Popular e-commerce service types, Ground and Express services offered by both UPS and FedEx will remain affected, resulting in delivery delays irrespective of the service type consumers choose for their Holiday orders.

With unusually high congestion affecting every type of transportation network, both air and ground shipments are expected to face significant delivery delays.

UPS will perform better when compared to FedEx from an on-time delivery standpoint, in fact considering their 12-month track record, UPS' performance will be 2x better than FedEx during the Holidays.

The overall number of holiday packages that will be sent out will exceed the handling capacity of shipping carriers, thereby missing promised delivery windows. In the run up to the holidays, the supply chain will take center stage and the winners are going to be those retailers who will take measures to mitigate the impact of delivery delays on customer experience and loyalty.
The Post-purchase Customer Experience Mandate

The surge in online orders will see retailers and shipping carriers grappling to meet customer expectations around frictionless shipping, delivery and returns experiences. The shift to e-commerce is here to stay but a negative order delivery experience will have a long-lasting impact on your relationship with customers; making post-purchase CX key to your businesses success during this Holiday season and beyond.

Focusing on your post-purchase CX strategy is critical because it helps you:

- Establish trust and buyer confidence with clear shipping and returns policy, thereby fostering loyalty
- Reduce customer anxiety by meaningfully engaging with customers during the “Order Delivery” phase
- Drive customer delight post-checkout with memorable, on-brand tracking experiences
- Improve customer satisfaction and increase loyalty by proactively resolving delivery issues
- Boost revenue from repeat purchases by leveraging your customers’ order tracking moments
- Increase conversion, repeat purchase rate and retain revenue by optimizing product returns on your store

As evident here, there are numerous benefits that emanate from a well thought through post-purchase customer experience strategy for your online retail business.
The Big Post-purchase Customer Experience Gap

In today’s retail market, there are hundreds of shipping carriers worldwide that specialize in e-commerce deliveries.

However, regardless of who your shipping partner is, the truth is that:

- ~10% of all parcels shipped are either delayed, lost or damaged
- Customers blame and penalize the brand they shop from and NOT the shipping carriers for delivery failures
- 1-in-3 consumers will switch to a competitor after just ONE bad post-purchase experience with a brand

> 40% of all customer support tickets created are either Shipping, Delivery or Returns related.

All of these lead to a big post-purchase CX gap that has a negative impact on customer satisfaction and ultimately affects your profits.

THE BIG POST-PURCHASE CX GAP IN ONLINE RETAIL

- You don’t track parcels in real time, foresee delays and proactively resolve delivery-related issues
- You don’t regularly and proactively update customers about their order delivery status
- You don’t offer self-serve, branded order tracking experiences to your customers
- Your returns process is vague and complex, often discouraging shoppers to buy from you
Taking measures to close the post-purchase CX gap and provide customers with a frictionless delivery experience can cement you as their preferred brand. Adopting the following ways to improve your post-purchase CX will ensure a positive impact on both your customers’ lifetime value and the retention rate of your business.

**PROACTIVELY IDENTIFY AND RESOLVE DELIVERY RELATED ISSUES**

Third-party shipping services are highly error prone. Monitoring your in-transit parcels in real-time and being in the know about parcels facing delivery issues will ensure proactive and faster resolution of delivery-related customer issues.

**REDUCE CUSTOMER ANXIETY WITH AUTOMATED SHIPPING NOTIFICATIONS**

Effectively engaging with your customers throughout the order delivery lifecycle will strengthen customer relationships and foster brand loyalty. With timely email and SMS alerts, keep customers informed about their order delivery status, including critical delivery issues.

**OFFER CUSTOM-BUILT BRANDED TRACKING EXPERIENCES ON YOUR ONLINE STORE**

To ensure seamless brand experiences, every customer interaction should be owned by the brand. Default order tracking pages provided by shipping carriers are dull and off-brand. Providing brand consistent order tracking pages on your store drives customer delight and increases brand loyalty.
MAKE ORDER TRACKING SELF-SERVICE TO REDUCE DELIVERY RELATED SUPPORT TICKETS

Over 30% of customer support tickets created are shipping related, with most tickets being WISMO (Where Is My Order) enquiries. Addressing such tickets can be both time consuming and expensive. Enable your customers to track their orders from within your website or app to significantly reduce customer support enquiries.

LEVERAGE ORDER TRACKING MOMENTS TO INCREASE SALES AND REDUCE RETURNS

On average, customers track their orders 6 to 8 times before order delivery, that’s 6-8 additional marketing touchpoints with customers post-checkout. Boost repeat sales with product recommendations on order tracking pages, besides providing relevant product usage information to reduce returns.

GET CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AROUND ORDER DELIVERY EXPERIENCES

Capture customer feedback around their delivery experiences after every order delivery to understand the detractors of a great post-purchase experience and make necessary changes to improve.

OPTIMIZE YOUR RETURNS PROCESS TO MAKE IT HASSLE-FREE WHILE MAINTAINING PROFITABILITY

Be transparent and establish trust with a clear returns policy. Make product returns effortless for your customers, while providing return methods that encourage exchanges and store credit options to ensure revenue retention.
Did you know your business might be overpaying shipping bills by up to 20% by not claiming refunds from shipping carriers for service failures and billing errors?

**Audit invoice for 50+ service failures & billing errors**

**Recover refunds and save up to 20% on shipping costs**

**Get better service-quality from shipping carriers**

However, claiming refunds from carriers can be both exhaustive and expensive, making it extremely challenging to recover refunds for valid claims before their eligibility window expires. Auditing your shipping invoice regularly can help you receive better service quality, and save you up to 20% on shipping expenses.
About LateShipment.com

At LateShipment.com, we are driven by an overarching mission to bring more transparency to the world of shipping. Our retail logistics solutions include cloud tools for small parcel shippers with a focus on post-purchase delivery experience and shipping cost optimization.

Trusted by thousands of companies worldwide, at LateShipment.com we have tracked over 150 million packages shipped through 80+ shipping carriers globally. With our unique industry position, we’re able to leverage our global shipping data and expertise in fulfillment logistics to publish unbiased carrier performance reports aimed at empowering readers with insights about the workings of the parcel shipping industry.

OUR SOLUTIONS

LateShipment.com is the world’s only cloud-based Post-purchase Success platform built to enable retail parcel shippers of all sizes to provide memorable order delivery and returns experiences — besides reducing shipping costs by up to 20%.

Our feature-packed Delivery Experience Management platform helps improve shipment visibility and drive customer delight post purchase. Our customer-first Returns Management platform makes returns effortless and efficient — all while retaining revenue. Our Automated Shipping Refunds solution brings better performance accountability to shipping carrier services by recovering millions of dollars in refund claims.

LateShipment.com seamlessly integrates with over 600 shipping carriers and business tools that include E-commerce platforms, Order Management Systems, CRM and Marketing Automation tools to help you craft delightful post-purchase experiences, at scale.

Visit www.lateshipment.com to find out more.
Disclaimer

The data and information in this report has been solely drawn from shipments tracked by LateShipment.com, on behalf of its customers. While particular care has been taken to ensure that all data sets analyzed are accurate and statistically relevant across the small parcel shipping industry, LateShipment.com is not responsible for any errors or omissions whatsoever.

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