



Ebook Guide

How to grow your eCommerce business with

International shipping

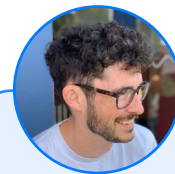




About this report

One of the best parts about taking your business online is the opportunities for expansion that open up. eCommerce has greatly changed the way people shop, which means it's also changing what they expect from your business. If a potential customer from overseas stumbles on your products through Instagram or Etsy, or any of the other dozens of channels out there, you'll want a robust international shipping setup so you can easily sell to them.

As you grow, you'll want to make sure you're able to offer the same quality services to both shoppers in your neighbourhood and those overseas. Having an international shipping strategy in place even before you're ready to actually start branching out into these key markets is the key to turning these opportunities into wins.



About the author

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Contents

Chapter 1	Why offer international shipping?	4
Chapter 2	How to create your international shipping strategy	5
Chapter 3	Understanding rules and regulations	6
Chapter 4	How long does international shipping take?	7
Chapter 5	International inventory management	10
Chapter 6	How to plan for costs and customs charges	11
Chapter 7	How to create an international shipping label	13
Chapter 8	How using one platform can simplify international shipping	15
Chapter 9	Case study - How Lorna Jane has grown with international shipping	17
Chapter 10	5 Expert tips for international shipping	18
Chapter 11	How to start shipping internationally	21

Why offer international shipping?

The number one reason to offer international shipping is growth. To keep finding new customers and sharing your products with the world you need to have connections that go beyond your local market.

The rise of online shopping is a key driver of this potential for growth, with Statista finding that 80% of respondents will make at least one purchase online this year. It's clearly something the majority of people are comfortable doing, which ties into some of the other major benefits of international shipping for businesses.

Benefits of international shipping



Reach customers around the world: Customers in other countries might not be able to find a local version of your product - or maybe they just like yours more!



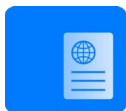
Expand your customer base: If you're in a niche market, you might quickly outgrow the demand from your local customers.



Improve your brand image: Be seen everywhere! Being recognised internationally can be a huge boost to your business.

Challenges with international shipping

However, you should be aware of the potential cons too when you're thinking about international shipping. Some things to be aware of are the following.



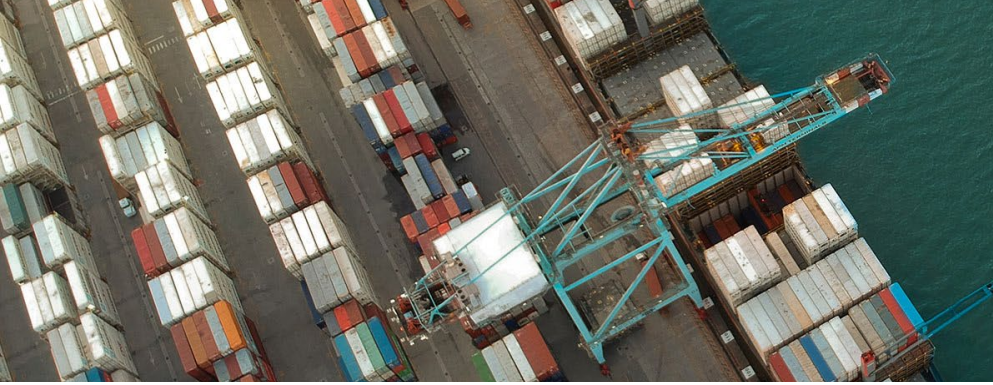
Customs, import duties and VAT: The prices on your website might not reflect the final cost for the customer if there are import duties or other sales taxes.



International restrictions: Tariffs and other laws may prevent some of your products from being shipped entirely.



Higher costs: Customers will have to pay for shipping, and you have to limit deals that offer free shipping on orders over a certain amount.



How to create your international shipping strategy

Once you've considered the pros and cons, you're ready to start putting your strategy together. Here are the key considerations you need to run through to be prepared for success:

What will you ship?

When you're starting out, offer a small selection of popular items for international shipping. You'll also want to confirm product-market fit. One easy way to assess the demand for your product is by researching similar products on eBay and Amazon.

Where will you ship?

Are you going to open the floodgates or add new countries one by one? Check your site's Google Analytics to see where your visitors are located.

Check local shipping regulations

Check for product import and/or export restrictions. You may be surprised to find out which products are not eligible for shipping. The categories of permitted goods range from reasonable, like aerosol cans and ammunition, to surprising, like nail polish.

Which carriers will you use?

We recommend using a mix of international and domestic carriers to ensure your customers get the best service, that's why offer multiple carrier support with our shipping solutions.

Do you have the right packaging?

Check to see if your current packaging options are robust enough to safely carry your products across the world - especially if you ship fragile items.

The next point is big enough for a section on its own and is probably going to be the biggest learning curve in your international shipping journey: Rules, regulations and customs.

Understanding rules and regulations

This is going to be your biggest source of potential complications, but understanding what you can and can't ship to specific countries is going to be key to offering effective international shipping options to your customers.

UPS - one of Starshipit's many integrated shipping partners - has a [great tool](#) that's invaluable for checking out import and export rules for all the countries they serve. It allows you to choose a destination and origin country and see which restrictions could affect your ability to ship items.

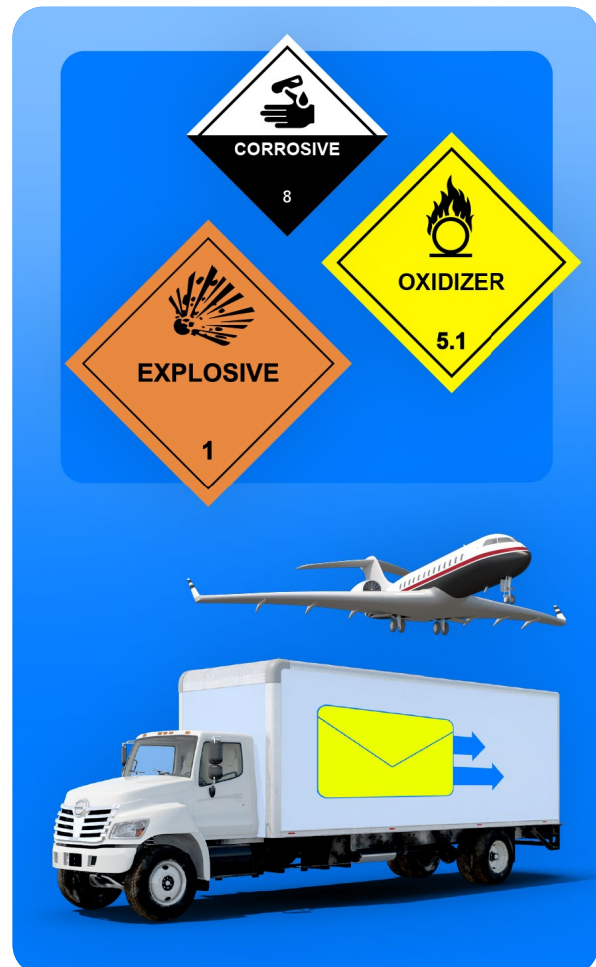
However, it also shows the sheer depth of rules governing international shipping, including guidelines for the following:

- ★ Prohibited and restricted items
- ★ Dangerous goods
- ★ Weight and size limits
- ★ Value limits
- ★ Invoice requirements
- ★ Correct import and export documentation

Having the correct Harmonized System (HS) codes on the orders you ship is a big step towards ensuring compliance with international shipping regulations.

These codes are international designations that tell customs inspectors what a package contains and which regulations it might need to conform to. They are very strict classifications that put products into specific categories, and even detail which material they are made out of.

However, despite being overseen by an international organisation, these codes vary slightly between countries so it's essential to check these codes every time you start supplying to a new country. For example, UPS points out that if you shipped a pallet of footballs to the US, you would use the Harmonized System code 9506.62.4040. If you simply copy and pasted the same code on a pallet headed to China, it would be rejected because they use a slightly different designation for that product.



How long does international shipping take?

If you're a retailer, it's important to understand both how long international shipping takes and the factors that affect delivery times. Why? Because knowing estimated delivery times means you can set expectations for your customers. And, when customers have a clear idea of when their products will arrive, they'll be more satisfied with their shopping experience.

How long international shipping takes depends on which delivery service you choose. For example, express international shipping is a faster option for international shipments than standard international shipping.

But as we'll learn, there are a number of other factors that can impact delivery speed. For example, the customs clearance process and whether or not you're shipping dangerous goods.



International shipping services

Generally, international shipping options can be broken up into several broad categories, which we'll cover below. Keep in mind: every shipping provider and carrier will have their own unique offerings.



Express international shipping

Usually the fastest option, international express shipping offers quick delivery times often in the 1-5 day range. These services also come with enhanced tracking, faster customs clearance and priority handling. Examples include DHL Express and FedEx International Priority.



Standard international shipping

This is the standard shipping option for most international packages. Delivery timeframes are typically longer, but the services are also more affordable. Carrier provided services often include basic tracking and standard customs clearance. Examples include USPS Priority Mail International and UPS Worldwide Expedited.

How goods move internationally



Economy international shipping

The most affordable international shipping option. Delivery times are slower, but the costs are also significantly reduced. It's the ideal option for less time-sensitive orders. Examples include DHL eCommerce and UPS Standard.



Air freight

Air freight is a shipping method for most types of orders, even large and heavy items. It's often used for commercial purposes, arranged through specialised shipping companies. It can be expensive, but it's one of the fastest options for shipping cross-border.



Sea freight

Ocean freight is often for bulky or large shipments where longer delivery times aren't an issue. Like air freight, you'll often need to arrange these services through specialised shipping companies.



What impacts delivery speed?

Shipping a package internationally is much more complex than sending a package within the same country. Below are the key things to keep in mind.

Customs

Sending anything from one country to another means going through customs, and dealing with the destination country's customs guidelines. This process usually involves completing a customs declaration form and providing necessary documentation about the contents (and value) of the package.

Customs authorities assess duties, taxes, and fees based on their evaluation of the package. The package undergoes customs clearance, which includes inspection, documentation review, and assessment of applicable charges.

Delays or disputes may occur if the authorities raise any concerns, requiring additional information or resolution. Once customs clearance is complete, the package is released for delivery.

This is an area where automation can help. By automating your customs documentation, every order always has the right paperwork to go along with it.

Which services you choose

The services you choose for your parcel delivery also has a large part to play, like air freight and sea cargo. Before you make a decision, consider what you're shipping and the timeframes you (and your customers) are comfortable with.

Air freight is the fastest option, and typically the method of choice for retailers shipping small items. Sea freight, on the other hand, is cheaper but takes significantly longer.

Dangerous goods

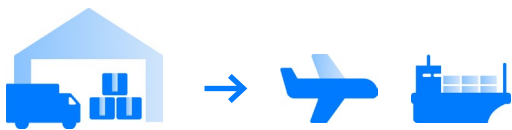
Are you shipping products containing dangerous goods? Don't brush this question off so quickly – there are many items which may seem safe but fall under this category. Lithium batteries are just one example, and are found in many consumer products. The same goes for cosmetics, many of which have restrictions.

Before sending anything overseas, make sure you understand whether or not you're sending dangerous goods.

International shipping address format

International shipping speed can take a hit if you don't stick to international shipping address formats. This format is a standardised way of formatting addresses to ensure accurate and efficient delivery of packages across borders.

International inventory management



Shipping goods internationally can put considerable pressure on your stock management system – and generally requires an inventory management software tool to manage the added complexity.

For example, it's important to keep a close eye on your stock levels to prevent under- or over-stocking. In a domestic market, you can often get away with a 'just in time' approach to stocking, ordering from suppliers only when you make a sale – or even drop-shipping, to avoid stock costs altogether.

When you ship overseas however, the longer lead times – and higher freight costs – mean you'll likely need to hold stock of your own so that you can deliver to customers in a reasonable time frame.

This very quickly becomes a drain on your cash flow as money gets tied up in physical goods. It also adds a degree of risk to your business: what if you don't manage to sell the stock you've bought? What if it somehow expires, or goes out of date or fashion? Throwing away valuable stock you can't use is a painful and costly experience you won't want to repeat.

A good inventory management system helps you manage all of these pain points. It does this by keeping your stock levels lean – while ensuring the items you can't afford to run out of are always on hand.

Finally, an inventory management software system will let you track the stock you hold in multiple warehouses, wherever these are – including the warehouses of third parties like overseas distributors and logistics firms that may help you with international fulfilment.



How to plan for costs and customs charges

International shipping is also going to cost more. If you're offering deals like "spend \$50 and get free shipping" you'll need to think about adding a disclaimer that it's only for domestic deliveries or specific countries.

Setting up your international shipping on Shopify and other eCommerce platforms can help you manage your prices, but first you need to know what they are. Shopify provides some in-depth pricing guidelines on its website, making the point that pricing this service accurately involves more than just looking at what a carrier will charge to ship the package.

To manage the pricing of your international shipping, you should:



Use a rate calculator

For each country you want to ship to, check the size of the smallest package you're planning to send and the largest item someone could order internationally.



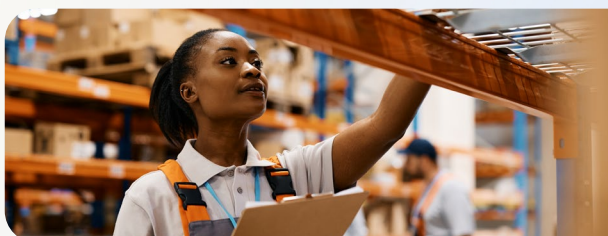
Check your packaging

See if the cost of packaging changes for your international orders. Are you using more durable and more expensive packaging?



Choose a pricing structure

Will you offer a flat rate, carrier rate or deals like free shipping for orders over a certain value? This will depend on how consistent your shipping costs will be.



Consider a handling fee

If you and your staff are finding that processing international orders is taking much longer than domestic, you might need to add further fees.

Then, there are customs fees. Extra fees like VAT when shipping to the UK can be an unwelcome surprise to customers. However, in most cases, paying these fees is actually the importer's responsibility. That doesn't necessarily mean you want them to pay, and part of offering a seamless international shipping experience for your customers will involve pre-paying these fees where possible.



DDP and DDU

Incoterms stands for International Commercial Terms and relates to how you manage the duties and taxes required when shipping orders internationally. The most common Incoterms in freight delivery are DDP (Delivery Duty Paid) and DDU (Delivery Duty Unpaid). It's worth noting there are many Incoterms, but DDP and DDU are the main ones Starshipit supports.

What is [DDP](#)?

DDP (often referred to as Sender Pays Duty) should be used when you would like to pay the import charges, taxes etc on behalf of the customer. This is the incoterm used when your customer prepays their duty charges at checkout to you, the seller, so that when the package goes through customs they aren't charged again.

What is [DDU](#)?


DDU is the default for your shipments. This means the obligation to pay customs charges are on the buyer, rather than the seller. This means there's nothing for you (the seller) to calculate at checkout. If you're not sure which one you're using, it will probably be DDU.

How to create an international shipping label

An international shipping label is typically attached to the outside of a package. These documents provide all the details required for the accurate delivery of a shipment across international borders. Here's what they contain:


Global Express Mail

Customs Declaration - CN54



Tracking: LC 0566 3082 49

POSTAGE



From Address:

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP Code _____

Phone _____

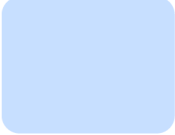
Ship To:

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, ZIP Code _____

Phone _____



Detailed description of contents:	Quantity	Weight	Value	HS Codes	Country of Origin
<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid #ccc; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid #ccc; width: 100%; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid #ccc; width: 100%;"></div>					

Contents:

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Sender information: The name, address, and contact details of the person or company sending the package.

Recipient's information: The name, address, and contact details of the person or company receiving the package. Software can help to ensure you get these details right.

Tracking number: A unique identification number assigned to the shipment. This allows the sender and receiver to track the progress of the package during transit.

Description: A list of the items contained within the package, including quantities, weights, and value. Also include country of manufacture. This information is important for customs clearance and determining duties or taxes.

Harmonized System (HS) codes: These are standardised codes used to classify products for customs purposes. HS codes help customs officials identify the type of goods being shipped and determine if any restrictions or regulations apply.

Customs declaration: A statement that declares the contents of the package and their value. It may also include additional information such as the country of origin of the goods and any applicable warranties or certifications.

Barcodes: Scannable barcodes may be included on the label to facilitate automated tracking and processing of the shipment.

How to fill out international shipping labels

We've already covered what goes into an international shipping label, now let's cover the specific considerations for each field.



Sender's Information: Include every relevant detail, including your contact information.

Recipient's Information: Do the same for your customer details, and add their contact information if you have it. Tip: If the address line seems too long, check if the province has an abbreviation. For example "Nova Scotia" can be shortened to "NS".

Tracking number: You get these numbers from your shipping carrier.

Description: Be specific and clear when describing the contents. For example, instead of listing "clothing," specify "3 T-shirts" or "1 Pair of shoes". Include material composition or the purpose of the items here too.

Harmonized System (HS) Codes: Assign the correct codes to each item. Use the official directory to ensure you've got the correct codes for your items. Tip: Use Starshipit's Product Catalogue feature to load your products into Starshipit, along with the HS codes. This can help to save you handling time.

Customs declaration: Declare the contents and their value accurately on the label. If required, include additional information such as the country of origin of the goods or any relevant warranties or certifications.

Barcodes: Affix any barcodes or labels provided by the shipping carrier or postal service in the designated areas on the label.



While you can create these labels manually, it's much more reliable (and faster) to use fulfilment software to generate them automatically.



How using one platform can simplify international shipping

It's taken us a while to get here, and that's one of the reasons you'll want one, centralised and integrated shipping platform to help to manage delivery labels, shipping costs and all the other admin so you can focus on making the most of these opportunities for expansion.

With Starshipit, you can manage all carriers from one dashboard. This means you can easily use different carriers for domestic and international deliveries, without switching between multiple carrier portals. This level of integration also means you'll be able to show customers the shipping rates at checkout so there are no surprises down the track.

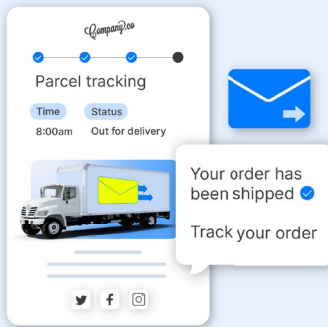
	New	Printed	Shipped	Returns		
	Select view				Print	Check addresses
<input type="checkbox"/>	Order	Customer	Country	Courier		
<input type="checkbox"/>	363	Millar	AU	Australia Post		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	364	Newman	NZ	DHL Express		
<input type="checkbox"/>	365	Rayner	FR	Deutsche Post		
<input type="checkbox"/>	366	Olson	DE	DPD		
<input type="checkbox"/>	367	Davidson	IT	Evri		

There's also the sheer amount of time you're able to save as Starshipit automates your customs documentation. In general, shipping automation lets you focus on running your business as efficiently as possible, with a host of other benefits which we'll explore below.



Paperless trade for commercial invoices

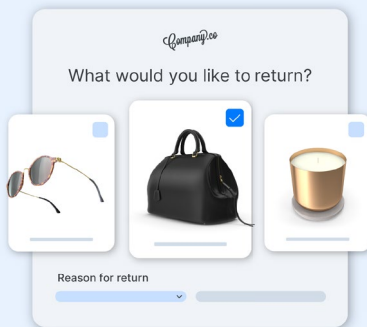
Starshipit offers paperless trade for customers shipping internationally. This means you no longer have to include the commercial invoice on the package; you will only be required to attach the carrier label. All of the customs documentation will be stored electronically and when it is scanned at customs the information will be displayed to customs.



Keep your customers in the loop with tracking pages and notifications

When customers are left in the dark about their orders, help desk queries spike. This gets even harder with international shipping, especially when customer queries come through after your staff have gone home for the day.

Automatic branded tracking pages and notifications keep your customers informed about where their orders are, giving them a consistent eCommerce experience and reducing help centre enquiries.



Branded returns

Managing your returns process isn't easy at the best of times, and it can get even more complicated with cross-border shipping. This is another area where fulfilment automation can help, allowing your customers to self-service returns.

Starshipit lets you build your own returns portal with your company branding where your customers can generate their own returns labels, freeing up your staff.

Product catalogue

Product name	Size	SKU	Price	Weight
Starshipit Pullover Hoodie	S	0001	\$12.34	0.23KG
Starshipit Pullover Hoodie	M	0002	\$12.34	0.23KG
Starshipit Pullover Hoodie	L	0003	\$12.34	
Starshipit Pullover Hoodie	XL	0004		0.23KG

[Edit](#)

Product catalogue

The product catalogue enables you to store all relevant details about your products within Starshipit. You can then access these details to populate missing values during order import.

It's easy to see how this can speed up international fulfilment processes, as you can ensure products always have the proper HS codes and country of origin added, ensuring smooth transit through customs.



Case study

How Lorna Jane has grown with international shipping

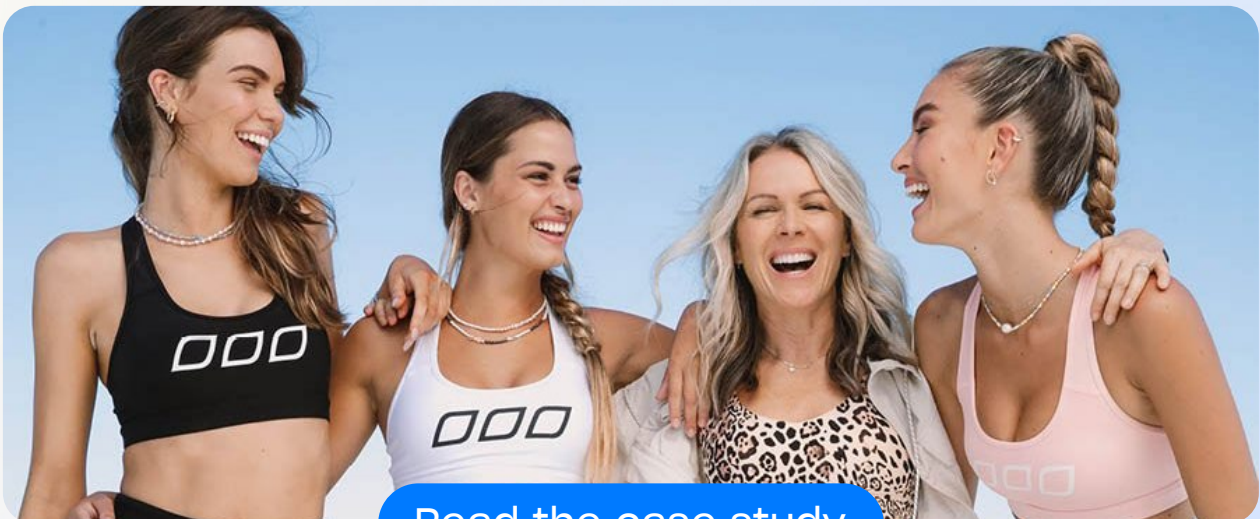
Aussie fashion giant **Lorna Jane** uses Starshipit to manage a global shipping operation, all from Australia. According to Global Operations Manager Danny Hancock, being able to ship using a variety of shipping carriers is key to their international success.

What's more, it's important for Lorna Jane to be able to offer customers a selection at the checkout – options when it comes to shipping carrier, service level and delivery timeframe. Starshipit makes it easy to offer these choices to customers.



“If you get a simple solution and the right partners, shipping internationally and shipping domestically doesn't really change too much. It goes in that cage or it goes in the other cage basically. If you get your model right, it shouldn't be that different.”

— Danny Hancock, Global Operations Manager at Lorna Jane



[Read the case study](#)

5 expert tips for international shipping

1 Make the most of your data

Leverage your valuable data – turn numbers and analytics from the platforms you use, into actionable tips that push your business forward.

By analysing carrier data, such as delivery times, shipping costs and customer satisfaction ratings, you gain a clear understanding of delivery performance, allowing you to make informed decisions about which services meet your unique needs across different regions.

Additionally, integrating data from your eCommerce platform provides a holistic view of customer behaviours and market trends, allowing for precise adjustments to your shipping strategies. This powerful combination of insights ensures your international operations are both efficient and aligned with market demands, setting a solid foundation for global expansion.

You can use Starshipit to get a holistic overview of your shipping performance, including whether your carriers are meeting their DIFOT requirements, how many orders you're shipping, packages sent and more.



2 Easily manage international returns

Managing international returns is critical for maintaining happy customers and loyalty across borders. What's more, when your customers know that returns are an option, they'll be more likely to purchase from you in the first place [\(1\)](#).



Starshipit streamlines the returns process, making it as simple for your international customers as it is for your local ones. With easy-to-navigate return portals and clear instructions, customers can initiate returns without hassle, building their trust in your brand.

This reduces the complexity associated with cross-border returns, including handling duties and taxes, ensuring that products are returned without a hitch. This not only improves the customer experience but could also positively impact repeat business and customer reviews, which is gold when it comes to long-term success in new markets. Additionally, it minimises the time and resources you spend on managing returns, allowing you to focus on growing other areas of your business.

3

Use advanced inventory optimisation

When it comes to international shipping, understanding advanced inventory optimisation techniques will be a game-changer for retailers trying to scale efficiently.

These techniques are not just about keeping the right amount of stock; they're about smart, strategic positioning of your inventory to meet global demands quickly and effectively. By utilising these techniques, you can:

- Accurately predict market trends.
- Adjust your stock levels in real-time.
- Ensure that popular products are always within reach for your international customers.



Technology like Inventory Management Software (IMS) and Warehouse management Systems do more than monitor stock levels; they enable strategic inventory positioning, meaning your products are readily available for your international customers.

This level of precision in inventory management optimises shipping times and costs, and elevates customer satisfaction by delivering a top-notch shopping experience.

4

Utilise powerful cross-border eCommerce technologies

Cross-border eCommerce technologies are specialised digital tools designed to simplify and facilitate international online sales.

They can complete a variety of functions to tackle the complexities of selling and shipping products in different countries. They also allow retailers to scale and grow at their own pace, without being overwhelmed by all the logistical challenges.

This can include things like:

- currency conversion, to display prices in the local currency of your customer;
- language translation features, to make your website accessible to a global audience;
- localised payment gateways, to offer preferred local payment methods.

Platforms like Starshipit handle international tax and duty calculations, ensuring compliance with local laws and regulations. They also provide logistics support, such as automated customs documentation and real-time tracking, to streamline the shipping process. Essentially, these tools are built to manage the tricky parts of international commerce, making it just as straightforward as domestic sales.



5

Keep sustainability in mind

Adopting sustainable practices in international shipping is essential for businesses aiming to minimise their environmental footprint while expanding globally.

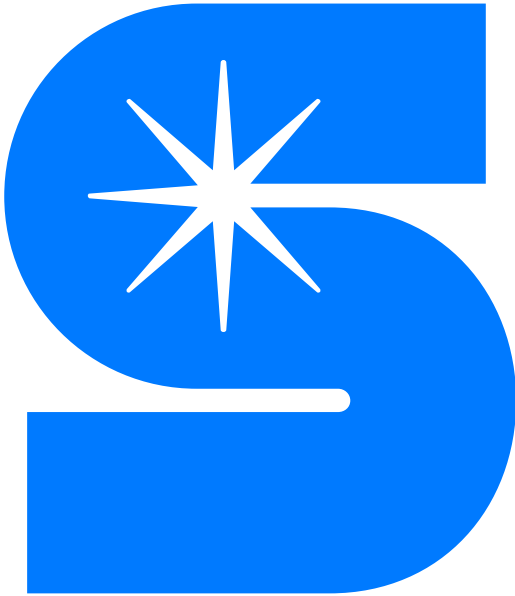
This could involve:

- Using eco-friendly packaging when fulfilling orders
- Optimising shipping routes to reduce carbon emissions
- Choosing carriers that are committed to sustainability and offer sustainable products (like DHL GoGreen Plus).

These efforts not only demonstrate a dedication to environmental responsibility, but also resonate with eco-conscious shoppers worldwide, enhancing brand reputation and customer loyalty. Additionally, sustainable shipping practices contribute to long-term operational efficiencies, reducing waste and potentially lowering costs.

For businesses looking to stand out in the international market, incorporating sustainability into their shipping strategy is not just an ethical choice, but a strategic one that aligns with the evolving expectations of customers worldwide.





Starshipit

How to start shipping internationally

As we said at the start, offering international shipping can open up a tonne of opportunities to expand your business, just as long as you've got a strategy in place for each step of the journey. With the help of an integrated shipping platform, you can greatly reduce the admin time and focus on your next market to conquer.

[Book a demo](#)
[Start a 30 day free trial](#)

Starshipit					New	Printed	Shipped	Returns
Select view		Filter orders						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Order #	Customer	Country	Courier				
<input type="checkbox"/>	54363	Edmund Millar	AU	Australia Post				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	54364	Izabel Newman	NZ	DHL Express	PRINT			
<input type="checkbox"/>	54365	Felix Rayner	FR	Deutsche Post				
<input type="checkbox"/>	54366	Stuart Olson	DE	DPD				
<input type="checkbox"/>	54367	Olivia Davidson	IT	Evri				

Get in touch with one of our team to book a demo, or start a 30-day free trial today (no credit card required).



 **Starshipit**