

# Save Money by Packing More Efficiently

*Packing and shipping wall decor products more efficiently can save you money by reducing labor costs, speeding up shipments, and minimizing damage*

By Jim Burke

After your product is manufactured, you need to get it to your customers without damage and in the most efficient manner. One of the most interesting details of a production framing operation just might be the packaging and shipping of the finished goods. The fact is that it can be very efficient or very inefficient, depending on how you handle it.

For large volumes of finished frames with glass, mats, etc., a bulk packaging system can be used if a customer is receiving the shipment in bulk at one location. If your orders are divided into smaller amounts for shipment to many locations, then your packaging set up must match the order size, and sometimes the differences from one order to another can create packing problems.

There are many machines and systems available today for efficient packaging of just about anything, so it's hard to know where you should start and what to include. For production framing, assume that open frames or finished frames with glass and content are being packed and shipped. The volume for each order will determine what system you incorporate. For small quantities of small items, you might ship by UPS, FedEx, or other couriers. Small quantities of large items might need to be shipped by truck freight. And large quantities of any size will more than likely need to be shipped by truck freight on pallets with protective wrapping.

Which system best serves your needs? In today's market, with changing clients and specific niches to fill, all of these options could be needed.

## Simple Packing System

The first stage would be a simple system for small- to medium-sized frames packed in bulk for shipping



*Stacking frames vertically and protecting the corners especially helps larger framed pictures arrive safely with minimal damage.*

to one location. Using cardboard corner protectors is pretty much standard. They also help keep frames apart for boxing and shipping. Whether to fasten them to the frame is the only question. While some customers may request that you do not staple the corners to the frame, most times you will staple them on the back so they don't come off during shipping or handling at the customer's location. If the finished frames have been shrink-wrapped for protection, a simple corrugated sheet between each layer may be all that's required. This would also allow higher density freight rates.

The size of the shipping box will depend on the overall quantity of each size of frame and the total number of frames to be shipped in each order. If the order is for hundreds or even thousands per shipment, the boxes can be quite large, such as Gaylords (large, heavy duty, reusable corrugated boxes sized to

fit a standard pallet), which hold as many frames as possible.

Larger frames will normally be loaded vertically in a large box to protect the glass from stress loads. When using smaller boxes, small frames can be stacked one on top of the other, with protection between each level. Keep in mind that up, down, top, and bottom are relative directions for smaller boxes that can be rolled and tossed around by delivery companies. So packing has to be viewed from a three-dimensional point of view. What starts as top and bottom when packed can quickly become sideways and upside down during shipping. If small boxes will be stacked by your people on larger pallet loads, then you can be more discriminating about packing direction inside the boxes.

Very large frames need to be packaged vertically with spacers or padding to keep them tight, so they don't rack back and forth during shipping. Padding on the sides or top and bottom might be necessary to eliminate damage to glass or frames. For mirrors in poly frames, it is also very important that the frames don't get twisted or racked during shipping. The internal weight can be greater than the frame and wreak havoc on the corners. The corners for large mirror frames made from poly moulding might need to be reinforced with wooden corner wedges or metal brackets to survive shipping.

## Special Packaging Machinery

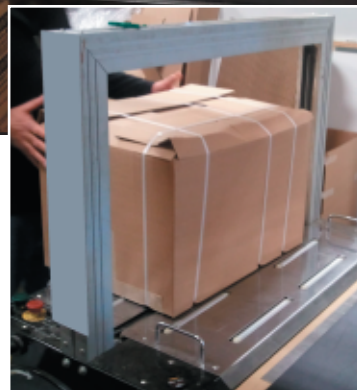
Depending on the type of package you need to ship, there are a number of machines that can make your job easier. Any or all of the following equipment might work for you, depending on the job at hand. Payback on each investment depends on your requirements and the overall usage, but the time saved and increased efficiency might be just what you need. To determine your needs, consider whether shipping or packaging is taking you too much time or too much money for the quantity you ship. Finding cheaper materials may not be the answer. Efficiency may be the cost saver for you, instead.

## Protective Corner Machines

There are machines for production framing that fold and fasten the cardboard corners to your frames faster than your people can do it by hand. This eliminates the folding parties everyone has in which you first fold the corners and throw them in a big box, then put the corners on the frames as needed. A more automated approach can be a real timesaver. The cost of the corners might be slightly higher than what you pay now, but the labor savings could easily outstrip the difference. Also consider the total output for each day with more automation.

## Strapping Machines

For individual frames or combinations of one to three framed pieces, you might pad the entire bundle, wrap them in corrugated board, and strap instead of tape them. Strapping machines can really speed up the packaging process. This technique works well on all sizes of boxes or packages up to the limit of the strapping machine itself. The object is to save labor and tape costs. Several well-placed plastic straps can do the job in



*A bridge-type strapping machine is usually automatic and therefore slightly faster than a semi-automatic one.*

seconds that would take multiple tape wraps and minutes to accomplish.

Powered strapping machines come in two varieties, automatic and semi-automatic. Flat top machines, which require you to grab the strapping and position it over the package, are semi-automatic. Machines with bridges over the top are generally automatic; you don't touch the strapping. You activate the process and the machine applies the strapping, heat-welds the end, and cuts it for you. These machines naturally cost more initially but are faster and could be more productive depending on your needs. Used machines are also available, which can drastically reduce your investment. Sometimes a local strapping supplier knows where to find used equipment. Consumables are the mainstay for the local distributor on these products. New machines can run thousands of dollars whereas used units can be in the hundreds.

## Pallet Wrap Machines

If you presently shrink-wrap pallets with multiple boxes

to protect the integrity of an entire load, then a wrapping machine could save you time. How often you ship this type of pallet will determine the feasibility of such an investment. These machines spin the load on a turntable while the stretch film is paid out from a large roll on the side. The object is to save time and money



Turntable machines rotate a pallet while the stretch film is wrapped around the shipment—a lot faster than doing the job by hand.

and make more shipments per day. Some of these turntables can wrap 40 or more loads per hour, greatly increasing your output. They can be quite an investment, but used equipment is available through auctions or used machine distributors. New machines cost \$6,000 to \$10,000 depending on speed and loads while used units can range from \$2,500 to \$6,000.

### Foam-in-place Fill Machines

If you need to ship many small frames or packaged items in larger boxes, a foam-in-place system might prove worthwhile. Most use polyurethane foam sprayed



A foam-in-place system uses a two-part polyurethane foam that is sprayed or poured into plastic pouches or bags. This expands, filling voids in a box and provides cushioning.

or poured into plastic pouches or bags. The two-part packaging foam expands, filling the voids in the box and provides cushioning and protection. Again, this is very efficient and speeds up the entire process of packing and shipping for certain types of shipments. This type of system also allows you to create trays or inserts using simple plywood molds, including protective trays for horizontal packaging for individually boxed frames. There is also a new “green” product available that uses bio-friendly foam instead of urethane.

### Air Fill Packaging

Air fill packaging can also be used to fill voids in boxes and provide cushioning at a lower price point and quicker payback than foam-in-place systems. These are called air fill, air pillow, void fill, etc., and the sizes and suppliers seem endless. For packing larger fram-

ing orders, it might prove to be just the ticket to speed up shipping and reduce overall costs. The polybag material comes rolled up flat and is inflated and



This tabletop machine produces air fill packing that is light in weight and helps cushion the product against damage, especially for larger orders.

sealed in-line at fast rates. The finished package weight is also lower than using paper or corrugated fill to do the same job.

These are some of the ways to help speed up packaging and shipping of many different products, not just framed art or empty frames. As your packing needs change, it will be necessary to look at all the ways you can save money by becoming more efficient at packaging your final product and safely getting it to your customer. The key here is to save money by saving time, increasing your product shipment, and having fewer damaged products arrive at your customers. ■

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