

Asked & Answered

The Evolution of Industrial Shipping

Innovations in shipping supplies make for stronger packages — and lower costs

Dave Fromm, field sales director for Staples Business Advantage's Industrial Shipping Supplies, has been working in industrial shipping for 20 years and has a unique perspective on the changes in the industry.

“Some of the innovations in this industry might appear small, but they are important for shippers to be aware of,” says Fromm. “In particular, new materials are available that can do much more for less cost, and that’s always a top priority to shippers.”

The key, says Fromm, is working with a shipping products partner that can help you understand the latest offerings and how to apply them in your business.

“We often find companies are buying shipping products without knowing what exactly they are buying, or what options are available,” he says. “That’s where we come in.”

Fromm has identified six product categories in industrial shipping that have seen new innovations that shippers need to consider.

Stretch Wrap

“When I started in the business, the stretch-wrap films that were available consisted of mainly three-layer films,” Fromm says. “Today we’re using nine-layer films, which means you can use less product and reduce costs. Chemists at the film makers are always working to create a substrate that is lighter but stronger — and shippers can benefit from that, but only if they know how to evaluate the options.”

Today, a suite of high-performance films can offer benefits specific to the environment and application the film is being used in.

Void Fill

“In the late 1990s there were essentially three ways to cushion product: Bubble Wrap, kraft paper or newsprint, and packing peanuts,” Fromm says. “Those were the only options for many years.”

Today, delivery systems are more important as customers look to save on labor costs and get more throughput in their shipping operations. Air pillows, as well as variations such as “bubble on demand,” and paper delivery systems are much more customizable and offer faster and automated shipment packaging.



Question:

What six industrial shipping product categories have recently seen new innovations?

Answer:

Stretch wrap, void fill, strapping, boxes, tape and poly bags.

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Continued from page 1

In addition, with warehouse space at a premium, these systems enable customers to save space for their raw material and finished goods instead of filling their warehouses with bulky products such as Bubble Wrap and packing peanuts.

Strapping

“The standard used to be steel strapping, which is extremely dangerous,” says Fromm. “If it pops open, you have a metal strap flying through the air — it is rare, but incredibly dangerous.”

Steel strapping is still in use by some shippers and industries, but polypropylene and polyester strapping are less expensive and safer alternatives. Different varieties can be used depending on the job.

Boxes

“There is an entire science behind the chemistry of the paper box,” says Fromm. “The paper industry is constantly working to build stronger boxes that use fewer natural resources to help the box protect the products inside without collapsing. Also, new boxes can help the shipping tape and stretch wrap stay in place.”

In short, a box is not just a box. In many cases it’s the direct connection between shipper and customer, so it’s important to have a shipping products partner that understands the strengths — and weaknesses — of various box types.

Tape

Historically, shipping tape has been differentiated by its film backing, adhesive and thickness. Like some of the other categories we have discussed, chemical advances continue to make films stronger and adhesives stick better.

“Different adhesives adhere to different kinds of boxes better, or adhere better in cold or dirty environments,” says Fromm. The tape, box and environment must be suited for one another for maximum effectiveness.

Poly Bags

Similar to tape and stretch-wrap films, polyethylene bags have seen some changes. Today, they can be differentiated by the chemical makeup of the bag and chosen based on the customer’s need.

“A simple plastic bag used to ship nuts and bolts could be chemically constructed very differently than a bag required to meet clean-room specifications for medical devices, or for applications requiring automation and/or printing,” says Fromm.

In all of these cases, having a trusted partner to help guide your product decisions can make a difference.

To learn how the experts at Staples Business Advantage can help you determine the best shipping materials for your needs, visit StaplesAdvantage.com/StaplesShipping



Dave Fromm started in the packaging business in 1997 working for Chiswick Packaging. When Staples purchased Chiswick in 2007, he became the general manager of Staples Industrial and is now the field sales director for Staples Industrial Shipping Supplies.