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Right-sized and on-brand:
Deloitte's omnichannel
delivery packaging study

Executive summary

Packaging for e-commerce deliveries plays multiple, high-impact roles for companies. It shapes the customer experience by protecting products in transit while reinforcing brand identity at the moment of delivery. It's also often the largest cost component after shipping and labor—one that must simultaneously serve as a visible proof point of corporate sustainability commitments.

Incorporating brand identity into delivery packaging can strengthen recognition and confidence at the moment of unboxing, turning a routine delivery into a consistent extension of the brand experience. Second, right-sizing delivery packages for efficiency helps eliminate excess materials and “empty air,” which can reduce packaging and shipping costs while also improving handling and reducing waste. Third, packaging to meet sustainability commitments brings published charters and mission statements to life through practical decisions—materials, design choices, and process changes customers can see and value.

Across all three themes, the imperative is the same: Packaging decisions should be designed to have an impact on internal cost-to-serve while improving customer experience.

When packaging is optimized for brand, efficiency, and sustainability together, companies can reduce friction for customers (less waste to dispose of, fewer avoidable materials), protect loyalty, and deliver a clearer, more credible story about what the organization stands for.



Brand identity: Incorporating brand identity into delivery packaging means designing the box, materials, and unboxing experience to reflect your brand's look and values, which is important because it turns delivery into a consistent customer touchpoint that can build trust and strengthen loyalty.



Right-sizing: Right-sizing delivery packages for efficiency means matching package size and materials to the product to minimize empty space and excess packaging, which is important because it can reduce shipping and material costs while improving the customer experience by cutting waste.



Sustainability: Packaging to meet sustainability commitments means aligning packaging materials and delivery methods with published sustainability goals, which is important because it makes those commitments visible to customers and can strengthen trust while reducing unnecessary waste.

Incorporating brand identity into delivery packaging

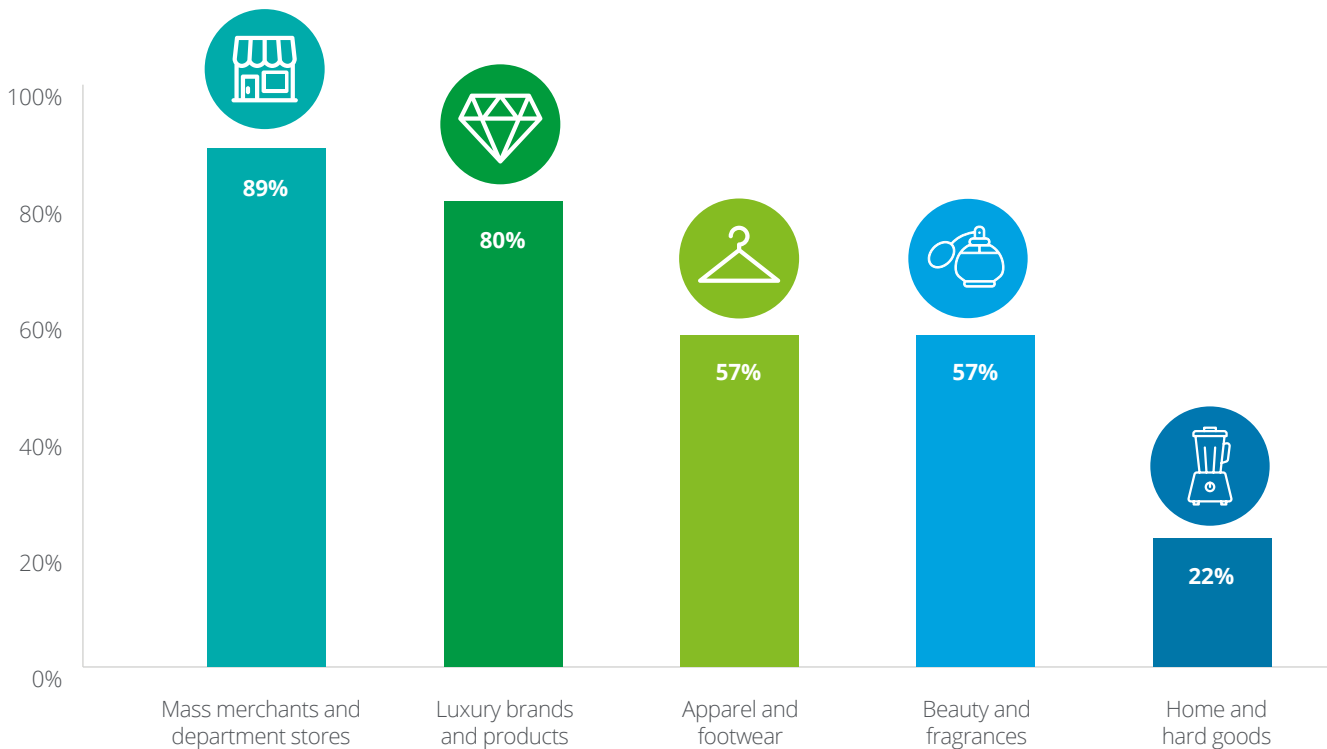
Branded delivery packaging matters because it's one of the few physical, high-attention moments in an otherwise digital journey—every box, mailer, and insert effectively becomes a mini billboard that travels through carriers, doorsteps, mailrooms, and households, reinforcing recognition far beyond the original purchaser. Done well, it also upgrades the “unboxing” into a differentiated experience (clarity, care, delight), which can translate into stronger trust, higher repeat intent, and more word of mouth—especially when competitors ship in plain, generic packaging.

Companies should make sure they aren't lagging on branded delivery packaging because “plain box” shipments can quickly signal a lower-effort experience versus both direct competitors and the broader market. When branded packaging becomes the norm for a product type, it shifts from a “nice to have” to a baseline expectation.

For example, with nearly 90% of mass merchants and department stores shipping in branded packaging, other sellers of similar or the same products risk customers choosing to buy through resellers or large retailers—where the end-to-end delivery experience feels more polished—rather than buying direct from a brand or specialty store.

A lack of packaging material branding can undercut even the strongest store and digital brand identities if the same level of design, quality, and overall “feel” doesn't carry through to the delivery experience.

Deloitte performance test results: Branded materials used in online delivery packaging



Luxury brands often use a “discreet outside, elevated inside” approach: They keep the exterior shipper plain to protect anonymity in transit, then deliver the full brand experience through interior printing and materials. This can be a more effective theft deterrent than highly visible security tape, which may unintentionally signal that the package contains high-value goods and increase theft risk.



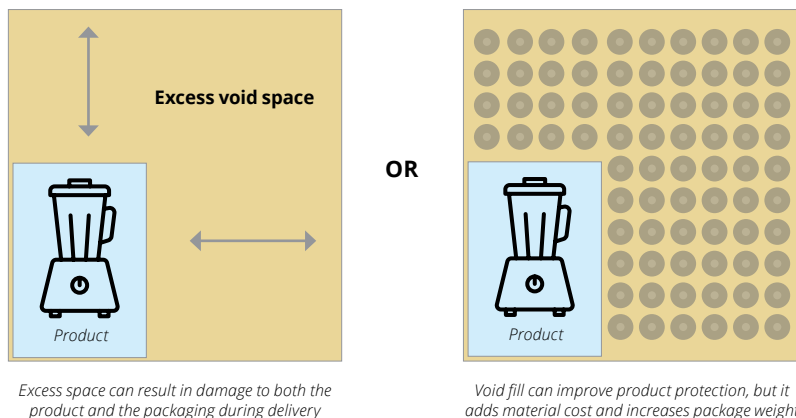
Right-sizing delivery packages for efficiency

Using the correct size shipping container is critical for online deliveries because oversize packaging drives up material usage and cost, increases dimensional weight and delivery expense, and creates excess space that allows products to shift in transit. That movement can damage the product and the packaging, undermining the customer experience and increasing the likelihood of damage-related returns and replacement shipments.

Void fill materials can help protect products, but they're best reserved for fragile items; using them simply to fill excess empty space from an oversized package can add unnecessary cost and complexity to online fulfillment.

Every piece of unnecessary material added to an online delivery increases cost for the company and leaves customers with more packaging to dispose of.

Oversize carton impacts



Deloitte performance test results: Automated versus manual mailer sizing

Mailers we received that were packaged using automated equipment (versus manual packing) were almost three times larger and had 40% lower fill efficiency. This suggests a shift to automation without accurate product dimensions, resulting in automated mailers that are four to five times larger than the actual products. Implementing automation without accurate data (or in-line measuring components) puts return on investment at risk, because labor savings can be eroded by higher material costs.

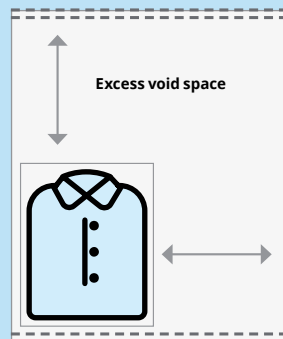
Manually packaged mailers



Packing associates often disregard system guidance and visually select the mailer sizes they use

FILL EFFICIENCY 65%

Automated mailers



FILL EFFICIENCY 25%

Oversize mailer impacts

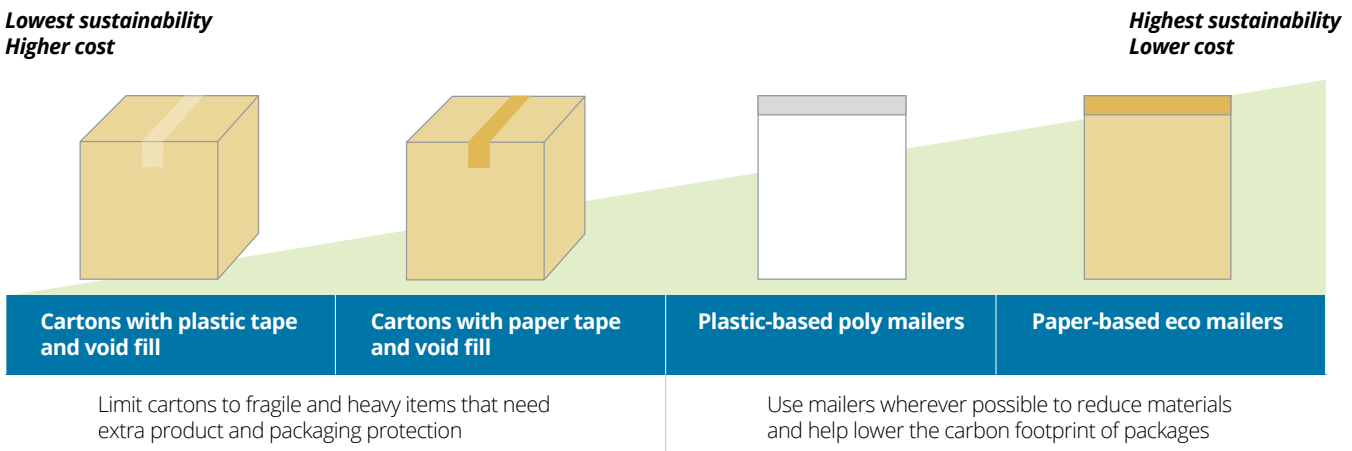
- Additional material costs can exceed labor savings.
- Excess film can get caught in conveyor systems, resulting in merchandise and equipment damage.
- Product movement during delivery can cause extreme wrinkling and poor merchandise presentation.

Packaging to meet sustainability commitments

Because e-commerce is the shopping channel with the highest environmental impact, every practical consideration should be on the table to reduce that footprint—starting with sustainable materials across online operations and packaging. Done well, this can deliver a trifecta of benefits: improved sustainability outcomes, lower costs through smarter material choices and rightsized packaging, and a better customer experience by addressing concerns about environmental harm and the burden of disposing of excess packaging. Paper-free packaging is a critical part of that shift: Paper invoice inserts that are ultimately discarded can be replaced with digital alternatives (for example, email receipts, QR codes, or account-based order histories). Deloitte testing has found that more than 60% of companies have already eliminated paper invoices in their packages—making paper-free the new industry baseline.

Like brand identity, companies need to ensure their environmental commitments—published in sustainability charters and mission statements—are visible and credible to consumers through the materials and methods used in delivery packaging.

Sustainability & and cost index by delivery container type



Industry-leading opportunity

Some companies are further reducing packaging-related environmental impact by eliminating exterior shipping packaging. One approach is to collaborate with suppliers, so products arrive in “ship-ready” condition—ready to deliver safely without an additional carton or mailer. Companies can engage environmentally conscious customers by offering a packaging-free delivery option at checkout.



Shipping with no exterior packaging

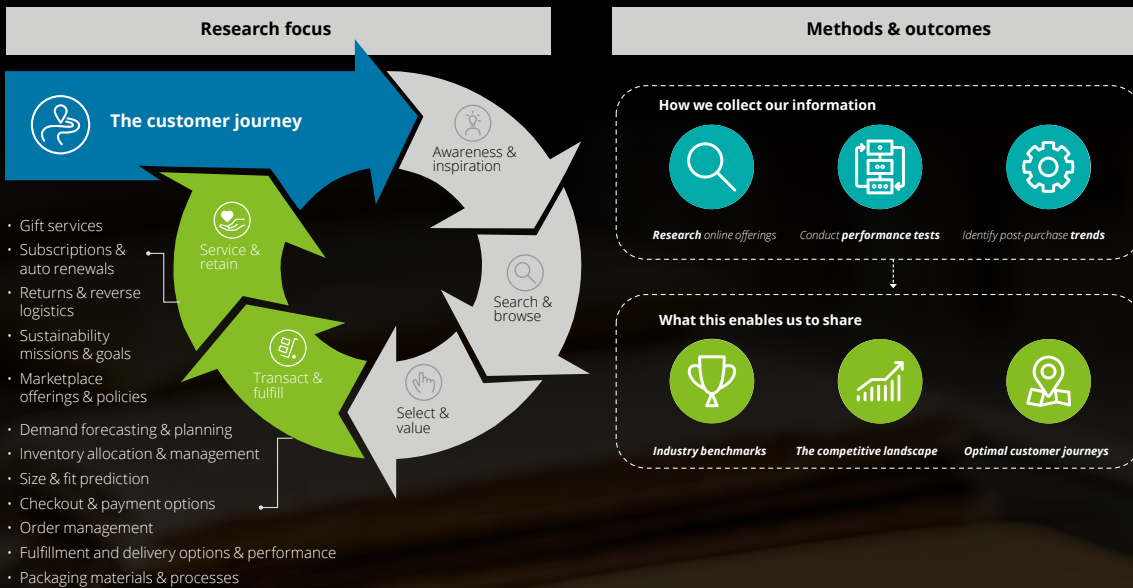
Deloitte's omnichannel competitive landscape services

Deloitte's omnichannel competitive landscape research and assessment services can help companies quickly understand where they are leading or lagging key competitors across the end-to-end customer journey. We benchmark current capabilities, identify the gaps that matter most, and translate the findings into

a practical set of priorities. We can also help you build the business case—linking improvements to customer experience and cost drivers—and support implementation of leading capabilities, from operating model and process changes to enabling technology and performance measurement.

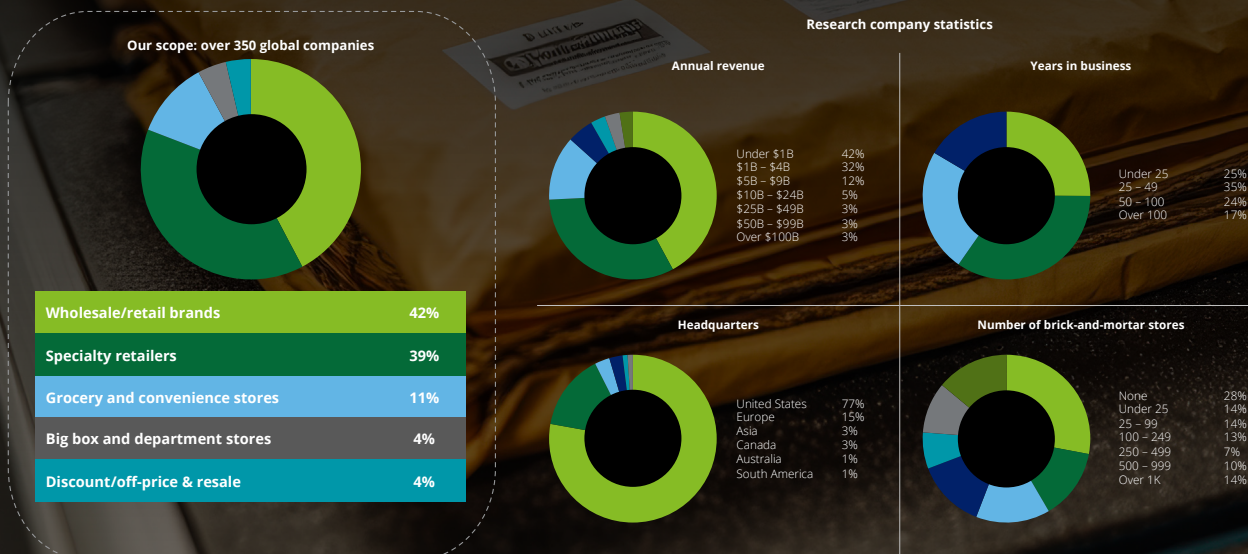
Deloitte omnichannel competitive landscape research

We monitor and test the services retail companies offer across the post-purchase customer experience, including capabilities to transact and fill orders as well as services that retain ongoing loyalty



Research companies: Key statistics

We include companies of varying sizes, maturity, and operating models to capture the broadest spectrum of capabilities across the retail industry



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