How to Optimize Last-Mile Logistics: A Guide to Exceed Customer Expectations



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Contents

The last mile: The most important step in your delivery process	3
What is the last-mile delivery?	
What are the challenges of the last mile?	4
Overcoming the challenges of the last mile	4
How have COVID-19 shopping trends changed the last mile?	5
Meeting the challenges of the last mile head-on	7
What does last-mile logistics success look like?	7
The three biggest challenges of the last mile	8
Challenge 1: Fulfilling increased e-commerce demand in urban centres	8
Challenge 2: Increasing consumer expectations for a personalized experience	9
Challenge 3: Logistical issues that can't be anticipated1	0
Purolator's Mission Critical – Customized delivery to the rescue 1	1
Winning the last-mile challenge with exemplary customer service1	1
How have calls for sustainability changed the last mile?	2
Choosing a last-mile carrier1	3
Your last-mile carrier: An extension of your brand 1	3
Key considerations when partnering with a last-mile carrier 1	4
Win the last-mile delivery challenge with Purolator	5
Purolator. We are where your customers are	5



The last-mile: The most important step in your delivery process

Last-mile delivery is by no means a new concept. In fact, it has existed for as long as consumers have been getting mailorder purchases. Long before we started making purchases from our laptops or mobile devices, the last mile was simply the final step in the linear movement of goods – from the warehouse and the retailer, to the carrier and finally to the end recipient – and it wasn't given a lot of thought. Only a few years ago, delivery options were limited with minimal visibility into the delivery journey.

Then, along came a sharp rise in e-commerce purchases, and consumers started to expect a similar level of convenience from the retailers they were used to visiting in person. These expectations drove businesses and last-mile carriers to look for ways to optimize the last-mile delivery. Last-mile logistics is often the most complex and expensive part of the delivery process. Pair that with the exceptionally high <u>customer expectations</u> for same-day or next-day shipping, and you can start to see the challenges retailers have to overcome. The pressure is high to cut costs, improve transparency and speed up delivery to stand out against e-commerce giants.

What is last-mile delivery?

The last mile is simply the final step in the transportation of goods – from the warehouse or retailer, to the delivery carrier, and finally to the collection point or customer's home.

What are the challenges of the last mile?

Cost and complexity are the main challenges of the last mile. The last mile can involve many moving parts: from warehouse storage, to moving goods from pallets to trucks, to businesses and retailers, to distributing packages to many different customer locations. The participants need to get extremely effective at determining the most direct and quick route. This is last-mile optimization.

The last mile can be especially challenging because of the increase in shipping volume from e-commerce orders, the need to navigate dense urban areas, and finally, overcoming unexpected issues.

Overcoming the challenges of the last mile

In this ebook, we'll show you how to meet the challenges of the last mile head-on. Then you'll be able to overcome these top three challenges and optimize your last-mile logistics:

- 1. Fulfilling increased e-commerce demand in urban centres
- 2. Meeting consumer expectations for a personalized experience
- 3. Overcoming logistical issues that can't be anticipated

Businesses have to overcome these challenges all while delivering with speed and transparency. Speeding up last-mile delivery requires businesses to create the most direct and efficient routes to their customer locations, even in the most densely populated areas. In addition, they need to set delivery expectations with customers by closing technology gaps. Adding tracking technology to their trucks, systems for addressing delays and realtime notifications for customers (via SMS) are some of the ways they can create a better customer experience.

Over the years, last-mile carrier options have improved drastically, but some businesses still struggle to provide a streamlined experience.

In this ebook, we explore the last-mile delivery – from the evolution of the last mile, through to some of the most common last-mile challenges and **how you can solve them for your business.**



How have COVID-19 shopping trends changed the last mile?

In 2020, COVID-19 impacted the way consumers buy

products, fueling unprecedented growth for e-commerce purchases and other non-traditional shopping methods. Working against this increase in volume, major disruption to the global supply chain happened at the same time.

What's causing supply chain disruption? There are many reasons for the bottlenecks. Many overseas manufacturers closed down due to COVID-19 concerns, which severely reduced capacity and spiked up shipping costs. Other capacity constraints have shown up in the form of overcrowded ports and warehouse and truck shortages. All of these supply shortages and shipping delays have created more reasons for businesses to step up their communication and transparency with customers. Together, businesses and shipping providers had to overcome logistics setbacks to deliver the best customer experience.



Here are two trends that impacted the retail and consumer packaged goods (CPG) spaces, and how these trends will likely have long-term effects on the last mile.

Retail businesses are fully embracing omnichannel strategies.

Omnichannel services were growing in popularity before COVID-19, but when brick-and-mortar stores had to close for in-person shopping, having an <u>omnichannel strategy</u> became more of a necessity, rather than a competitive advantage.

In an attempt to hold onto their market share, retailers created seamless omnichannel experiences for the entire buyer journey – from awareness to purchase evaluation. For example, a shopper could choose to research online, view at a store, buy through the e-commerce site, get the item shipped to a closer store, then review on the businesses' social media page.

What this means for the last mile...

Shoppers interact with a business using a variety of different channels to complete a purchase, and businesses need to have resilient supply chains to ensure product availability for a quick delivery or pick up. This means the last mile is no longer a journey from A to B. Supply chains must move in new directions. For example, items can be shipped from one store to another for pickup orders or from store-to-home to facilitate faster turnaround times than the traditional warehouse-to-home or warehouse-to-store delivery route.

Consumer packaged goods (CPG) have secured a strong online presence.

Prior to COVID-19, <u>CPG products</u> (such as groceries, cleaning products and personal hygiene products) were generally purchased in-store rather than online.

However, during the first week of COVID-19 lockdowns (March 7-14, 2020) in the U.S., for example, CPG online sales increased by an astounding 91%.¹ At the end of 2020, CPG e-commerce purchases were up a net USD \$63 billion over 2019.²

What this means for the last mile...

As online shopping grows for CPG purchases, some businesses are shifting their operations to dark stores by using store locations as mini-fulfillment centres. These "stores" allow businesses to decrease their last mile by having products available closer to the customer. This in turn can help to reduce last-mile costs, while making it quicker to deliver to customers.



Ready to master your omnichannel strategy? Read our ebook for more tips.



How COVID-19 rapidly boosted e-commerce sales



Retail e-commerce market share saw 10 years of growth in the first three months of 2020.³

CPG ecommerce sales increased by an astounding 91%.

Meeting the challenges of the last mile head-on

Imagine that you're on the verge of winning a 10K race that you've spent the good part of the year preparing for. You've maintained a healthy diet and stuck to a rigid training routine. The finish line is well within sight, you're feeling strong and... you trip. You limp to the finish line, with nothing to show for all that hard work but scraped knees and a bruised ego.

It's an unpleasant scenario, but it's also the perfect analogy for how the last mile is truly the "make or break" part of a transaction. No matter how much time, money or manpower you invest, it's all worthless to a consumer if you fail to meet their expectations in the end. On the other hand, a great last-mile delivery experience can have a <u>lasting impression on your customers</u>. Communicating with your customers, getting their package there quickly and crossing the finish line successfully builds trust. Once you set the tone for a great delivery you can follow through on, you're likely to establish brand loyalty and repeat sales.

What does last-mile success look like?

Before we tackle the challenges of the last mile, let's take a quick look at what makes for successful and efficient lastmile logistics for both consumers and businesses. Customers increasingly want greater visibility and reliability for their deliveries. Businesses want their shipping partner to help them meet customer standards, plus they need support in their supply chain network.

For consumers



v and real-time

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Visibility and real-time order tracking

Delivered on time



Shipments transported safely and securely



Flexible delivery options



No missed deliveries

For businesses



Supply chain experts available



Inventory tracking

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No handoffs



Large distribution network



All these components (and more) help to build an ideal last-mile journey, but in reality there are so many variables that can turn the last mile from being a simplistic node of a journey, into a logistical headache.

Your supply chain – and specifically the last mile of it – is a process that needs to be continuously optimized in order to keep up with <u>customer expectations</u>, direct competition and, of course, the e-commerce giants. We explore three of the biggest last-mile challenges and share our top solutions that could help you win the last mile.

The 3 biggest challenges of the last mile

Challenge 1

Fulfilling increased e-commerce demand in urban centres

Only a few years ago, it was a ground-breaking stat to report that about 80% of Canadians were hitting the "buy" button online. Then, COVID-19 restrictions caused online shopping to become more of a necessity than an option. This not only showcases the rise in online shoppers, but also shows that shoppers are choosing to continue to choose e-commerce when we're at a point where in-store retail is opening back up again.

Nearly 50% of all deliveries occur within urban centres,⁵ emphasizing the need for a speedy last-mile solution to maximize on capacity delivered in a day. The last mile is spent navigating busy routes, complete with strict parking/ idling restrictions, leaving little time to attempt the delivery. This is a particularly evident problem in buildings that don't have a concierge to hand a package over to or when packages require signing for. If a package isn't able to be handed over to the recipient, the delivery is missed.

Another similar issue is many customers don't like their packages left on their doorstep – and rightly so – due to the growing issue of doorstep theft. If someone isn't able to answer their door, drivers may have to take the package with them, so the delivery is missed. Alternatively, the delivery driver can leave the package on their doorstep so the delivery is made, but this can leave the package exposed to theft.

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More people are buying more online. The average online basket spend has increased by 14% over the past two years.⁴

Winning the last-mile challenge with innovative alternatives to home deliveries

Thankfully, new innovations mean that missing a delivery, or a package left on the doorstep, are on the way to becoming a thing of the past. Last-mile carriers, including Purolator, have installed convenient <u>parcel lockers</u> in a growing number of condos, shopping malls and other community facilities. A parcel locker is a secure location to drop packages when the customer isn't home that allows for 24/7 access (or access for as long as the building is accessible). It's been so successful that there's been a 46% reduction of missed deliveries where lockers are available.⁶ Purolator offers lockers and many <u>other access points</u> around urban centres to facilitate pick up and drop offs. Partnering with a carrier that has multiple access points in their network coverage creates ease for customers and increases last-mile optimization successes.

A similar concept is <u>Purolator's Mobile Quick Stop</u> – our award-winning pickup location on wheels. This innovative solution provides customers and businesses with the convenience of collecting their packages close by within their neighbourhood, at public transport stations and other spots that are central to a community. Best of all, they're open beyond the traditional delivery time slots, so it's easy to pick up a package in the evening, after work hours, for example.

There are more ways than ever <u>to make pickups</u> <u>convenient for customers</u>. Delivery providers can partner with stores to provide secure locations closer to your customers, such as Michaels or Staples, where they can pick up or drop off their shipments.



Challenge 2

Increasing consumer expectations for a personalized experience

Back in the days before the e-commerce boom, it was much easier to deliver as promised. Deliveries weren't customizable – they took a lot longer and there was no flexibility on delivery options. Plus, online tracking wasn't available at all, so it was impossible for customers to know when to expect their delivery. Shipping was simply like this because there was no online retailer providing a better alternative. Providing a convenient and <u>personalized experience</u> has become a big selling factor, particularly in retail. Once used to gain a competitive edge, it's becoming commonplace. In fact, a recent study showed that 80% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase from a brand that provides personalized experiences.⁷

Businesses now need to provide an array of delivery options to match the on-demand and personalized characteristics that customers are used to.

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Customers' last-mile delivery preferences are growing to be as on-demand, convenient and customized as their Netflix and Spotify playlists. <u>Read this article to learn more</u>.

Winning the last-mile challenge by keeping up with trends

It's no longer enough for consumers to simply receive their package without prior notification – customers want control of their delivery. In fact, 93% want to receive updates on their order throughout its journey.⁸ This is in part influenced by the capabilities offered by food delivery services like Uber and Instacart. These platforms offer recipients the option to view the real-time status of an order, make changes to the delivery while it's in transit and provide additional instructions to ensure the delivery is completed smoothly (such as providing that all-important buzzer code so the driver is able to access the building).

In the last few years, last-mile carriers have launched ways to improve the personalization of a delivery – making it a more convenient experience for the recipient. Purolator launched its own personalized delivery solution for e-commerce deliveries called Purolator Your Way. With <u>Purolator Your</u> <u>Way</u>, customers can fully track their delivery through detailed SMS notifications. Recipients have the option to customize delivery preferences, even while their delivery is en route. For example, they can choose their preferred delivery drop-off location (e.g. front door, garage or add a buzzer code). One of the most beneficial features is the opportunity to remotely sign for a package. Should the customer not be home, this feature reduces missed deliveries by allowing the customer to waive the signature requirement for certain packages.

Key features of Purolator Your Way for home deliveries and businesses

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Total visibility of

shipment journey

Clear next steps for missed delivery

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Customizable delivery preferences

<u>*</u>

release*

Digital signature



No app download required

*Digital signature release is not available for shipments requiring signature by an adult or the intended recipient (such as alcohol, cannabis, certain types of pharmaceuticals/ narcotics, etc. or other DG regulated items).

47% of consumers won't order again from a brand that provides poor delivery visibility.⁹ Give them what they want with Purolator Your Way[™]. <u>Watch this video to learn more</u>.



Challenge 3 Logistical issues that can't be anticipated

With shortened delivery windows, the longest stretch of the tracking time is often when a product has left the final distribution centre. This is where the true inefficiency of the last mile comes to light – it's the portion of the journey that has the lowest density of deliveries over a much larger area.

The most challenging aspect for retailers and CPG businesses are the factors that can't be anticipated, like:

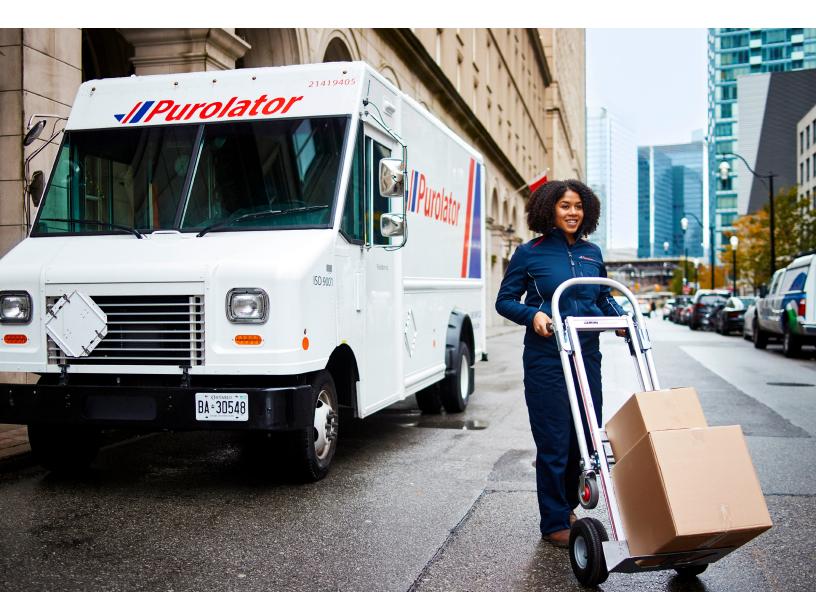
- Bad weather conditions
- Traffic congestion
- Parking restrictions
- Mix-up at the depot
- Unusually busy periods

Winning the last mile with a specialized delivery solution

Some unexpected situations call for specialized solutions. Maybe you're shipping an unusual item or face complex, unanticipated regulations. It's still crucial to get your delivery to its destination as directly and efficiently as possible, and avoid disruptions like the item being sent back.

Your last-mile carrier can be a great partner for providing custom solutions when a delivery requires it. Some of the advantages of the right partner include leveraging their:

- Knowledge to help you prepare and meet regulatory requirements
- Expertise in transporting specialized goods
- <u>Network coverage</u> for more direct options



Purolator's Mission Critical – Customized delivery to the rescue

For the most challenging and <u>urgent deliveries</u>, Purolator offers a critical service that extends coverage, optimizes routes, draws from specialized support and offers full visibility for time-sensitive deliveries.

Here's just one example of how a global biomedical company trusts <u>Mission Critical</u> to delivery it's time-sensitive shipments on time:

Challenge:

A global biomedical company needs to transport shipments of alligator blood from the U.S. to medical labs and hospitals located across Canada. Why alligator blood? So researchers can explore its strong potential for use as an antibiotic in humans.

Client requirements:

- Expedited transit (within 72 hours from the U.S.)
- Temperature control
- Maintain shipping integrity
- Regulatory compliance to CITIES standards The Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora agreement, which regulates international trade of wild animals and plants.

Solution:

<u>Mission Critical</u> offers technology and flexibility for a custom shipping solution.

- Shipments are automatically picked up from the biotech company facility based on direct flight availability to Canada.
- State-of-the-art technology determines "Best Flight Out" using real-time access to global flight schedules, factoring in fastest recovery time and flight reliability.
- 3. When in Canada, shipments are broken down and directed towards last-mile delivery to awaiting labs and hospitals.
- 4. The flexibility to use "off network" resources that are available 24/7 allows for a seamless solution to be provided on an ongoing basis with real-time tracking throughout.

Results:

The customer has full confidence their shipments will arrive consistently on time and in the desired condition for ongoing important research for their clients. The continuous monitoring aspect of the solution also provides peace of mind and high levels of customer service.

Winning the last-mile challenge with exemplary customer service

While factors such as bad weather and traffic may seem like the part where you're limited at controlling the last mile, it's actually an opportunity to stand out through customer service.

Last-mile carriers have an opportunity to simply acknowledge a less-than-perfect delivery experience upon arrival. This acknowledgement can go a long way – customers are far more likely to empathize with the situation and won't hold this against the overall shopping experience.

Beyond the benefits of providing great customer service, the downfalls of unexpected challenges can be mitigated by using tracking visibility platforms (such as Purolator Your Way) and providing the driver with contact information, so they can call the customer and explain the delay. 66

If I'm late for a pickup or delivery due to something that can't be controlled, like bad weather, unexpected traffic or a late train into the depot – it's frustrating for both the customer and myself, and I tried my best. You do get irate customers like with any job. I make sure I give them a smile and be as pleasant as I can be. I'll be honest and try to explain the situation to them."

Mike Gancarczyk, Purolator Courier

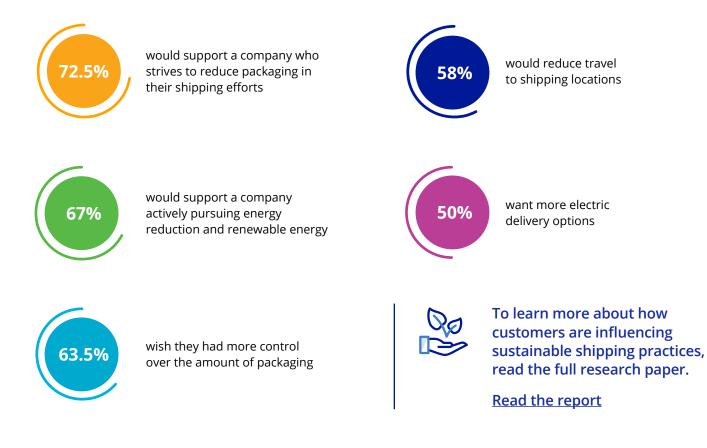
How have calls for sustainability changed the last mile?

Not only can the last mile be complicated, but it can involve many moving parts that have an environmental impact. Everything from the way products are packaged to the fuel efficiency of your carrier's transportation relates back to your company's impact.

And now more than ever, customers are inclined to support businesses with sustainability practices that are minimizing their impacts on the environment. While customers still expect speed and transparency for their deliveries, their standards are higher in regards to companies' environmental efforts. Customers are applying pressure with their spending, choosing to buy from companies that:

- Reduce packaging
- Reduce energy consumption
- Improve shipping route efficiency

How customers are influencing sustainability



It can be a great advantage to have a shipping partner who helps you think strategically about minimizing your environmental impact. For example, the right last-mile carrier can help you have systems in place to streamline your returns process – reducing packaging use and optimizing routes and processing. There are some last-mile conveniences that can have environmental benefits. The right last-mile carrier can also equip you with more of these options for getting deliveries to your customers. Here are some examples:

Solution		Benefit
•	Parcel lockers, Quick Stop kiosks, drop boxes and pickup locations	 Create route efficiencies by having centralized drop-offs and pickups
•	Touchless returns and QR codes	 Paperless printing and shipping
•	eBikes and alternative-fuel vehicles	 Cut down emissions by using efficient modes of transportation

Successfully streamlining your last mile is a win-win for both the environment and your business – helping your brand perception and loyalty.

Choosing a last-mile carrier

Your last-mile carrier: An extension of your brand

When a customer receives their order late or damaged, they're more likely to call your customer service to complain about it – not the carrier who delivered it. Worse, they'll broadcast their dissatisfaction on social media to everyone they know. Your brand may have a stellar reputation for its products and customer care, but who you choose to represent your business within the last mile matters. If you partner with a delivery service whose standards aren't as high as yours, it's your brand that ultimately pays the price. Choosing a provider to uphold your brand integrity and understand your brand to help <u>maintain or enhance your brand loyalty</u> needs to be a key factor in choosing a last-mile carrier.

In many industries, technology has removed the need for customer interaction. Real-time tracking visibility, online FAQs, reviews and resources answer many common questions and concerns. As a result, the last mile, and specifically the lastmile carrier, is a pivotal point in the overall experience.

Whether your destination is a retail store, or you ship straight to the end consumer, choosing the right last-mile carrier is an important part of the business ecosystem. It's no longer just a conversation that should occur between the operations team and a carrier. Today, C-suite executives, strategists and marketers are discussing how the capabilities of various lastmile carriers can srengthen the brand and value proposition.

46%

of consumers would share their negative experiences if a delivery is late¹⁰

14%

would abandon a business altogether after just one late delivery¹¹

Key considerations when partnering with a last-mile carrier



Do they offer more than just delivery services?

It goes without saying, you need a carrier who can handle the tougher requirements of your business. You need to ensure that your delivery partner has the ability to manage:

- Volume: Do they have the workforce and facilities available to take on mass volumes of shipments?
- **Speed:** Are there options to deliver in timeframes that meet customer expectations and that make economic sense?
- <u>Geographical reach</u>: Do they have a network that spans the outreach of your business, without the need for handoffs?

Are they able to customize, adapt and grow their services with your business?

In business, the only constant is change, and as your business evolves, you need a partner that can evolve with you – whether that's additional flexibility in delivery times, expanding your delivery area or increasing your shipment frequency.

Are they a reputable and reliable brand?

Your last-mile carrier should safeguard your products, but also be able to protect your <u>brand reputation</u>. As we pointed out earlier, the consumer equates the entire process back to your business, rather than the last-mile carrier. Errors should be infrequent, but in the case of last-minute changes or unforeseen circumstances, the last-mile carrier's customer service should be easy to reach and ready to help.



<u>Learn more</u> about customer expectations about sustainable delivery.

4

Do they have innovative services to stay ahead?

The last-mile process is changing so quickly, continual improvement is key to stay at the forefront of the latest trends and consumer expectations. Implementing the latest technology is only half the battle – you need to choose a last-mile carrier that challenges the status quo with innovative ideas to keep you ahead of the competition.

5 Do they provide "best-in-class" customer service?

It's worth repeating – your last-mile carrier is an extension of your business and your brand. It's critical to go with a carrier that gets to know your core competencies, priorities and company values. It should be clear that they feel invested in your success and truly want to help your business thrive.

6 Do they offer a personalized customer experience?

When it comes to getting packages to your customers, your last-mile carrier can help provide more convenient options that work for them. With apps like Purolator Your Way, customers can set delivery preferences and receive notifications so that they get the delivery experience they want. If your carrier has great partnerships as well, they can give your customer the option to pick up their package from a secure delivery location, like terminals or access points.

7

Do they have sustainable practices?

The demands for sustainability are louder than ever – especially in logistics. Your last-mile carrier plays an important role in your businesses' overall sustainability with practices such as their packaging, driving practices and route efficiency. Customers are increasingly interested in <u>supporting businesses with sustainable</u> <u>shipping practices</u>.

Steer clear of last-mile carriers who:

- X Are the cheapest. Don't choose a carrier on price alone. It's unlikely they'll provide the best overall value and may end up costing you more in the long run.
- Are just starting out. Don't run the risk of putting your product, your brand and your customers' trust in the hands of an inexperienced carrier.
- Are crowdsourced. Yes, it's efficient. But 75% of consumers¹² only trust an experienced, holistic and professional delivery service.
- Are not environmentally sustainable.
 Excessive packaging and inefficient routes can negatively impact your customer experience and their perception of your business.

Win the last-mile delivery challenge with Purolator

Purolator. We are where your customers are.

You can trust Purolator as your delivery services partner. Purolator services 99.9% of Canadian postal codes¹³ and we use up to 99% of our own assets to get your business across Canada.¹⁴ With our flexible and customized solutions, we reduce unnecessary hand-offs and streamline the last mile. Beyond our <u>freight</u> or <u>courier services</u>, our experts can assist with enhancing internal processes, optimizing supply chains and providing innovative tech solutions. Rest assured, with over 60 years of providing a customer-centric experience, we'll help keep people coming back to your business.

Optimize your last-mile with the largest selection of guaranteed, time-definite express shipping options from Purolator:



More drop-off and pickup points.

Enjoy more flexibility with later drop-off times and over 1,200 Purolator retail facilities, agents, Mobile Quick Stop locations across the country and <u>innovative shipping and</u> <u>delivery locations</u> to reach more customers more conveniently.



Better network visibility and security.

With Canada's largest operating courier fleet and delivery using 99% of our own assets, you get improved visibility, security and reduced damages.



Deliver to virtually any address in Canada.

Purolator delivers to 99.9% of all Canadian postal codes, allowing you to use one carrier for all of your deliveries.



Variety of delivery speeds.

Provide convenient shipping options to your customers – from fast next-day delivery options to economic ground shipping when speed isn't a priority.

We also offer specialized delivery options, including:

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<u>Signature services</u>.

Get added security with Adult Signature Required, Chain of Signature and Signature Not Required/Origin Signature Not Required.

<u>.</u>	

Special handling.

Ship items with unique shapes or special contents, plus overweight and oversized pieces with confidence.

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<u>Evening and</u> weekend delivery.

Widen your shipment pickup window and improve the customer experience with more delivery times.

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Pickup and delivery services.

Customize your pickup or delivery with special services like Hold For Pickup, ExpressCheque®† and Saturday Service.

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Let's get started!

Find out how Purolator can help you win the last-mile challenge.

Connect with us



purolator.com

Resources

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