



CHALLENGE

Safco Dental Supply Company sought the most reliable – and sustainable – shipment packaging possible.

SOLUTION

After meeting stringent criteria for damage prevention, right sizing and materials content, Safco became the first company in the nation certified under the UPS Eco Responsible Packaging Program.

RESULTS

Safco's package damage rate decreased by over 50 percent, a huge benefit for customers, the company and the environment.

"We've always tried to do what's best for our customers, and more reliable, eco-friendly shipping is a key part of this commitment."

— Ken Saffir, President & Owner, Safco Dental Supply Company

ECO RESPONSIBLE PACKAGING SUSTAINS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

SAFCO AND UPS PARTNER TO REDUCE WASTE AND IMPROVE SERVICE

Competitively speaking, Safco Dental Supply Company often sees itself as David compared to the Goliath suppliers in its industry. With only 50 employees and one location in Buffalo Grove, IL, the second-generation family-run business knows success depends on providing stand-out quality and service. The company offers dentists a broad line of dental products, with the exception of precious metals and gold. "Some of our competitors are 40 times our size," explains Ken Saffir, Safco's president and owner. "So we have to be friendlier, price our products better and provide a higher level of service."

This approach has helped Safco build and maintain a solid base of dental office customers since its founding in 1945. To Saffir and his senior management team, earning certification under the UPS Eco Responsible Packaging Program seemed perfectly

aligned with Safco's dual commitment to superior customer service and sustainable business practices.

MOVING TO A GREENER VISION

The path to certification began a few years ago, when Safco began planning a move to larger headquarters. "When we were building out the new space, we tried to go as green as we possibly could by using recycled and recyclable materials, and those that were least



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harmful to the environment,” recalls Neil Ingram, vice president and general manager at Safco. “Most of us [Safco employees] have children, and we’d like to give them a better world.”

Once Safco moved, Ingram incorporated other environmentally responsible initiatives. He contracted with a disposal company that guaranteed all waste leaving their building would be recycled. He also worked closely with Tim Williams, Safco’s warehouse manager, to evaluate ways to make their shipping packaging more eco-friendly while at the same time minimizing product damage.

Safco frequently ships liquids, the type of product most prone to damage during transport. If they spill, not only do they make a mess for both the carriers and the customer, but many dental liquids such as sterilants, disinfectants, and ultrasonic and x-ray solutions can be moderately unpleasant to people not wearing the correct protection.

“So almost 10 years ago, we started doing something that a lot of our competitors don’t do,” Ingram says. “We taped the lids and put the containers into plastic bags.” Absorbent, tear-away paper packaging was also used in the box for additional protection.

“We thought we were doing the right thing,” Ingram explains. “But we got complaints about waste in our packaging that didn’t fit in our customers’ garbage cans. We ship to dental offices that are generally relatively small and don’t have big dumpsters behind them for bulk trash.”

SUSTAINABILITY AND SERVICE GO HAND-IN-HAND

After researching options, Safco switched from paper to recyclable plastic air pillows. In addition to being recyclable, the plastic is treated with a chemical that makes it biodegradable, even without access to sunlight. According to Ingram, “it satisfies the dental offices’ concerns about not having room for waste. All they do is take a pen, poke a hole in the air pillow and it goes into a tiny bundle. And when it goes into a landfill, it dissolves and disappears in about five years.”

In addition, Safco switched to recyclable, biodegradable bags for packaging the liquids. “That meant we had converted all of our packing materials except the carton sealing tape to recyclable and biodegradable,” he says.

UPS took notice, and invited Safco to become the carrier’s beta site for the Eco Responsible Packaging Program it planned to launch. “They knew we had put a little extra expense

and effort into doing what we could to make our packaging friendly to the environment,” says Ingram, who immediately expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity.

A CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT

To earn certification, Safco had to have each box it used for shipping evaluated by UPS according to procedures vetted by SGS, an independent inspection, testing and verification company. All packaging had to meet stringent criteria for damage prevention (since damage creates waste), right sizing (to avoid excess packaging) and materials content (utilizing those with a more sustainable profile). After three months and numerous redesigns, Safco became the first company in the United States to be certified under the UPS program. It remains the only certified company in the dental supply industry.

Safco proudly features the UPS Eco Responsible Packaging Program logo on all packages it prepares and ships. But it’s even prouder of the fact that the new packaging has slashed damage claims by more than 50 percent, according to records kept both by Safco and UPS. That improvement translates into substantial savings of time and money, a smaller carbon footprint and additional intangible benefits.

“First and foremost, we build good will,” Saffir says. “This packaging allowed us to deliver products to our customers in the good condition they expect.” Dental offices avoid the hassle of having to arrange for a replacement for a damaged product and the possible treatment delays which may result. Since most dental offices place orders on an as-needed basis, if a patient is scheduled for a procedure but the product arrives damaged, both the dentist and patient are inconvenienced.

More reliable shipping also has a positive impact on Safco’s bottom line, since the company absorbs the expense of replacing and reshipping damaged products, by air if necessary. Plus, when Safco doesn’t have to reship, that means less fossil fuel energy is used.

“By participating in the UPS Eco Responsible Packaging Program, we’ve put our money where our mouth is,” Ingram adds. “We’re doing this because it makes good sense for our dental customers and for us. And it will only help make a better world than we live in today.”

Safco thanks Bruce Bruzzini and Randy Seibert from UPS and Chris Borzello from Champion Container for their service and support in achieving this certification.