



## SMALL BUSINESS GETS BACK IN THE FAST LANE WITH UPS

Between tight budgets, limited resources and small spaces, operating and growing a small business is difficult enough. But if you factor in a massive hurricane, complete loss of inventory and an unexpected relocation — some may consider the task nearly impossible. New Orleans based AAC Enterprises, Inc. not only saw the possibility, but turned hardship into new opportunities.

### SEEING THE LIGHT

Justin Hartenstein started as a small eBay® vendor selling various automobile parts out of his garage in 1999. Several years later he decided to use his automotive electronics knowledge to concentrate in a niche market and specialize in auto lighting systems. Today, Advanced Automotive Concepts (AAC) designs and develops innovative custom lighting for car enthusiasts and ships about 350 orders a week. AAC specializes in light-emitting diode (LED), organic light-emitting diode (OLED) and surface mount diode (SMD) lighting systems — the next generation of LED lighting technology.

Customers send their existing factory headlights to Justin and his team to have the lights refashioned to their specifications. The technicians perform a variety of transformations from painting headlight housings to laser-etching the surface of the headlights with the customer's own design. Therefore, the need to protect these fragile, custom modified parts became more important than ever in the reverse logistics process.

Justin and his wife Tiffanie were using several different providers to ship products and supplies. As the business grew, so did the number of damage claims. In search of a more reliable solution, they turned to UPS and didn't look back.



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The UPS Package Design and Test Lab analyzed and tested the company's boxes and packaging supplies and recommended several key changes to secure the delicate lights. UPS collaborated with AAC to design a new, customized box for shipping headlight Halo kits — the company's most popular product. The Hartensteins credit the new boxes with helping to decrease damage claims by 60 percent. If a customer wants to use a shipper other than UPS, Tiffanie requires them to sign a waiver stating AAC is not responsible for any damages in transit. In addition to the customized box, UPS Account Manager Catherine Stropolo suggested a foam-packaging machine for some of the larger products. "Before they would spend an hour packing a box, but the lights still arrived broken or damaged," she said. "Now it only takes five or six minutes to foam pack an order, and the packages are better protected."

## WEATHERING THE STORM: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

With the new packaging solutions in place, AAC was on the fast track to success — until Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in August 2005. Like thousands of others, the Hartenstein's home in New Orleans was flooded. Their home office and most of the inventory was nearly a total loss. The young couple was forced to relocate to Atlanta and the business was at risk of going under. That's when UPS stepped in again — in a whole new capacity.

"UPS was one of the first carriers to begin operating in New Orleans post-Katrina,"

Justin said. "With the help of our family and friends still in the city, we were able to have what was left of the business packed up and shipped to a temporary location. That's when we realized UPS was more than a reliable shipper — they were a trusted business partner."

After three months of working with UPS drivers to move packages up and down three flights of stairs from their small apartment, the couple moved back to New Orleans into a bigger and better facility. The company outgrew two additional spaces in four years. "When you are operating a company that is basically doubling in size every six months, it's important to have relationships with partners that have the ability to scale with your growing needs," Justin said.

## GETTING AHEAD IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN

In addition to packaging design, AAC takes advantage of several other UPS solutions to increase customer satisfaction and streamline business processes. With UPS Quantum View® Manage, customers can track shipments at every stage of the supply chain journey. "Our customers want to know where their shipments are at all times," Tiffanie says. "It's extremely helpful to be able to track each order and alert customers of any hiccups or problems in real time."

Approximately 20 percent of AAC's business is exporting. UPS Paperless® Invoice manages paperwork for international shipments electronically. The service helps

Just three years after Hurricane Katrina, AAC grew more than 914 percent and was listed on the *Inc. 500* list of America's fastest growing private companies. "We're on track to surpass \$3 million in revenue for 2011, and we wouldn't be where we are now without the support of trusted partners like UPS," Justin says. "Based on the time and effort they've put into helping a small company like ours grow, we know UPS recognizes potential and believes in our success."



AAC avoid the number one reason for delays: incomplete paperwork. Information for each shipment is also organized and stored in one place — saving time and paper. The company also uses UPS TradeAbility® international tools to obtain landed costs and harmonized codes for their global shipments.

The Hartensteins consider the level of customer service and support that UPS has provided over the years to be invaluable. "We know UPS understands the challenges small businesses face on a daily basis, and we have a wonderful relationship with our driver Kevin," Justin said. In the future, as AAC expands, the company plans to look to UPS for additional supply chain solutions.

*To learn more about AAC's lighting products, please visit:*

[aacstyle.com](http://aacstyle.com) | [camarolighting.com](http://camarolighting.com)