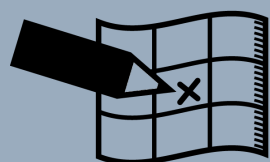


# LOGISTICS ADVICE

## FOR THE INDEPENDENT MAP SELLER

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# INDEPENDENT MAP ARTISTS

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For many of us, the logistics of turning digital files into items that customers can actually buy is a challenge, one with many different solutions. To help with this, a big group of folks at the Independent Map Artists shared their experiences and opinions, to which I (Daniel Huffman) added my own before compiling them into this document. Quotes from members have been lightly edited. This was written in June 2025, so please be mindful of the timeliness of this document if you're reading it years later.

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**Many thanks to everyone who shared their thoughts!**

*Rŕ Andrews, Monty Beaumont, Cameron Booth, Iván Cárdenas, Ŗug Cerović, Jeff Clark, Stentor Danielson, Andrew Douglas-Clifford, Courtney Edwards, Maddy Grubb, Patrycja Krajczynska, Andrew Lynch, David Medeiros, Eleanor Mohren, Adam Steer, Anton Thomas, Andrew Tyrrell, and Ŗen Urso.*

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In this document, we'll review IMA members' thoughts on printing, sales, and shipping solutions. Please note that sometimes these are intertwined (there are printers that also handle shipping and sales, while some others solely do printing, or will print and ship, but not offer a sales platform). So, the organization scheme used in this document isn't strict.

# PRINTING

First we'll tackle printing. Most IMA members start with a digital design, and then need some way to get that design printed onto physical paper so that they can send it out to customers. There are three broad categories here: printing at home, printing with a professional print shop, and using a print-on-demand service.

No matter the way that you get your prints made, there will generally be a relationship between the cost you pay and the quality of the work that you end up with. **Andrew Lynch** sums it up: *“if the cost seems too good to be true, it is.”* So, if you're aiming for a fine-art market, you might select a more expensive printing solution than if you want to make an affordable mass-market poster.

## PRINT ON DEMAND

Many (perhaps most) members of the IMA use print on demand services. With these services, you only pay for individual prints when you need them (i.e., when a customer has ordered one). You simply upload your file, and the service will make a print and ship it to your customer. The general advantage is that you don't have to keep inventory, nor do you have to deal with shipping — the print on demand service handles all of this. But, your choice of paper, print size, and print quality are all limited by what the service decides to offer.

Many print-on-demand providers have production facilities around the world. This has the advantage of making shipping cheaper and easier. An order for an Australian customer can be printed in Australia, while one for a Canadian customer can be printed in Canada. Individual networks vary by company, but this is true of many of the services described below.

There are *many* available options, which can make it difficult to choose. Here are ones that members expressed opinions about.

## Printful

Printful offers a wide variety of products, and production facilities around the world. Printful also *“offers much more detail about its suppliers and supply chains”* than some other services, such as Redbubble, notes **Adam Steer**.

IMA members who use Printful were broadly pleased with the print quality:

*The print quality (I do posters primarily) is excellent for the price point and I've had mostly excellent product reviews so far.*

**David Medeiros**

*I've ordered several test items from them and I've been generally happy with the print quality.*

**Daniel Huffman**

*I've been happy with products made via Printful, and I'm also happy to sell things I have only digitally proofed based on results.*

**Adam Steer**

Printful also integrates well with popular sales platforms, such as Etsy (**David Medeiros:** “pretty seamless”) and Shopify (**Iván Cardenás:** “nice and easy”). When properly integrated, the sales platform automatically notifies Printful, which prints and ships the order, with no input needed from you. If the shipment gets lost or damaged, Printful will generally send a replacement for free.

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*I have ordered several test prints, and on two occasions they have gotten damaged in shipment. That's a higher rate than I would expect. While the free replacement is nice, it's something to be aware of.*

**Daniel Huffman**

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One potential downside to Printful is their lack of choice in print size. While they offer prints in several common sizes (including A-sizes and customary US ones), there is no option to customize the dimensions if you want to produce something with an unusual size.

## Gelato

Gelato claims to have the “world's largest print-on-demand network,” with over 140 print partners in 32 countries. This is a broader footprint than Printful, but there's also a key difference: Gelato has “print partners,” whereas Printful operates its own printing facilities. Perhaps this decentralized approach leads to inconsistency in quality, as our members who had used Gelato were not impressed:

*The product was TERRIBLE. Inconsistent paper. Inconsistent colour and resolution.*

.....  
*The dimensions of them aren't the best. They're all meant to be A4 (210×297mm), but*

*Fuzzy lines, splotchy colour. Double thumbs down.*

**Courtney Edwards**

*each one is up to a couple of millimetres too large or too small in dimension, and aren't quite orthogonal.*

**Andrew Tyrrell**

It was not all bad. **Andrew Tyrrell** said of one of his test prints: “*The image is crisp, and the page size is exactly A4.*” Unfortunately, this same print was also ruined by the presence of “*a squashed fly or similar.*”

If you want to give them a try, the positive side is ease of use. **Courtney Edwards** mentioned Gelato’s “*really intuitive interface,*” and **Andrew Tyrrell** said that they were “*very easy to deal with and link to my website.*” Gelato also has one of the broadest set of paper options.

Payment to Gelato is made by loading an online wallet. This caused **Andrew Tyrrell** some issues in getting refunded for his test prints, as the refunds went to his Gelato wallet rather than his credit card.

## Prodigi

Like Printful, and unlike Gelato, Prodigi does its printing in-house. They even have a dashboard where you can see the status of their production facilities around the world. IMA members had good things to say about the quality.

*Good quality paper and nice prints. A good balance of quality and price. Shipping is reasonable.*

**Courtney Edwards**

*I currently use Prodigi for my prints as the quality is often better than other print on demand providers such as Gelato & Printful, but it does make it a little more expensive.*

**Monty Beaumont**

Like all of these services, however, they are not error-free.

.....

*I have had some issues with prints arriving printed on the wrong paper, but I suspect that this is because when I started using them their Canadian printer had a new owner. I also had the most epic store launch where the very first customer on my store (thankfully a friend) got shipped an amazing cat poster instead of a map. Customer support has been quick to respond and rectify the issues; hopefully this wrong-paper/cat-poster phase is over now.*

**Courtney Edwards**

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## Redbubble

Redbubble offers print-on-demand services, integrated with their own marketplace. This has some advantages. Since Redbubble handles both sales and printing, everything is more tightly integrated: “they take care of everything and send you a pay check at the end of each month” says **Jug Cerović**.

Additionally, a customer might *already* be on the Redbubble website and come across your work. This is in contrast to a service like Printful, which only offers printing/shipping and does not offer a searchable marketplace that is regularly visited by customers looking for art.

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*It is very convenient that [a design on Redbubble] self promotes ... it seems a huge number of people are regularly browsing Redbubble for almost impulse buys.*

**Adam Steer**

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Members also reflected on the print quality and sourcing of materials.

*In general I've had good experiences with Redbubble. A couple of times I've received complaints from customers that they received a certain product that's pixelated or not sharp, so I think it helps to order a test*

*Redbubble printing has been good. I'm less happy with the actual product. I'm not certain how their supply chain works. I felt it might be important to [the market] that I can say "hey this is printed on blanks from*

*product to make sure the size and quality is what you're looking for. But I sell my work mainly in the form of affordable posters, and for that purpose Redbubble fits what I need.*

**Eleanor Mohren**

*[reputable company]". With Redbubble we don't know that (or it isn't obvious).*

**Adam Steer**

Finally, **Adam Steer** notes that *"I can't charge as high a commission per item as I can on Printful."*

## Zazzle

Zazzle is similar to Redbubble, in that it handles printing and sales, running a marketplace with a built-in customer base. You can upload a design, set a price, and receive an occasional check with royalties, without ever interacting with a customer.

Unlike some of the other printers on this list, Zazzle allows custom sizes. *"I've been able to offer customers a map with the ridiculous size of 60x10 inches"* (**Daniel Huffman**).

On Zazzle, you are not entirely in control of the amount you make from each item. You specify a percentage markup on the base price that Zazzle charges. However, Zazzle sometimes has sales, and this means your item will be discounted (and thus your total profits will be, as well).

All that being said, members were not impressed by the print quality.

*I've used Zazzle in the past and that was terrible. They have much cheaper feeling products and poor in-house marketing.*

**David Medeiros**

*I ordered test prints from Zazzle a dozen years ago and they were fine, so I started selling through them. My more recent test prints have been blurry (and one was on the wrong paper type), and I'm hoping to switch away from them soon.*

**Daniel Huffman**

## Others

Above are the services mentioned by more than one IMA member. Here are a few others that individual members had thoughts about.

**Foldfactory:** *“a really nifty printer worth everyone's radar. They worked with me to get my Cali map just right” (RJ Andrews).*

**Lumaprints:** *“Has many print paper options and they always turn out great. They offer options to ship prints rolled, flat or framed. They have a fantastic customer service team ... even though it's a big drop shop print company it feels like there is someone taking care of your work. They seem to be constantly improving their website, their integrations with other platforms” (Maddy Grubb).*

**Pictorem:** *“A Canadian print company (Montreal) with a printer in the US too. Lots of interesting products, like metal and acrylic panels. Ships everything Canada/USA and only rolled posters international. Nice quality prints. Consistent paper, resolution, and colour. They claimed they had a Shopify integration, which was a lie; their service is not automated for use with Shopify” (Courtney Edwards).*

**ThePrintSpace:** *“UK-based company. Geared towards high-end fine art. Beautiful prints. High quality paper. Their shipping is a flat rate and super high. Works for high-end art that can eat the cost of the super high shipping, but didn't work for my lower-ticket pricing” (Courtney Edwards).*

**Tricera Print:** *“A Canadian company (Vancouver). Geared towards Canadian high-end fine art. Great products, but a bit expensive for my business model. Not really automated, instead you give them access to your Shopify store and they make things as orders come in” (Courtney Edwards).*

## PRINTING AT A SHOP

Instead of a large print-on-demand service, some members have worked with independent print shops. Usually they order bulk prints, though some do work with these small shops for print-on-demand. In many cases, these printers are local to the member.

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*You can't beat the care and attention of a local small business that actually knows you as a person and artist.*

**Courtney Edwards**

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Ordering a bulk set of prints from a printing company means a lower cost per print. As a rough example, you could obtain 2,500 high-quality prints for perhaps under USD 2 each, while a print-on-demand service (with possibly lower quality) might charge USD 10–20 per piece. There is usually a large minimum order size, meaning that a bulk set of prints is a financial risk. *“The cost per map decreases significantly when ordering larger print runs so you need to understand your market and order accordingly”* (**Jeff Clark**).

Getting a bulk quantity of prints usually means that you have to store them in your home, along with the necessary supplies to handle all the shipping to customers.

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*When I started, I raised funds with a very successful Kickstarter. Because of this, it made the most sense to make a large order of each print and ship them myself. Oh, if only I knew how much work that would be! Not just work, but how much space. Not all of my prints sold as well as others. Because of this, I ended up sitting on a lot of inventory. After a couple of years, I realized that if I wanted to expand what I sold, I needed to find a different printer that could do on-demand at a reasonable price.*

**Andrew Lynch**

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However, you can also work with a third-party warehouse to handle your shipments, instead, though that option was rare among respondents. More on that later.

Since most members worked with printers that primarily served their local region, this document doesn't have much in the way of specific recommendations here. However, there is one that may be of interest to the community: Williams and Heintz. They are a commercial offset printer based in the United States that specializes in maps, and they will ship bulk prints around the country. *“They did beautiful work at a great price for my Landforms of Michigan poster”* (**Daniel Huffman**).



## PRINTING AT HOME

Some people choose to do their own printing, on a printer that they own. This option means an expensive initial investment (especially for machines that can make larger prints), but allows higher-quality prints at a lower price than print-on-demand services. You also have the flexibility to try out unusual paper types and sizes.

*Acquiring the large-format printer was a result of getting a grant our provincial government (British Columbia) made available to small businesses during COVID. Inks are ridiculously expensive, but that seems to be the business model for all printer manufacturing companies*

**Jeff Clark**

*The downside is the initial investment — not everyone wants to outlay \$4000 for their own inkjet printer, plus the ongoing costs for ink, paper and shipping materials*

**Cameron Booth**

*I can do quality control and guarantee a better end result than you'd normally get from a print-on-demand service, which don't always use top quality archival materials. I also have a much better profit margin than you'd get using a POD service.*

**Cameron Booth**

The three respondents who do their own printing were kind enough to mention the specific printers that they own: An Epson 9750, an Epson SureColor P9000, and a Canon iP8700 series. **Cameron Booth** prints on Moab Lasal Matte 230gsm art paper, while **Jen Urso** is supplied by Red River Paper.

## SALES

Most members make use of some sort of online platform to handle the logistics of sales. The platform will show the product to customers, collect the money, and pass it on to the

artist. Some print-on-demand providers (like Zazzle and Redbubble) offer this service, as mentioned above.

Broadly, there are three categories here. First, you can add an e-commerce platform to your own website. Or, if you don't have a website or want to integrate a platform into your current one, there are standalone platforms that will, in essence, create a new website for you that hosts the shop. Finally, you can join an existing marketplace that is already full of shops. Marketplaces offer the advantage of having existing customer bases: people are already browsing these sites and looking for things to purchase. Setting up your own solo shop means you have to bring the customers in yourself. But, it also means avoiding the fees that marketplaces charge you for participating.

## MARKETPLACES

### Etsy

Etsy is an art marketplace originally geared toward individual, handmade goods, but they also feature plenty of stores that offer prints. They have a huge customer base of tens of millions, so you have a lot of potential eyes on your store: *"My products on Etsy far outsell those on any other platform"* (**Daniel Huffman**). However, this also means it attracts a massive number of artists, and you may have trouble standing out. This usually involves playing the game of optimizing your product descriptions and tags to get a better placement in Etsy's search results, or paying Etsy to run internal ads for your products.

*Etsy is also a helpful platform but you're mixed in with a tonne of other designers / sellers, so it can be challenging to get visibility.*

**Monty Beaumont**

*If I was trying to make this a more lucrative gig I'd be doing a lot more advertising on my own, which would reduce the need for that discoverability.*

**Stentor Danielson**

If you are already sitting on a stack of prints and planning on doing your own shipping, Etsy offers discounted postage and pre-filled shipping labels that you can print out at home.

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*This is especially nice for international orders since Etsy fills out all the customs stuff automatically. Before they had this feature I had to buy all my shipping labels at the post office and it was a huge pain.*

**Stentor Danielson**

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Etsy also integrates with some print-on-demand services, which can simplify your work by making all sales, printing, and shipping automated (though you'll need to occasionally interface with customers or the printer on occasions when there are problems).

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*I post my products to an Etsy store that is linked to Printful. Etsy is a nice choice for those who want to do mostly "casual sales." Once your listings are setup and you've done some of the required SEO work for your shop or products, you can mostly let the store go on auto pilot. Casual sales are slower than if you spend time to do active promotion, but anyone who just wants to sell things they make and not have to constantly babysit your shop, it's a good trade-off.*

**David Medeiros**

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There is a cost to all this convenience, though. Etsy charges a listing fee, and takes a percentage of each sale. As **Iván Cárdenas** notes, Etsy's messaging system can have "lots of spam and attempts of scams." And, you don't get as much control as if you were using your own site to do sales.

*I still recommend it, but it's much harder than it was a few years ago. Etsy protects buyers much more than sellers which is sometimes unfair and increases costs.*

**Patrycja Krajczynska**

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*As Etsy is a third-party platform, you also don't get any customer data and are bound by Etsy's Terms and Conditions, which can result in higher fees and drops in visibility.*

**Monty Beaumont**

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It remains a very popular option among IMA members, despite its downsides. "Etsy has steep fees but I enjoy having to do less work for marketing and outreach" says Maddy Grubb.

## Others

Etsy was the only marketplace mentioned by multiple people, but there are a few others that individual members commented on.

**Amazon:** *“I tried listing on Amazon, but that isn't really the place for unique art.”* (**Andrew Lynch**).

**Avenza Maps Store:** *“For maps that may actually be functional (e.g. trail maps or route guides), an alternative to printing is selling them as GeoPDFs through the Avenza PDF Maps app. It reaches a different kind of user that may not be interested in map prints. The downside is that you typically can't sell a digital only map for as much as a map poster, and there is often more work involved in making a map of that type in the first place (so an inverse relationship between sale price and labor to initially produce).”* (**David Medeiros**).

**Bluethumb:** For Australian artists. *“Part of Bluethumb's deal is that they offer insurance and certificates of authenticity etc.”* (**Adam Steer**).

**eBay:** *“The customer base isn't as geared toward art prints, but there's also no listing fee and I've gotten a small number of sales”* (**Daniel Huffman**).

## PLATFORMS AND PLUGINS

### Shopify

Shopify was a popular option with many IMA folks. Shopify will set up a storefront website for you and handle customer payments, and it can integrate with print-on-demand services to keep maintenance minimal. In exchange, you pay a monthly fee (with several different plan options). Many members emphasized its ease of use and affordability.

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*I would recommend Shopify over any of the others because of the following:*

- *It is pretty affordable (around £25/30 month)*
- *Most Print on Demand companies will have pre-built connectors which go directly to their platform from Shopify (automated orders etc).*

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- *Marketing integrations often favour Shopify over other platforms due to the volume of potential customers.*

### **Monty Beaumont**

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*With printful I connected to Shopify front store. The integration is nice and easy. Managing of orders and accountability is also easy.*

### **Iván Cárdenas**

*Shopify has decent integrations with Canada Post, UPS, and other courier/postal entities – which is important. When an order comes in, I simply purchase postage for the product that'll be shipped and print out the packing and shipping labels. Done, very simple.*

### **Jeff Clark**

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*I use Shopify and I can't recommend it enough. It makes everything around sales and order management so easy, and is worth the cost. In the past it was inferior as a blog/portfolio-style website, due to their focus on ecommerce, but that has improved a lot too – especially if you choose a good theme.*

### **Anton Thomas**

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A downside is that Shopify isn't directly integrated into your website. It's a separate site that customers will be linked to. You can somewhat alleviate this by setting up a website that shows off the product, and then use a quick purchasing link that takes customers to a pre-filled cart on Shopify, to minimize the time they spend off your site. But, this is still a limitation.

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*I would prefer to use Shopify for e-commerce but don't want to separate my shop from my main website and have to redo all the SEO. So, I would recommend anyone to use Shopify if their main focus was print sales.*

**Jen Urso**

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## Woocommerce

Woocommerce is a Wordpress plugin, and so offered a good option for several of our members who are already hosting their own Wordpress-based websites. It allows a lot more control than something like Shopify, and doesn't have monthly fees—but you'll also be doing more work yourself to get set up.

*It integrates well with WordPress and charges no extra fees for the base product. I haven't had a problem with it in more than a decade of selling prints, though I know other people have very different experiences with it.*

**Cameron Booth**

*WooCommerce / WordPress is good (and open source), but requires a lot more work to design & manage*

**Monty Beaumont**

*I self host Woocommerce on my own website which gives me full control over my site's design and functionality. It is a bit DIY so not for everyone, but if you're comfortable with web platforms like Wordpress and you've got some time it's pretty achievable.*

**Andrew Douglas-Clifford**

## Others

**Big Cartel:** Like Shopify, sets up a sales site that your customers will need to be directed to. “It’s a simple platform, and doesn’t integrate with Printful, but the basic plan is completely free, so it’s a low-risk way to get started.” (**Daniel Huffman**).

## SHIPPING

Unless you’re using a print-on-demand service, you’ll likely be personally responsible for shipping your maps. Many IMA members choose to go this route.

## CARRIERS AND POSTAGE

The specific shipping service will be based on where you and your customer are located, but it's worth noting that in many situations, you can get discounted rates both from government postal services and from commercial carriers. Here are some thoughts from members on the services they use:

*I use Endicia as my shipping software for the commercial rate on USPS shipping. It doesn't really integrate with WooCommerce, but the process is pretty painless and much better than online services like PirateShip, which takes way too long for my liking. Endicia does have a fairly hefty monthly subscription fee, but I make it back in postage savings most months.*

**Cameron Booth**

*For those items that I have to ship myself, PirateShip is a good simple option, with no fees. I've also used Shipstation to fulfill Kickstarters. It's overkill (and overpriced) for my usual needs, but it was helpful when I was sending out dozens of packages in a month. It lets you track where they all are on a dashboard.*

**Daniel Huffman**

*As we get the odd postal strike up here in Canada, which seriously affects many small businesses like mine, I've had to find alternative shipping services – there are many.*

**Jeff Clark**

*I buy postage through Etsy and print it out on sticky labels. This is especially nice for international orders since Etsy fills out all the customs stuff automatically.*

**Stentor Danielson**

*I either ship directly from my house or bring things to the Post Office. UPS is way overpriced.*

*I ship to the US, Canada and further European countries by the national post office, but to Germany, Czechia, Slovakia by DHL courier company. I have a signed*

**Jen Urso**

*contract with the national post office and  
DHL.*

**Patrycja Krajczynska**

.....  
*UPS is much more expensive, but super reliable and quick especially in  
North America. I've since shifted most volume to AusPost/USPS  
because they're much cheaper (on average less than half the price, for  
me). More packages get delayed or lost but it's still worth it.*

**Anton Thomas**

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## **LABEL PRINTER**

Several members mentioned the value of having a label printer to make the process easier. **Cameron Booth** uses a Dymo LabelWriter 4XL thermal printer. You can also purchase sheets of labels that can go into a home printer, though those are less convenient, as you have to line them up properly. This becomes particularly annoying if you have a sheet with only 1 or 2 labels left and you are attempting to print in the correct spot.

## **SUPPLIES**

Respondents used a wide variety of materials, just based on the specific needs of their individual maps, and there was no particular consensus.

*I use packaging materials from EcoEnclose since all of their options are either recycled or recyclable (including their tape and labels). Their rigid mailers work well for 8.5"×11" prints or smaller. For larger prints (13×19 and up) I use mailing tubes from*

*I do this all myself, holding an inventory of 3" diameter cardboard tubes in various lengths. When ready, I simply leave the tubes out the front of my house for USPS pickup — my mail carrier knows about the*



*Yazoo Mills. They are super sturdy and also made from recycled content.*

**Jen Urso**

*volume of stuff I send and looks after me well.*

**Cameron Booth**

*I buy packaging supplies from [packagingsupplies.com](http://packagingsupplies.com) — stiff cardboard envelopes and mailing tubes — and pack orders myself.*

**Stentor Danielson**

*I've bought mailing tubes from Uline, which is maybe the biggest packaging company in the US. For padded mailers, I've been happy with ones I got on Amazon from a brand with the amusing name of "Fuxury."*

**Daniel Huffman**

## WAREHOUSES

It's not necessary to maintain inventory yourself, if you don't want to. There are plenty of third-party services that will warehouse your product and handle shipping, so you don't have to keep everything in your home or office. Besides paying for shipping, you will need to pay storage fees, so this only makes sense if your sales are regular enough to cover your ongoing costs.

Only one of our members mentioned having used such services — me (**Daniel Huffman**), the compiler of this document. I have, in the past, worked with Amazon's Multi-Channel Fulfillment. Amazon offers warehousing and shipping services without requiring that you actually sell your product through them.

I have also worked with East View Map Link, which is a wholesale map distributor with a facility in the United States. This was a somewhat informal arrangement, in which I emailed them each time an order came in. They offered a good shipping rate, much lower than I could get anywhere else.

## **WRAP-UP**

There are a lot of ways to handle the logistics side of your map sales, including plenty of printers, sales platforms, and shippers that aren't covered here. However, while doing your research is important, this guide should help you get started!

Thanks again to everyone who contributed their knowledge and experience. We're stronger together.