



How to Order Your Packaging

A Buying Guide for Direct Customers



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Welcome

At Inline Plastics, we know how confusing the process of getting the right packaging can seem. Suppose you're responsible for packaging at a new restaurant or retail store. Navigating the world of food packaging can feel like reading a menu in another language. There are so many options. Who do you call? How do you buy?

Don't worry! We have been helping businesses like yours get the packaging solutions they need for over fifty years.

In this guide, we would like to share critical areas to be aware of when beginning your ordering journey at Inline Plastics, alleviating stress and confusion. We will also provide insider tips to help you make informed buying decisions because the only thing that should be complicated is how you make that signature dish of yours look irresistible to customers and display perfectly on the shelf.

Finding the Right Fit

What you're putting into those little plastic containers will dictate what is right for you. You should know what foods will be going into the package. When identifying the right packaging solution, here are areas that will help you find the right fit:

- **Size, shape, and weight** -- When the packages are stacked at the store, the bottom container must support the weight of any that are stacked on top of it without being crushed.
 - How heavy is the product that you're going to put into the container?
 - Do you know what shape container would be best to display your food?
 - How much will the total package of food weigh?
- **Appearance – This is crucial because it attracts attention, communicates quality, and brand identity.**
 - How do you want your product displayed (i.e., on a shelf, stacked, in a cooler, center store, endcap)?
 - Is the retail shelf straight, or does it display packages on an angle? This matters especially when you are stacking packages on top of each other.
 - Are you trying to maximize shelf space, or do you want to showcase a product?
- **Temperature – This is important as the material can dictate the material.**
 - Will the package need to hold hot or cold food?
 - Will the food be refrigerated?
 - Will the packages need to be put under heat lamps?

- How will consumers eat the contents? Straight out of the package, or will it be plated? Or both?
- Will they need to heat up the package?
- **Leak-resistance – Leaking packages can cause shelves to look sticky and unclean, raising concerns about product safety.**
 - Does your product have liquid components?
- **Tamper Protection – This is important because it builds consumer trust by showing that the product hasn't been altered or compromised.**
 - Is it important that your customers take comfort in knowing their food hasn't been opened?
- **Clarity – This is essential because consumers want a clear 360-degree view of what they're purchasing.**
 - Does your product require high-clarity packaging without tints or dyes?
- **Shipping – This is vital so that your packaging is structurally sound enough to support your product during transportation.**
 - Will the food have to be shipped before it hits the shelf? If so, is there any additional packaging that will be designed around the primary food container?
 - What route will it travel? How long will it take to get there? For example, altitude changes pressure, which can impact the packages during transport and merchandising.
 - How many do you want to put in a case?
 - How many on the shelf?

What If Inline Plastics Doesn't Offer a Product I Need?



There are over 300 options in the Inline portfolio to choose from. Check out our [digital catalog](#).

If you can't find what meets your needs, [we design custom packaging](#) for unique applications and help to differentiate your brand from competitors.

While the process requires a commitment to minimum order volumes and involves a multi-stage development process from initial design and prototyping to final production, we guide you through each step to ensure your packaging meets the specific requirements for the food type, environment, dimensions, shipping needs, and shelf life.

[\(Click here\)](#)

How to Order Samples

We recommend testing the fitness of your application. That's why we offer free samples. You can easily visit the Inline Plastics website to [order test samples](#). You should make sure they meet your quality standards and specifications.

Before making the final decision, consider testing the products for production, shipping, shelf life, leak resistance, shelving presentation, and environment. You should always see how packages stack up when they're ready to hit the market.

For the shipping test, we recommend packing the product and shipping it via standard logistics to simulate the shipping process as closely as possible. This will give you an idea of how the packaging can handle the various elements it will encounter. Did your product come back safe and sound?

Ordering Tips

Once our product passes your tests, it's time to order. Let's look at the steps of ordering:

1. A dedicated Sales Manager will guide you through the process and provide pricing.
2. You will be asked to fill out a credit application so we can establish you as a customer with our accounting team.
3. Next, you will speak with an Order Management Representative (OMR) from our



Please reach out directly to your OMR for all questions/inquiries related to your orders.

Customer Experience Team (CX). Together, with your dedicated Sales Manager, they will get you set up.

4. You will then fill out your purchase order form. You can generate a PO from your system if you're a larger company with an automated

ordering process, such as EDI (an Electronic Data Interchange). Our systems will automatically generate a ticket and an order confirmation for your order.

5. Your OMR will continue to manage your data as your order is processed and keep you informed of every PO you place there on.
6. Your Sales Manager will work closely with you to make sure you are aware of all the latest and greatest innovations from Inline Plastics.

What to Expect:

- When you send an order to our Customer Experience Team, you will receive an automatic response letting you know we have received your order and assign you a ticket number for reference.
- You will receive a response from your OMR within 24 hours, confirming your order and providing information that is needed to complete order processing.
- Your OMR will communicate any necessary details every step of the way. Please reach out to them directly for all questions/inquiries related to your orders.

Please ensure your PO has the following information:

1. Item codes
2. Quantities
3. Pricing
4. Freight: Pickup or delivery
5. Requested delivery dates

How do I modify or make changes to an existing order?

A customer can email our Customer Experience Team for this request. Customers work directly with their OMR to make changes.

Note: We discourage changes after 24 hours of placement and 72 hours prior to shipping.

How to Manage Damages or Returns

1. Please email orders@inlineplastics.com for any issues related to shortages, damages, or returns.
2. Include the PO, item, quantity, and reason for request.
3. Include the BOL and receiving paperwork on the shipment.
4. Our Customer Experience Team will evaluate the claim and provide approval based on paperwork and an internal investigation into our on-hand inventory.
5. For all quality concerns, please contact your sales associate directly.

We aim to maintain this order flow to effectively communicate, process, and deliver your order on time.

Who Do I Call If I Have A Problem?

If you need assistance, reach out to the Customer Experience Team at orders@inlineplastics.com. With personalized experience, your OMR is your go-to contact Customer Experience Representative for any issues/questions related to your order.

Important Considerations

Factors That Might Affect Lead Time

Orders for stock items are typically ready to ship within 10 business days from the date Inline Plastics confirms the purchase order. Confirmation is sent within 24 hours of receipt of the Purchase Order. Weekends and holidays do not count as business days in lead time calculations. Please contact the Customer Experience Team at orders@inlineplastics.com for the lead time on items that are not held in stock or are considered special order. These items will need to be scheduled for production, and order fulfillment may vary. Lead times can also be affected by:



Orders for stock items are typically ready to ship within 10 business days from the date Inline Plastics confirms the purchase order.

- **Global events:** Shipping delays can be caused by unforeseen circumstances such as bad weather and closed ports.
- **Seasonality:** Different types of packaging are in demand at specific times of the year.
- **Non-stock/special order:** Items with specific or unique features may not be readily stocked in a distribution center. Additional production time will be required, which may result in a longer delivery schedule.

The Importance of Forecasting

To help us deliver your packaging on time, please share your upcoming needs in advance.

Many of the raw materials we use — particularly the resins essential to our packaging — have a lead time of 3 to 4 months. That's because we specialize in thermoforming, and our close partner and expert in resin production is responsible for manufacturing the sheet material we use. To ensure an uninterrupted supply, we need to place orders well in advance. That's why it's so important to provide a forecast of your expected packaging demand — especially if you're planning high-volume activities like Buy-One-Get-One (BOGO) promotions or other special events.

Once we know when materials are arriving, we can schedule your production alongside other orders. We also need to coordinate cartons, sleeves, and labor, all of which take time to line up.


We do keep a buffer based on your past order patterns, but any major changes in demand, like big promotions or product launches, should be communicated as early as possible. The more accurate your forecast, the better we can support your business and keep everything running on schedule.

Our Commitment to Quality

Quality extends beyond the look and feel of our products — it's embedded in every step of our manufacturing process, from conception to completion.

We're committed to comprehensive quality management, transparent communication about challenges, and clear direction when issues arise. Our mission is to create a seamless experience for you.

Should you encounter any concerns, our dedicated support team is readily available to provide immediate assistance. Please take a moment to review our quality statement below:



Our mission is to create a seamless experience for you.

[IPC Quality Statement 2025](#)


FAQ's

Q. How long will it take to get my product?

A: At Inline, orders for stock items are generally available to ship within 10 business days of the Purchase Order confirmation date by Inline Plastics. Confirmation is sent within 24 hours of the receipt of the Purchase Order. Weekends and holidays do not count as business days in lead time calculations. Please contact our Customer Experience Team for the lead time on non-stock items at orders@inlineplastics.com.

Q: Is there a minimum number of cases I need to buy?

A: The minimum number of cases needed per order is 500, but this number can vary with special order items. We have made exceptions for customers who cannot meet that number, but it does come with an additional “under minimum fee.”



The minimum number of cases needed per order is 500.

Q: How often should I order?

A: Our Customer Experience Experts (including your Order Management Representative) should be able to help you strategically plan your business's ordering so that you're never left without a packaging solution.

Q: When should I pay my bill?

A: Most of our customer base is on a term-payment process, meaning they usually have 30 days to pay for their order. Some international accounts, as well as customers on credit lists, must be paid before shipment.

Q: What happens if I receive an incorrect or damaged product?

1. Please email orders@inlineplastics.com for any issues related to shortages, damages, or returns.
2. Include the PO, item, quantity, and reason for request.
3. Include the BOL and receiving paperwork on the shipment.
4. Our Customer Experience Team will evaluate the claim and provide approval based on paperwork and an internal investigation into our on-hand inventory to make sure it is not affected.
5. For all quality complaints, please send them directly to your Sales Representative.

Q: Does Inline take "Special Request" orders?

A: Yes. There is a process for customers requesting a special order (example: ordering a product that is longer in production) through the Sales Representative, and it requires approvals from Sales, Marketing, Planning, and Customer Experience.

Q: How do I modify or make changes to an existing order?

A: A customer can email our Customer Experience Team for any changes to an order.

Note: We discourage changes after 24 hours of placement and 72 hours prior to shipping.

Q: Where are your products made?


A: With four manufacturing facilities strategically placed across the United States ([Connecticut, Utah, and two in Georgia](#)), no matter where you are located, we have you covered.

Q: Does Inline Plastics create Custom Packaging?

A: Yes — we do create custom containers! Our experienced Research and Development team uses state-of-the-art technology and in-house manufacturing capabilities to tailor everything from the shape and size to special features that fit your product and brand perfectly. [Here is a link to the specific process for creating custom packaging.](#)

Whether you have specific design criteria or need a container that addresses particular packaging challenges, we can collaborate with you to create a custom solution that not only protects your product but also enhances its market appeal.


This specialized work requires investment to cover those costs. A commitment to annual volume is required, depending on the product and scope. Generally, we are looking for a multi-year commitment of at least one million pieces annually; however, the final decision depends on the partnership level with the customer, the type of item needed, and what is required. We are always flexible and look forward to new developments we can bring to the market.



A commitment one million pieces annually is preferred for custom orders.

Q: Can you help me optimize/automate my packaging process?

A: Yes, we do offer automation solutions for loyal Inline customers! Our Automation Team specializes in integrating state-of-the-art- equipment — such as de-nesters, closers, labeling systems, and conveyors — into your packaging line to streamline operations and reduce costs.



To help you see the benefits immediately, we've developed an online Automation Calculator.

To help you see the benefits immediately, we've developed an online [Automation Calculator](#). By simply entering your packaging statistics (like containers per minute, labor costs, and daily operating hours), the calculator instantly shows how much time, money, and labor you could save with our automation solutions.

Q: If I give you a competitor's item # what's your equivalent item #?

A: You can contact your Sales Manager or Order Management Representative (OMR) for assistance.

Contact Us for Any Additional Questions

Inline Plastics

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