



# WHAT WINE AND SPIRITS DELIVERY DRIVERS WISH YOU KNEW

DISTRIBUTOR DRIVERS AND WAREHOUSE MANAGERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY SHARE THEIR TIPS FOR RESTAURANTS AND RETAILERS ON HOW DELIVERY LOGISTICS CAN RUN MORE EFFICIENTLY

BY CHRISTY FRANK

**T**he truck drivers who deliver wine and spirits to shops and restaurants may clock hundreds of miles each week crisscrossing their state, or battle snarls of urban traffic (or both) while moving hundreds of cases each day. While many accounts see their delivery driver more often than their sales rep, these interactions are often taken for granted.

“While that final step of bringing the wine to someone might seem really simple—you placed an order and now you’re receiving it—there’s so much backend coordination that goes into getting you that wine,” says Grant Richardson, owner of Pangea Selections in Texas. “People want to be taken care of, but they don’t understand all the moving parts and planning that goes into that 10-minute interaction between the receiver and the driver.”

*Beverage Media* spoke with truck drivers for distributors across the country to learn how the delivery process can be improved.

## **Provide Clear, Precise, and Up-To-Date Delivery Instructions**

Drivers really do read these and depend on them in order to plan their route throughout the day. It’s critical for buyers to specify accurate receiving

windows of time and to note the days the business is completely closed. Titus Laie, a driver with Last Mile Hillebrand in California, stresses the importance of also providing detailed instructions on which door to deliver to and how to find it, as well as information on one-way streets or side streets that make for better entrances. Details on specific staging areas within the account are also very helpful. Laie also stresses the importance of listing telephone numbers that will be answered (and won’t be directed straight to the business’s answering machine).

ABOVE: Drivers Titus Laie and George Lewis (Last Mile Hillebrand) and Scott Luce (Martignetti)

## The Importance of Process and Well-Trained Staff

“I’m invading your space—I know that,” says Emmanuelle Barbe, a driver with Kellogg Selections in North Carolina. “I’ll try to make it as smooth as possible, and please do the same for me.” Ideally, every staff member should be trained and authorized to receive deliveries and know exactly how to handle incoming cases.

“Drivers are creatures of habit. When a location has everything clearly marked, where to drop product, where to drop paperwork along with who to go to for a signature, this is when things run the smoothest,” says Rob Martin, also with Last Mile Hillebrand.

Developing seamless processes pays off for everyone on both sides of the transaction, says Edward DeVito, SVP warehouse operations and delivery at Martignetti Companies in Massachusetts: “Going to an account with nice receivers who know what they are doing, those are my favorite accounts.”

## Accept the Order. Don’t Ask Drivers to Come Back

Asking a driver to come back later may seem like a simple request but it makes walking the logistical tightrope even more challenging. “A lot of accounts aren’t available during their provided time windows and we must then reattempt several times to make the delivery,” Laie shares. “This impacts all the other



deliveries scheduled for that day.”

Accounts may not realize the logistical nightmare this can create. “You have to figure out how you’re going to navigate to go backward,” says Orven Anderson, a driver with M.S. Walker in Massachusetts. This involves constantly reworking his route and physically reshuffling hundreds of cases in his truck multiple times a day.

This isn’t simply considerate to drivers—it keeps costs down. “Being flexible on receiving windows and attentive and prompt when signing for deliveries helps us be more efficient,” says Charisse Tolano, dispatch manager at Last Mile Hillebrand. “This keeps delivery prices lower. Delivery companies like FedEx charge three times the price we do, and that’s without offering specific time windows or temperature control.”

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ABOVE: Prufrock driver Seth Dixon, who listens to the Dollup podcast while driving // LEFT: Abbey Koenig of T Elenteny Imports

## Fintech Is Your Friend

If you’re in a market that requires payment upon delivery, drivers urge you to have checks ready and waiting. If available, explore an online pre-payment system such as Fintech, which ensures that anyone can accept delivery—without needing to track down a check or someone authorized to write one. Those “few minutes” quickly add up. “In the big scheme, it’s nothing,” says Kellogg Selections’ Barbe. “But in our day, 25 minutes plus 25 minutes plus 25 minutes will make the difference between a happy customer at the end of the route and a very angry customer who’s not receiving his wine on time.” Besides, as Temez Isaac, a driver with Rive Gauche Wine Co. in Georgia, adds, your driver “won’t need to worry about carrying this little slip of paper that might be worth thousands of dollars.”

## Check the Invoice—Always!

“It would be great if the receiver knew exactly what the buyer had ordered,” says Barbe. This may seem like wine receiving 101, but nearly everyone we spoke with complained about the frequency of delivered products not matching the invoice, and the mis-ship not being noticed.

“Even if you discuss it verbally with the driver,” says Elly Hartshorn, the founder of Sidekick Delivery, which joined forces with Hillebrand in 2017 to form Last Mile Hillebrand, “always note any discrep-



ancies with your signature on the Bill of Lading (BOL).”

It’s time well spent to save headaches later. “A BOL is a legally binding document and a huge piece in determining when things go awry,” explains Abbey Koenig, senior account manager at T. Elenteny Imports. If an issue isn’t marked at the time of delivery, an account can request an investigation at the warehouse, but if a physical inventory can’t confirm it, “there is not much we can do.”

**Don’t Shoot the Messenger**

“As drivers, we are on the front line and we take the heat for the salespeople, office people, wine producers, and warehouses when they make mistakes,” explains Laie. “We are human and sometimes we make mistakes too, but most of the time we are at the end of a long telephone chain.”

“I’m happy to help and answer questions if I can,” says Seth Dixon, a driver with Prufrock Wines in Oregon, “but no, I don’t know what you talked about with your salesman. All I know is what’s on my invoice.” Make sure you have general guidelines in place so anyone



receiving an order will know what to do—receive it as is, refuse it entirely, or try to reach you (and if they can’t, what to do then). If this varies by distributor, make sure you have detailed instructions accessible.

**Build Relationships—Acts of Kindness Are Noticed**

“We’re all in this together” was a common refrain during all our conversations with drivers. Delivery drivers recognize that they’re tightly tied into a codependent supply chain network, even if the accounts don’t. Get on a first name basis with them and take time for some small talk to build trust and respect.

“The customers we have good communication with make our jobs so much easier,” says Anderson. “Those are the customers that you don’t mind going the extra length for every now and then if they need it.” And yes, drivers have favorites. “All accounts, big or small, are important for us, but the accounts that treat us with respect, not as delivery guys, are always our favorites,” shares Gardy Dumesle, the long-time warehouse manager at New York’s Rosenthal Wine Merchant.

“When you are on the road all day, you don’t have a breakroom, per se, so accounts that offer water or use of their

ABOVE: M.S. Walker driver Ovren Anderson and a piece of wood he keeps in his truck... just in case // Edward DeVito of Martignetti



**“There’s something new that you didn’t expect to happen on a day to day. Nothing surprises you anymore - you’ve already been through the worst. What else can happen?”**

**- Ovren Anderson, a driver with M.S. Walker**

bathroom makes you feel like a human,” explains Last Mile Hillebrand’s Hartshorn. “Those acts of kindness make the job worth it.” And don’t underestimate the power of a good snack. Rive Gauche’s Isaac fondly remembers a mind-blowing basil cake with strawberry sorbet and Martignetti’s DeVito recalls a thank you sandwich after wrapping up a 300-case delivery.

Most accounts wouldn’t think twice about offering this sort of hospitality to their customers and should be offering it to their drivers as well. As Barbe put it, “Everybody is a customer for everybody. Treat everybody with respect.”

And please, don’t forget to check your invoice. ■