

Building a value-added fulfillment experience



Hedley & Bennett: Building a value- added fulfillment experience

It used to be that achieving customer satisfaction in e-commerce meant delivering the right order to the right place within the promised time frame. But in 2022, brands are facing far higher stakes.

Today, e-commerce fulfillment is a multi-faceted strategy that requires both flexibility and supportive technology to meet consumer expectations for a seamless experience—both before and after placing an order.

This is complicated by the nature of e-commerce: a dynamic, constantly evolving landscape that often throws curveballs in the path of growing brands.

When unexpected consumer demand or a less-than-satisfactory return experience can easily add friction to the customer experience, partnering with an experienced, integration-led e-commerce fulfillment provider is the best formula for success.

We spoke to Hedley & Bennett about how their partnership with both Ryder and Loop Returns has put the apparel brand on a path to faster fulfillment, better CX management, and a stronger product.



Empowering confidence and creativity

Los Angeles-based Hedley & Bennett was launched in 2012 by Ellen Marie Bennett, a professional chef who was frustrated with poor quality aprons that fell apart after a few uses. She set out to create a high-quality, colorful, and durable alternative that could stand up the pressure and activity of a busy kitchen, giving chefs and home cooks alike the right apparel to empower their work.

Today, Hedley & Bennett's Apron Squad includes nearly 1 million followers on social media, an enthusiastic community of chefs and other makers who are passionate about getting creative and honing their craft. Every one of their aprons is handmade and designed for maximum functionality—from handy pockets to sturdy straps—for a trusty kitchen companion that can stand the test of vigorous creativity.



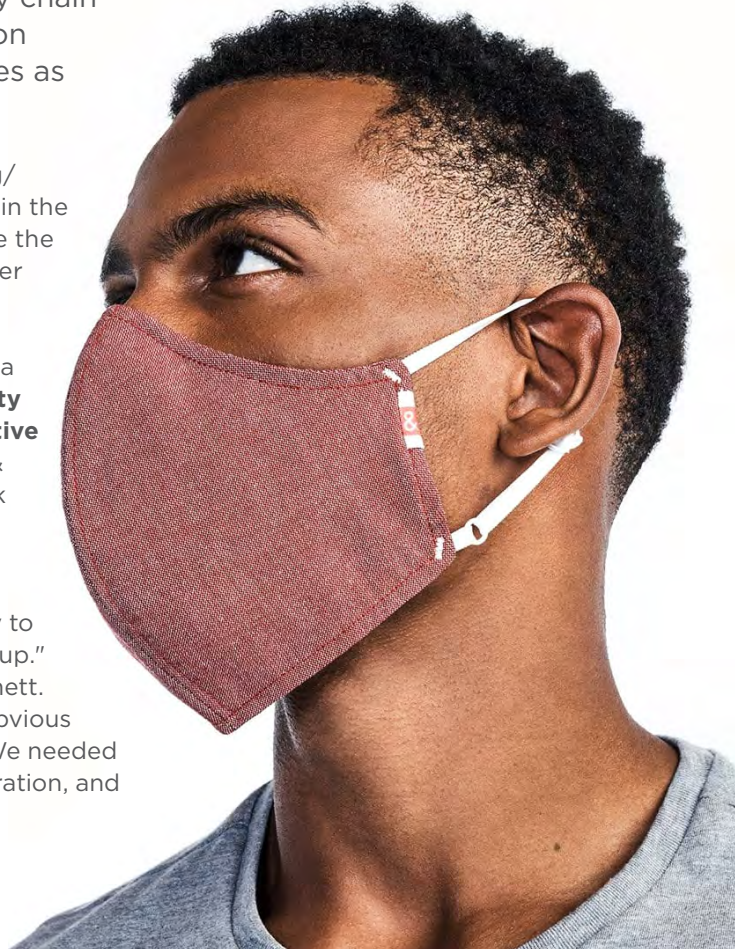
Maximizing the opportunities of the pandemic era

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a variety of challenges for the retail sector, from stay-at-home orders to supply chain disruptions that have made it difficult to get products on the shelf. Yet it's also led to the rise to new opportunities as consumer purchasing behavior shifts.

Subscription offerings, food delivery services, and remote working/learning software are just some of the winners that have emerged in the last two years. And let's not forget about e-commerce itself, where the current forecast will see direct-to-consumer sales grow by 50% over the next four years.

With their experience in producing textiles, Hedley & Bennett saw a clear opportunity at the start of the pandemic: **making high-quality fabric masks to help remedy the widespread shortage of protective gear.** The brand began producing and shipping its own Wake Up & Fight masks, donating one mask to first responders for every mask sold to the consumer. Order volumes rose quickly, overwhelming Hedley & Bennett's capacity to fulfill mask orders independently.

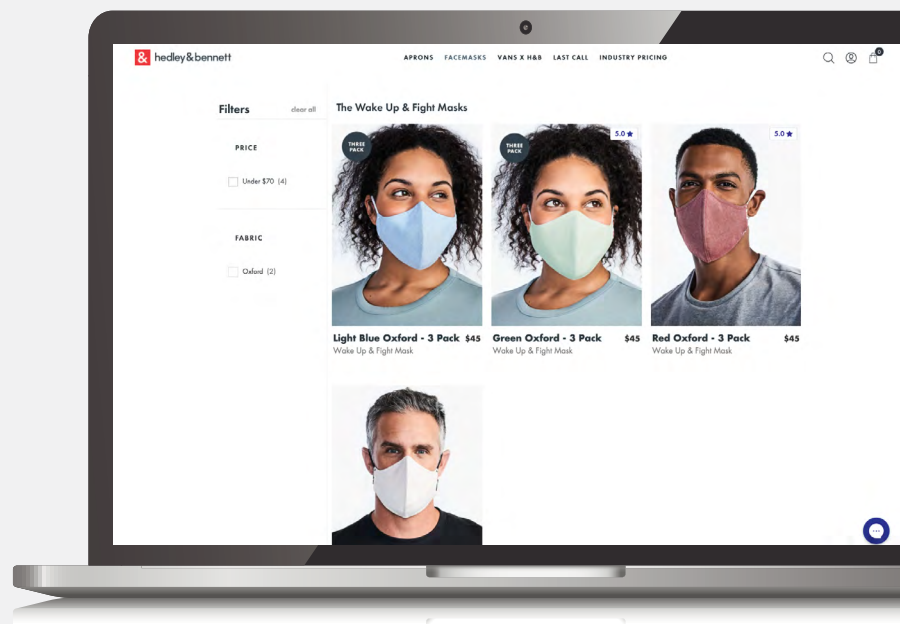
"When the pandemic started, Hedley & Bennett saw an opportunity to use our expertise in textile production to add face masks to our lineup." Said Steven Feczko, Senior Director of Operations at Hedley & Bennett. "We were blown away by how quickly demand ramped up. It was obvious we wouldn't be able to fulfill this volume of orders independently. We needed a partner that could facilitate an incredibly fast scale-up of our operation, and that led us to Ryder.



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at Hedley & Bennett



Rapid growth = Rapid fulfillment

While the brand had already been in discussions about forming a 3PL partnership with Ryder, it was their face mask initiative that drove home just how vital scalable e-commerce fulfillment was to the success of their business. A late-night call from Hedley & Bennett's founder to Ryder led to a 48-hour implementation project to ship masks from one of Ryder's Los Angeles facilities.

Scalable e-commerce is defined as the ability of merchants or 3PLs to accommodate large peaks and troughs in order volume. Scalability includes but is not limited to labor levels, warehouse space, order processing, and SKU management.

If just one of the above areas is unable to keep up, brands are looking at considerable bottlenecks in the fulfillment process - not to mention unhappy customers.

Within days of reaching out to Ryder, Hedley & Bennett had sent thousands of masks to the appointed facility and got the SKU uploaded into the Ryder system, a rapid turnaround made possible by their proprietary technology.

"The big advantage Hedley & Bennett had at the beginning of our partnership was that they needed something really simple," said Brian Weinstein, Vice President of Business Development at Ryder. "They had a single SKU (the mask) and thousands of small-package orders that were virtually identical. This made it very easy for us to get them set up in the Ryder system and start fulfilling orders quickly."

By the end of the first quarter of 2020, Hedley & Bennett had begun experiencing a large increase in order volumes across the board, thanks in part to the publicity from their mask campaign. With advanced support now needed across their product catalog, the brand made the decision to outsource their entire D2C fulfillment operation to Ryder, maintaining single-point distribution from their Los Angeles fulfillment location.

"It was a very intense 60 days, especially from the standpoint of ensuring that our ERP and support systems were properly integrated with Ryder and determining how much warehouse space we were likely to need," said Feczko. "It was a massive shift to go from just one SKU to 200, but Ryder handled it with true professionalism."

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The power of value-added services

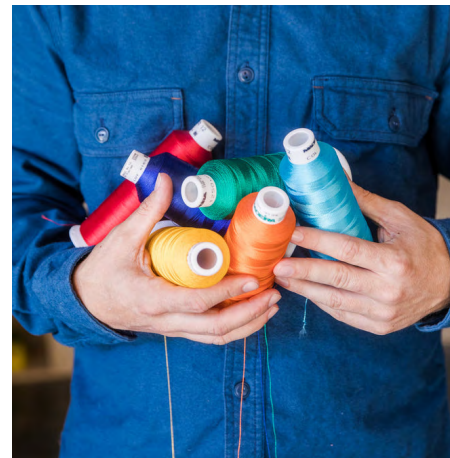
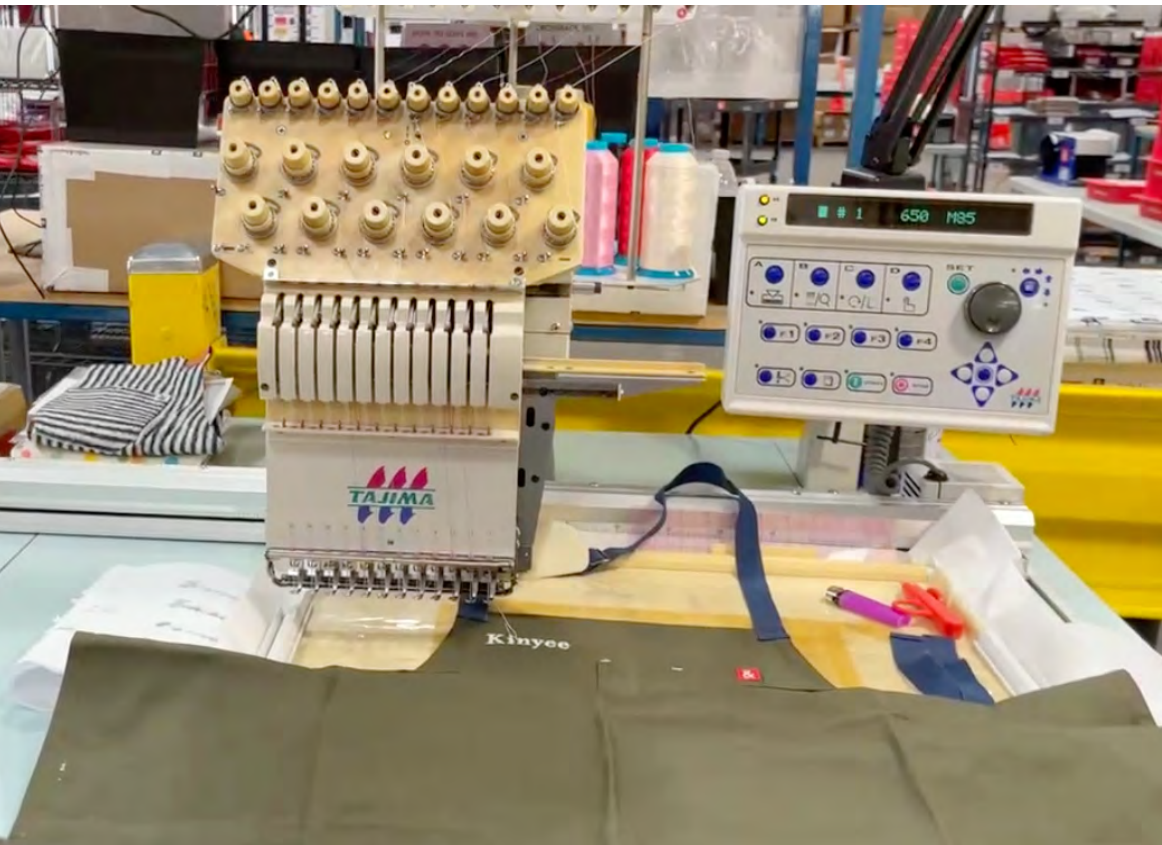
Although e-commerce fulfillment is thought of as moving goods from A to B, the devil is in the details when it comes to providing end customers with a great product and a memorable experience. This is why value-added services, also referred to as custom fulfillment services, are the true differentiator in 3PL partnerships.

While it's relatively easy to find a fulfillment provider who can supply you with wholesale shipping rates or multiple warehouse locations, it's far harder to find someone who is willing and able to tailor a unique workflow of fulfillment services.

In fact, it's the fear of losing control over the brand experience that puts many businesses off from outsourcing fulfillment in the first place.

For Hedley & Bennett, custom embroidery services aren't just a nice-to-have; they're an essential part of what makes their products unique and appealing. Enabling businesses to customize their aprons has set the brand apart within the highly competitive apparel sector.

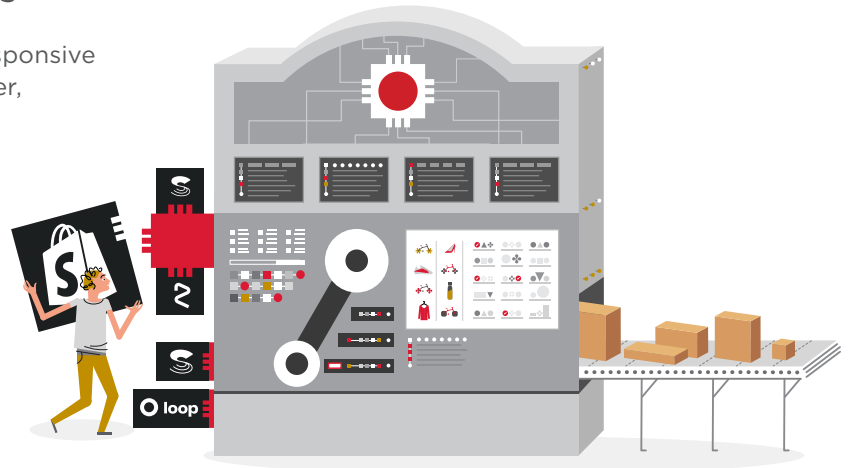
“When we started to look seriously at scaling our e-commerce fulfillment operation with Ryder, it was their embroidery capabilities that won us over,” Feczko said. “The ability, experience, and willingness to adapt that Ryder has shown via their value-added services has made them the ideal 3PL for us. We bought in the hardware, while they bought in the operators who we trained. **It really is a true partnership.**”



Harnessing best-in-class e-commerce technology

In an era where consumer expectations for rapid, responsive order processing and delivery have never been higher, e-commerce brands need to leverage the very best technology if they want full visibility over their fulfillment operation.

Inventory management is an area where real-time insights can be the difference between being able to fulfill outstanding orders or suddenly finding yourself with insufficient inventory. This is why Ryder invested considerable time and expertise into creating proprietary e-commerce technology that syncs in real-time with all major e-commerce platforms, enabling brands to easily keep tabs on their entire operation via one interface.

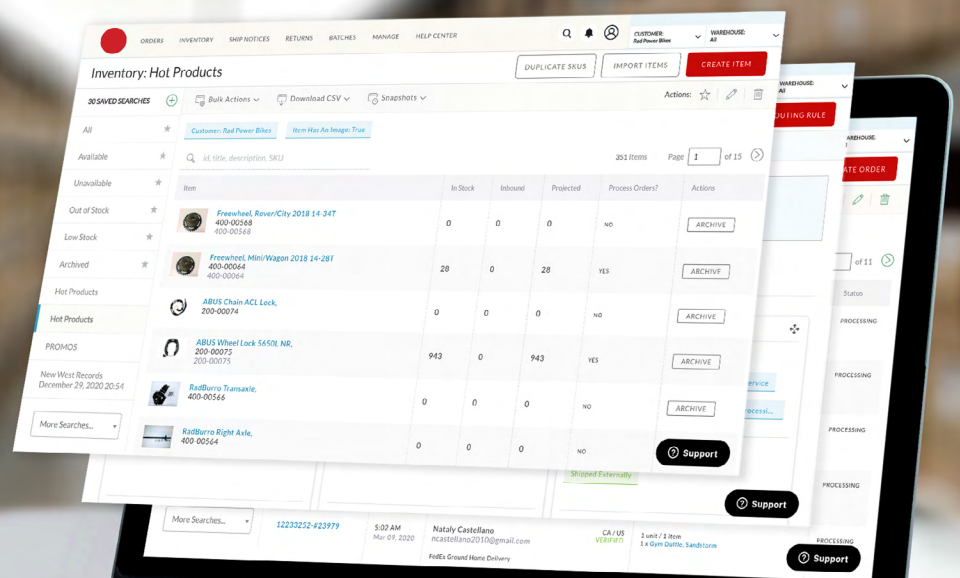


The usability of the Ryder platform is a key reason why the partnership has been so seamless for Hedley & Bennett.

“The problem with a lot of order and inventory management platforms is that they aren’t designed for the end user,” said Feczko. “Ryder is so intuitive that just about anyone can go into the system to create and save searches—it’s the ideal self-service tool. If there’s something we aren’t sure about, like setting up an Order Rule, we have an account manager who is always on hand to assist us.”

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Delivering seamless returns management via the Ryder/Loop integration

But the power of integrations doesn't stop at inventory management. Ryder's open API enables the platform to connect with a wide variety of tools to make e-commerce selling and fulfillment run more smoothly.

In a time when return rates in e-commerce are at an all-time high, effective returns management is a must to ensure a positive experience for your customers. In fact, 42% of consumers say an exchange/return policy that's difficult to navigate is what defines a poor omnichannel shopping experience.

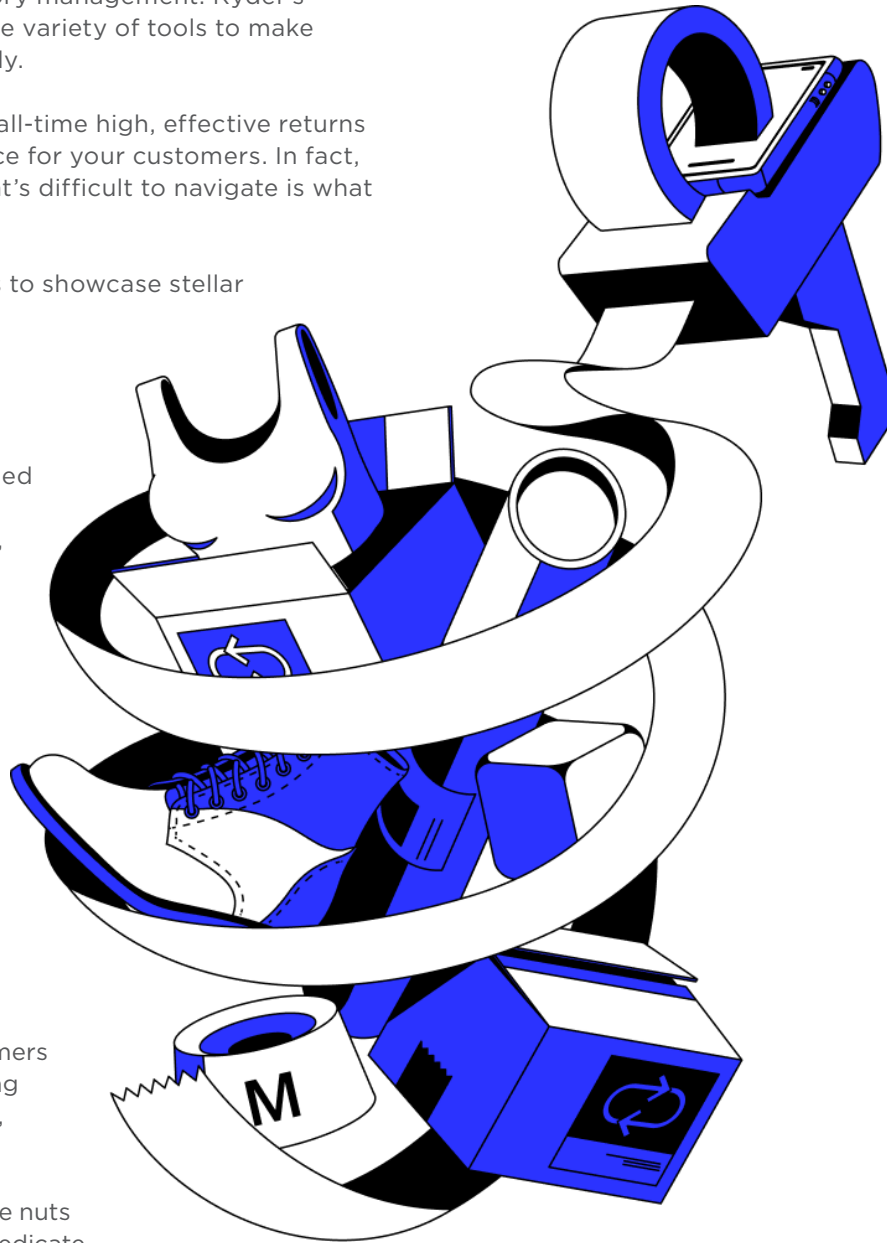
In sum, returns are a valuable opportunity for brands to showcase stellar customer care, both before and after purchasing.

For Hedley & Bennett, returns management was an undeveloped part of their business. For the first few months of their partnership with Ryder, returns were not integrated into their fulfillment operation. Returned merchandise was sent to their head office to be manually processed and sent back to the warehouse, a process that was time-intensive and inefficient.

Their decision to partner with returns management platform Loop, a Ryder integration partner, was a key turning point in Hedley & Bennett's ability to offer their customers a self-service return process.

"Enabling our customers to perform self-service returns with Loop, even with incomplete order information, has been invaluable to us," Feczko said. "Loop keeps endless support tickets from slowing down our CX team so they can focus on bigger issues. If the average consumer can navigate this system without problems, you know it's working well!"

Loop's direct integration with Ryder means that customers who return items via the Loop system receive a shipping label to send merchandise directly to the Ryder facility, whose team inspects and processes returned items according to Hedley & Bennett's criteria. In sum, Hedley & Bennett no longer needs to have a hand in the nuts and bolts of the fulfillment process, allowing them to dedicate more time to developing great products.



“A great yardstick for measuring the success of an integration is how often you need to get involved in troubleshooting a problem,” said Feczko. “We recently had a minor issue crop up with the Ryder/Loop integration. The two technical teams got in touch and had it resolved within just 48 hours. Not only does this integration minimize admin for our customers, it achieves the same for us as well.”

So what’s next for Hedley and Bennett in their direct-to-consumer e-commerce journey?

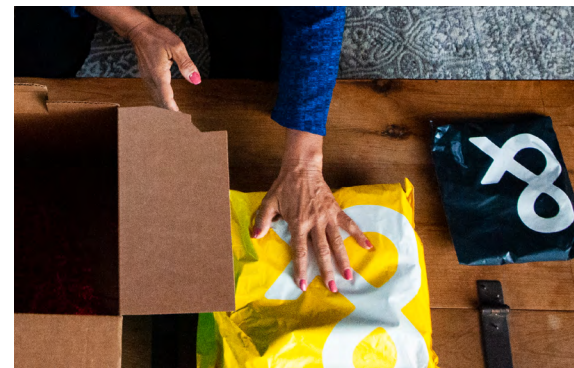
“In 2022, Hedley & Bennett will be expanding their catalog with products in addition to textiles and soft goods,” said Feczko. “We’ll also be offering more advanced customization options via our embroidery services, which will help us to tap into the shift in consumer preferences toward personalized products and apparel. We’re very confident that Ryder will be the ideal partner in these endeavors.”

With the brand’s expanded partnership with Ryder now fully online and ready to handle a bigger SKU base and higher order volumes, Feczko has no doubt the future will be bright.

“It’s their willingness to say ‘yes’ that sets Ryder apart from other 3PLs. They’ve been able to provide everything we need to maintain the integrity of our product and the brand experience that our loyal customers expect. It’s a level of flexibility that we would struggle to find anywhere else.”

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About Ryder System, Inc.

Ryder System, Inc. (NYSE: R) is a leading logistics and transportation company. It provides supply chain, dedicated transportation, and fleet management solutions, including warehousing and distribution, e-commerce fulfillment, last-mile delivery, managed transportation, professional drivers, freight brokerage, leasing, maintenance, commercial truck rental, and used vehicle sales to some of the world's most-recognized brands. Ryder provides services throughout the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Ryder is regularly recognized for its industry-leading practices in third-party logistics, technology-driven innovations, commercial vehicle maintenance, environmental stewardship, corporate social responsibility, world-class safety, and security programs.

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