

# 'We have no business if we can't deliver': The cardboard box shortage making life hard for shops across the UK

**With so many people buying almost all their goods online now, there is an estimated 200 million more parcels going through the postal and courier systems in 2020**



From the Cheshire Cheese Company in Macclesfield, to supermarkets including Tesco, firms across the UK are facing a cardboard shortage (Photo: Erda Estemera/Unsplash)

When Joelle Nebbe-Mornod recently went to order her usual batch of boxes for her wine-delivery business, her supplier told her there was a big delay because of a cardboard

shortage. “We have no business if we can’t deliver,” says the owner of [Alpine Wines](#) in Idle, West Yorkshire. “Packaging stocks are just not something I ever had to think about much before.”

From the Cheshire Cheese Company in Macclesfield, to supermarkets including Tesco, firms across the UK are facing a cardboard shortage. When some Asda customers asked on Twitter recently why their eggs now come in plastic containers instead of the traditional boxes, the company replied that “there is a shortage of the pulp required for cardboard boxes across all industries.”

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*Hey Lionel. ????? This is affecting all supermarkets as there's a global shortage of the pulp used. We hope to be back to the cardboard as soon as possible. The plastic currently used is also fully recyclable.*

*Best wishes, Danielle*

*— Asda Service Team (@AsdaServiceTeam) [January 30, 2021](#)*

## ‘Beige gold’

Why has cardboard suddenly become what recycling experts have called “beige gold”? It’s mainly down to a surge in home deliveries during the pandemic.

With so many people buying almost all their goods online now, from houseplants to trainers, from wine to bicycles, this amounted to an estimated 200 million more parcels going through the postal and courier systems in 2020, according to Royal Mail.



Ben Hughes at Jawbone Brewing has been having an issue with boxes (Photo: Jawbone)

Brexit has also led to problems transporting material to make the boxes across the Channel. Meanwhile collections of household recycling for homegrown supplies have been hampered by staff shortages and an increase in waste overall.

## Share price rise

The Confederation of Paper Industries says demand for cardboard boxes from online retailers is five years ahead of where it had expected to be before the pandemic.

DS Smith, one of the biggest packaging firms in the UK, has seen its share price rise by almost 50 per cent since September. Its CEO, Miles Roberts, says there has been “an explosion of demand” and a backlog has clogged up the supply chain.

“All our factories have been working flat out, and I really mean flat out, producing record volumes of packaging,” he tells **i**. “The word ‘record volumes’ doesn’t really do it justice – it’s not a tiny bit ahead, it’s hugely ahead of where we’ve been previously.”

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[Jawbone Brewing](#), a new craft brewery in south-west London had to delay the launch of online deliveries by three weeks while the company searched for packaging. Founder Ben Hughes put out a plea to local customers on social media to bring boxes with them. He managed to get a delivery out on Friday 29 January but it's taken a lot longer and has been more expensive than then he budgeted for.

["It's like toilet paper, all over again,"](#) says Nebbe-Mornod. "People are over-ordering when they do get the chance to get cardboard, because they don't want to be caught out with too few boxes. So in worrying about more of a shortage, they're creating shortage.

"I'm going to be just as bad when my supplier gets boxes back in... Whether I need them or not, I'm going to order some, because without boxes, how can I send wine to my customers?"