

Online Wedding Shopping 101: Buying from US websites

Thanks to the Internet, you can now shop-the-world for your wedding and most notably for Canadians, all sorts of **US-based websites, with their much lower pricing**. But, in practice, shipping costs, customs, duties, taxes and other fees can quickly become a frustrating adventure and many a Canadian bride have found it more economical to abandon their order, rather than pay some significant and totally unexpected charges.



Wedding e-Stores for Canadian Brides

Here is a list of the top-20 ranked online wedding stores in bride.ca's [wedding invitations](#) and [wedding favours & supplies](#) directory categories. Luckily, most of them are in Canada! Still, those 4-5 U.S. stores carry enough products to easily double your choices.. so, **what do you need to know?**

Store	Invites	Favours	Supplies	Country	\$\$	Shipping
<i>DreamGroup Boutique</i> (Wedding Star)	✗	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Print Canada Store</i>	✗	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Bridalicious!</i> (Kate Aspen)	✗	✓	✗	U.S.	USD	UPS (details)
<i>Nuptial Celebrations: SHOP CAD</i>	✓	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Finally the Bride</i>	✓	✓	✓	Canada + U.S.	CAD	(UPS) (details)
<i>In Casa Gifts & Favours</i>	✗	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Gorgeous Moments</i>	✗	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Creative Expressions</i> (Wedding Star)	✗	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>The Uncommon Bride</i>	✓	✓	✗	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Nuptial Celebrations</i> (Carlson Craft)	✓	✗	✗	U.S.	CAD	UPS (details)
<i>Paper Garden: DIY Supplies</i>	✓	✗	✗	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Prelude to a Kiss</i> (Wedding Star)	✗	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Wedding Style - Wedding Favours</i>	✗	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Celebration Invitations</i>	✓	✗	✗	Canada	CAD	(details)

<i>Nuptial Celebrations: SHOP USD</i>	✓	✓	✓	U.S.	USD	UPS (details)
<i>MDC Designs (DIY)</i>	✓	✗	✗	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>A Beautiful Day</i>	✗	✗	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>InspirAsian Creations</i>	✗	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Nuptial Celebrations (McPhersons)</i>	✓	✗	✗	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>The Thank You Company</i>	✓	✓	✓	Canada	CAD	(details)
<i>Nuptial Celebrations (Stylart)</i>	✓	✗	✗	U.S.	USD	(details)

(*) **Careful:** these are not your only options for invitations or favours, just the most popular e-commerce outlets. For your full range of options, including local specialists, spend some time in the [directory](#).



We have turned to our "resident expert", our good friend Linda from [Nuptial Celebrations](#), to try and make some sense of this labyrinth of charges and learn what to look for before ordering, to ensure you are trully getting a deal.

Linda operates her own *Canadian wedding web-store*, in addition to another three "private label" websites by US-based wedding companies: *Carlson Craft* (often referred to as "Cceasy"), *Stylart* and *McPhersons*, as well as operating a website where customers can order with drop shipment directly from United States vendors (referred-to as *Nuptial Celebrations: Shop USD*). So no one understand this stuff better than her!

Shipping, Duties & other Charges, Demystified

Rule #1:

Before even browsing a website, first check out their *About Us*, *shipping policy* and *return policy* pages. This will help you determine where the company is located and decide whether it makes sense to even bother considering these items.

(*) If you can't find a physical address and/or phone number for contact purposes, **leave the site**. It can have all the web-security in the world, but that will not help you when there is a problem **after** you place your order.

So, your favourite item is on a U.S. website..

(Obviously, if you're on a Canadian website -that passed rule #1!- there is nothing much to discuss.. no duties or levies or customs or brokers.. what you see is what you get. But the interesting things happen after you "cross the border"!)



..or, a third-party U.S. website, under a Canadian label

..which is very often a source of confusion. See, many Canadian owned and operated companies are actually marketing a third-party "affiliate" website, which itself is operating out of the US. Most of the time, you can readily see this in the website's web address, in your browser. Something like www.somecompanyname.cceasy.com. So (in this case) this is really the *Carlson Craft* website, marketed locally by some Canadian company.

HINT: The About Us page should clearly identify the Canadian "host" of the website, while the company that actually powers the website should be shown on the bottom of the home page (with their name and the copyright sign ©).

Whichever the case, in most such US-website situations (with a few exceptions)

- pricing is in USD,
- shipment is from the United States
- and **(warning #2!) YOU are responsible** for brokerage fees and taxes **upon delivery** (details below).
- (Any discounts have already been applied at check out.)

"Standard" Extra Charges, Considerations & Exceptions



When buying off a U.S.-based website, there are almost always some extra charges upon delivery (unless the amount is minimal).

- Invitation **samples** are sent by postal service with **no payment** on delivery.
- Any **parcels** sent by post usually require a *brokerage fee* of \$5 - \$15 depending on the value of the package, **plus** applicable *taxes*.
- Too, parcels can take **longer** to reach you, as they can sit in customs for up to **6 weeks**.
- UPS does **not** charge *brokerage fees* on items with a value of less than \$20;
- UPS also "absorbs" the brokerage fees within their shipping fees, if you're paying for their *Expedited Shipping* and *Worldwide Shipping* options;

- In all other cases,
 - the *brokerage fees* are a progressive amount based on the values of goods imported,
 - *excise taxes* are payable in accordance with Canada's trade agreements (eg. Candles and jewellery).
- Some companies including Kate Aspen and WMI Designs use FedEx (instead of UPS) which include the brokerage fees either within their shipping fees, or a separate handling fee / "pre-payment" of customs.

The value of research

The above standards seem simple-enough (assuming that you can estimate the value of any brokerage & taxes fairly accurately). But also keep in mind that the "host" Canadian company may be offering **additional or seasonal benefits for shopping in a particular store**, which may not be available on other "versions" of this same US-based website. For example, at *Nuptial Celebrations* you are presently offered

- various specific discounts,
- payment in CAD (which could change, based on dollar's current exchange rate); and
- **three shipping alternatives:** ship directly to your destination, ship to their studio and you pick it up, or ship to your destination via their studio (where Nuptial Celebrations actually covers the brokerage fees on the later two choices)

So, **do your research and compare the total prices**, even between different Canadian versions of the same US website.

Special Case: *Kate Aspen Favours*

Kate Aspen products are extremely popular and are found both "within" dozens of Canadian websites or as stand-alone "Canadian label" Kate Aspen web-stores. One of the options they offer is **pre-payment of customs**. Careful! Not "included" customs, just "pre-paid", on their website's checkout. Presently the fee is \$20.95 which is **added** to their shipping rates (by FedEx), meaning that you don't have to pay it on delivery. Kate Aspen bulk ships to Canada once a week, with delivery arriving within 3-10 days, depending on your location.

Warning #3 (Kate Aspen): If you find a Kate Aspen item listed for a very low price in an "independent" website, be very careful. Make sure the item is current and has not been since discontinued. Try to find it in one of those "Canadian-label" Kate Aspen websites (eg. [*Bridalicious*](#)) - their products are by definition always up-to-date. Linda receives too many calls each year from brides who have ordered from a website based on price but never receive their order. Kate Aspen is taking steps to control this situation.

A New Wrinkle: Independent International Shipping companies



"Faking" a U.S. Address..

Traditionally, just about anything one ordered online from a U.S. website, was shipped with UPS, or perhaps Fedex (very rarely, via U.S. Post). But during the past few months you will notice **new shipping companies**, like [IshopUSA](#) and [Bongo International](#) (for real, that's their actual name: "Bongo Int'l", lol) which have partnered with some of the U.S. web sites, as their exclusive international shipping company. So, if the website you are browsing uses one of those two for international shipping, some slightly different rules (and better options!) may apply:

- **IshopUSA**, does offer international shipping worldwide, and is a good alternative when ordering items from more than one site and wanting your goods shipped internationally.
 - You can pay in your own currency,
 - plus you can choose to pre-pay customs, and brokerage fees, etc. with **no payment on delivery**,
 - or you can choose to pay these fees at the time of delivery.

To determine your shipping and handling costs it is necessary to complete your shopping cart and click on calculate. You will also be advised of the amount of pre-payment of customs if you choose to elect that option.

- **Bongo International** (lol) is neat. For either a monthly subscription or pay-as-you-go-and-\$5-sign-up, **they will actually issue you a US address**, which you can use when shopping on US websites that do not ship internationally! *Bongo* handles and forwards the items to you. You can calculate your shipping costs quite easily: you select your country and then view a charge-chart, based on your membership, and the weight of your shipment.

Having spoken with both companies,

- *IshopUSA* is more expensive as the customer pays shipping to their address in California, shipping to the customer's destination, plus a fee, and depending on their choice they can pre-pay customs and brokerage fees or pay upon delivery,
- whereas, *Bongo International* advises they use FedEx and that the shipping costs quoted include the brokerage fees for Canadian companies. But **the customer will still be responsible for applicable taxes upon delivery**.

HINT: If you are planning on ordering from several US companies for the wedding, *Bongo* may be the way to go, as FedEx does include the brokerage fees in their pricing. All your parcels can be shipped to the address and you decide when to have it shipped to you - when all the parcels arrive at your US address - and the shipping fees to Canada will be less than if each was shipped individually. Plus the US websites often offer free shipping to US address when you reach a certain threshold.

Reprinted, with permission from: bride.ca | [the wedding ideas blog](#).

RESOURCES:

Canada "Customs": [Border Services Agency](#)

UPS: [United Parcel Service](#)

Federal Express: [FedEx Canada](#)

Current Exchange Rate: [USD vs CAD](#) on Google