

# 7 Steps to Building a Returns Experience Customers Love

There's no denying that returns are the new normal. But with obstacles and risks for retailers such as call center and pre-printed label costs, fraud, seasonal inventory, and blind returns that throw warehouse operations for a loop, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to keep up with consumer expectations.

Almost half of the shoppers we surveyed for our returns consumer study, *"Making Returns a Competitive Advantage"*, said that they actively check a retailer's return policy before completing an online transaction, and it can be costly to ignore the implications of a frustrating returns process. To help you craft an experience that's convenient for your customers and easy to implement for your business, we've developed a handy checklist, complete with practical steps you can take and best-practice advice. Whether you're starting from scratch or revamping your current process, this cheat sheet will make sure you have all your bases covered.



## 01.

### Do away with restocking and return shipping fees.

Customers don't want to pay extra fees for the items they don't want to keep. We found that **84% of shoppers wouldn't make a purchase if a brand charged restocking fees**, and **74% would empty their carts if they would be expected to pay for return shipping**. While returns can be expensive for retailers, in the end it's more expensive to lose would-be customers because of these barriers.



## 02.

### Offer a 30-day window for returns.

You want to strike a balance between what your customers expect and what's good for your bottom line. When it comes to return windows, we found that 30 days is the magic number. 51% of shoppers said that a short time limit for returns would prevent them from making a purchase, but **53% said that a 30-day policy is fair**. The even better news? Most of them won't actually take that long—26% returned their items within a week, and 48% returned within just a few days.



## 03.

### Communicate proactively about return and refund statuses.

One of the reasons Amazon is so popular with customers is because it communicates with them at every step of the way. **34% of consumers were satisfied with their Amazon returns because they were informed when the refund was processed**, and **24% were satisfied because they received updates about the status of their return packages**. Being transparent will also reduce costs by decreasing the amount of calls coming in to Customer Service from customers wondering what happened with their return.



## 04.

### Make it easy for customers to return unwanted items in-store.

**47% of shoppers we surveyed said it's easier to return a purchase in a store**. Why? Because they can a) get their refund immediately, and b) shop for other items while they're there. It presents the opportunity for omnichannel brands to drive more in-person traffic and get a leg up on the competition. By giving customers the option to buy online and return in store, you can win over the 38% of customers who prefer to return unwanted items at brick-and-mortar locations.



## 05.

### Replace pre-printed labels with a step-by-step process online.

Turns out that pre-printed return labels don't really deliver much value—they usually cost businesses between \$0.25 and \$0.40 per package, whether a return is initiated or not. On top of that, a lot of them end up getting lost, which means your customer care contact volume (and the associated cost) goes up, and you'll have to print out and pay for more than one. By moving the whole shebang online, you ensure only customers initiating a return will get a label and eliminate all of those extra hassles and costs.



## 06.

### Use return reasons to improve product information up front.

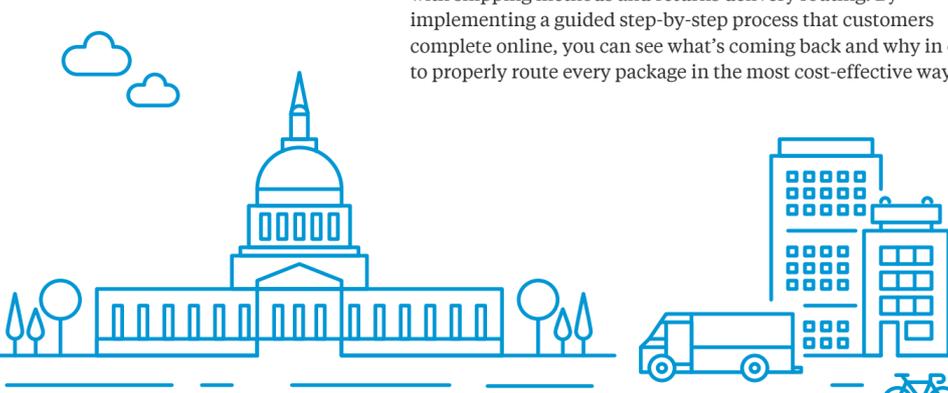
A guided online returns process that prompts consumers to enter their reason for return lets you see up front why customers are sending items back. This allows you to identify trends—such as clothing that runs big—so you can get ahead of the problem. It's not uncommon for retailers to update a product detail page because sizing or color info is off—in fact, 70% of apparel returns are made for exactly those reasons. If you can get ahead of issues, you'll see fewer returns down the line.



## 07.

### Optimize inventory disposition by capturing return data online.

Pre-printed labels don't let retailers track items that are coming back. Besides not being able to plan for returns at the warehouse, it's a better opportunity for brands to return to the warehouse, with shipping methods and returns delivery routing. By implementing a guided step-by-step process that customers complete online, you can see what's coming back and why in order to properly route every package in the most cost-effective way.



Once you've covered these seven checkpoints, you'll be well on your way to creating a returns experience that customers love and your brand profits from.

Download our ebook, *"The Essential Guide to Retail Returns"*, for more insights into these evolving consumer expectations, along with advice about how to make the most of returns.

## A final note: Getting buy-in from your organization's key stakeholders:

Change management can be a pain in the you know what, but we've made it easy for you to roll out this action plan internally. Just copy, paste, and adjust the below email to get the conversation started:

Hi team,

I've been doing some research about how we can optimize our returns process to improve our overall customer experience. By implementing some new policies and processes, we'll create the opportunity to drive more repeat purchases and increase revenue for the business.

Can we meet this week to talk more about how we make this happen?