# UK E-Commerce Shipping Study 2019

A detailed study of the strengths and potential capabilities in checkout, shipping and returns of the 100 largest UK online retailers.

**parcellab.com/en**

parcelLab

**Foreword** 4

**Executive Summary** 6

**Purpose of study** 10

**The 100 UK E-Commerce retailers** 13

**The study results in detail** 16

- Industry specific results 40
- Summary 46

**Learning from the best** 48

**Frequent issues** 60

**Contact & About Us** 62

# Foreword



## E-Commerce logistics: **Room for improvement**

**So how do the UK's largest online shops[1] perform during checkout, shipping and returns? The study shows that customer centricity ends after checkout and retailers expect customers to seek information from them, rather than the other way around. As a result of this sub-par after-sales support, the UK's online retailers are throwing away millions of pounds in potential sales every month.[2]**

Shopping online should be more convenient for the customer than going to a store. For this reason, customers expect their parcel to arrive conveniently, without shipping costs and, most importantly, on time. So, to what extent do UK online shops meet these expectations? Specialist in post-purchase communications, parcelLab has analysed the logistics services of 100 UK retailers to find out. For this in-depth study, we placed orders with all 100 online shops, and then documented which services these retailers offer their customers before they checkout, and what happens afterwards.

The conclusion? UK retailers still have a long way to go to meet the expectations of their customers.

---

[1] Based on InternetRetailing UK Top500 2018 (excluding marketplaces) https://internetretailing.net/top500-reports/iruk-reports/internetretailing-uk-top500-2018

[2] Calculated from the Statista value of internet retail sales 2018 per month multiplied by the additional revenue generated by post checkout (empirical values of parcelLab customers).

# Executive Summary

Customers expect a convenient and quick shipping service, where they are given the chance to tailor it to their needs. Sadly, the majority of the UK's online retailers fail to deliver this.

94 of the 100 retailers do not give customers the opportunity to choose between different delivery partners, and instead expect customers to accept the delivery carrier the retailer selects.

Freedom of choice in delivery times is limited for online buyers. Whilst 72% of retailers offer express delivery, only seven of the 100 analysed offer same-day and this is often geographically restricted; for example, Zara only offers this service in London and Missguided in Manchester. Furthermore, only 42 retailers offer weekend delivery and only 25 retailers allow the customer to pick a particular timeslot for delivery at checkout.

In addition to shipping solutions not being very customer-oriented, the study shows that customers are paying dearly for the service as well. Only 12 of the 100 retailers offer free shipping. 65 of the retailers offer free shipping above a minimum order value. This, however, can range from £10 to £150. For those who do apply a shipping cost, the amount is usually high, averaging £3.99 across the online shops.

After checkout, most merchants stop directly communicating with their customers and leave them to check the status of the order themselves. Of the 100 retailers, only 11 communicate with their customers during shipping. The remaining 89 either leave this communication to the delivery carrier or the customer receives no updates at all. These communications are tailored to the customer for only four retailers. Therefore, a staggering 96 retailers are missing out on the opportunity to provide their customers with a personalised post-purchase experience.

Only 13 of the 100 retailers have the Track & Trace page integrated in their own shop, meaning 87 retailers are missing out on the opportunity to drive customers directly back to their website. Most surprising is that 17 of the retailers either do not send a dispatch confirmation or do not give the customers any tracking information. For a further 15 retailers, the tracking information provided returned the error message “Tracking number not known” when checked immediately. This was due to the retailer providing the tracking information before the carrier had registered the parcel; the error was resolved once this was done.

Returns are another area where UK retailers demonstrate different service mentalities. 22 of the 100 retailers analysed do not provide customers with a returns label or any alternative returns options (such as a collection service). For these, the customer must organise the return themselves. Incidentally, 49 retailers enclose this label, although it does not always include pre-paid postage. The majority of retailers allow customers to return to store and 55 provide the option to return to a parcel shop such as Doddle or a parcel locker; both these options are seen as convenient alternatives for the customer, especially those customers that live in major cities where these services are often located close by. Only 63 retailers allow their customers to return goods free of charge.

When it comes to refunds, almost three quarters of retailers are very customer-oriented and do not let their customers wait longer than three days for their money. 25 retailers did not communicate with us or allow us to track our goods once returned – a poor returns experience. There is still a lot of potential for optimising returns communication therefore.

The analysis shows that while retailers place customer centricity as the top priority pre-checkout, post-purchase the focus is on getting parcels to customers as cheaply and efficiently as possible for the retailer. The convenience for the customer is not considered. In addition, retailers are not utilising opportunities in their post-purchase communications to proactively inspire their customers with detailed and relevant messages on the status, and most do not include any cross-selling options. Improving these would make retailers stand out in the increasingly crowded marketplace, even after checkout.



# Key-Findings

12 shops offer free shipping and another 65 offer free shipping with a minimum order value. Otherwise, the average amount is £3.99.

Only six retailers allow customers to choose the logistics provider and four of these ask the customer to pay for this additional service.

89 retailers send a shipping confirmation, after which 75 shops end customer communication, with 62 leaving it to the delivery carrier.

For 70 shops, the parcel tracking is hosted by the logistics provider and for 15 checking the parcel tracking link immediately led to an error message. 17 retailers do not send any tracking information.

49 shops enclose a returns label, while 22 do not provide a label for returns at all. The most popular returns option was return to store, with 79 retailers offering this. 63 retailers allowed customers to return goods free of charge.

73 retailers refund the money within three days. For retailers that told customers when they would get their money back, 53 refunded the money earlier than expected. 35 shops gave no prediction to the customer.

# Purpose of study

Surprisingly, shipping and returns make up only part of retailers' customer centricity strategy. The majority of retailers focus heavily on pre-checkout and place less importance on post-purchase customer experiences.

After all, 30-50% of all customer enquiries take place during shipping and returns. In addition, this is the crucial time for creating loyal customers; customers who are impressed by a retailer post-purchase are more likely to purchase from that retailer again.

Retailers are no longer defined by their products, but instead they are differentiated by the service they provide from initial visit right through to returns. Therefore, if a retailer wants to consistently outgrow its competitors, they need to build strong customer loyalty through above average customer experiences.

As a specialist in post-purchase communications, parcelLab optimises communication between retailers and their customers from checkout all the way through to returns – giving control back to retailers from the delivery service providers, worldwide. We noticed that there are very big differences between retailers, which we showcase in this study.

In addition, whilst the pre-checkout offerings of the UK's top retailers have been studied in detail previously, there is little research into how these retailers communicate with customers post-purchase. This study aims to fill this gap and we will use the results to develop concrete recommendations for improvements.

## Methodology of the study

In November and December 2018, orders were placed with the 100 largest UK online retailers in order to analyse the shipping and returns services of the UK's online shops. The following factors were examined in the study:

**Trial orders**
Clear arrangement of the ordering process, selection of parcel service providers and dispatch times, dispatch communication

CW45
CW46
CW47
CW48

**Returns handling**
Communication services during the return process

CW49
CW50

**Refund**
Checking incoming emails for refund notifications, analysis of chargeback times

CW2
CW3
CW4
CW5
CW6

**Evaluation and study elaboration**

CW7
CW8
CW9
CW10
CW11



# The 100 E-Commerce Retailers

## **Beauty, Household Goods & Food** (10 companies)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Boots | Holland & Barrett | Morrisons | Sainsbury's | Superdrug |
| Estée Lauder | The Fragrance Shop | MAC Cosmetics | Whittard of Chelsea | Fragrance Direct |

## **Clothing, Footwear & Accessories** (48 companies)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Marks & Spencer | New Look | Next | Oasis | Schuh |
| ASOS | Dorothy Perkins | Dune London | H&M | JD Sports |
| Mothercare | Topshop | Superdry | Accessorize | Ann Summers |
| Claire's | Cotton Traders | Footasylum | M&Co | Matalan |
| Miss Selfridge | Missguided | Moss Bros. | River Island | Shoe Zone |
| size? | SportsDirect.com | TK Maxx | Topman | Uniqlo |
| Urban Outfitters | White Stuff | Bonmarché | Boux Avenue | Cath Kidston |
| Crew Clothing Company | Evans | Fat Face | Freemans.com | Getthelabel.com |
| Hobbs London | Jack Wills | Jigsaw | JoJo Maman Bébé | Karen Millen |
| DeMellier London | Zara | Yours Clothing | | |



## **Multi-category retailer** (8 companies)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Debenhams | House of Fraser | John Lewis | Selfridges | Very |
| Liberty London | Argos | Amazon | | |

## **Electronics, Computers & Accessories** (10 companies)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Screwfix | Currys PC World | AO.com | Apple | Game |
| Richer Sounds | Andertons Music | AppliancesDirect | Ebuyer.com | Hughes Electrical |

## **Home, Garden & DIY** (7 companies)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dunelm | Home Bargains | Axminster | Pets at Home | Toolstation |
| Topps Tiles | Bathstore | | | |

## **Sport, Leisure & Automobiles** (10 companies)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Evans Cycles | GO Outdoors | American Golf | Chain Reaction Cycles | Ellis Brigham |
| Millets | Wiggle | Blacks | Decathlon | Euro Car Parts |

## **Toys, Books & Office Supplies** (7 companies)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Waterstones | Early Learning Centre | The Entertainer | Mamas & Papas | Post Office Shop |
| WHSmith | Hobbycraft | | | |

# The study results in detail

## Checkout

For online retailers, shipping services start at checkout. Therefore, the analysis of the 100 retailers will start here. Our mystery shoppers documented in detail which shipping and handling options online merchants offer customers, how they communicate delivery times and which shipping charges are paid for by the customer.

Retailers invest a lot of time, money and effort into making the checkout process as smooth as possible for the customer, attempting to eliminate any potential conversion blockers. As such, the checkout is widely considered to be one of the most optimised areas of an online shop and retailers are continually investing to improve this further. Despite this, the study found large numbers of conversion killers in many of the UK's largest online shops.

## Selection of preferred delivery provider

**Figure 1**
Only 6 of the 100 retailers let the customer choose between different delivery providers.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

## Which carriers do the 100 retailers use?

Unlike in Germany, where it is common practice for a retailer to display their logistics partners in their website footer, only 38% of the UK retailers analysed included this information on their website. When it was displayed on the website, it was not showcased clearly and was often included within the delivery policy.

Therefore, for 62% of retailers that did not display their chosen carriers, only the courier that was assigned to the test order is included. It is likely, however, that these retailers use multiple carriers.

The most popular carrier service used by the 100 UK retailers was Hermes, which 49 of the 100 UK online shops use to deliver their goods.

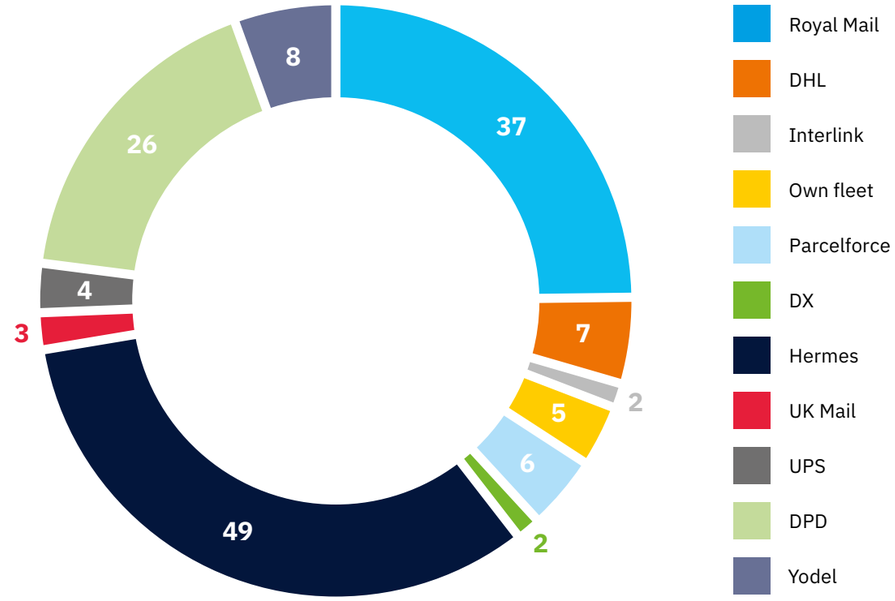



**Figure 2**
Carrier distribution[3]: Hermes is the most popular courier in UK E-Commerce[4].

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures; multiple answers possible
Status: November 2018

[3] There were an additional 10 carriers that were only used by one retailer. These are omitted from the figure.

[4] Within the top 100 retailers for only 1 product per order.

## Offering customers a choice of delivery options is standard

Most retailers offer customers a variety of choice when it comes to delivery options. Just 10 of the 100 retailers analysed only offered standard home delivery, whilst the rest were a lot more flexible. Indeed, 79 retailers offered Click & Collect, 61 of the retailers offered special or next day delivery and 20 allowed customers to collect from a parcel shop such as Doddle.

**Alternative delivery options in the 100 online shops**

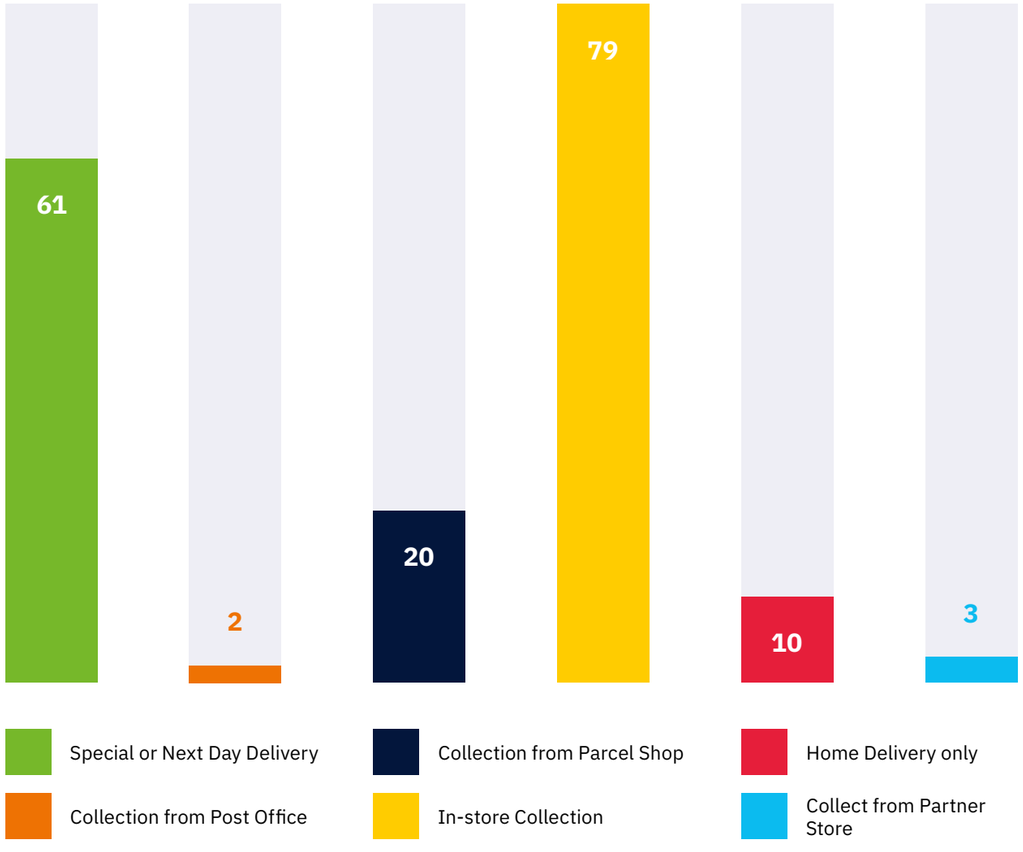



**Figure 3**
The 100 retailers offer customers a variety of delivery options.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures; multiple answers possible
Status: November 2018



## Delivery date: Retailers happy to make promises

Over half of the retailers give customers an exact delivery date (55 retailers). A further 34 give a predicted date range (e.g. five working days) and the remaining 11 do not give an estimated delivery date at checkout. It is likely that customers would rather have an exact delivery date as, if they need the parcel for a particular day, they will feel assured that it will arrive on time.

**How is delivery date articulated?**

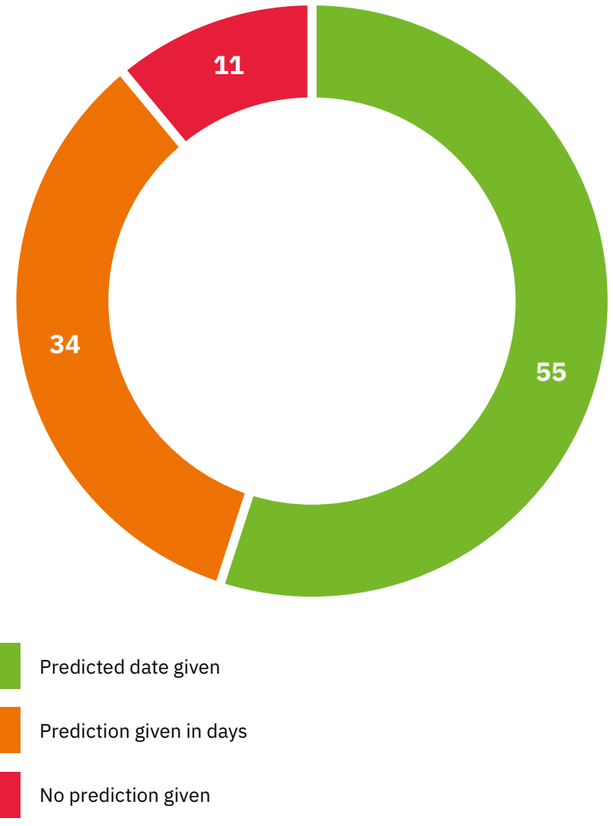



**Figure 4**
Over half of UK retailers give an exact delivery date.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

The majority of the UK's largest online shops offer express delivery (72 out of 100) with costs ranging from £3.95 to £15.00; on average, customers pay £5.89 for next day delivery. Interestingly, the UK retail market is seeing a rise in subscription delivery services or "delivery passes". Of the 100 retailers analysed, 11 offer delivery passes, two in the Beauty, Household Goods and Food sector, one multi-category retailer and eight in the Clothing, Footwear and Accessories sector. In the latter, this option is relatively new and retailers are offering customers unlimited next day delivery for a set amount, ranging from £9.95 to £19.99 per year.

Only seven of the 100 UK retailers offered same-day delivery and, when this was offered it was at a high price (average £7.78). For three of these retailers, same-day delivery was only available to certain geographical locations (e.g. London).

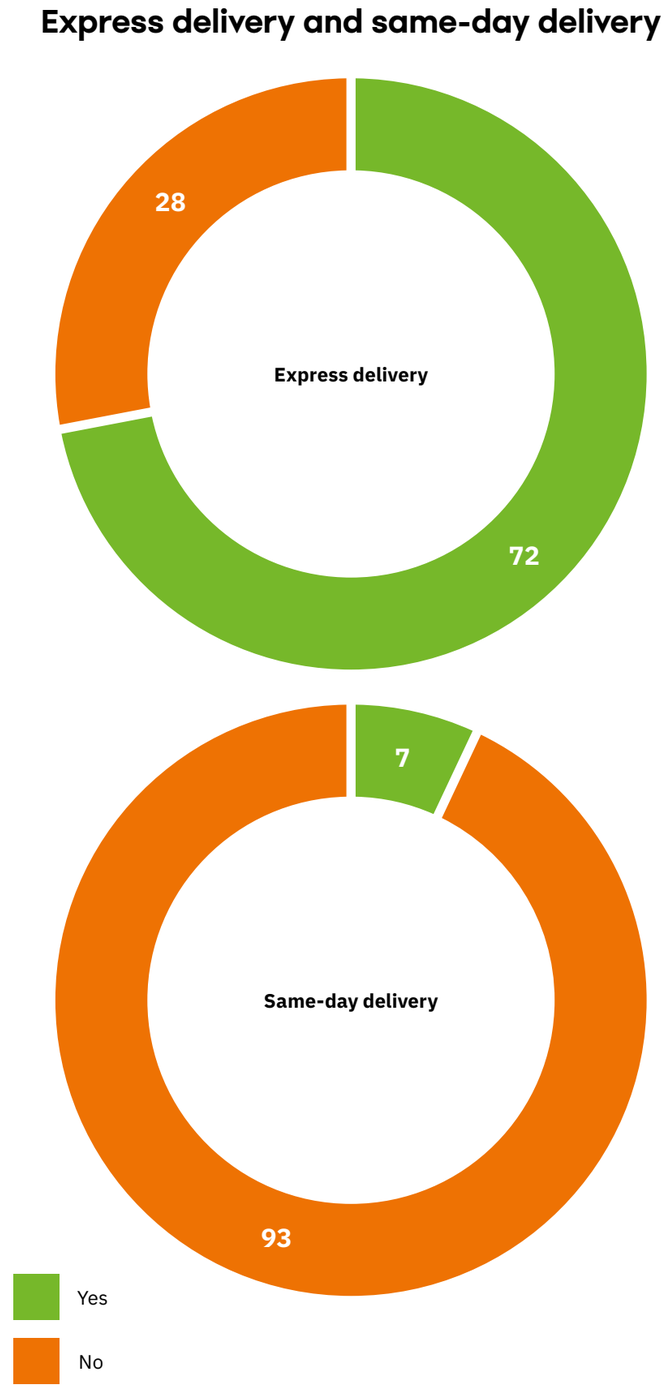



**Figure 5**
The majority of UK online stores offer express delivery.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

## Weekend delivery: Sometimes available

Weekend delivery is available to select in 42 of the 100 online shops. It is likely that additional retailers deliver packages on weekends; however, they do not promote this service and instead include it within their next day or nominated day offering. For example, with ASOS next day delivery, if you order on a Friday, it will arrive on the Saturday. This is not ideal for customers as, for the remaining 42 retailers, they cannot guarantee weekend delivery.

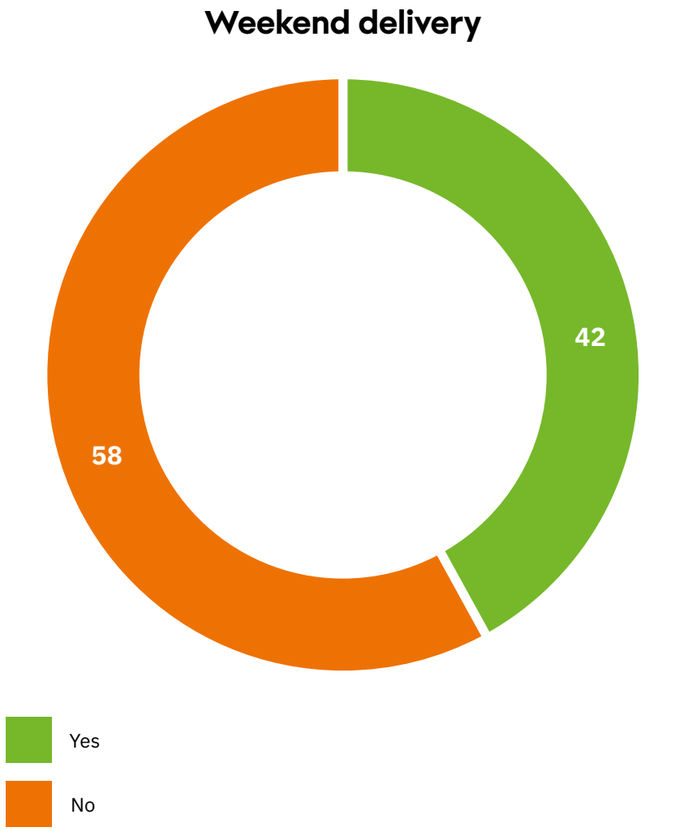



**Figure 6**
Over half of the 100 retailers do not offer weekend delivery as a separate option.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018



## Choice of timeslot: Rarely available

The option to choose a time slot for delivery is only available in 25 of the 100 online shops. It is likely that the carrier may offer this service after checkout; however, the customer cannot guarantee that the retailer uses a carrier that offers this. For example, DPD offer one-hour time slots, but Royal Mail does not.

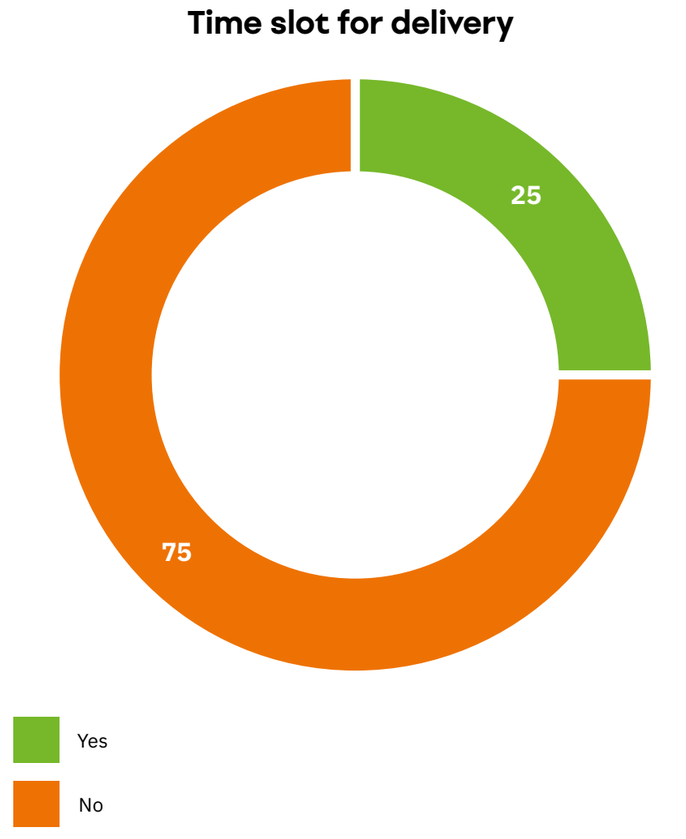



**Figure 7**
Only 25% of retailers allow customers to choose a time slot for delivery.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

Despite various studies[5] showing that shipping costs are a major "conversion killer", the UK's largest online retailers rarely offer free shipping; often, this benefit is only available during promotional periods. Indeed, only 12 out of 100 retailers offer free shipping with no restrictions.

The majority of retailers (65 out of 100) waive shipping costs above a Minimum Order Value (MoV), varying in this study from £10 to £150. When delivery is charged, this can vary between £1.99 and £20 for standard delivery, with the average amount charged being £3.99.

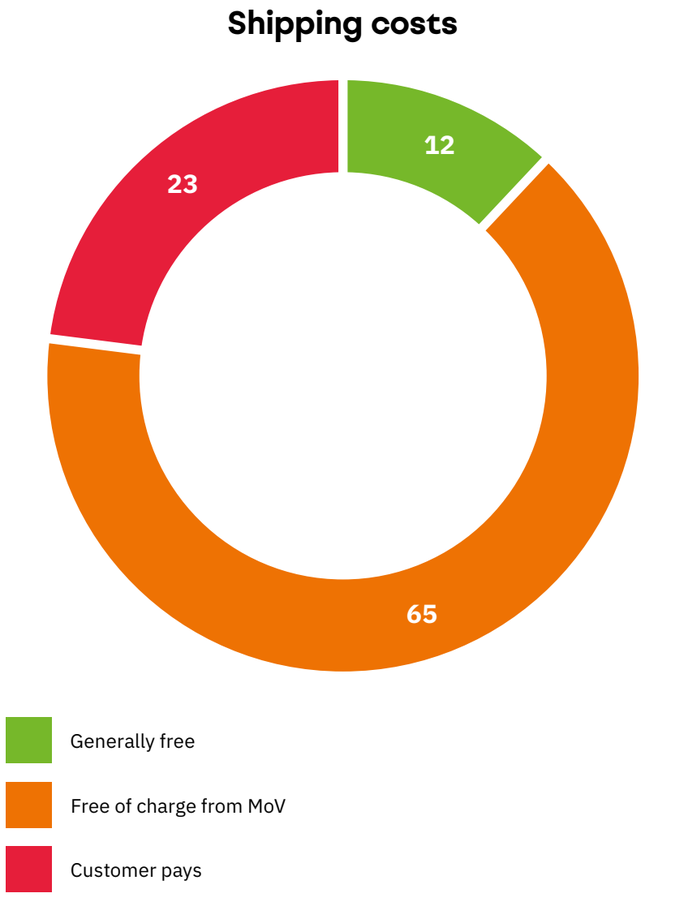



**Figure 8**
Are shipping costs charged by the 100 retailers?

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

[5] comScore: 61% of customers are 'at least somewhat likely' to cancel their purchase if free shipping unavailable Baymard: 55% abandon online purchases due to extra costs being too high (e.g. shipping)



## Post-purchase customer support

According to our research, there is limited empirical research into the behaviour of UK retailers after a customer 'checks out'. As a result, the study looked at this in detail, recording whether the parcel was delivered within the promised delivery window, how the retailer communicates the shipping process to their customer, how parcel tracking is implemented and how returns are processed.

## Shipping communication: Is the customer kept informed?

After checkout, most retailers do not provide customers with sufficient information about the status of their order. Although all 100 retailers send out an order confirmation after the order has been placed, customers are often left in the dark following this. Indeed, one out of the 100 retailers does not send their customers a dispatch confirmation – the minimum amount of information the customer expects. In addition, a further 16 retailers who do send a shipping confirmation email do not include a tracking link that allows the customer to see the status of their order.

The majority (70 out of 100 retailers) of customers are directed to the carrier's Track & Trace page. Only 13 retailers host this information in their own online shop.

### Track & Trace location for the 100 retailers

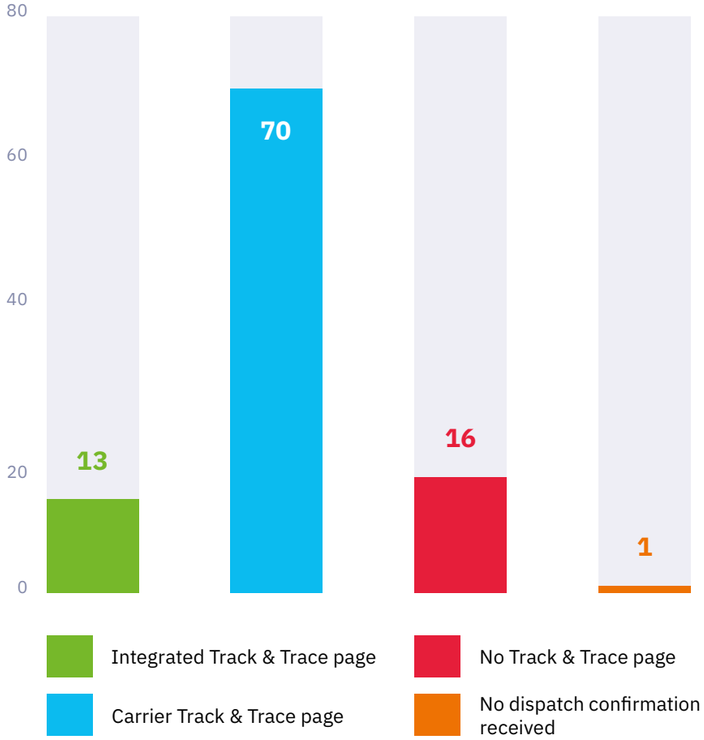



**Figure 9**
Over two thirds of the 100 online retailers rely on the carrier to provide the Track & Trace page.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018



Interestingly, for 15 retailers, the Track & Trace page displayed an error message "Shipment number not found". This is frustrating for the customer and may lead to a higher number of customer service enquiries. This is caused by a lag in the data from the retailer being sent to the delivery carrier, meaning that they do not have the information about the shipment yet.

### Availability of Track & Trace page

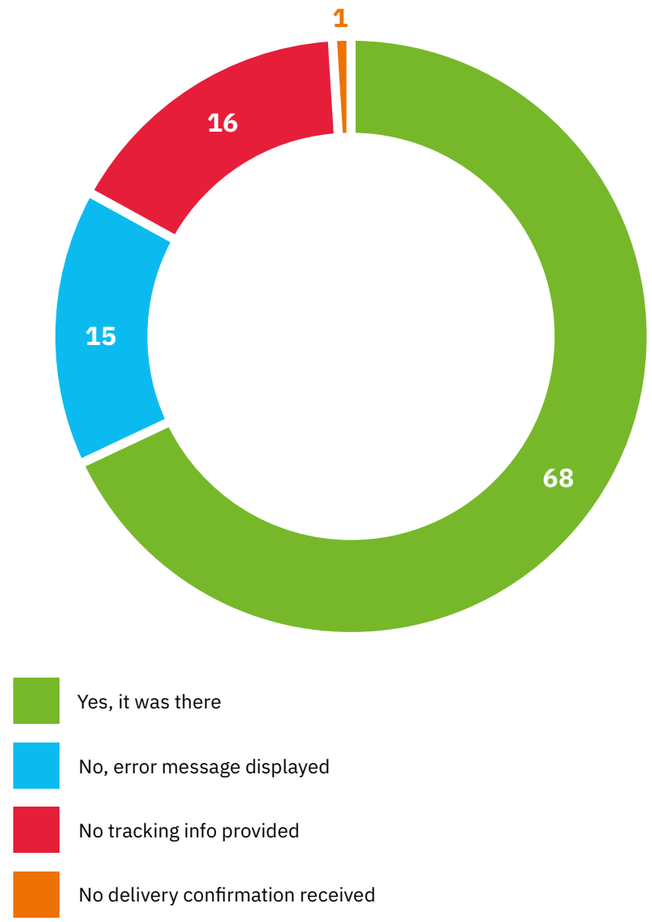



**Figure 10**
Availability of the shipment information on Track & Trace page.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

Only nine retailers communicate with their customers directly during shipping. A further two share the communication between the retailer and the delivery carrier. 62 retailers leave the communications to the delivery carrier after dispatch confirmation while for 27 retailers, neither the carrier or the retailer communicates with the customer.

## Who communicates with the customer during shipping?

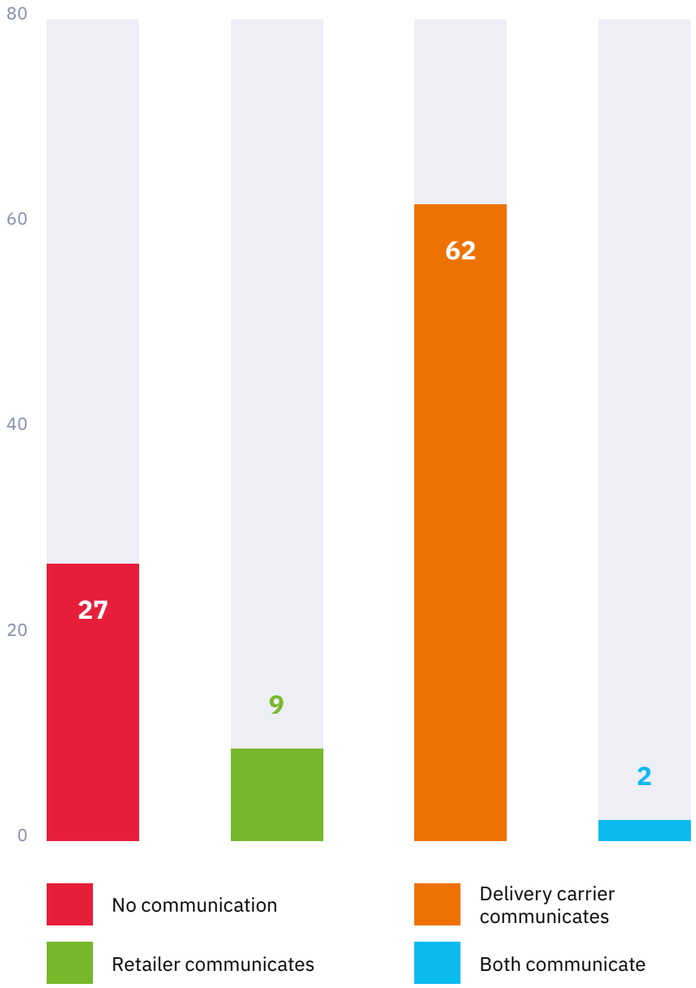



**Figure 11**
Communication during shipping is most often left to the carrier

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018



Only four retailers send personalised shipping communications to the customer, showing there is a lot of room for improvement for UK retailers to optimise this part of the customer journey. Furthermore, only three retailers include adverts for cross/up-selling in their post-purchase communications. As such, the remaining 97 are missing out on the opportunity to increase revenue by showcasing further products to existing customers in these emails.

## Is shipping communication branded and personalised?

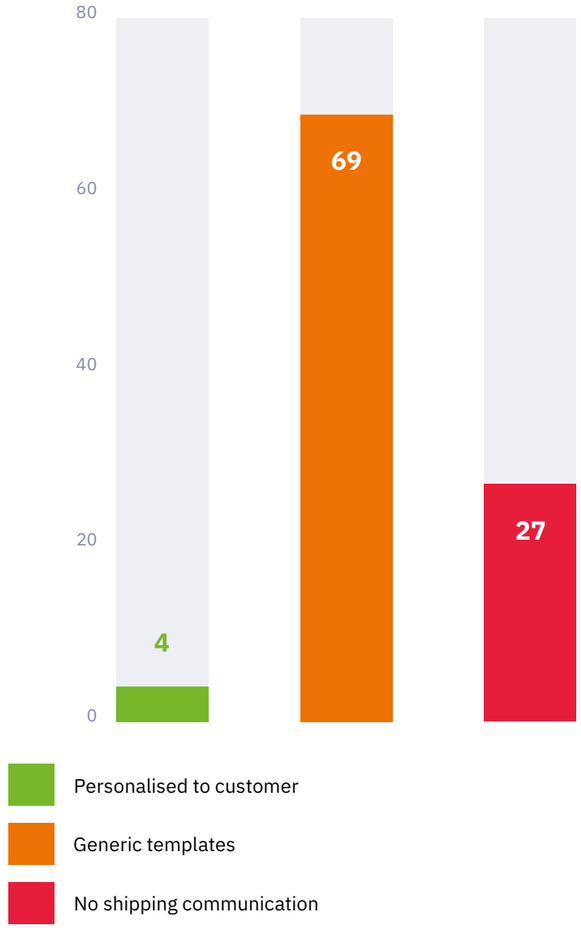
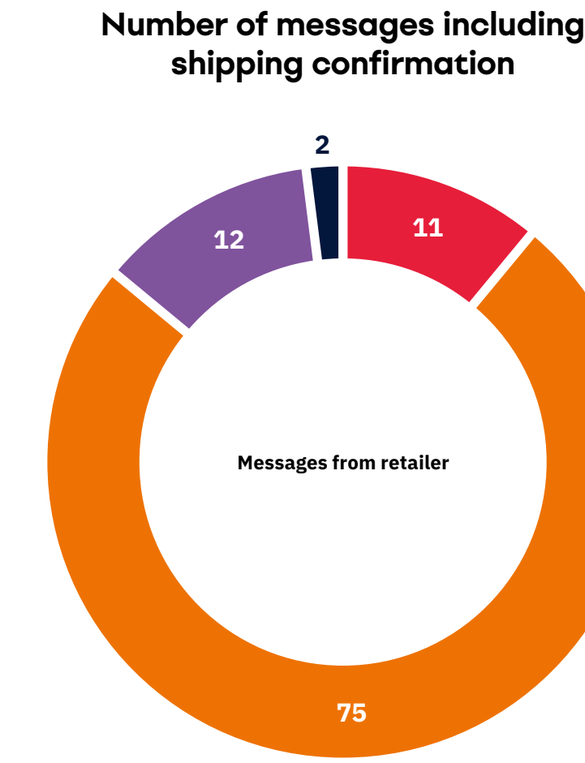



**Figure 12**
Most retailers send generic shipping communications.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

11 retailers do not send a shipping confirmation and 75 of the 100 end communication with the customer immediately after the shipping confirmation. Only 14 retailers send two or three messages including shipping confirmation. The delivery carriers communicate more with customers: almost half send 2 or more messages.

Overall, it is clear that UK retailers have a long way to go to provide customers with the volume of communication they expect, whether from the retailer or the carrier.



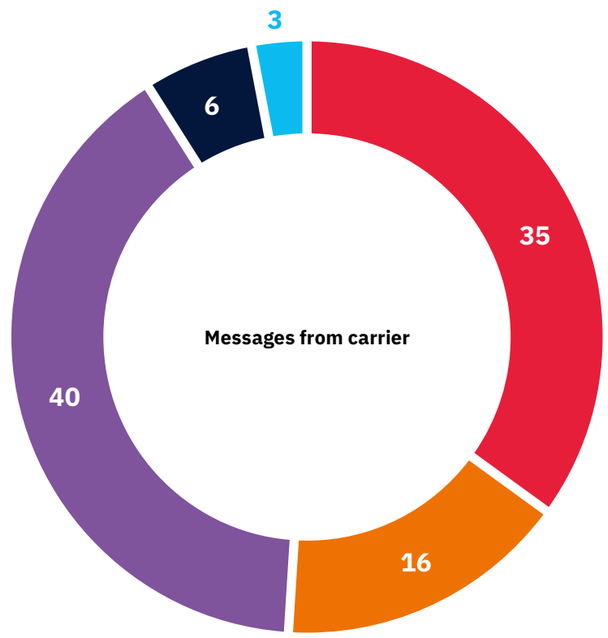




**Figure 13**
Retailers send limited communication during shipping.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

## Delivery promise: Mostly kept!

UK retailers mostly keep their delivery promise. Of the 100 retailers, 27 parcels arrived early and 57 arrived on the predicted delivery day or within the specified time period. Only eight arrived later than promised. The final eight retailers do not give a delivery prediction at checkout.

Only 28 of the 100 retailers informed the customer that their parcel had been delivered successfully. Whether the retailer communicated discrepancies in the delivery date was not possible to report in the test.

### Punctuality of delivery

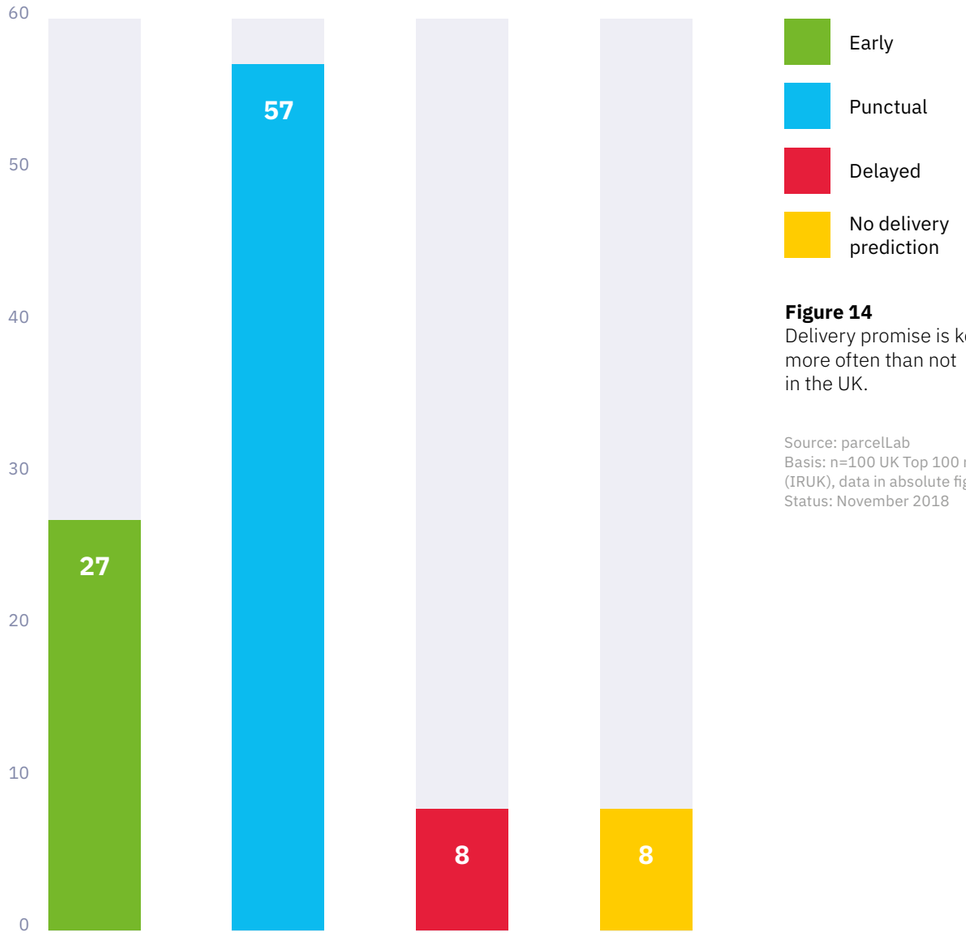



**Figure 14**
Delivery promise is kept more often than not in the UK.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

## Returns processing: Service mentality differs

When it comes to returns options, the 100 retailers differ in their service offerings. 22 of the 100 retailers do not provide customers with a returns label and instead expect customers to arrange the return themselves. Almost half of the retailers enclose a returns label in the parcel and 16 ask the customer to download it. The most popular returns option is returning to store, with 79 of the 100 retailers offering this service. 63 retailers offer free returns either by post or in store. The majority of the remaining retailers ask customers to send the return by a tracked service. For those that do charge customers for returns, the average cost is £8.42. It is worth noting at this stage that three retailers did not allow us to return parcels due to either short returns periods or strict returns policy.

### Processing of returns

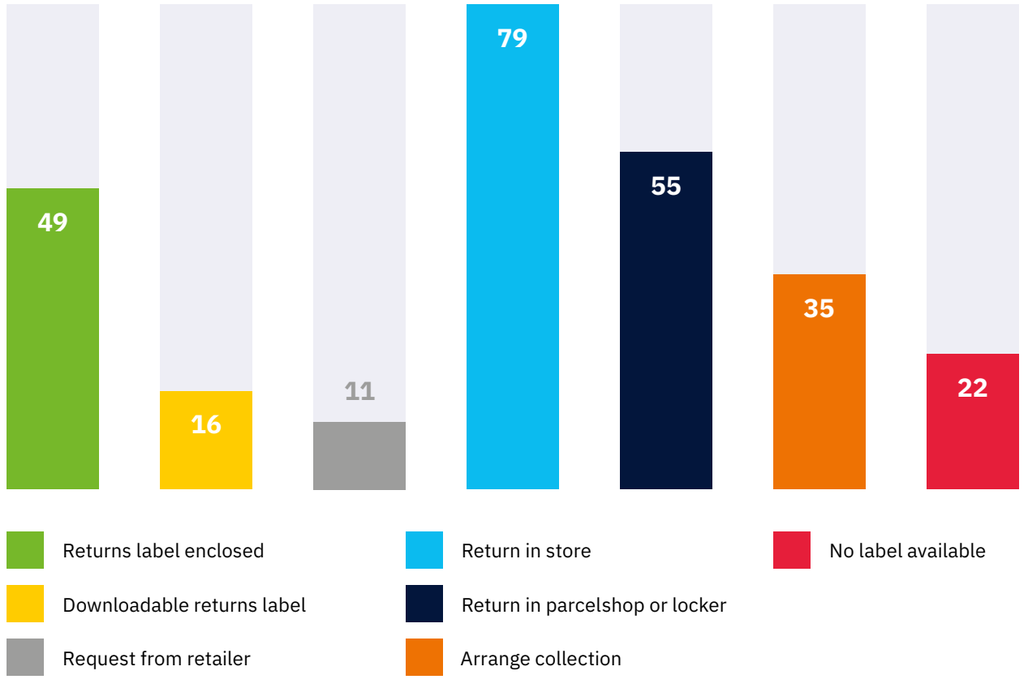



**Figure 15**
Returns processing: the majority of retailers offer free returns in store and almost every other includes a returns label in the parcel.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures; multiple answers possible
Status: November 2018

Returns communication also differs for online retailers. 72 retailers informed their customers that their return had arrived. However, 25 did not communicate with the customer at all.

## Acknowledgement of return

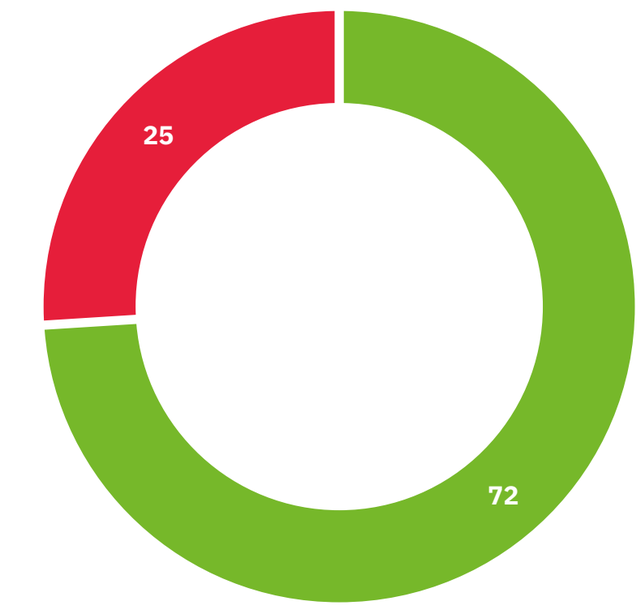



**Figure 16**
Almost three quarters of retailers inform their customers that they have received their return[6].

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=97 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), no returns possible for three merchants; data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

[6] 3 retailers did not allow us to return the parcel and are therefore omitted.



63 of the 100 retailers notified the customer with a time frame for remittance. The time given varied from one day to 14. The most common time frame was three to five days.

## Notification of predicted reimbursement period

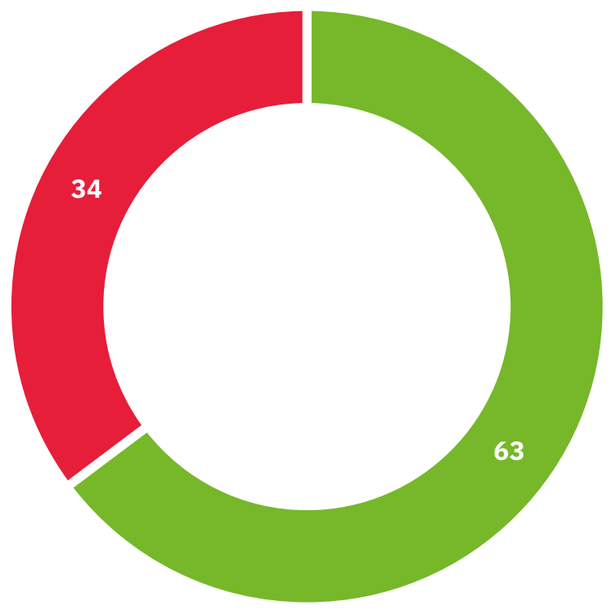



**Figure 17**
The majority of retailers let their customer know when the refunded money will arrive in their account.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=97 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), no returns possible for three merchants; data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

The majority of retailers (73) reimburse their customers within three days of receiving the returned parcel. A further six retailers took between four and seven days to refund the money and only three took longer than seven days. The remaining 15 retailers did not allow us to track the returns.

## Remittance time frame

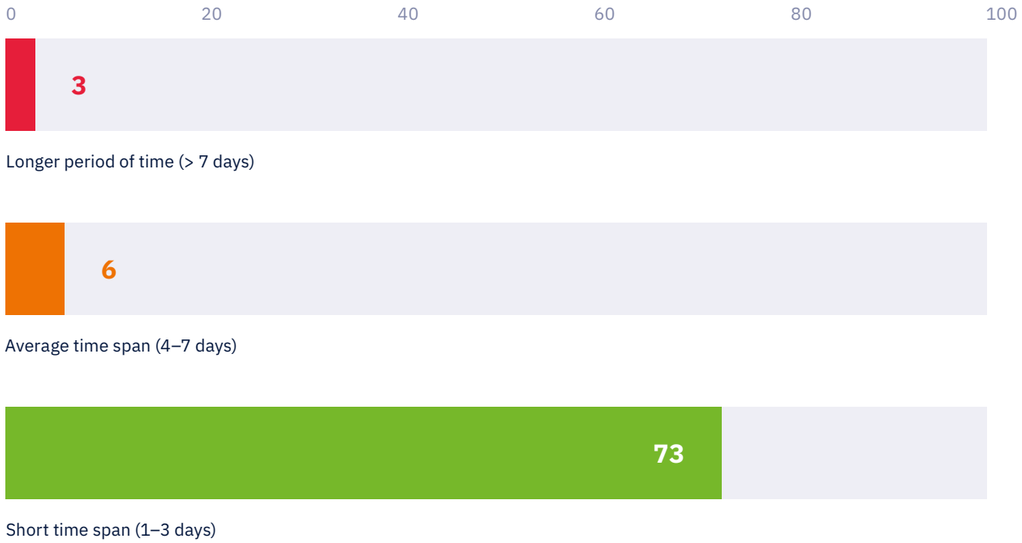



**Figure 18**
Refund: 73% of retailers refund the money within three days.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=82 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), no returns possible for 3 merchants + 15 where no tracking was possible; data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

When retailers informed our researchers how long it would take to receive the repayment, more often than not the customer received the refund earlier than expected. The repayment took longer for only one retailer investigated. A staggering 35 retailers did not provide the customer with a time frame for refund.

## Punctuality of the remittance

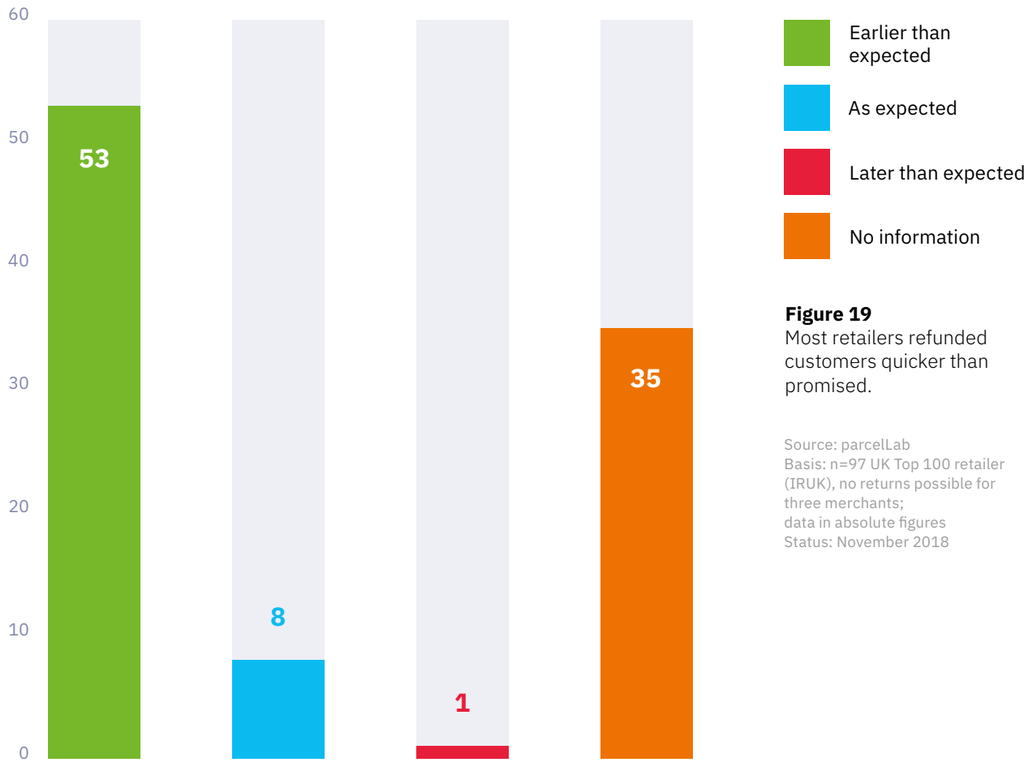



**Figure 19**
Most retailers refunded customers quicker than promised.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=97 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), no returns possible for three merchants; data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

# Industry specific results

How retailers treat customers post-purchase varies from industry to industry. In this study, the number of retailers per sector was distributed in the following way.

## Number of online retailers analysed per sector

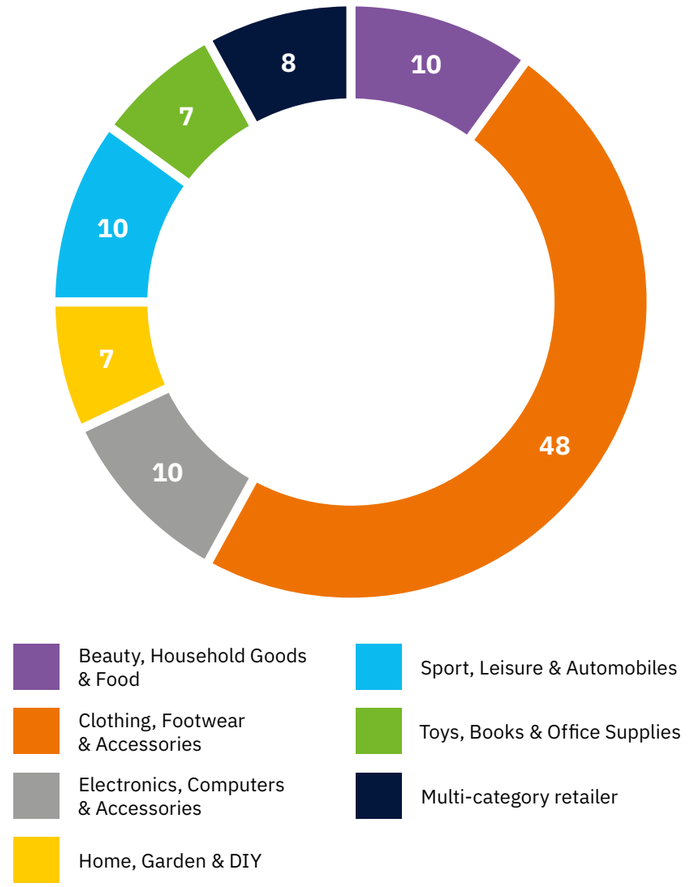


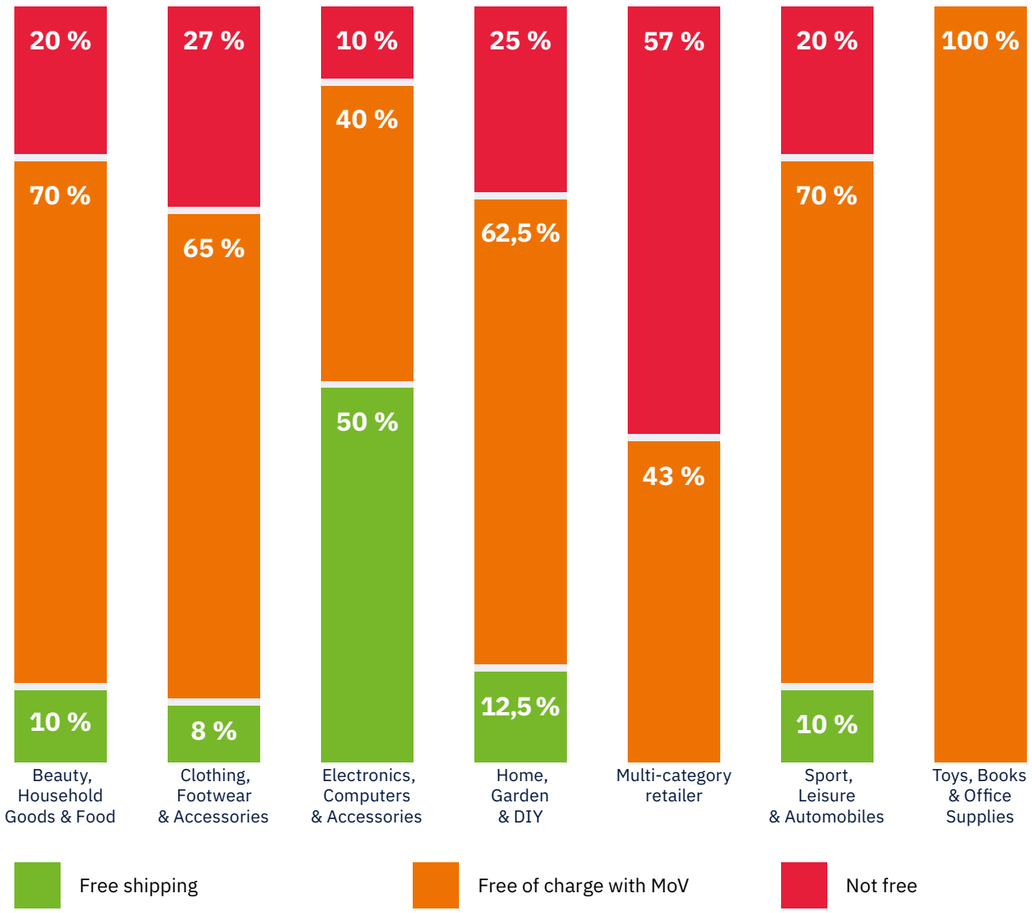

**Figure 20**
Allocation of the 100 retailers to seven sectors.

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in absolute figures
Status: November 2018

## Free shipping comes with restrictions

Very few UK retailers offer free shipping, with Electronics, Computers and Accessories the most likely to offer this. None of the Toys, Books and Office Supplies retailers analysed offer free shipping. In six out of the seven categories, the majority of retailers offer free shipping over a minimum order value, varying from £20 to £50. The one exception is for 'multi-category retailers', where only 43% offer free shipping over a minimum order value.

### Free shipping offered?




Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in percentage (100% per sector)
Status: November 2018

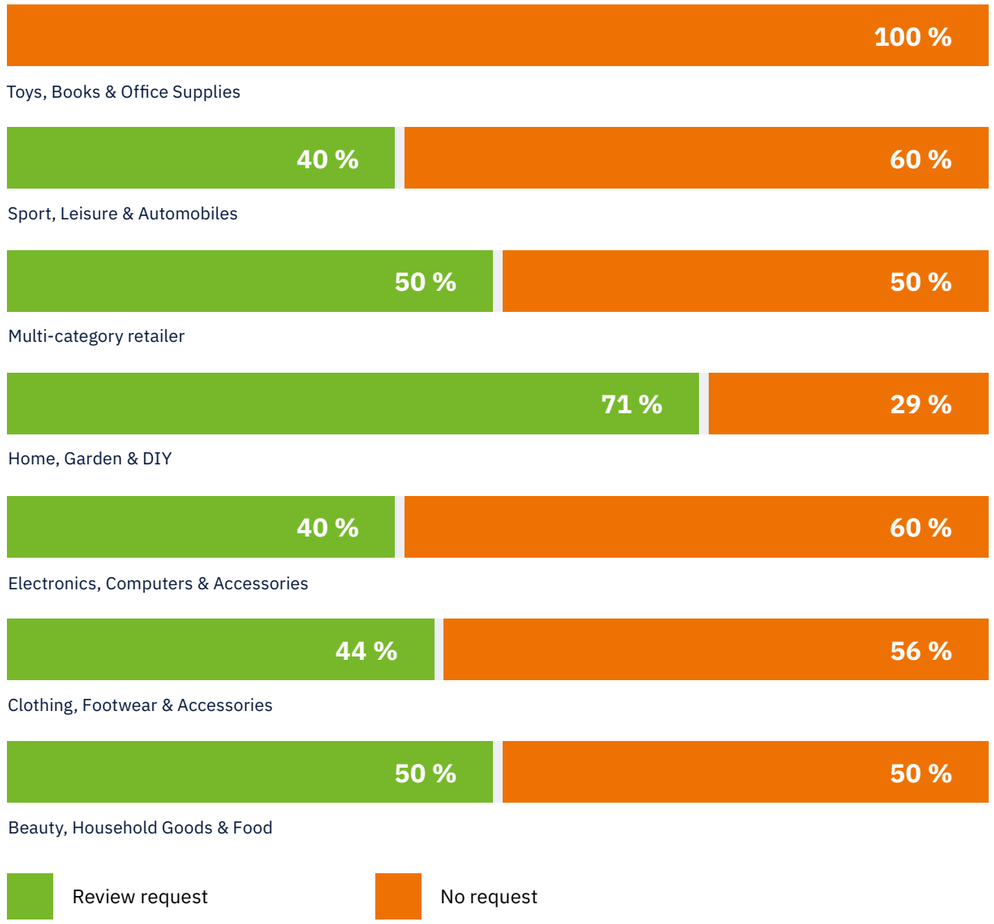
**Figure 21**
Which industries offer free shipping?



## Toys, Books and Office Suppliers are the least likely to request reviews

Online retailers in the Home, Beauty and Multi-category retailer sectors are the most likely to request a review by email after a customer purchases a product; 57% of retailers in these sectors ask their customers for reviews. The sector with the highest number of review requests is Home, Garden & DIY. In the Sports and Electronics sectors, only 40% of retailers ask for reviews. Interestingly, none of the retailers analysed in the Toys, Books and Offices Supplies category ask for reviews.

### Percentage of retailers who request product reviews




Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in percentage (100% per sector)
Status: November 2018

**Figure 22**
Do dealers send a request for evaluation?

## Fashion retailers: The best for returns

Industries with high return rates make it particularly easy for their customers to return goods. 77% of online fashion retailers enclose a returns label in the parcel. Interestingly, only 38% of the Multi-category retailers enclosed a returns label; these companies are major players in the fashion E-Commerce industry, yet do not provide the same service.

For some retailers in the study, ‘traditional’ returns options were not offered. For these it was only possible to return to store, to a parcel shop (such as Doddle or Collect+), a locker or via collection - these are classed as ‘alternative options’ in Figure 23. Many of the other retailers gave these alternatives as additional returns options.

### Return services according to industries

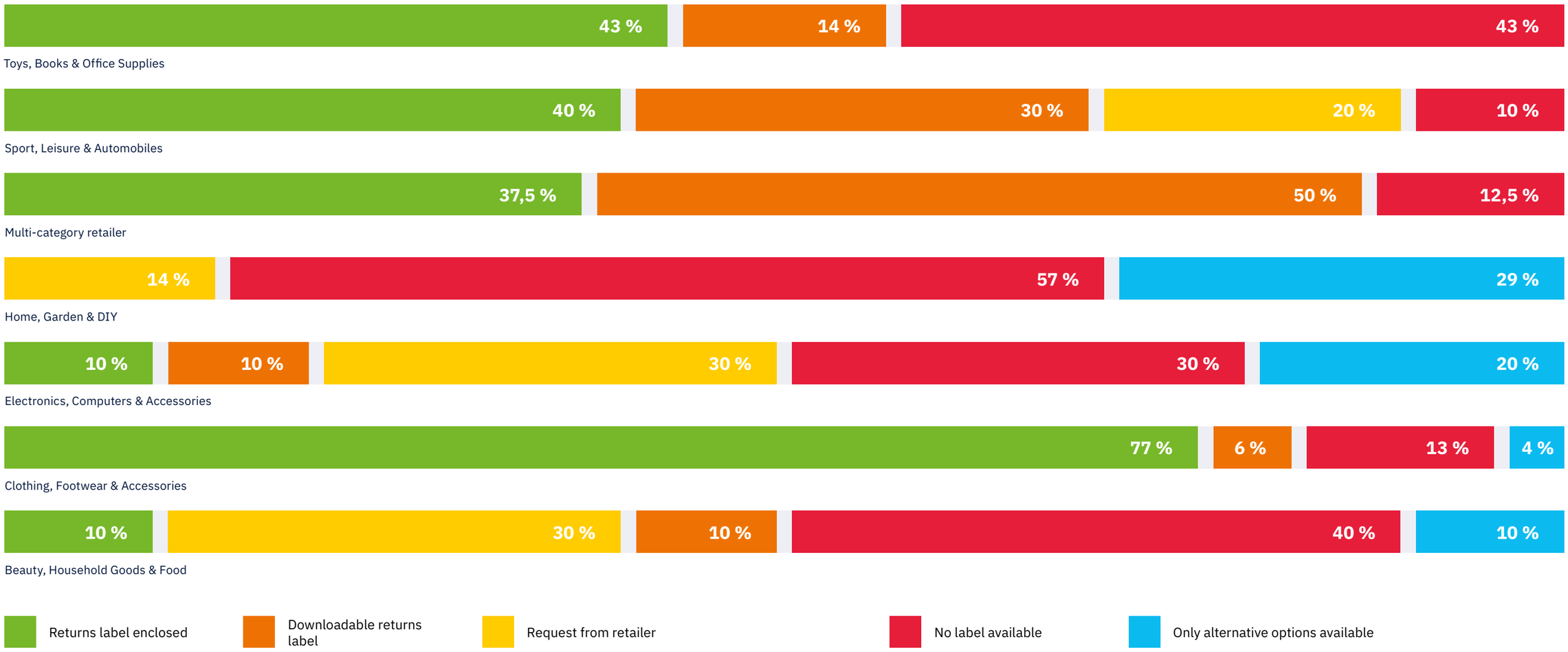



**Figure 23**
How are returns handled (as a percentage of total in the industry).

Source: parcelLab
Basis: n=100 UK Top 100 retailer (IRUK), data in percentage (100% per sector)
Status: November 2018

# Summary

The study shows that although the quality of service provided by retailers in the UK is as a whole very good, the main focus is on perfecting the customer journey prior to checkout. Indeed, whilst most retailers are equally matched in their service offerings pre-checkout, there are much higher discrepancies post-purchase.

Overall, the customer is offered little flexibility when it comes to shipping and returns. This is surprising when there are key players in the UK that do offer such flexibility; for example, ASOS allows customers to choose between 10 different delivery options, an unlimited next-day delivery pass for a year and seven ways to return.

With most customer service enquiries made after checkout, a smooth post-purchase experience is paramount for customer loyalty, retention and repeat purchases. However, too many UK online retailers miss out on the opportunity to continue communicating with customers after checkout, instead handing it over to the third-party delivery carriers. This means that the retailers do not accompany the customer through the entire purchasing journey and as a result do not utilise the available touchpoints for further product promotion and in turn increased revenue.

The following section highlights the best retailers in the appropriate categories.

## Shipping analysis & benchmarking for your shop:

**https://parcellab.com/en/shipping-analysis/**

# Learning from the best

There is still a lot of potential for online retailers to optimise their shipping and returns service. That being said, some UK retailers already stand out from the crowd in their checkout, shipping, delivery and returns processes.

The winners of the respective categories come from a wide range of industries. This means that any online retailer, from any category, has the potential to become just as successful.

# Overall Winner
## New Look

Founded from a single store in Taunton, New Look is a British fashion retailer operating almost 900 high street stores worldwide. Selling womenswear, menswear, clothing for teens and homeware, their transactional website now ships to over 66 countries, generating 14% of overall sales.

**Short profile**

URL: https://www.newlook.com/uk/
Founded: 1969
Industry sector: Clothing, Footwear & Accessories
Couriers: DPD, DHL, Royal Mail
E-Commerce revenue: £188.7 million

### What did we like?

- Multichannel customer centric approach: New Look has created a smooth multichannel experience for its customers, including guest checkout and wishlisting.
- Mobile optimised: Throughout the whole customer journey, browsing, navigation of the website and contact with New Look is always mobile optimised.
- First-class delivery options: New Look offers fast click and collect, as well as next day, evening, weekend and nominated day delivery. Customers are given the option of purchasing a delivery pass for £19.99, offering unlimited next day delivery and click & collect for a year. They also partner with a range of delivery providers including Collect+, Doddle and Hermes to create a best-in-class delivery service.

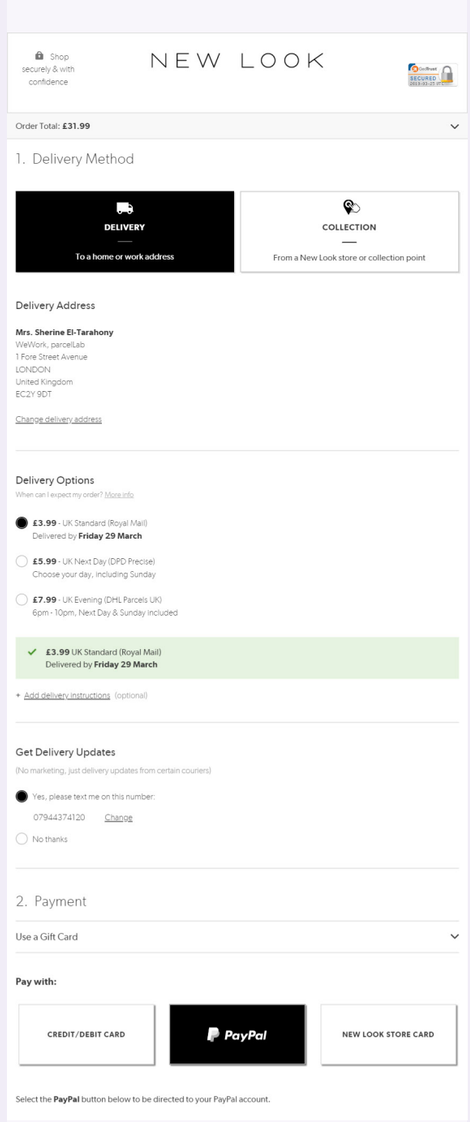
### What could be improved?

- Integrated Track & Trace: In order to drive customers back to their online store and encourage future purchases, the Track & Trace page should be integrated into New Look's online shop.
- Include cross-selling options: Within the order communication emails, reference could also be made to complementary New Look products to complete the outfit.

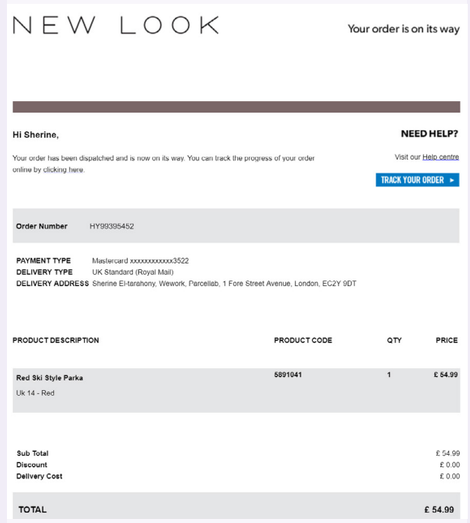
### Why the overall winner?

- Customer centricity: New Look invested heavily in their online customer experience the past year to create a smoother customer journey right through to checkout.
- Checkout: New Look allows guest checkout and payment via PayPal, credit/debit card and store card.
- Design & layout: Clean and simple design that is easy to navigate.
- Delivery pass: New Look offers customers an unlimited next day 'delivery pass' for £19.99 per year. This is a great way to gain loyal customers and encourage repeat purchases.
- Mobile optimised: New Look's online shop is optimised in all areas analysed, across different devices.
- Best practice: New Look communicates well with customers throughout checkout and returns, including notifying the customer that their parcel has been delivered and when their return has been received.

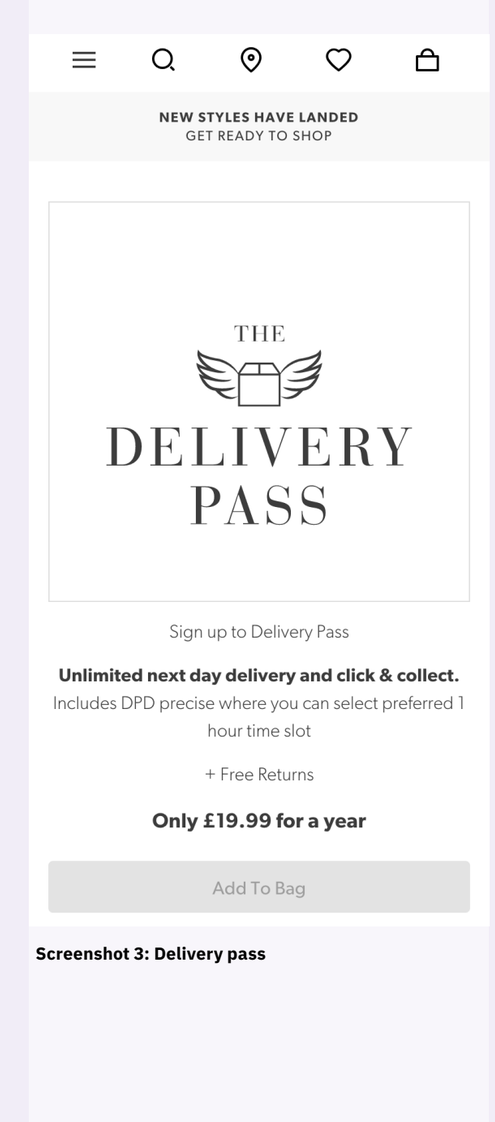




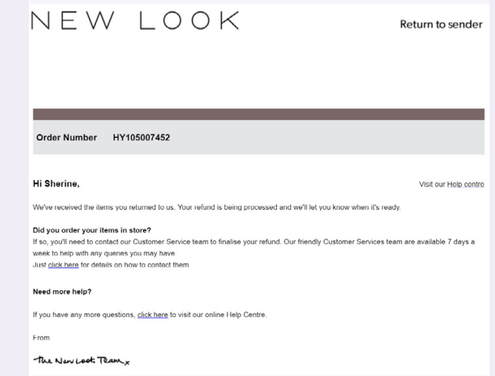

**Screenshot 1: Checkout and payment options**




**Screenshot 2: Dispatch confirmation**




**Screenshot 3: Delivery pass**




**Screenshot 4: Returns confirmation**

# Best Checkout Experience
# ASOS

ASOS is a British online fashion and cosmetic retailer aimed primarily at young adults. They sell over 850 brands, as well as their own ranges of clothing and accessories, such as ASOS Design and ASOS White. A global E-Commerce giant, ASOS shaped the online retail market in the UK and now ships to over 200 countries.

**Short profile**

URL: www.asos.com
Founded: 2000
Industry sector: Clothing, Footwear & Accessories
Couriers: Not mentioned on website
E-Commerce revenue: £2.417 billion

## What did we like?

- Guest checkout: ASOS allows customers to 'guest checkout', making the purchasing process much quicker.
- Delivery pass: ASOS's delivery pass is the cheapest of all the retailers, costing just £9.99 for a year's unlimited next day delivery. For those that have purchased this pass, checkout is quick and easy.
- Apple Pay: Customers are able to pay with Apple Pay on ASOS's app, making the checkout process even quicker as they do not have to enter any details.
- Buy now, pay later: ASOS have partnered with Klarna, a 'buy now, pay later' service, where customers only pay for what they keep a month later. This makes checkout much easier for customers, especially for ASOS who are purely online, as the customers do not have to worry about credit card charges whilst they are waiting for refunds.
- Auto-fill: Checkout fields allow customers to auto-fill the information saved on their device if compatible.
- Alternative delivery options: Customers can have their parcels delivered to a variety of parcel shops, including Doddle and DPD Pick Up points.

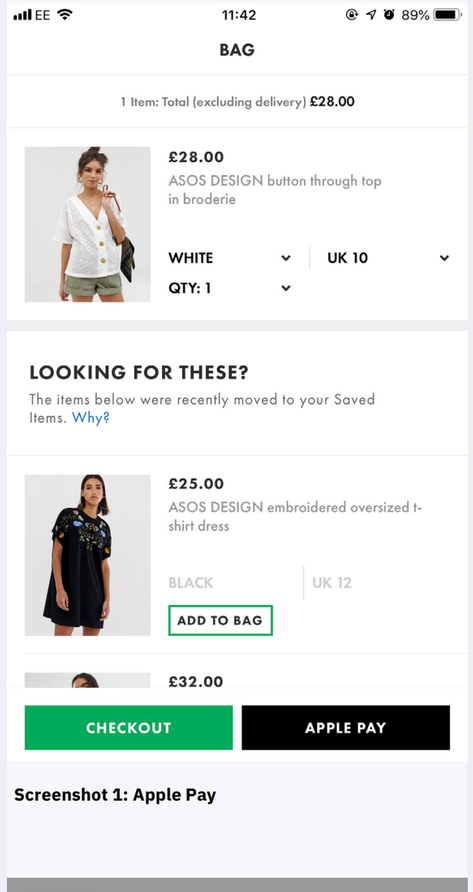
## What could be improved?

- 1-click checkout: So you don't have to go through the steps each time.
- Shipping costs: Without delivery pass, ASOS's shipping costs are on the higher end, costing £5.95 for next day.

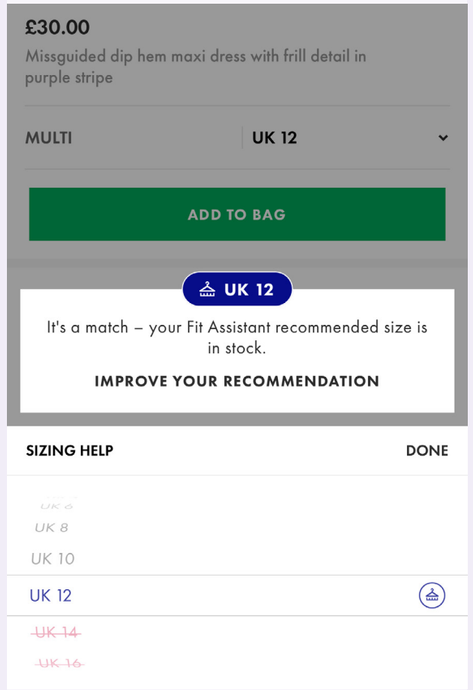
## Why the best checkout experience?

- Call-To-Action: Due to the clean layout of the website, it was always clear how to navigate through to checkout.
- Omnichannel experience: ASOS allows you to add items to your basket or saved items on one device and pay for them on another.
- Fit assistant: ASOS's fit assistant suggests the right size for the customer, making checkout even quicker.
- Address finder: When adding a new delivery or billing address, ASOS's address finder allows the customer to search by either postcode or the first line of the address.
- Best practice: ASOS has thought through each stage of the customer journey to checkout, eliminating conversion killers to make the process as easy as possible for the customer.

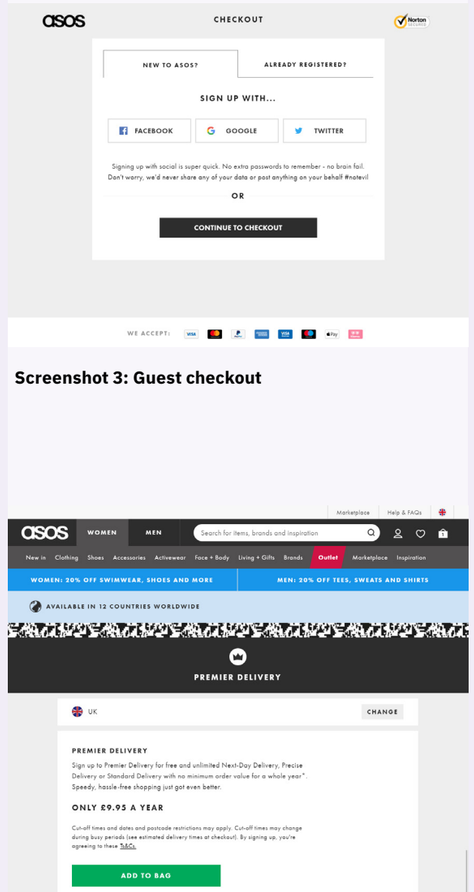




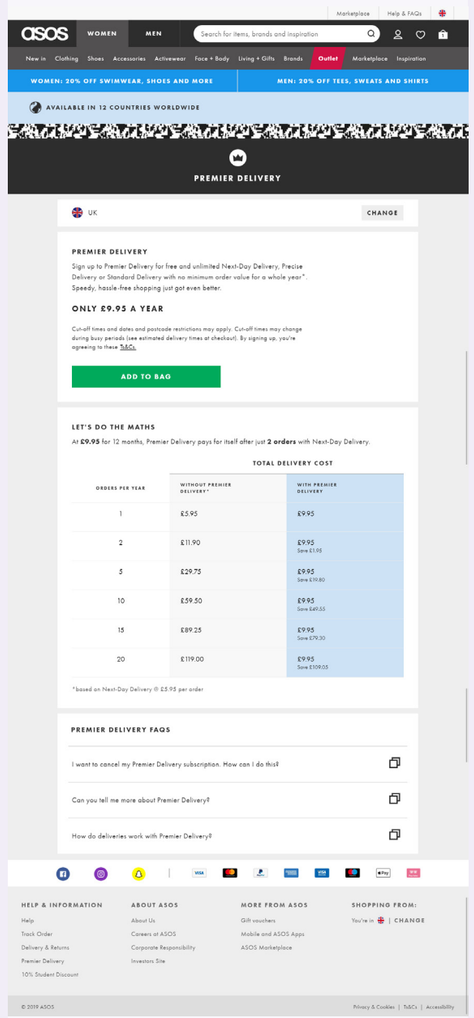

**Screenshot 1: Apple Pay**




**Screenshot 2: Fit assistant**




**Screenshot 3: Guest checkout**




**Screenshot 4: Premier delivery pass**

# Best Shipping Process
# The Fragrance Shop

The Fragrance Shop is the UK's largest independent, fragrance retailer. They showcase over 130 fragrance brands, including Chanel, YSL and Alexander McQueen. The Fragrance Shop operates over 200 high street stores, a mobile-optimised website and an app, giving customers plenty of options to shop.

**Short profile**

URL: https://www.thefragranceshop.co.uk/
Founded: 1994
Industry sector: Beauty, Household Goods & Food
Couriers: Not mentioned on website
Revenue (in-store and online): £121 million

## What did we like?

- Clear tracking information: Tracking number, link to tracking page and order status are displayed clearly in retailer email communications and in customer account.
- Integrated tracking page: Tracking landing page is integrated into The Fragrance Shop's online store, successfully driving traffic back here post-checkout. Actual tracking information links out to courier's page however.
- Track & Trace immediately available: Information about the shipment was immediately available on the Track & Trace page.
- Retailer communicates: All post-purchase communications are branded with only The Fragrance Shop communicating directly with the customer during shipping.

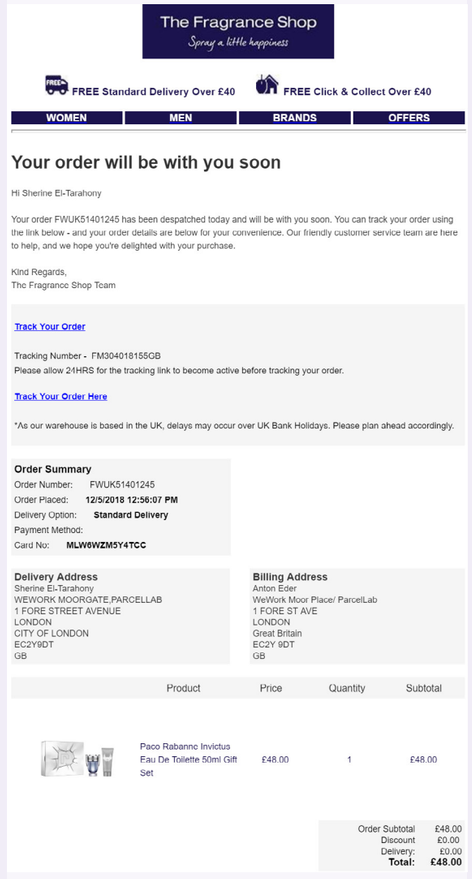
## What could be improved?

- Integrate carrier notifications into online shop: The Fragrance Shop should go one step further and integrate the live carrier notifications as well into their online shop.
- Expand communication channels: Dispatch updates should also be available via other channels, e.g. Facebook Messenger or The Fragrance Shop app.
- Cross-selling: The Fragrance Shop should utilise their post-purchase communications and include cross/up-selling recommendations.

## Why the best shipping process?

- Brand experience: The experience with The Fragrance Shop's brand was consistent. All communications addressed us personally and the lasting impression was very positive.
- Track & Trace information was immediately available, the page layout is clean and easy to navigate and includes links to the carriers tracking page.
- Customer-first approach: Contact information is clearly displayed throughout communications so the customer can easily contact The Fragrance Shop's customer service team if necessary.




The Fragrance Shop
Spray a little happiness

FREE Standard Delivery Over £40 FREE Click & Collect Over £40

WOMEN | MEN | BRANDS | OFFERS

Your order will be with you soon

Hi Sherine El-Tarahony

Your order FWUK51401245 has been despatched today and will be with you soon. You can track your order using the link below - and your order details are below for your convenience. Our friendly customer service team are here to help, and we hope you're delighted with your purchase.

Kind Regards,
The Fragrance Shop Team

Track Your Order

Tracking Number - FM304018155GB
Please allow 24HRS for the tracking link to become active before tracking your order.

Track Your Order Here

*As our warehouse is based in the UK, delays may occur over UK Bank Holidays. Please plan ahead accordingly.

**Order Summary**
Order Number: FWUK51401245
Order Placed: **12/5/2018 12:56:07 PM**
Delivery Option: **Standard Delivery**
Payment Method:
Card No: **MLW6WZM5Y4TCC**

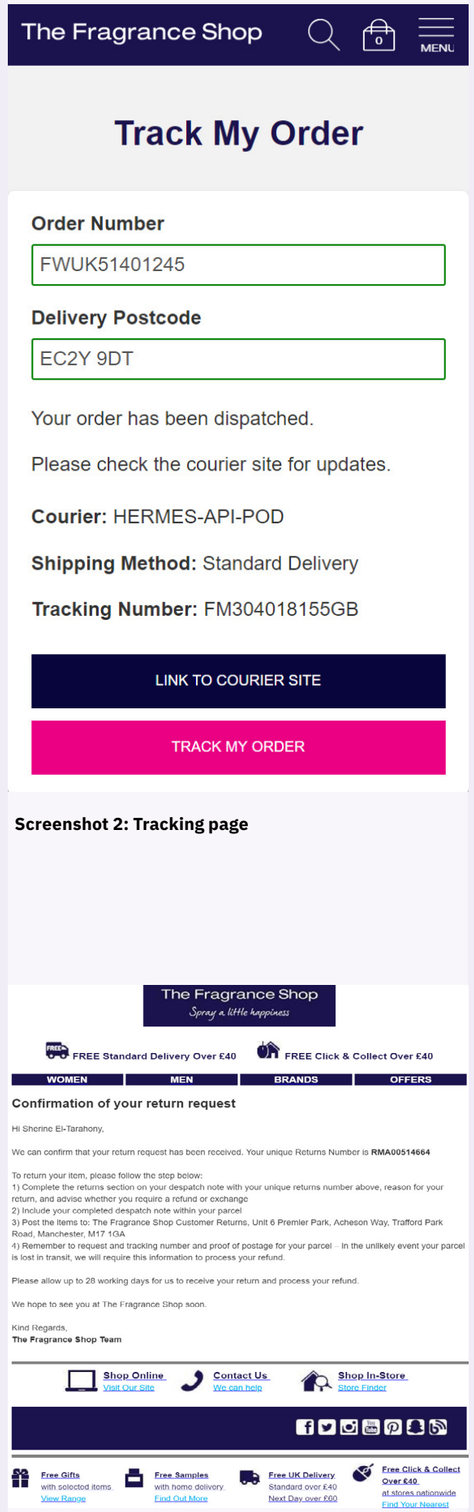
**Delivery Address**
Sherine El-Tarahony
WEWORK MOORGATE,PARCELLAB
1 FORE STREET AVENUE
LONDON
CITY OF LONDON
EC2Y9DT
GB

**Billing Address**
Anton Eder
WeWork Moor Place/ ParcelLab
1 FORE ST AVE
LONDON
Great Britain
EC2Y 9DT
GB

| | Product | Price | Quantity | Subtotal |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paco Rabanne Invictus Eau De Toilette 50ml Gift Set | £48.00 | 1 | £48.00 |

Order Subtotal £48.00
Discount £0.00
Delivery: £0.00
**Total: £48.00**

**Screenshot 1: Dispatch confirmation**


The Fragrance Shop

MENU

Track My Order

**Order Number**
FWUK51401245

**Delivery Postcode**
EC2Y 9DT

Your order has been dispatched.

Please check the courier site for updates.

**Courier:** HERMES-API-POD

**Shipping Method:** Standard Delivery

**Tracking Number:** FM304018155GB

LINK TO COURIER SITE

TRACK MY ORDER

**Screenshot 2: Tracking page**


The Fragrance Shop
Spray a little happiness

FREE Standard Delivery Over £40 FREE Click & Collect Over £40

WOMEN | MEN | BRANDS | OFFERS

Confirmation of your return request

Hi Sherine El-Tarahony,

We can confirm that your return request has been received. Your unique Returns Number is **RMA00514664**

To return your item, please follow the step below:
1) Complete the returns section on your despatch note with your unique returns number above, reason for your return, and advise whether you require a refund or exchange
2) Include your completed despatch note within your parcel
3) Post the items to: The Fragrance Shop Customer Returns, Unit 6 Premier Park, Acheson Way, Trafford Park Road, Manchester, M17 1GA
4) Remember to request and tracking number and proof of postage for your parcel – In the unlikely event your parcel is lost in transit, we will require this information to process your refund.

Please allow up to 28 working days for us to receive your return and process your refund.

We hope to see you at The Fragrance Shop soon.

Kind Regards,
**The Fragrance Shop Team**

Shop Online Visit Our Site | Contact Us We can help | Shop In-Store Store Finder

Free Gifts with selected items View Range | Free Samples with home delivery Find Out More | Free UK Delivery Standard over £40 Next Day over £60 | Free Click & Collect Over £40 at stores nationwide Find Your Nearest

**Screenshot 3: Returns confirmation**

# Best for Delivery
## Zara

Part of the Inditex group, the world's largest apparel retailer, Zara is a Spanish fast fashion retailer based in Galicia. Selling womenswear, menswear, kids and homeware collections, Zara has over 2,200 stores in 96 countries and a thriving online shop. The customer is at the heart of their unique business model, which includes design, production, distribution and sales through their extensive retail network.

**Short profile**

URL: https://www.zara.com/uk/
Founded: 1975
Industry sector: Clothing, Footwear & Accessories
Couriers: Not mentioned on website
Revenue (in-store and online): £704 million

### What did we like?

- Customer centricity: Zara's standard delivery is next day, which is free for orders over £50 and £3.95 otherwise. Londoners are able to choose a precise day and time period, and same-day delivery is available to them at a cost of £9.95.
- Signature on delivery: Customer can choose whether they want to sign for the delivery or not.
- Delivery tracking: Customers are informed when their items have been dispatched and how they can track their parcel.

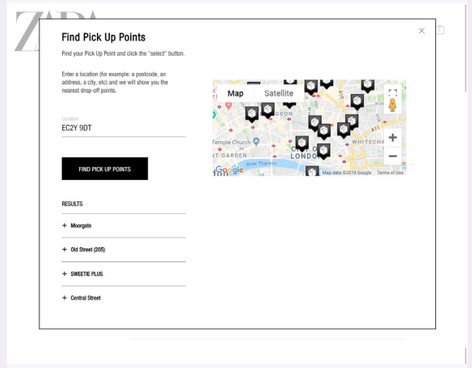
### What could be improved?

- Integrated tracking information: Tracking information should be integrated into Zara's online shop and accessible from the customer account.
- Cross/up-selling: Zara could increase revenue by cross/up-selling products in post-purchase communications. For example, items to complete the look.

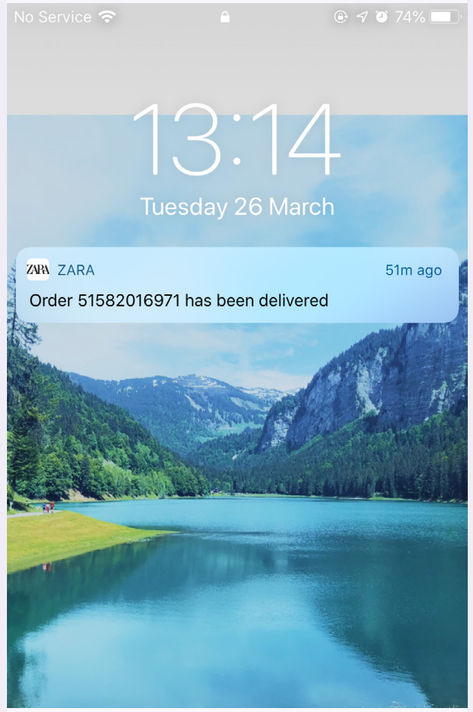
### Why best for delivery?

- Fast delivery: Zara's model for delivery is 'the quicker the better'. Customers purchasing fashion goods want their parcels immediately and Zara have created a service that offers this.
- Removes conversion killers: Zara's delivery options make shopping with them easy and quick. Customers do not have to pay a premium for next day delivery – this is simply the norm! Customers will remember this ease and return to the shop for reliable, fast delivery.
- Click & Collect: Zara has partnerships with parcel shops all over the UK, so if a customer is unable to accept a delivery, they can collect it from a convenient local store.
- Personalised dispatch confirmation: Zara's dispatch confirmation is branded and includes information about the products purchased.

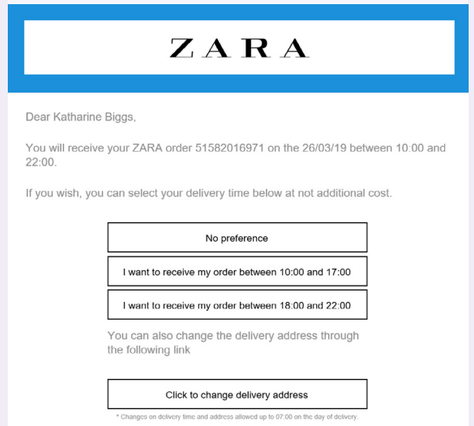




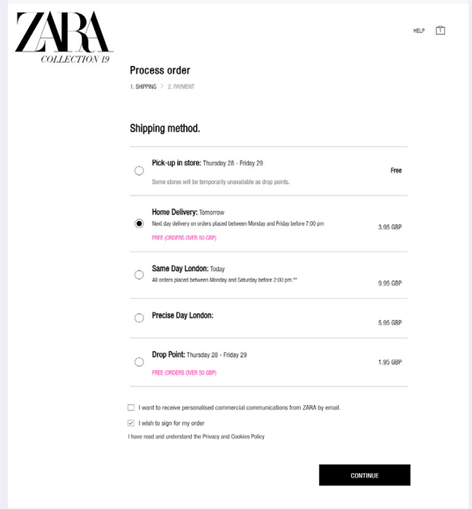

**Screenshot 1: Click and collect**



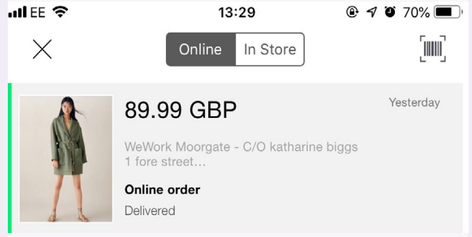

**Screenshot 2: Successful delivery push notification**




**Screenshot 3: Delivery preferences**




**Screenshot 4: Wish to sign**




**Screenshot 5: In-app delivery confirmation**

# Best Returns
# Chain Reaction Cycles

Chain Reaction Cycles started life as Ballynure Cycles, a small family business in Northern Ireland serving and supporting local cyclists. As the business grew, the founders acknowledged the need to expand their store and relocated to nearby Ballyclare, rebranding as 'Chain Reaction Cycles'. After several successful years focusing on mail order, the website was launched in 2000 and the vibrant online business the company boasts today was born. The business merged with Wiggle LTD in 2017 to create Wiggle-CRC group.

**Short profile**

URL: https://www.chainreactioncycles.com/
Founded: 1984
Industry sector: Sport, Leisure & Automobiles
Couriers: Not mentioned on website
Group Revenue (in-store and online): £393 million

## What did we like?

- Free and convenient returns: Returns are free of charge and convenient for the customer. The label is available to download online, or the customer can take the parcel to a local drop-off point or have it collected.
- Returns communication: Chain Reaction Cycles let us know that they had received our return and when the money would be back in our account.
- Returns platform: Chain Reaction Cycles host their returns through ReBOUND[7], a returns platform that allows customers to track their parcel from printing the label right through to refund.

## What could be improved?

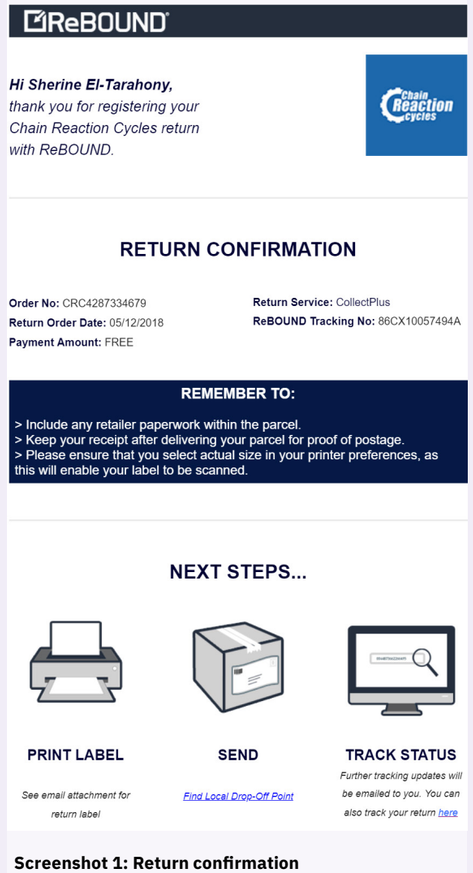
- Faster refund: The refund took around seven days to go back into our account. This is below average when compared to the other 100 retailers.
- Product feed: Chain Reaction Cycles should include a latest products feed to encourage the customer to purchase something different from them.

## Why best returns?

- Subject line: "Your Chain Reaction Cycles return has been received by CollectPlus" – subject line is clear and informative.
- Regular updates: ReBOUND sent us regular, useful information about our return and this communication continued when Chain Reaction Cycles accepted our returned parcel. We were never left in the dark about the status of our return.
- Design & layout: Although the return email may seem unspectacular at first glance, all important information is included.

[7] ReBOUND offers retailers an intelligent returns management platform




ReBOUND

*Hi Sherine El-Tarahony,*
*thank you for registering your Chain Reaction Cycles return with ReBOUND.*

**RETURN CONFIRMATION**

**Order No:** CRC4287334679
**Return Order Date:** 05/12/2018
**Payment Amount:** FREE
**Return Service:** CollectPlus
**ReBOUND Tracking No:** 86CX10057494A

**REMEMBER TO:**
> Include any retailer paperwork within the parcel.
> Keep your receipt after delivering your parcel for proof of postage.
> Please ensure that you select actual size in your printer preferences, as this will enable your label to be scanned.

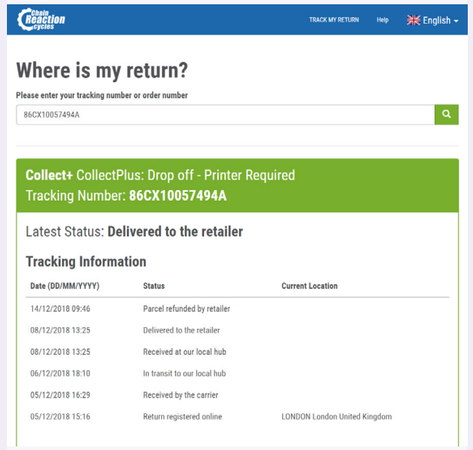
**NEXT STEPS...**

**PRINT LABEL**
*See email attachment for return label*

**SEND**
*Find Local Drop-Off Point*

**TRACK STATUS**
*Further tracking updates will be emailed to you. You can also track your return here*

**Screenshot 1: Return confirmation**


TRACK MY RETURN Help English

**Where is my return?**

Please enter your tracking number or order number

86CX10057494A

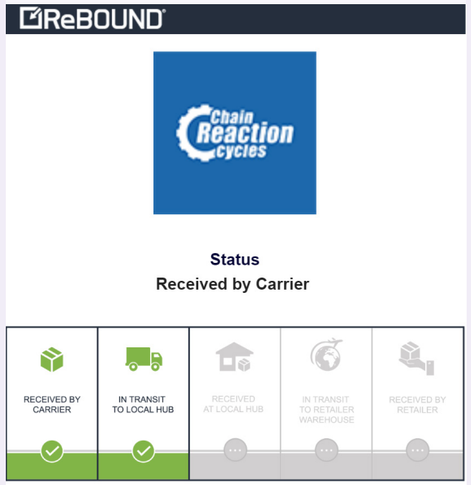
**Collect+** CollectPlus: Drop off - Printer Required
Tracking Number: **86CX10057494A**

Latest Status: **Delivered to the retailer**

**Tracking Information**

| Date (DD/MM/YYYY) | Status | Current Location |
|---|---|---|
| 14/12/2018 09:46 | Parcel refunded by retailer | |
| 08/12/2018 13:25 | Delivered to the retailer | |
| 08/12/2018 13:25 | Received at our local hub | |
| 06/12/2018 18:10 | In transit to our local hub | |
| 05/12/2018 16:29 | Received by the carrier | |
| 05/12/2018 15:16 | Return registered online | LONDON London United Kingdom |

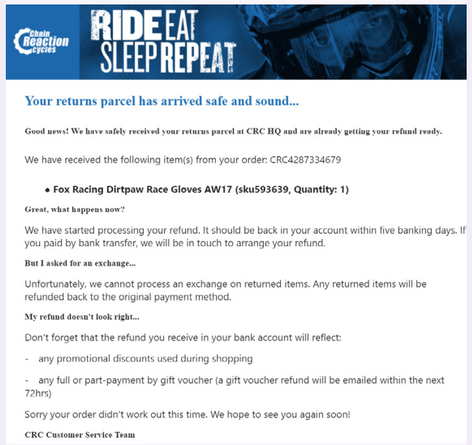
**Screenshot 2: Return tracking page**


ReBOUND

**Status**
**Received by Carrier**

RECEIVED BY CARRIER | IN TRANSIT TO LOCAL HUB | RECEIVED AT LOCAL HUB | IN TRANSIT TO RETAILER WAREHOUSE | RECEIVED BY RETAILER

**Screenshot 3: Return status**


RIDE EAT SLEEP REPEAT

**Your returns parcel has arrived safe and sound...**

**Good news! We have safely received your returns parcel at CRC HQ and are already getting your refund ready.**

We have received the following item(s) from your order: CRC4287334679

- **Fox Racing Dirtpaw Race Gloves AW17 (sku593639, Quantity: 1)**

**Great, what happens now?**

We have started processing your refund. It should be back in your account within five banking days. If you paid by bank transfer, we will be in touch to arrange your refund.

**But I asked for an exchange...**

Unfortunately, we cannot process an exchange on returned items. Any returned items will be refunded back to the original payment method.

**My refund doesn't look right...**

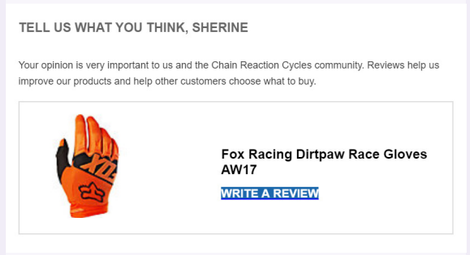
Don't forget that the refund you receive in your bank account will reflect:

- any promotional discounts used during shopping
- any full or part-payment by gift voucher (a gift voucher refund will be emailed within the next 72hrs)

Sorry your order didn't work out this time. We hope to see you again soon!

**CRC Customer Service Team**

**Screenshot 4: Return arrival**


TELL US WHAT YOU THINK, SHERINE

Your opinion is very important to us and the Chain Reaction Cycles community. Reviews help us improve our products and help other customers choose what to buy.

**Fox Racing Dirtpaw Race Gloves AW17**

WRITE A REVIEW

**Screenshot 5: Order review**

# Frequent issues

Sometimes, not everything goes as expected in the delivery process. During the research stage of the E-Commerce Shipping Study, a few differences were particularly noticeable in delivery.

Several times, we were forced to pay by PayPal as the retailer did not accept a foreign credit card number. In addition, some retailers allowed us to checkout, and then notified us that our order had been cancelled.

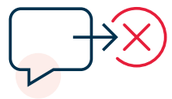
Some retailers did not customise the email subject for each stage of the journey. The customer simply receives “The order status has changed” several times.

Several times, customer accounts were not updated to reflect what was happening with the parcel. This means that in some cases, a parcel has already been delivered, but still showed as “in transit” in the customer account.

For some retailers, we had to contact the customer service several times to get a returns label.

Some retailers only allow you to return the parcel in store. If you do not live near a local store this is extremely inconvenient.

Some retailers returns policy is very short. By the time you have picked up the parcel, you need to return it again to be eligible.



One retailer sent all communications to the PayPal email address instead of the customer account one – this meant the wrong person was kept informed about the status of the delivery.

One retailer sent the ‘order processed’ email nine days after the parcel had arrived.

# Contact & About Us

parcelLab monitors, analyses and validates consignment data for each individual order in real time via direct interface with the shipping service providers. This data is used to trigger communications relevant to the customer in order to improve the customer experience.
These communications carry the online retailer‘s branding and enable the customer journey to be implemented end-to-end exactly according to the retailer‘s wishes in order to inspire customers and retain them for a long time.

The Munich and London-based start-up was founded in 2014 by Tobias Buxhoidt, Anton Eder and Julian Krenge. Today more than 40 employees work for more than 350 international retailers in 38 countries and in 25 languages.

Contact
parcelLab Ltd.
1 Fore St. Ave
EC2Y 9DT London
United Kingdom

+44 7871 446255
info@parcellab.com
www.parcellab.com/en