

2020/2021

E-commerce Delivery Compass

How consumer expectations will influence
e-commerce logistics in 2021



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Introduction

E-commerce is one of the most dynamic and fast growing industries in the world. Revenue in the e-commerce market has an annual growth rate of 6.7%.

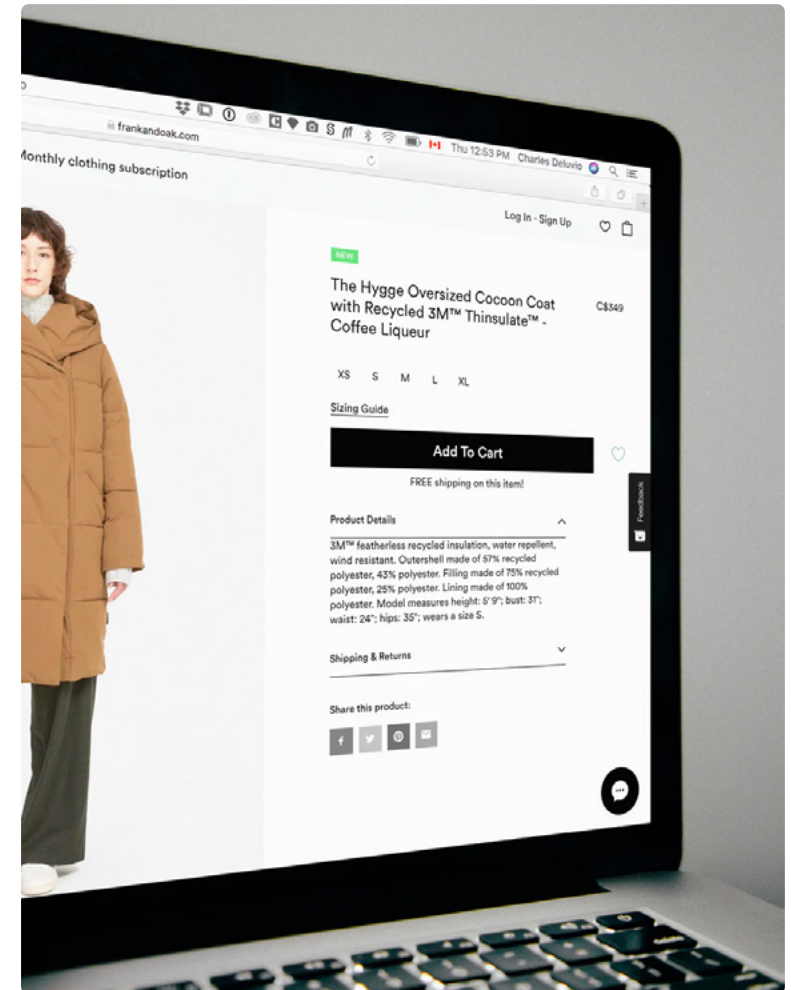
Brick and mortar stores experience difficult times and the ones who implement an omnichannel strategy will win. However, this leads to heavier and intense competition in the online landscape.

Major international players are dominating the market and spoil today's consumers with the best customer-centric offers. As a result, consumers have become accustomed to having their order delivered "where and when" they want to.

In addition, the coronavirus caused quite a stir in 2020. Consumers have started ordering online in large numbers. What are the developments in e-commerce and logistics? We see a lot of opportunities to increase your results, as long as you handle your shipping and return policy smartly.

This report provides insights into the wishes of European consumers, both before and during the corona crisis and shows to what extent online retailers respond to them.

It is up to you to turn these insights into your (competitive) advantage!



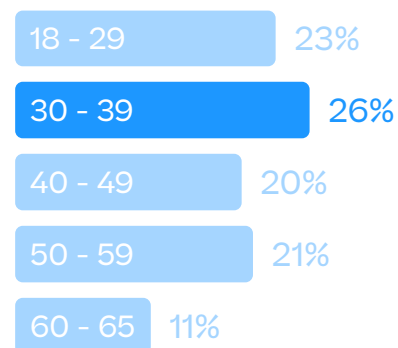
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Sample

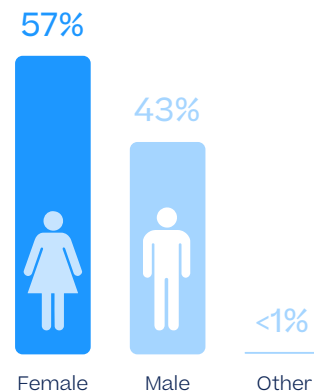
This report is the result of a European study conducted in Q1 of 2020 amongst a total of 8529 consumers in the United Kingdom (1196), Germany (1009), Spain (1043), Italy (1131), France (1137), Belgium (1006), The Netherlands (1005) and Austria (1002).

All respondents bought products online, were either male or female and aged 18 to 65 years old. The online purchase of services such as tickets and holidays was excluded from the research. Since the initial study was conducted and closed before March 2020, answers have not been influenced by the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe.

Age



Gender



Data has been collected through an online questionnaire consisting of 37 questions and statements. European data was weighted based on population size per country in order to reflect the right proportion of European online shoppers.

Additional research on the impact of COVID-19

After completion of the initial study, the coronavirus reached European soil. The strict but necessary measures have had a major impact on the economy. Physical stores had to close their doors and consumers started shopping more online.

To measure the impact of these changes, an additional study into the change in consumer expectations due to COVID-19 has been conducted. This was done based on ten modified questions and statements that were also posed in the original study, again presented to 1000+ consumers per country.

Key insights



Local preferences matter

Your gut feeling is right when it tells you to adapt your strategy when you want to expand to other countries. It's more than just translating your website and shipping to other countries: consumers have different standards, based on what they are used to.

Biggest differences can be seen in the amount of shipping costs consumers are willing to pay and speed of delivery. Furthermore, big differences can be seen in preferred delivery methods, the effects of the return policy and beliefs about e-commerce that can harm the environment and the economy.



Free delivery is not the standard anymore

Shipping costs are still the most important reason to abandon shopping carts. Most of European shoppers are likely to add another product to their shopping basket to reach a free shipping threshold.

When goods are needed at a specific time consumers are willing to pay additional shipping costs. Make sure to offer free shipping above a certain threshold and be flexible depending on shipping services. Offer a dynamic checkout to maximize conversion.



Return policies do increase conversion

Online retailers are often scared to receive returns and don't offer the most seamless ways to return orders. Shoppers do check the return policy before they decide to buy a product online though. Free and easy returns lead to more repeat purchases and the chance to earn more from a customer.



Green delivery is not a “thing” yet

Although many European consumers think the rise of online shopping is a problem for the environment, they aren't keen on having to pay extra for CO2 neutral delivery themselves. They do think shops could do better though, e.g. in terms of packaging: often too much is used and they think packaging materials should be fully recyclable.



Consumers expect less thanks to COVID-19

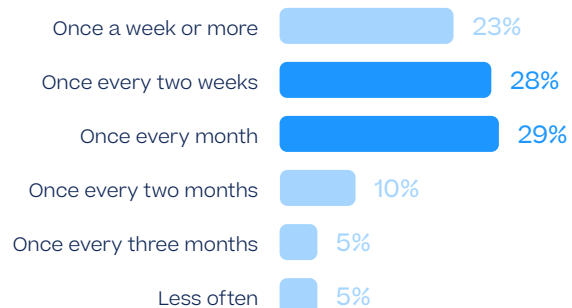
The 2020 coronavirus pandemic has had a huge effect on e-commerce. Consumers ordered almost three products more online than normally. Looking at the preferences of consumers, it turns out that the coronavirus led to more understanding: consumers are way more patient in the delivery of their products and a better delivery experience in the past became more important than a cheaper price.

Online shopping behaviour

What's becoming the "new normal" in terms of online shopping? Let's have a look at the frequency of online purchases, the amount of products bought and the value of these products.

European consumers purchase goods online at least once a month. The average is two times a month. On average five products are bought within three months.

How often do consumers order online?



 1.9 times per month on average

 2.3 times per month on average

 2.0 times per month on average

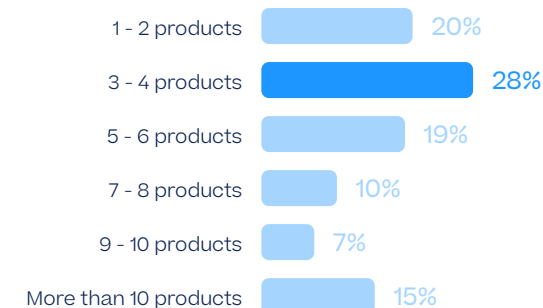
Big spender

Consumers will most often spend 11 to 50 Euros on a single order, but with excesses up to € 1000 the average amount spent is:

 €129.10 per product



How many products ordered online in the last 3 months?



 5.3 products in the last 3 months

 5.6 products in the last 3 months

 5.7 products in the last 3 months

Part 1

The checkout that drives conversion

In 2020 it might be obvious that the checkout of online stores is the door to a purchase. Do consumers leave with or without a product? A few factors are very important to take into account.



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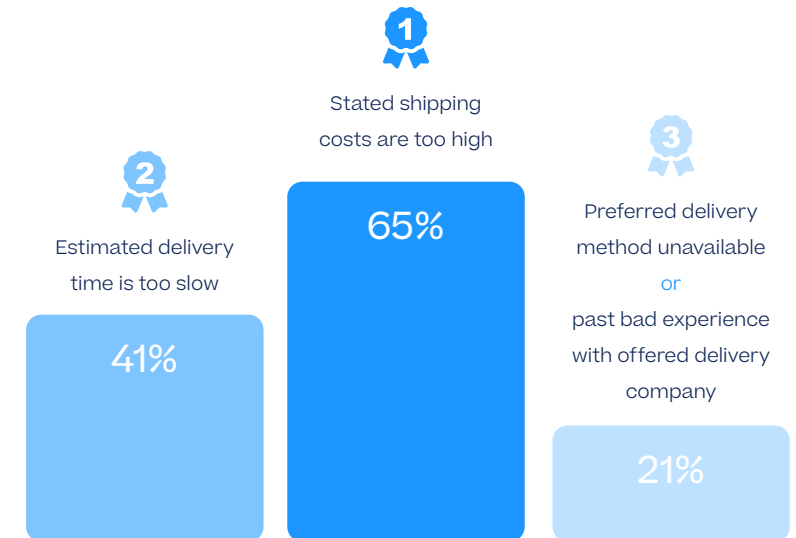
Shipping costs are deal breakers

What shipping related reasons for European consumers lead to abandoned shopping carts? It might not be a big surprise, but high stated shipping costs in the checkout will scare off people most. Important to take into account is that slow delivery, preferred delivery methods and a bad experience with the delivery company also have a negative effect on the e-commerce conversion rate.



Why do consumers leave your online store?

(multiple answers possible)



Less popular reasons:

14% Preferred delivery company not available

8% Other reason

Acceptable shipping costs

A significant 65% of European consumers abandons their shopping cart when confronted with too high shipping costs during checkout. But what exactly is 'too' high?

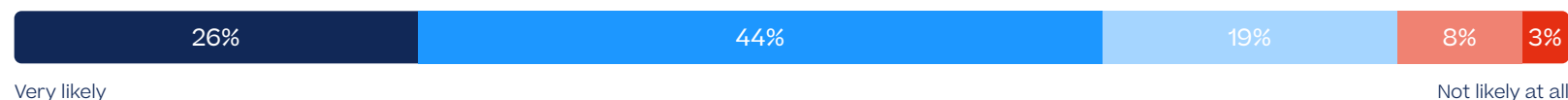


The maximum shipping costs that European consumers are willing to pay for next-day delivery depends on the amount of money spent on an order: the more expensive the order, the more shoppers are willing to pay for delivery.

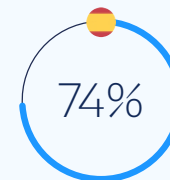
34% of online shoppers is not willing to pay for shipping at all when the order value exceeds € 150

The good news is that 70% of European online shoppers are likely to add another product to their shopping basket to reach a free shipping threshold.

How likely are you to add another product to your shopping basket to reach a free shipping threshold?



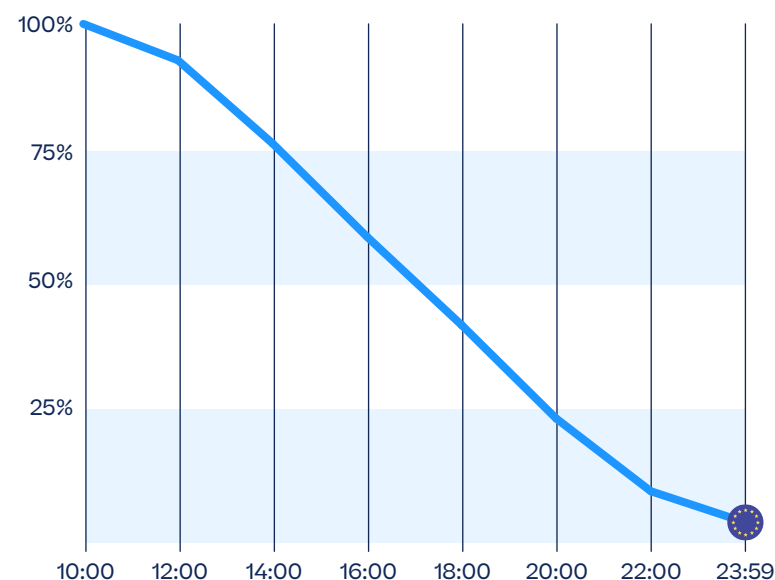
When comparing online shoppers per country, Spanish and Italian consumers are most likely to add another product to their order to reach the free shipping threshold.



High expectations for cut-off times

Online retailers are offering later and later cut-off times to increase their conversion rates, up to the point where it doesn't even seem to be a luxury anymore: larger webshops offering next-day delivery is pretty standard these days and even same-day delivery is getting increasingly common.

Until what time do European consumers expect to be able to order to still be eligible for next-day delivery?



On average, respondents in Europe believe that orders made just after 4pm should still be eligible for next-day delivery. A quarter even expects to be able to place their order until 8pm when next-day delivery is offered.

Expectations vary greatly throughout Europe though. The Dutch have the highest standards, expecting orders placed until just after 7pm still to be eligible for delivery on the next day.



Same-day delivery

Same-day delivery is a delivery option that is increasingly being offered in Europe, but is not yet available everywhere. 50% of consumers who use it expect to be able to place an order until 2pm and still have it delivered on the same day.

4% of European shoppers expects to be eligible for next-day delivery at all times, even when they place their order just before midnight.



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What do online retailers say?

What's the current state of checkouts in e-commerce?

Clients of Sendcloud spoke out loud and would like to improve the following about their checkouts:

- ✓ Decrease shipping costs for consumers
- ✓ Let consumers choose the day and time of receipt
- ✓ Flexible shipping costs based on dimensions of parcels
- ✓ Offer multiple delivery options
- ✓ Dynamic prices based on shipping costs

What about free delivery?

Free delivery is mostly a pain in the ass for online retailers. Shipping has a huge effect on margins. According to Sendcloud clients, 24% does offer free delivery and 26% doesn't offer free delivery at all. As an alternative, 48% offers free delivery above a certain threshold.

Managing expectations for delivery times

Interesting insights come from the online retailers we asked. Only 20% say they communicate about the expected delivery time in the checkout. They mostly communicate about it on product pages (36%).



Part 2

The (in)dependence of delivery companies

Shipping is a crucial part in the fulfilment of an order. Unfortunately, this fully lies in the hands of delivery companies. It's up to you as an online retailer to decide what delivery company you choose to ship your products with. Let's dive into the factors that are important to take into account when it comes to shipping.



The importance of delivery

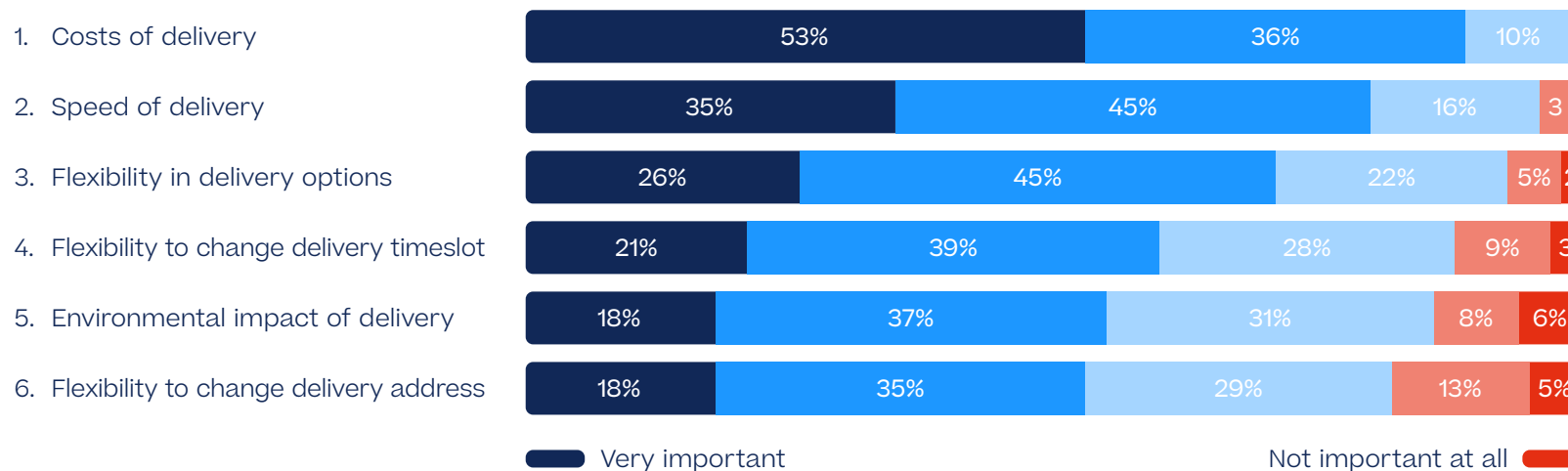
As we've seen before, shipping can be an important reason for consumers to leave a checkout. What's most important when it comes to the delivery of products?

The main reasons to choose one online store over another are related to the delivery costs (89%), speed of delivery (80%) and flexibility in choosing delivery options (next-day, service point, weekend delivery) (71%).

When comparing online shoppers per country, Italian and Spanish consumers agree most strongly upon costs and speed of delivery as main reasons to choose a particular online store over another.



Which part of delivery is the most important to the online shopper? (most to least important)



Standard delivery is not super fast

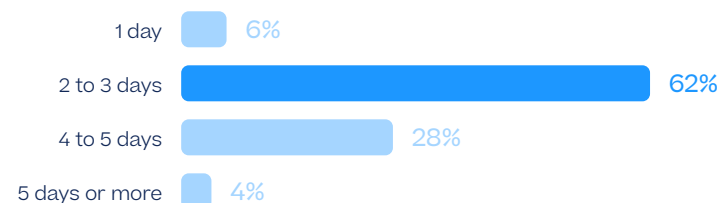
Consumers mention speed of delivery as one of the most important factors when shopping online. Standard delivery is stated in the shipping policy of e-commerce businesses, but what do consumers exactly expect from this?

If standard delivery is selected, European online shoppers expect to have their order delivered in about 3 days, but over a quarter wouldn't be bothered if it took 4 to 5 days

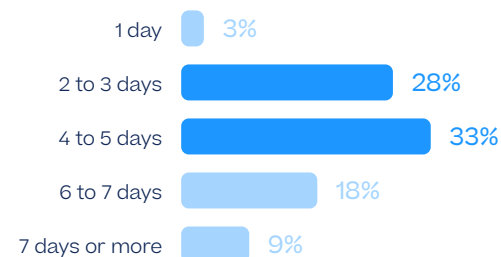
either. The average maximum time consumers are willing to wait for their delivery is 4 to 5 days, with 18% being okay with waiting up to a full week.

Dutch consumers have the highest expectations when it comes to the delivery time of their order, while shoppers from France and Austria are willing to wait longer.

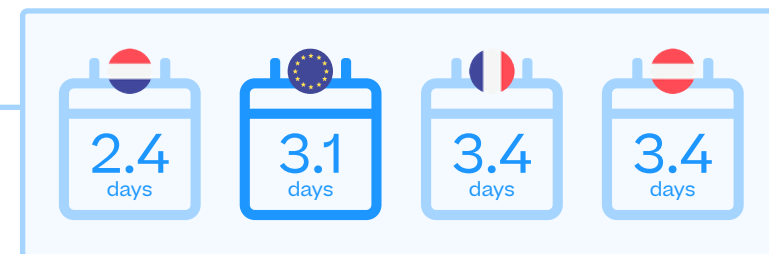
What is the expected delivery time for consumers?



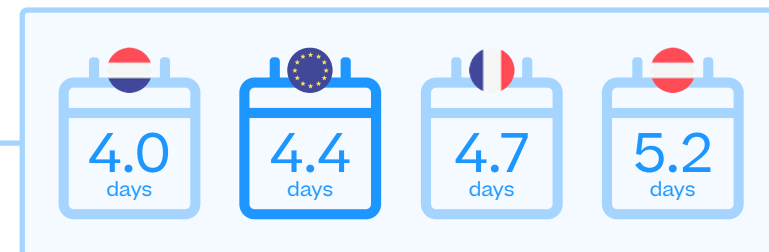
What is the maximum delivery time for consumers?



Average expected standard delivery times



Average expected maximum delivery times



Willingness to pay more for delivery

Are European online shoppers willing to pay additional costs for premium delivery services? Over a quarter says never to, but those who do are especially willing to pay when they can receive their order on the same day, the next day or when they can select the exact time of delivery.

Going Dutch

Dutch and Belgian online shoppers are least willing to pay more money for premium shipping options: over one-third doesn't want to pay extra, ever.



When are shoppers willing to pay additional shipping costs?

Choose same day delivery



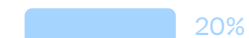
Choose next day delivery



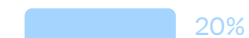
Choose exact time of delivery



Choose delivery within one hour



Choose specific day of delivery



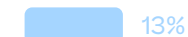
Choose weekend delivery



Choose evening delivery



Choose green (CO2 neutral) delivery



Consumers are least willing to pay extra for green delivery options.

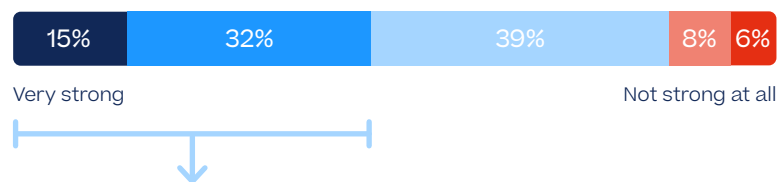
Preference for delivery companies

Does it matter to European online shoppers which carrier delivers their order? For most it doesn't, but 47% does have a preference when it comes to the delivery company. Of this group, the lion's share (78%) indicates it is likely the offered delivery company will affect their purchase decision.

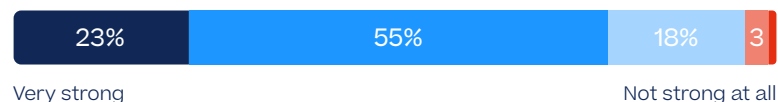


For almost half of European online shoppers, the carrier(s) offered by an online store has an influence on the purchase decision.

How strong is the preference for a specific carrier?



How likely is the (selection of) carrier(s) offered to influence consumers' purchasing decisions?



What do consumers find important?

The main reasons for European consumers to choose a specific carrier are cheaper shipping costs, a faster delivery time and a better delivery experience in the past.

What are the reasons for European online shoppers to choose a specific carrier over another?

1. Better delivery experience in the past



2. Cheaper price



3. Faster delivery



4. Ability to change the time of delivery



5. Ability to change the delivery address



6. Better option for the environment (less CO2 emissions)



7. Other reason / none of the above



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Preferred delivery companies throughout Europe

In general, the European consumer does not have a strong preference for a specific carrier. However, when asked to chose one favorite carrier, online shoppers in most countries prefer their parcels to be delivered by their national postal service.

Interesting to notice is that in France and Italy, subsidiaries of DPD are preferred.



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Lost and damaged packages

Delivery companies handle millions of parcels a day. No matter how reliable shipping providers are, packages can get lost or damaged. In general it's the online retailer who is responsible for making sure shoppers get what they pay for.

A bad delivery experience can be a reason for consumers not to order from a webshop again, but which shipping reasons weigh the most?

Not receiving a package at all comes in at first place, closely followed by receiving a damaged product. Both are problems that could be prevented by an online store with proper order processing and careful packaging of products.

Of course, these problems can also be caused by the carrier, but the consumer will turn to you as store owner for a solution. After all, they bought the product from you and are not responsible with which carrier you sent the package.

What are reasons for consumers not to order from a particular store again?



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Responsibility

If a package is lost or damaged, who is responsible? About half of European online shoppers blame both the online shop and the delivery company. One quarter only holds the shop accountable, the other quarter just the carrier.

Who is responsible for a damaged or undelivered package?

1. Both the online shop and the delivery company



2. The delivery company



3. The online shop



While on average European online shoppers hold the carrier and shop equally responsible, some countries such as **Germany** tip more to the carrier side, while others like **Spain** and **The Netherlands** blame the online store slightly more.



Preferred solution

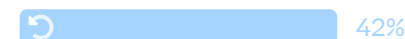
As a solution, consumers prefer to just get their money back, or receive a replacement product. Only a small portion agrees with receiving a coupon or voucher of the amount spent as compensation for the lost or damaged goods.

Which solution is preferred if a product is damaged or has not been delivered?

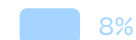
1. Reimbursement of the money



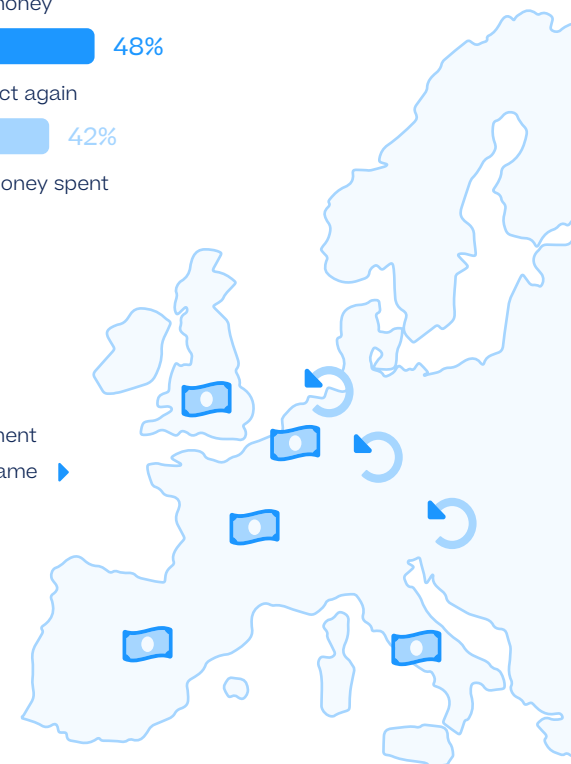
2. Receive the same product again



3. Coupon or voucher of money spent



Preferences for reimbursement of money or receiving the same product again throughout countries surveyed



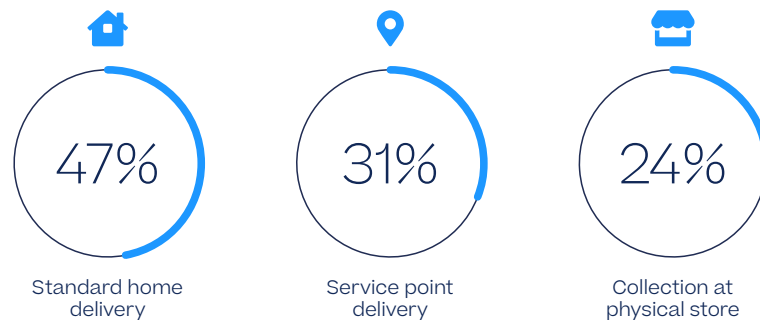
Delivery according to online retailers

Let's have a look at the state of online retailers. Do they meet the needs of online shoppers when it comes to the delivery of their products?

Delivery flexibility

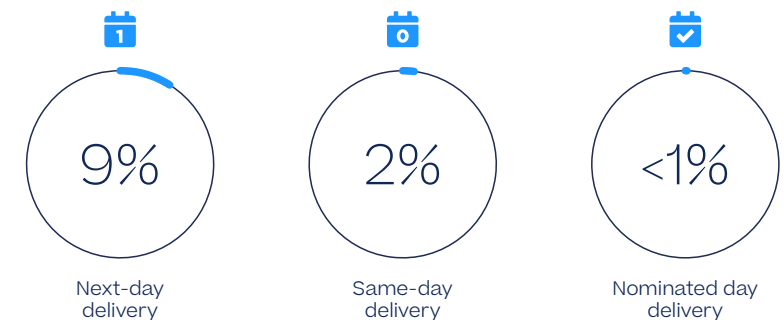
One of the reasons for European consumers to choose one online store over another is offering flexible delivery options (71%). Do online retailers offer this flexibility in delivery options? Sendcloud asked their clients and found that 51% does offer more than one shipping method in their store.

Most offered shipping methods by online retailers:



Premium shipping options offer chances

Consumers are willing to pay extra to receive orders faster or when they can choose the exact time of delivery, but these sorts of premium shipping options are only offered by a very limited number of online stores.



Reasons for these low numbers may be that it is not always as easy for online retailers to include these kind of premium delivery options in their checkout.

New opportunities arise when it's made easier for online retailers to offer more delivery options to online shoppers.

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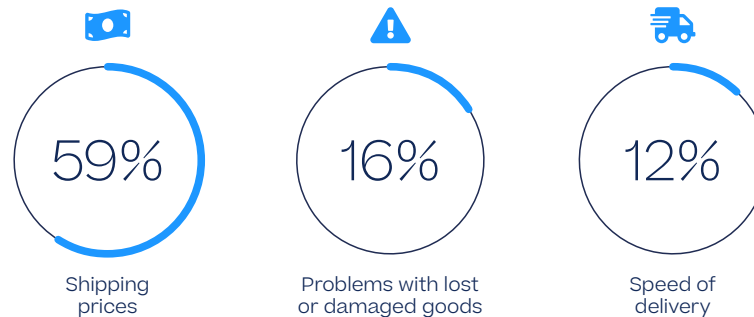
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Selecting the right delivery company

The good news is that most European online consumers don't have a strong preference for a specific carrier. This means that you can just choose the delivery company that suits your products best, without your choice having much effect on your conversion.

What are the most important aspects for online retailers in choosing a delivery company?



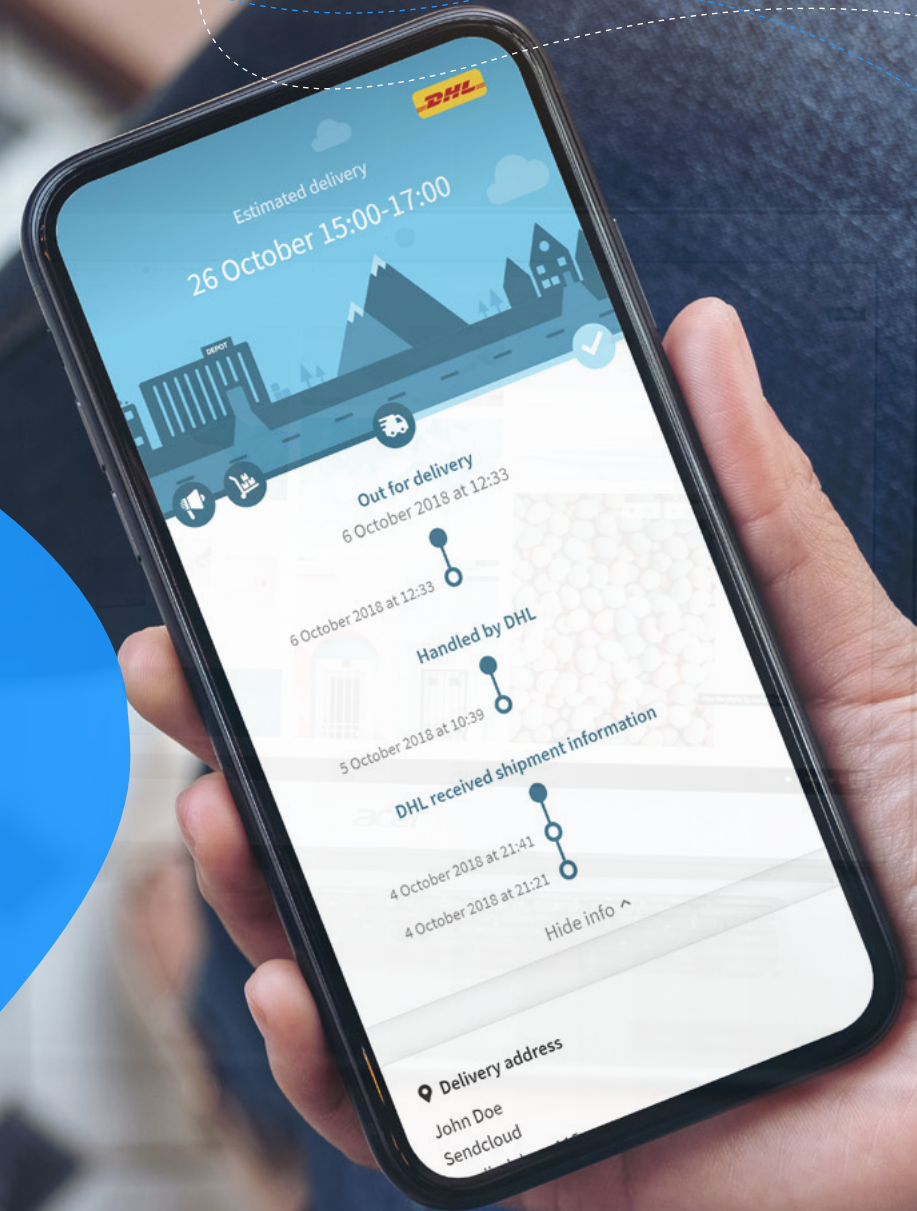
Consumers want online retailers and carriers to solve their issues when an order is not delivered. Reliability of carriers is important. Online retailers need to be able to offer a reimbursement or a new product when a package gets lost or damaged.

Make sure you can cover the costs of a lost or damaged shipment, so consumers won't suffer from a delivery issue.

Part 3

Tracking parcels is more than just a status

Consumers are most involved with their order when it's on its way. This offers chances for online retailers to increase customer satisfaction and repeat purchases. What do consumers expect when it comes to communication about their order status? Let's find out here.



The right message, at the right time, through the right channel

Tracking updates are an important part of the customer experience, so it's no surprise that European consumers like being updated about the delivery status of their order. There is still much to gain in this area for online retailers however, because tracking updates still are often very standard and impersonal. That's a shame, because it is this exact moment at which consumers are most engaged with their order!

The right time

European online shoppers like to be kept up-to-date on the delivery status of their order, especially when their package has left the warehouse, has been handed over to the carrier and is on its way to the delivery address.

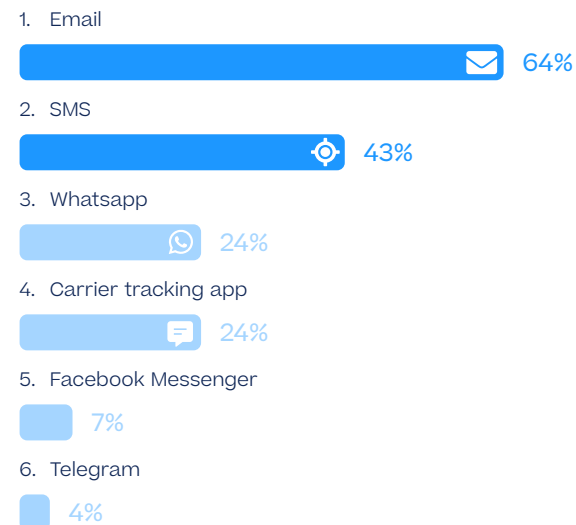
Consumers are least interested in receiving an update when the order is delivered. Precise GPS tracking of every step in the delivery process isn't found particularly desirable either.

European consumers would like to receive proactive updates about their shipment, specially when there is a delay or other shipping problem.

The right channel

Consumers expect to receive delivery updates mainly via email. SMS is a good second service to offer, followed by WhatsApp and carrier tracking apps in shared third place.

Through which channels do consumers prefer to receive delivery updates?



Although email is the most preferred notification method in nearly all countries surveyed, SMS, WhatsApp or a carrier tracking app all come second somewhere in Europe.

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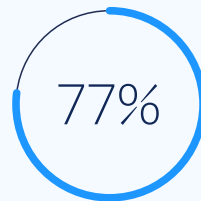
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Do online retailers follow?

Tracking notifications are quick wins for online retailers. They can be set up easily and sent out automatically via external tools. Do they meet the expectations of online shoppers?

Consumers prefer receiving tracking updates through email and luckily, retailers seem well aware:



77% of online retailers indicate that automated Track & Trace emails are very important to them.



83% of Sendcloud users is actively using the platform's tracking feature to send out automated and branded Track & Trace emails.



29% additionally makes use of a tracking page with further parcel information and extensive promotion possibilities for the online store.

Part 4

The ideal return policy

Returns are the least fun part of the equation. Returns cost time and money for online retailers and often also for consumers. What's the current state of returns? Can your return policy really make a difference when it comes to conversion and repeat purchases? We've got the answers.



European return rates

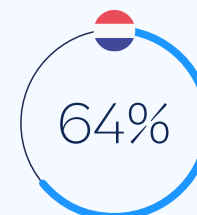
Only just over half of European online shoppers will typically return a product if they are not satisfied. Almost a third only returns sometimes and 16% doesn't return a product at all when dissatisfied. The most frequently cited reasons are that returns are too much of a hassle and the cost of returning is out of proportion to the value of the product.

Do European consumers often return products?

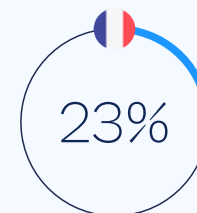


Why choose not to return a product?

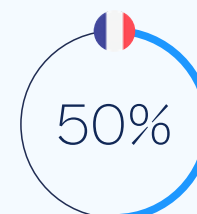
- Returning is a big hassle to me
50%
- Returning the product is more expensive than keeping it
44%
- There is no possibility to return
12%
- I tend to forget to return my product in time
11%
- Other or unknown reason
20%



In The Netherlands most consumers will return bought products when not satisfied: 64% answers yes, another 24% says they return sometimes.



From all countries studied, shoppers from France appear to be the least likely to return products: 23% says no, another 30% returns sometimes.



In France most online shoppers say they do not return a product because returning the product is more expensive than keeping it.



Consumers from the United Kingdom admit forgetting to return products most often.



Take responsibility over returns

Who is responsible for returns?

European online shoppers believe that online retailers are mainly responsible for arranging and paying for the return shipment of their order.

Who is responsible for arranging and paying the return?

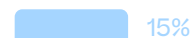
1. The online store



2. Both the online store and the customer



3. The customer



Don't know



In Germany, The Netherlands and Austria only about 50% of the shoppers are convinced it's just the retailer who is responsible for arranging and paying for the return. About 28% voted for both parties.



You think no one checks your return policy?

Like it or not, the facts don't lie: 56% of European consumers always checks the return policy before they decide to buy a product from an online store.

Do consumers review the return policy before making a purchase?



In Italy, an incredible 72% of online shoppers always checks the return policy before ordering. Spain comes in at second place with 65%.



Consumers from Germany seem to care less about the return policy, as only 43% indicates checking it before buying from an online store.

Ingredients to increase conversion with your return policy

What does a return policy absolutely need?

What are European online shoppers exactly looking for when checking your return policy? We asked and they answered! Consumers like to be mostly informed about:



How to return the product



When to expect the refund



How long the return period is



Additional costs for returning a product

Additionally, online shoppers from the **United Kingdom** have above average interest in how to track the status of their return and **Austrian** consumers want to know about the address where to return to.



What to offer to keep customers coming back?

Most online retailers already know that a good return policy can stimulate repeat purchases, but what do consumers really find important?

1

Easily accessible return policy

Returns are annoying and consumers are lazy, so they prefer to make as little effort as possible to return a product and prefer to shop at online stores that help them with this.

2

Free returns

Free returns almost always increase purchases. It is up to you to test if this results in a larger profit in the end. Reduce the chance on getting returns by paying extra attention to your product pages and carefully packaging orders.

3

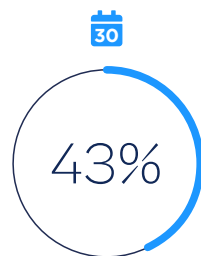
Easy and fast return process

It sounds logical and it is, but consumers find an easy to find and clear return policy extremely important. However, many webshops are already going wrong here, which is a pity, because 85% of consumers sometimes or regularly check the return policy before they purchase.

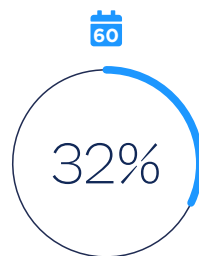
Psychological return tactics

Some online retailers are testing with offering customers longer return periods. A smart move that could work two ways, as consumers indicate a short return period is an important reason to not order at a particular store, whilst longer return periods might actually lead to fewer returns, because customers will forget about the product over time.

Offering a longer return period could kill two birds with one stone: increase conversion and cause fewer returns.

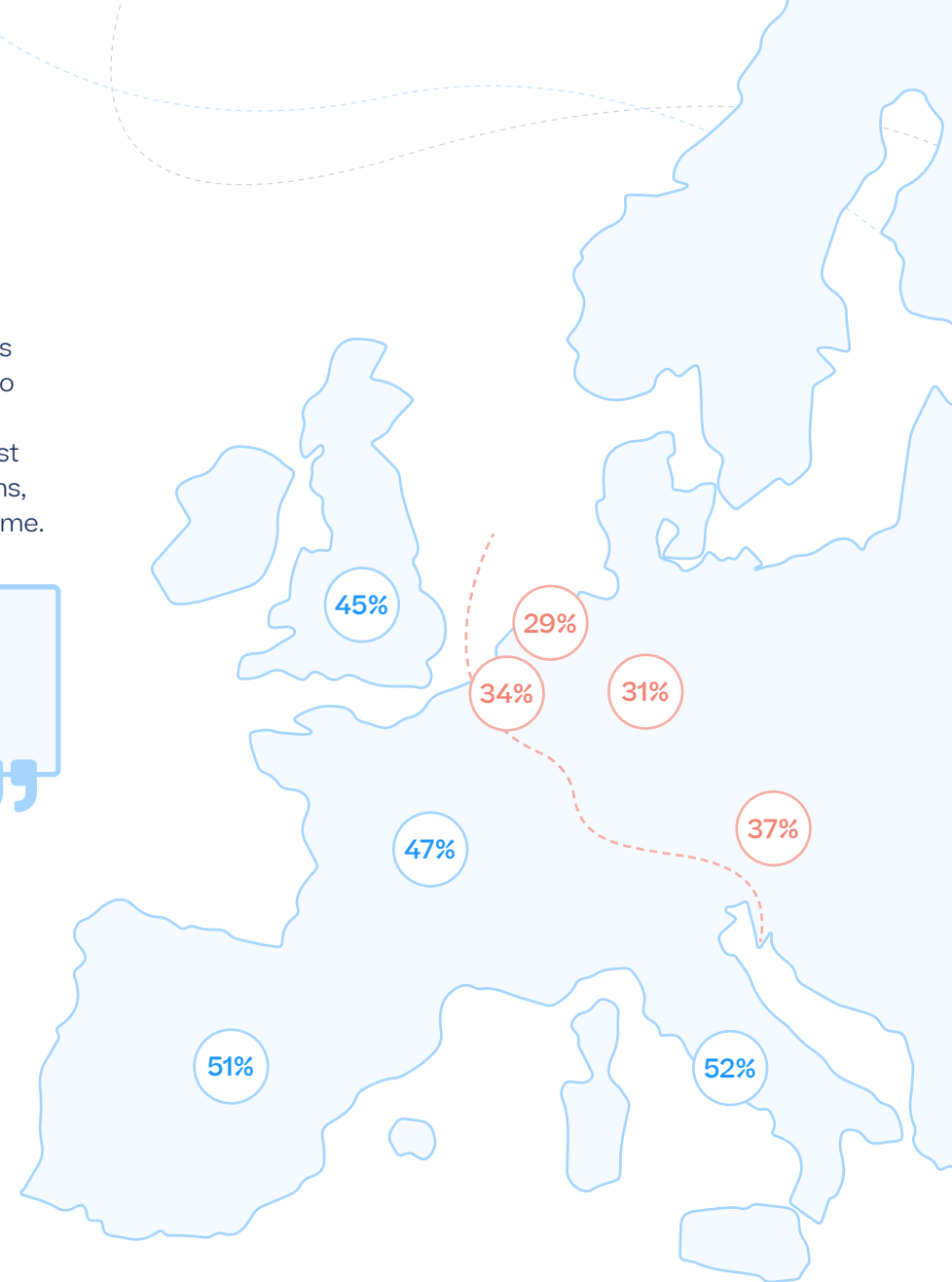


Would not order at an online store if the return period is less than 30 days



Would not order at an online store if the return period is less than 60 days

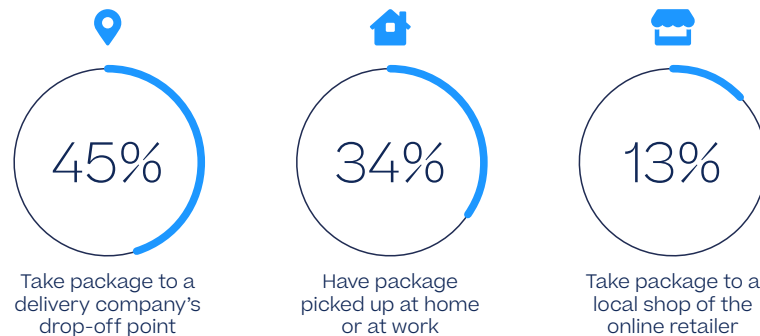
The attitude towards longer return policies seems split across Europe however, probably making this tactic more powerful in the UK and the south of Europe.



Percentage of consumers that would not order at an online store if the return period is less than 30 days

Dropping off returns

Most European online shoppers prefer to bring their return package to a drop-off point in their neighbourhood.

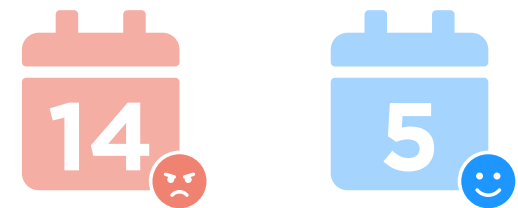


Although all countries indicate drop-off points as their most preferred returning method, **British and French** consumers are open to taking a package to a local shop of the online retailer more than average.



Handle returns quickly

The law for online returns states that refunding returns is allowed to take a maximum of 14 days after you've received a return notification from your customer. Time enough, you'd say? Well, not if you want to keep your customers happy.



Unfortunately, European consumers are not that patient and expect a retailer to process their refund a whole lot faster: on average, online shoppers are willing to wait for a refund only 5 days after they've submitted a return.

Austrian consumers are the most patient and are willing to wait 6 days for their refund. But 14 days? No way.

Returns according to online retailers

Returning products without a hassle is a big deal for online consumers. Offering a customer-friendly return process could therefore have a massive impact on the conversion of your online store.

What return solutions do online retailers offer?



An increasing amount of online retailers offers digital return solutions, so consumers can arrange the return themselves. Next to that, some create return labels manually when they receive a return notification. And although being one of the easiest consumer-friendly ways to offer returns, almost none add a return label directly to the box when packing an order.

Surprisingly, 4 out of 10 online retailers state that they hardly receive any returns at all. In addition, some online retailers indicate that they choose not to offer a flexible return solution because they don't want to encourage the return of products.



Part 5

The state of cross-border e-commerce

Predictions are that 22% of the total e-commerce will be cross-border in 2022. In 2016 this percentage was 15%. Cross-border e-commerce is exploding. What's the attitude of consumers towards cross-border shopping? Let's find out.



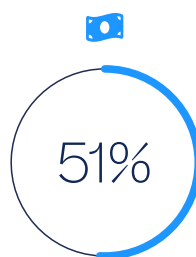
Attitude towards international shopping

More than half of European online shoppers ordered from international online shops last year, so crossing the border could well be an interesting opportunity for online retailers.

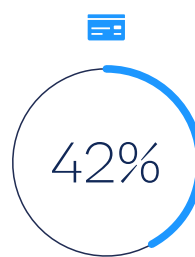


53% of online shoppers indicates to have ordered from an international online store in the past 12 months.

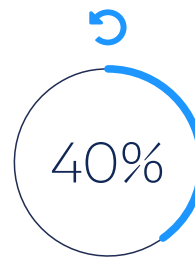
When expanding your business internationally, it's important to know the habits of consumers and their willingness to buy from an international store. European online shoppers state that the main reasons for them to not order from an international store are:



Delivery costs are too high



Potential extra costs for customs



Difficulties in returning products

When looking at the main reasons to not order from an international store per country, some interesting local differences can be found:

Spanish and French consumers expect delivery to take too long (35%), while online shoppers from Germany and The Netherlands tend not to trust international shipping (25%) significantly more than the European average of 18%.



Retailers take advantage of cross-border opportunities

Looking into our own data shows that Sendcloud customers ship to an average of vijf different countries. Moreover, 38% of online retailers say they ship to countries outside of the European Union.

There is a lot of cross-border potential for online retailers, as long as costs can be cut for both themselves and their customers.



Part 6

The future of e-commerce

Consumer expectations will always evolve, especially in e-commerce. The online environment is changing into a jungle of new players, developments and opportunities. How do consumers feel about the latest developments? Let's dive into it.



Main concerns for the future

Packaging

When it comes to current e-commerce logistics, European consumers' main concerns are with packaging: especially the French and Italians think packaging materials should be fully recyclable, while British and German consumers find that often too much packaging materials are being used.



**Fully recyclable
packaging**



**Less packaging
materials**

Local businesses

Almost two third of consumers believe that online shopping could jeopardize local economies and businesses, yet only one third actually acts upon it and prefers to buy from a local online store rather than from large online stores or marketplaces.



**Consumers fear local economies and businesses
could be jeopardized by growing e-commerce**

Online shoppers from the United Kingdom seem to be most concerned about their local businesses and state to prefer buying from them over international stores most often.

The environment

Although more than half of online shoppers says they are concerned that the rise of e-commerce is a problem for the environment, only 13% is willing to paying extra shipping costs for their order to be delivered in a CO2 neutral way and just 5% claims to choose one delivery company over another because they offer green delivery options.

*Consumers and online retailers are on
the same page when it comes to green
delivery: it's just not top of mind.*



And what about online retailers? Less than 1% of them currently offer green delivery options in their checkout. Potential explanations could be that the environment is not a big concern for them (yet) or that delivery companies don't offer additional green delivery services. But then, only 2% states to choose a delivery company over another because of the availability of specific shipping methods.

Big wins still to achieve in terms of environmental awareness in the world of e-commerce logistics, one could conclude...

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Smart delivery

Smart locks have been a part of trend reports for multiple years now. With a smart lock, packages can be delivered straight to the consumer's house without having to be home to receive it, making home delivery easier than ever. At least, that's the idea. How's the adoption within Europe?



In general, most European only shoppers do not have a very positive attitude towards this new technology: just one third is willing to use a smart lock on their door. In Italy and the UK shoppers are most positive, while Dutch and Belgian consumers are most weary about smart locks.

It might still be too early for futuristic delivery methods like smart locks.



Part 7

Delivery in times of crisis (COVID-19)

The coronavirus pandemic has changed our lives tremendously. While some e-commerce businesses could profit from COVID-19, others unfortunately had to get creative to generate sales. The fact is that online shopping has grown in popularity, mainly out of necessity due to lockdown situations. We measured the effects of COVID-19 on e-commerce and logistics. Let's see what can be learned from such a crisis.



Online shopping behaviour

Corona led to a real spring peak. Consumers were forced to order products so that they could work from home without problems, or stuff to pass the time with. On average, European shoppers bought almost three products more online than usual, as a result of the COVID-19 impact.

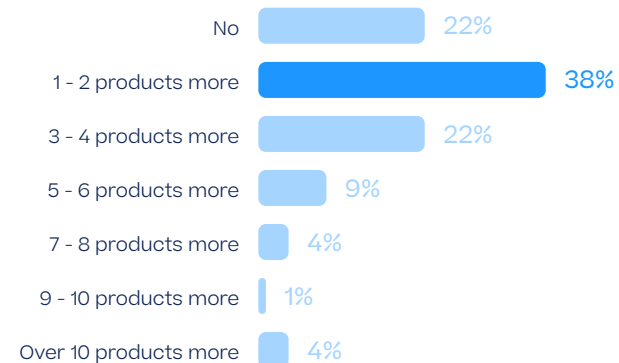
Forced to order online

Consumers in countries that experienced full lockdowns such as Spain and Italy, have bought the most additional products on average.

For example, Spanish consumers bought an average of three more products online as a result of COVID-19 measures.



Have you ordered more products online since COVID-19?



 On average, European consumers ordered **2.7 products more** than usual

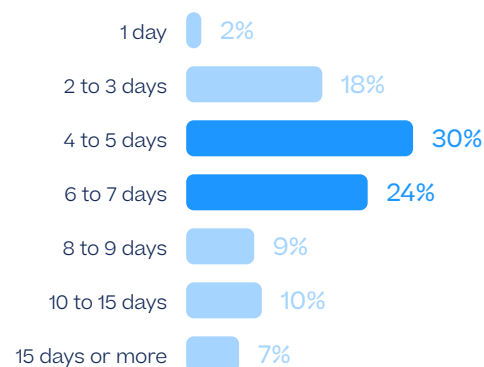
Will this trend continue once the corona crisis has passed? European online shoppers seem to think so:



Willingness to wait for delivery

COVID-19 led to a lot of challenges for delivery companies as well. Due to various measurements in different countries and an increase in the amount of orders, delays were hard to avoid. The big question, however, is to what extent the willingness of the European shopper to wait has changed.

How long are you willing to wait when “standard” shipping is offered in times of crisis?

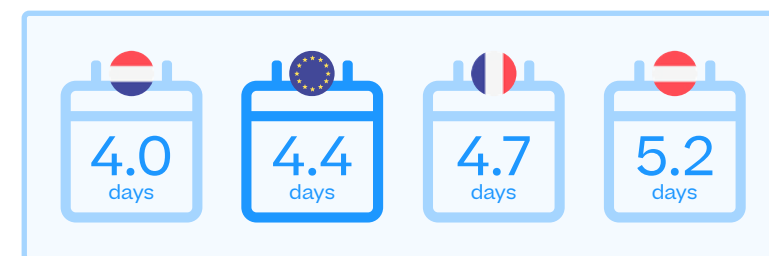


Before the corona crisis, European online shoppers expected to have an order delivered in about three days and were willing to wait a maximum of 4.4 days.

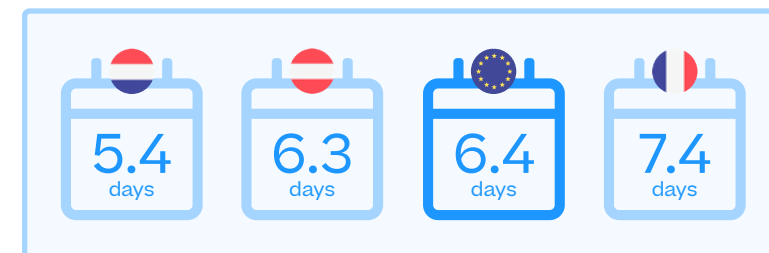
The pandemic makes consumers more patient: the average maximum amount of days they are now willing to wait for standard delivery went up to 6.4. More than a third is willing to wait 6 till 9 days to receive the order.

Dutch consumers were and still are least patient. While the Austrians were most patient before corona, they seem reluctant to accept longer delivery times in times of crisis. French online shoppers have taken the lead and are willing to wait over a week for their order to be delivered.

Average expected maximum delivery times before corona



Average expected maximum delivery times during crisis



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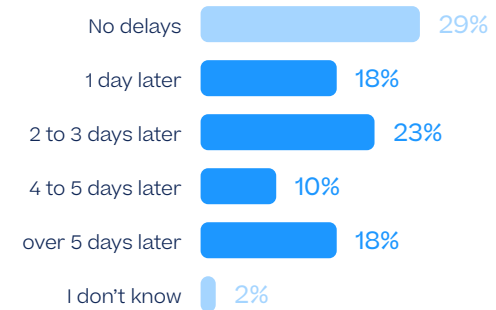
Delayed shipments

Carriers did their best, but delays were inevitable. In addition to the fact that they also had to comply with all new measures, up to 90% more packages were sent during the peak. As a result, carriers in all European countries experienced delays.

On average, parcels were delivered a little more than 2 days later than expected. No less than 69% of European online shoppers experienced shipping delays.

It is striking that consumers in Italy, one of the hardest hit countries, on average reported the least delays cases of delay. In France on the other hand, consumers experienced most delays. Almost one third of French consumers experienced a delay of over five days.

How much delay was experienced during the corona crisis?



Average days of delay during the corona crisis



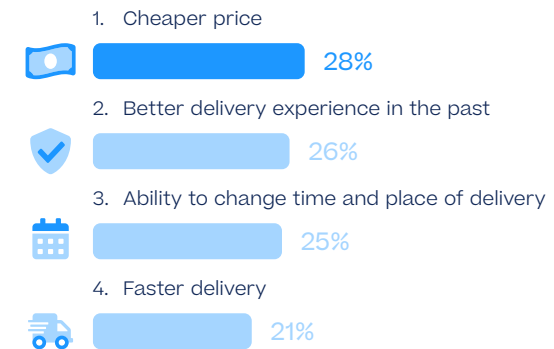
Delivery preferences

Previously we've seen that less than half of European online shoppers has a preference for a certain delivery company. Reasons to choose one company over another was better delivery experiences in the past, cheaper price or faster delivery time.

During a crisis like COVID-19 however, another factor seems to become relevant as well. A better delivery experience and cheaper price are still most important, but flexibility in when and where a parcel gets delivered rises from 12% pre-corona to 25% mid-crisis and kicks faster delivery out of the top 3.

Locally however, quite some differences can be found. For Germany, Austria and Spain delivery experience in the past is most important, while both Belgium and The Netherlands prefer flexibility over anything else. The UK, Italy and France follow the European average and see cheaper price as the most important reason to choose one delivery company over another.

What are the reasons to choose a specific delivery company over another during a crisis like COVID-19?



Most important reason to choose a specific carrier over another throughout countries surveyed



Cross-border or local online shopping?

Before pandemic, 53% of online shoppers said that they ordered from an international online store. Corona didn't lead to big changes regarding this:



Half of European consumers say they ordered more from local stores that are based in their country of residence since COVID-19. 44% didn't order more at local stores.



Looking at these numbers on a country specific level, Austria stands out. Ordering from international online stores went down from 79% pre-pandemic to 67%. Although that's still much higher than the European average, almost 70% of Austrian shoppers indicates to have ordered more from local online stores since the corona virus hit.

A reason for this could be that the Austrians committed to stimulating their local economies: before corona, Austrian shoppers were already significantly more worried that the rise of e-commerce could pose a problem for local economies than the European average.

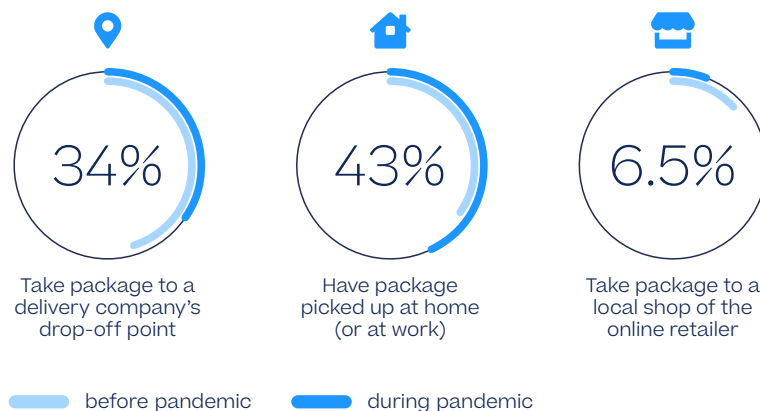
Local stores did become more popular or started an online business because of COVID-19, but it wasn't at the cost of international e-commerce.

Another reason for an increase in popularity of local online stores is that delivery is easier when there are no borders involved, especially in times of crisis.

Returning in times of crisis

What's the state of returns? Before corona it was shown that returns do have an impact on conversion and there are some interesting insights. During a pandemic like corona, only one thing matters. How to return a package when you don't have the option to leave the house?

Before corona, European shoppers preferred to bring their returns to a drop-off point. But the instituted stay-at-home measures shifted this preference towards home pick-ups:



Almost 43% now prefers their returns to be picked up from their house, compared to 34% pre-pandemic. Drop-off point preference dropped from 45% before to 34% now.

Stay at home, return from home

It's no surprise to see that in southern European countries, where the impact of the coronavirus on daily life was heaviest, consumers made a more significant shift towards preferring their return to be picked up from home.



Consumers from less severely struck countries such as Germany, Austria, The Netherlands and Belgium still preferred to drop off their package at a drop-off point themselves.

In summary: the impact of corona on e-commerce

At the time of writing, the impact of the coronavirus in Europe has declined sharply, but a new wave of infections or future pandemic is inevitable, according to some scientists.

What are the main concerns of consumers in times of crisis and how will consumer behavior change when restrictions are reintroduced? In short, what have we learned?



Flexibility in delivery options become more important as shipping delays increase and the expected delivery times become less reliable

69% of European consumers surveyed experienced shipping delays. On average, packages were delivered just over two days later than expected during the COVID-19 measures. Partly because of this, 25% now indicates that they consider flexibility in delivery to be more important than the speed and price of a shipping option.

This is relevant not only in times of virus outbreak, but also in busy e-commerce periods. Consider, for example, the busy December month and the often associated shipping delays. The ability to determine and adjust the time and location of delivery in the interim is expected by more and more consumers.



The rise of online shopping has accelerated and over a third thinks they'll buy more online after COVID-19, at the cost of brick and mortar retail

Physical stores that had to close due to the measures and consumers starting to shop online in large numbers are reasons for consumers to believe that more physical stores will disappear and more market share will go to e-commerce. 36% of European consumers expect to buy more products online after COVID-19 than before.



Consumers understand delays in times of crisis, but expect to be well informed

In times of crisis, European consumers are willing to wait an average of 6.4 days for a package when standard delivery is offered. This is a staggering 45% longer than before. They do expect to be informed about delays in time. As a webshop, make sure to inform the customer about possible delays during the initial ordering process.

Another option may be to offer shipping options from multiple carriers during periods in which shipping delays are more likely to occur.

Review & tips

Being successful in e-commerce requires flexibility and the ability to adjust the strategy based on your target group. Here's our study review and some final tips and tricks for the future of e-commerce logistics.



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Consumers' preferences in delivery are shaped by experiences and habits. Free shipping isn't the standard anymore, but shipping costs do have a great impact on conversion. The willingness of consumers to pay for shipping depends on the value of the order and the shipping methods offered. The good news is that standard delivery isn't expected to be super fast. This creates a window of opportunity for online retailers that want to ship products to international customers.

Most European consumers do not have a strong preference when it comes to the delivery company, as long as their package gets delivered without any issues. If something does go wrong, they want to be informed proactively and receive a reasonable solution.

Returns, on the other hand, have a huge impact on the current state of e-commerce delivery. More than half of European consumers check the return policy before they decide to place an order. They want to know how to return, when to expect the refund, what the return period is and what the returning costs are. Returns also define cross-border e-commerce. When returning a product is difficult or delivery and customs are expensive, consumers won't shop at international shops and market places.

Last but not least, green delivery won't be "a big thing" yet. However, we have to be kind to the environment and make sure that there's not a waste of packaging material.

Tips & tricks

**TIP 1****Offer dynamic shipping costs**

Don't charge your total shipping costs to your customers and communicate about the shipping costs on product pages and in the checkout. Add a free shipping threshold to your strategy to increase conversion and avoid losing customers.

**TIP 2****Offer multiple delivery options**

Give shoppers a choice when it comes to the delivery of their orders. They want to pay additional costs for faster delivery and delivery on a day of choice. Be clear about the cut-off time for same or next day delivery, the additional costs and the time of delivery.

**TIP 3****Don't be dependent on delivery companies**

By collaborating with multiple suppliers you will be able to offer the most suitable delivery methods for every order. Leave the decision to your customers and increase conversion in your checkout.

**TIP 4****Keep customers informed**

Make sure to proactively communicate about the status of orders via automated triggers. Any change in parcel status? Make sure to notify your clients. At least make them aware of the fact that an order has left the warehouse and is on its way.

**TIP 5****Create a profitable return policy**

Make sure to offer a clear and easy to understand return policy in your store. Collaborate with multiple delivery companies to save costs on international shipments. Make sure to adjust your return policy to specific countries and inform customers how they can return a parcel if they want to. Offering free returns might increase the amount of returns, but will increase the amount of repeat purchases in your store which will help you to increase your profit.

**TIP 6****Take care of the environment**

Ship small parcels with postal networks and keep packaging small. Never use a big box for an order that only contains one product. Make sure your customers can use the same package for returns.

About Sendcloud & Nielsen



About shipping platform Sendcloud

Sendcloud is the number one shipping platform for online businesses. As one of the fastest growing tech companies in Europe, the company is on a mission to make shipping as scalable as possible for every company.

The platform offers an optimized checkout with flexible delivery options, a fully automated picking, packing and label printing process, branded tracking notifications and a return solution.

With over 15,000 customers, integrations with over 30 e-commerce systems and 50 international carriers, Sendcloud is the leading shipping solution in Europe and soon beyond.

For more information, visit www.sendcloud.com.

About research agency Nielsen

Nielsen Holdings plc (NYSE: NLSN) is a global measurement and data analytics company that provides the most complete and trusted view available of consumers and markets worldwide. Their approach marries proprietary Nielsen data with other data sources to help clients around the world understand what's happening now, what's happening next, and how to best act on this knowledge. An S&P 500 company, Nielsen has operations in over 100 countries, covering more than 90% of the world's population.

For more information, visit www.nielsen.com.

Implement the key findings from this study yourself.

Want to be on top of the shipping game and offer the best shipping experience to your customers? Get started for free and see how you can save time and costs on logistics while offering your customers the best shipping and return solutions.

Discover the possibilities [↗](#)

Questions?

For more information about this study, reach out to marketing@sendcloud.com

