

'Dis-Like'

Consumers take to social media to complain about retailers

Social media is giving consumers a new outlet to vent their frustrations about online retailers whose online ordering and delivery services disappoint. In this article, Paul Galpin, Managing Director, P2P Mailing, examines how bad news can travel fast if delivery failings occur, and outlines how forward-thinking online retailers are turning to expert partners to protect brand reputation.

The growth of online retail has been matched by the growth of consumer expectation. Customers now presume that they will be able to order the product that they want at any time of the day, and for it to arrive promptly when they expect it. Moreover, those retailers that can't produce these standards will be punished. Research shows that experiencing delays or delivery problems just twice or more would convince 87% of online shoppers to switch to another supplier.¹ In addition, nearly two thirds of consumers cite poor delivery standards as the worst thing that can go wrong with online shopping.²

So, the message to retailers is clear: effective fulfilment and delivery processes are a must for retaining customers. If problems are experienced, consumers will simply make their purchases elsewhere.

But is that the only consequence of poor delivery standards?

As well as the growth of ecommerce, another product of the internet has been the evolution of social media. Whether it's Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest, social media is now part of our everyday lives. Findings from UPS show that 84% of online shoppers use at least one social media website.³ And whilst social media has given consumers a ready-platform to share views and news, it has also provided a means for disgruntled shoppers to show their dissatisfaction with online retailers.

Our research shows that almost a quarter (23.5%) of respondents said that they had already used social media to complain about poor order and delivery services. In today's time-pressured society, writing a letter or phoning a call centre to criticise a service takes time and requires a special effort. But access to social media is quick and easy via smartphones, tablets and laptops. These devices travel everywhere with consumers, and irritation with a company's service standards can be instantly expressed.

For retailers, the implications of this trend are serious.

¹ Are You Delivering, May 2012

² Ibid

³ 2013 UPS Pulse of the Online Shopper, February 2013

By using social media to comment about poor service consumers are immediately broadcasting this message to followers/friends. This means that potentially thousands of prospective customers have been given a negative view of the company from the outset, with the risk that they buy elsewhere.

Fulfilment and delivery excellence is recognised as essential to customer satisfaction, therefore it is critical that a secure and efficient infrastructure is in place to ensure goods get to consumers at the specified time. Failure to deliver promptly could mean that retailers lose the customers that they have disappointed, but they could also alienate a raft of potential customers that they haven't even yet engaged with.

For forward-thinking companies, outsourcing the delivery and fulfilment processes is proving to be more practical than taking on the task in-house. This option allows companies to harness the expertise that a specialist partner can bring. The best partners have well-established relationships with carriers across the globe and are able to flexibly match the right delivery service to a particular job.

Indeed, an expert partner should have the know-how to point companies to delivery solutions that are specifically geared towards *enhancing* the consumer experience, thus mitigating the likelihood for negative comments in the first place. Such solutions offer maximum choice and convenience to the consumer in terms of delivery options, and can provide total end-to-end visibility of the delivery process including proof of delivery at the point of handover.

Today's consumers demand excellent customer service. Social media makes it very easy for disgruntled customers to spread their dissatisfaction, potentially damaging company reputation. Expert partners can help to ensure that distribution solutions not only meet customer expectations but serve to enhance the shopping experience. And just as social media can quickly spread the bad news, so the opposite is true. Consistently delight customers, and the good news can travel fast.

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