

Fear of Onerous Return Policies Curbs Online Purchases of Clothing, Jewelry

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eMarketer Editors

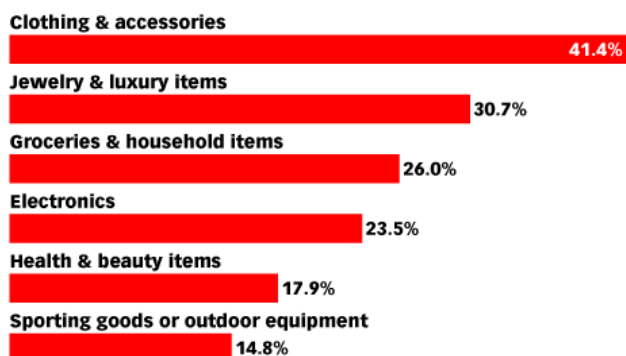
The possibility of having to return something is dissuading consumers from buying certain products online.

Not surprising, clothing and accessories—where size, fit and style are considerations—is one of the biggest product categories consumers are hesitant to buy, according to a November 2018 survey from Radial. Nearly 42% of digital buyers said so.

Jewelry and luxury item purchases also give many consumers pause. Roughly 31% of respondents were reluctant to spend so much in anticipation of having to send it back.

Which Product Categories Are US Digital Buyers Apprehensive About Buying Because of the Returns Process?

% of respondents, Nov 2018



Note: ages 18+
Source: Radial, "Cracking the Code: What Online Shoppers Value Most," Jan 14, 2019

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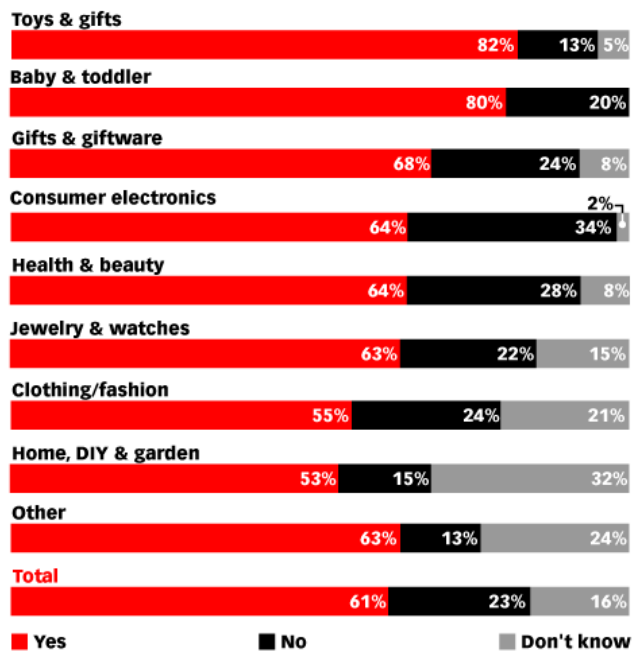
But returns don't happen as often as people think they do. A May 2018 survey from National Public Radio (NPR) and The Marist Poll found that many consumers would rather keep items they don't want instead of returning them. Just 2% of total US digital buyers surveyed said they return digital purchases "very often," while another 7% said they do so "often."

Flexible returns have become a differentiating factor that can make or break customer loyalty. But many retailers have a hard time discerning consumer indecisions vs. fraudulent behavior. And with the operational cost of returns skyrocketing, **retailers can't afford to have consumers making too many returns.**

In a September 2018 study from Brightpearl conducted by OnePoll, roughly six in 10 US retailers said they would consider permanently blocking "serial returners" who abuse free return policies.

Would US Retail Decision-Makers Ban Serial Returners from Shopping on Their Website Permanently?

% of respondents, by product category, Sep 2018



Source: Brightpearl, "Banned? A Returning Problem" in association with OnePoll; eMarketer calculations, Oct 18, 2018

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Retailers should avoid alienating customers with legitimate reasons for returning a purchase. The advantage of having a flexible returns policy? Customer loyalty. More than half (57%) of digital buyers in a September 2018 survey from Narvar said they would replace the item they returned, while another 96% of respondents said they would give a retailer repeat business based on a good returns experience.