

The returns process is still frustrating for some shoppers

Consumers don't want to spend money to ship items back

ARTICLE

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The returns process has always been a hassle for many shoppers—particularly the task of having to ship something back. Amid the pandemic, these pain points are just as prevalent, if not more so.

In recent months, scores of consumers have steered clear of physical retail locations and leaned instead on ecommerce to meet their shopping needs. But ecommerce doesn't always offer the same shopping experience—especially when it comes to seeing and testing out the product in person.

So, it comes as no surprise that returns are still a big part of the shopping journey, and a frustrating one at that, according to December 2020 data from CivicScience. When asked about the biggest pain point when trying to return items bought online, a quarter of US adults said it was having to drop their package off at a mail facility. Some 12% said it was the hassle of repackaging the items, while a smaller share (6%) cited the chore of printing a shipping label.

Biggest Pain Point When Trying to Return Items Purchased Digitally According to US Adults, Dec 2020

% of responses



Note: n=2,527 ages 18+
Source: CivicScience, Dec 29, 2020

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Cost, understandably, was the most commonly cited pain point in the survey. Just over a quarter of respondents—the largest share—said having to pay to ship their items back was the greatest inconvenience about the process. Free returns is something many consumers have wanted, and for quite some time now. In an October 2019 survey from Retail TouchPoints, more than half of US internet users said free returns was one of the most important elements of the online shopping experience. More recently, in an August 2020 study from Facebook IQ, 42% of adults worldwide cited free returns as one of the loyalty program perks they wanted, the third-most cited perk below free delivery and special price promotions.

Many retailers know this and already have free returns features in place, while others are beginning to implement them. SearchNode data from October 2020 revealed that 51% of ecommerce decision-makers in Europe and North America said their company already offered free returns, and another 8% said it was something they planned to introduce in 2021.