

# Satisfying Return Policies Can Lead to Loyalty

Shoppers like communication even more than an easy process

## ARTICLE |

**Krista Garcia**

Return policies used to be viewed as a necessary evil. Behind the scenes, logistics can create a lot of headaches for retailers, but consumers expect a seamless process. Flexible returns have also become a differentiating factor that can make or break customer loyalty.

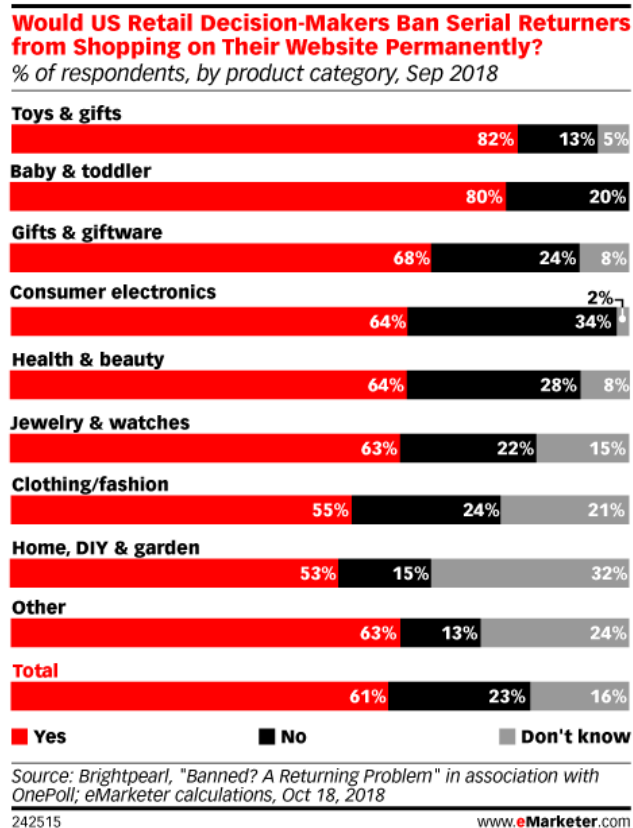
More online buyers means there are also likely to be more returns and exchanges. Plus, "bracketing," the practice of buying multiple versions of an item to determine the one a shopper likes best and returning the rest, is becoming a common practice.

According to a September survey of digital buyers who had returned an item in the past six months by [Narvar](#), 41% of digital buyers say they use bracketing some of the time; luxury shoppers do this at an even higher rate (51%).

According to the study, 96% said they would give a retailer repeat business based on a good returns experience. The biggest turn-offs are having to pay for return shipping (69%), restocking fees (67%) and difficulty finding the return policy (33%).

Retailers can be slow to meet consumers' needs, creating a contentious relationship. In a [BRP \(Boston Retail Partners\)](#) and [Windstream Enterprise](#) study, 68% of US shoppers said they would be **more inclined**

to shop on a merchant's site that offered automated returns capability, i.e., being provided with return labels or having refunds triggered when a shipper scans the returned package. But only 8% of retailers said they offer this feature.



While some retailers are considering blacklisting serial returners, they should also take caution against alienating customers with legitimate reasons for sending back a purchase. It is to a retailer's advantage to provide fast exchanges and immediate refunds, as most shoppers actually replace the item they returned (57%), according to the Narvar data. Forty-one percent bought from the same retailer, while 16% chose a different retailer due to reasons ranging from poor experience to a wanted item being out of stock.

Another interesting finding from the study was that shoppers appeared to value communication over ease. Effort is required more of shoppers making returns to Amazon than of customers on other sites, specifically in regard to printing out a return label (66% vs. 33%) and

having to contact a retailer for return authorization (35% vs. 27%). But Amazon shoppers were more informed about when a refund would be processed (39% vs. 21%) and were also updated more on the status of their returned package (28% vs. 14%).

When it came to rating satisfaction, despite taking more effort, more Amazon buyers considered their returns to be easy (75%) than did other digital buyers (65%).