

Should Online Retailers Blacklist Serial Returners?

It can be hard to discern consumer indecision vs. fraudulent behavior

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Jennifer King

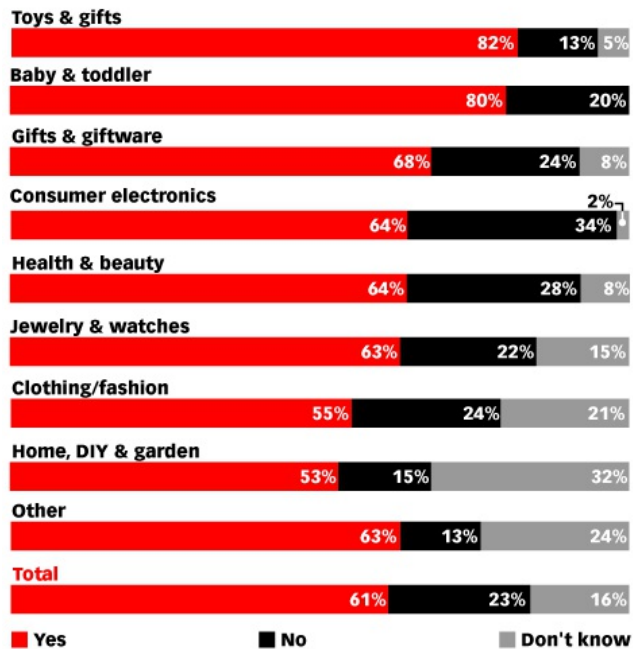
Following [Amazon's](#) recent decision to ban consumers suspected of [abusing its return policy](#), other retailers may follow in the ecommerce giant's footsteps to protect their bottom lines.

With the operational cost of returns skyrocketing, retailers can't afford to have consumers making too many returns. Plus, the popularity of the try-before-you-buy model can be overwhelming for retailers not equipped for [high return volume](#).

A September 2018 study from [Brightpearl](#) conducted by [OnePoll](#) found that 61% of US retailers 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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While many retailers were found to have little patience for return policy abuse, they were understanding when it came to certain product categories.

For example, categories where size, fit and style are considerations—like clothing and home furnishings—respondents said they wouldn't be as quick to blacklist. But when it came to products like baby and toddler goods, as well as toy and gifts, a large share of retailers said they would ban serial returners from shopping on their site again.

Retailers feel there are benefits to weeding out those who exploit policies. Nearly half (49%) said the practice can save their company administrative or operational time and resources, while others feel it reduces total return rates (21%) and ensures a positive experience for all shoppers (18%).

Taking a consumer-centric approach that doesn't tolerate misuse is optimal. Only a small fraction of consumers make illegitimate returns; others are likely just indecisive and know there's always the option to send any unwanted purchased back. And then there are those that would rather hold on to the item instead of sending it back.

A May 2018 survey from [National Public Radio \(NPR\)](#) and [The Marist Poll](#), found that **most would**. In fact, just 2% of total US digital buyers said they return digital purchases “very often,” while another 7% said they do so “often.”