Consumer Home Delivery Report

2023/4

IMRG | The UK Ecommerce Association

nShift

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imrg | The UK Ecommerce Association

"We are now in our fifteenth year of our Consumer Home Delivery research, which provides the opinions of UK customers on all things post-purchase. By reading this report, retailers can be better equipped to meet the ever-demanding needs of customers, ensuring increased satisfaction and retention. This year, we have noted that more than ever, customers want choice throughout the entire delivery journey and are open to change if the benefits are fruitful. Read on to learn more about optimising the post-purchase experience and identify areas for growth."

About

We help our members understand and improve their online retail performance through a busy programme of performance benchmarking, data analysis, insight, best practice-sharing, and events. We have been tracking online sales since 2000 – and now measure over 120 individual metrics in a series of indexes, providing in-depth intelligence on online and mobile sales, delivery trends, marketing ROI and channel performance.

Editorial:

Ellie-Rose Davies, Content Executive at **IMRG**

Andy Mulcahy, Strategy and Insights Director at **IMRG**

nShift

"From the moment they visit an online store to the moment they receive their order, customers today expect a smooth, friction-free experience. Providing excellent end-to-end delivery and returns means addressing influential factors such as how products are delivered, when and where consumers are communicated to, and what shoppers expect from returns - all elements covered in this report. In doing so, they can gain the trust, loyalty, and repeat business of their customers."

About

nShift is the global leading provider of cloud delivery management solutions enabling frictionless shipment and return of almost one billion shipments across 190 countries annually. nShift's software is used globally by ecommerce, retail, manufacturing and 3PL shippers. The company is headquartered in London and Oslo. It has over 500 employees across offices in Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, United Kingdom, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Romania.

Editorial:

Sean Sherwin-Smith, Product Director Post-Purchase at **nShift**

Methodology

Our Consumer Home Delivery research tracks the opinions of 1000 UK customers, aged 18-65+, year-after-year, enabling us to establish a comprehensive view of customers' sentiment towards delivery and returns services.

To date, we have fifteen years of trend lines, making us best placed to provide industry benchmarks that reveal top strategies for improving the post-purchase experience. Also, the insights help retailers to identify future customer needs.

The research was completed in October 2023.
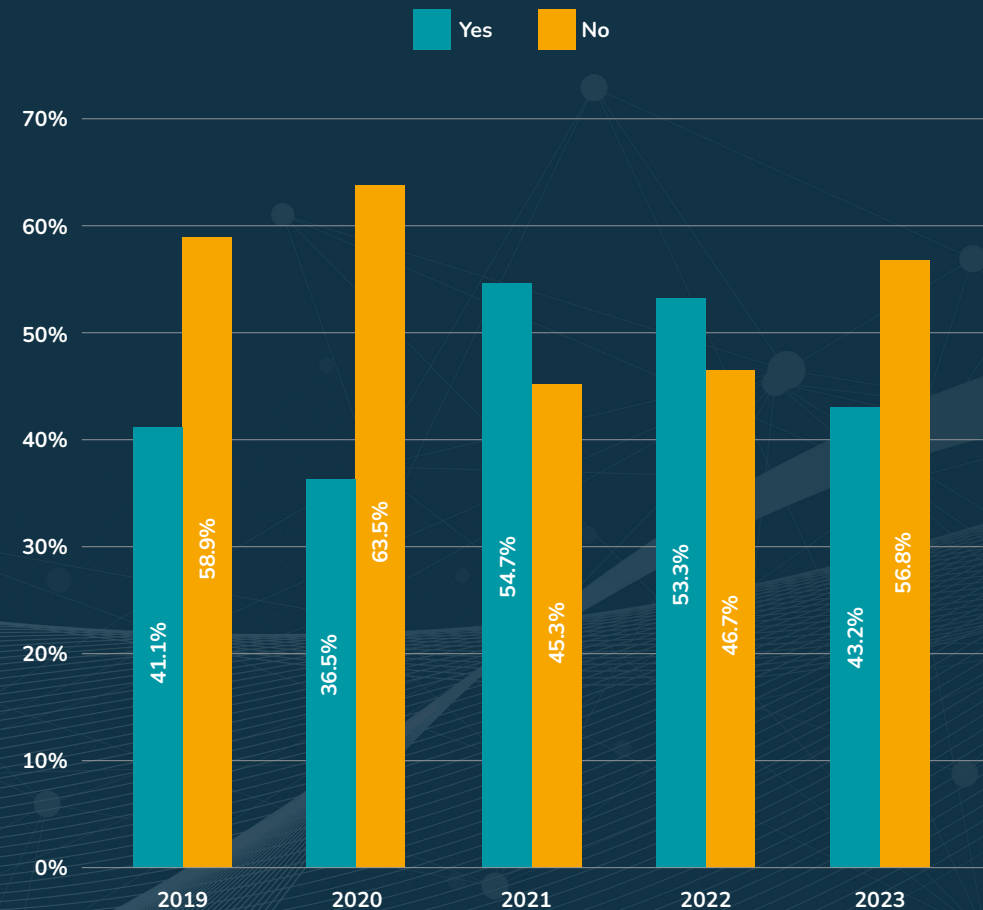
Delivery Concerns

Are delivery concerns causing cart abandonment?

Each year we set out to investigate whether there is low customer confidence in delivery services and if this contributes to increased cart abandonment.

Despite a decrease in the number of people who abandoned purchases due to delivery concerns or issues in 2023, 43.2% still faced this issue. Knowing that Year-on-Year the total online market was down -3.2%*, it has become integral for retailers to understand what these delivery concerns are to best mitigate them and prompt growth in 2024.

When looking at data from 2013 until now, a good delivery experience seems to be less of a key differentiator in encouraging purchases in recent years. However, there has also been an increase in customers who vouch that it might have encouraged them, signalling it to be more of an expectation than something a customer looks for. Another reason is that customers see other elements, such as price, as the biggest encouragement. Nonetheless, a respectable 58.8% who say a good delivery experience has directly influenced them to purchase again should not be overlooked.

Have you or people in your household ever abandoned an online purchase at the check out stage specifically because of delivery concerns or issues?

Legend: Yes, No

Year	Yes	No
2019	41.1%	58.9%
2020	36.5%	63.5%
2021	54.7%	45.3%
2022	53.3%	46.7%
2023	43.2%	56.8%

nShift Comments:

"Despite falling, cart abandonment remains a considerable hole in a retailers' bottom line. While there will always be an element of abandonment as consumers change their mind about making a purchase, there are ways in which retailers can reduce its impact. We know that by providing and clearly badging a range of delivery options, ecommerce companies can increase conversions by 20%. This includes offering clear and concise tracking information and making it easy for customers to make returns."

Case study: Scandinavian Luxury Group

Scandinavian Luxury Group were already using nShift Delivery when, in Spring 2021, they decided to improve their webshop by adding nShift Checkout to create an improved customer experience for their webshop customers. When a customer purchases an item at Scandinavian Luxury Group's online store, they can now choose between getting it sent to their address or (if they want a less expensive and potentially more convenient option) to a selected carrier drop-off point where they can go and pick it up themselves. The checkout is also tailored to each customer's location, so everyone at the checkout sees messages in their local language and prices are displayed in their local currency.

With a wider variety of payment and delivery options to choose from, 25% more site visitors are adding items to their shopping carts and 20% fewer carts are being abandoned at the checkout. And the purchases customers are making are worth more too. In fact, order value has gone up 28% since the new solution was implemented.

Has a good delivery experience directly encouraged you or people in your household to order again from a particular retailer?

Yes   No   Maybe

Year	Yes	No	Maybe
2013	74.1%	11.7%	14.2%
2014	71.9%	12.4%	15.6%
2015	69.4%	15.3%	15.3%
2016	67.75%	14.91%	17.34%
2017	66.9%	18.1%	15.0%
2018	63.4%	22.8%	13.8%
2019	60.4%	21.3%	18.3%
2020	69.06%	22.52%	18.42%
2021	65.7%	19.2%	15.2%
2022	62%	21.2%	16.8%
2023	58.8%	23.2%	18.0%

*IMRG's Online Retail Index, representative of £25bn+ in panel data.

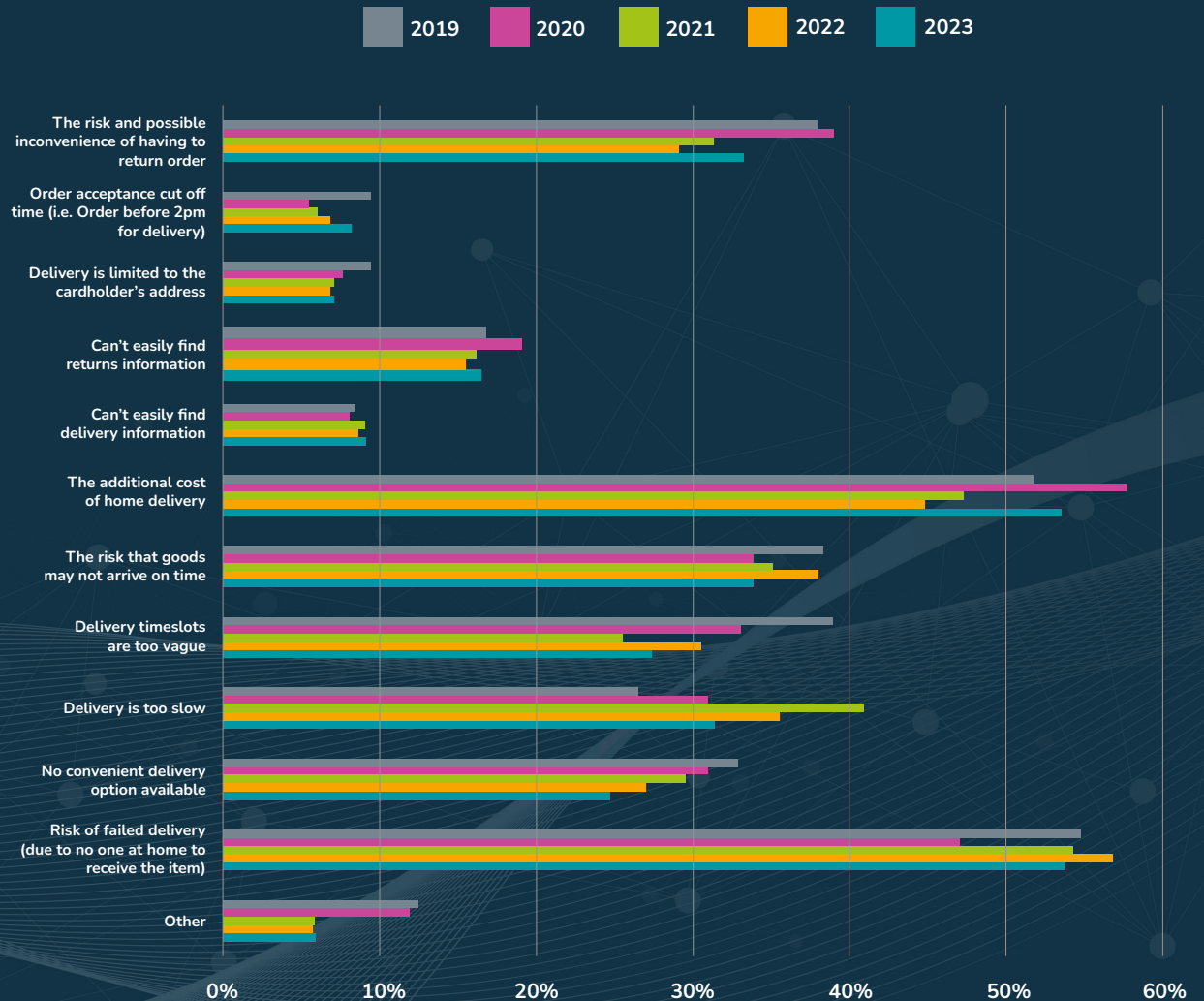## What are the top delivery concerns and issues?

Those who answered yes, delivery concerns have caused them to abandon an order in the past, revealed their reasons why.

The top delivery concern for customers in 2023 was the risk of failed delivery due to no one being home to receive the item (53.8%). Noticeably, in 2020, a year highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, this was less of a concern (47.03%) as people were more inclined to stay indoors and work from home.

The additional cost of home delivery was the second concern (53.5%) in 2023, which foregrounds how customers are likely to prioritise savings and make more considered online purchases during a cost-of-living crisis.

Promisingly, fewer customers said delivery was too slow in 2023 (31.4%) relative to the two years prior. There has also been a consistent decline in the last five years of customers who blame the lack of delivery options for their abandoned purchases.

Why do delivery concerns sometimes prevent you and people in your household from shopping online?

Legend: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

Horizontal bar chart with categories:
- The risk and possible inconvenience of having to return order
- Order acceptance cut off time (i.e. Order before 2pm for delivery)
- Delivery is limited to the cardholder's address
- Can't easily find returns information
- Can't easily find delivery information
- The additional cost of home delivery
- The risk that goods may not arrive on time
- Delivery timeslots are too vague
- Delivery is too slow
- No convenient delivery option available
- Risk of failed delivery (due to no one at home to receive the item)
- Other

X-axis: 0%, 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%

What are the expectations for standard delivery?

Interestingly, 31.4% of respondents have been put off purchasing an item online because delivery is too slow. To meet most customers' expectations, retailers should aim to complete their deliveries within three days, or even better, two days!
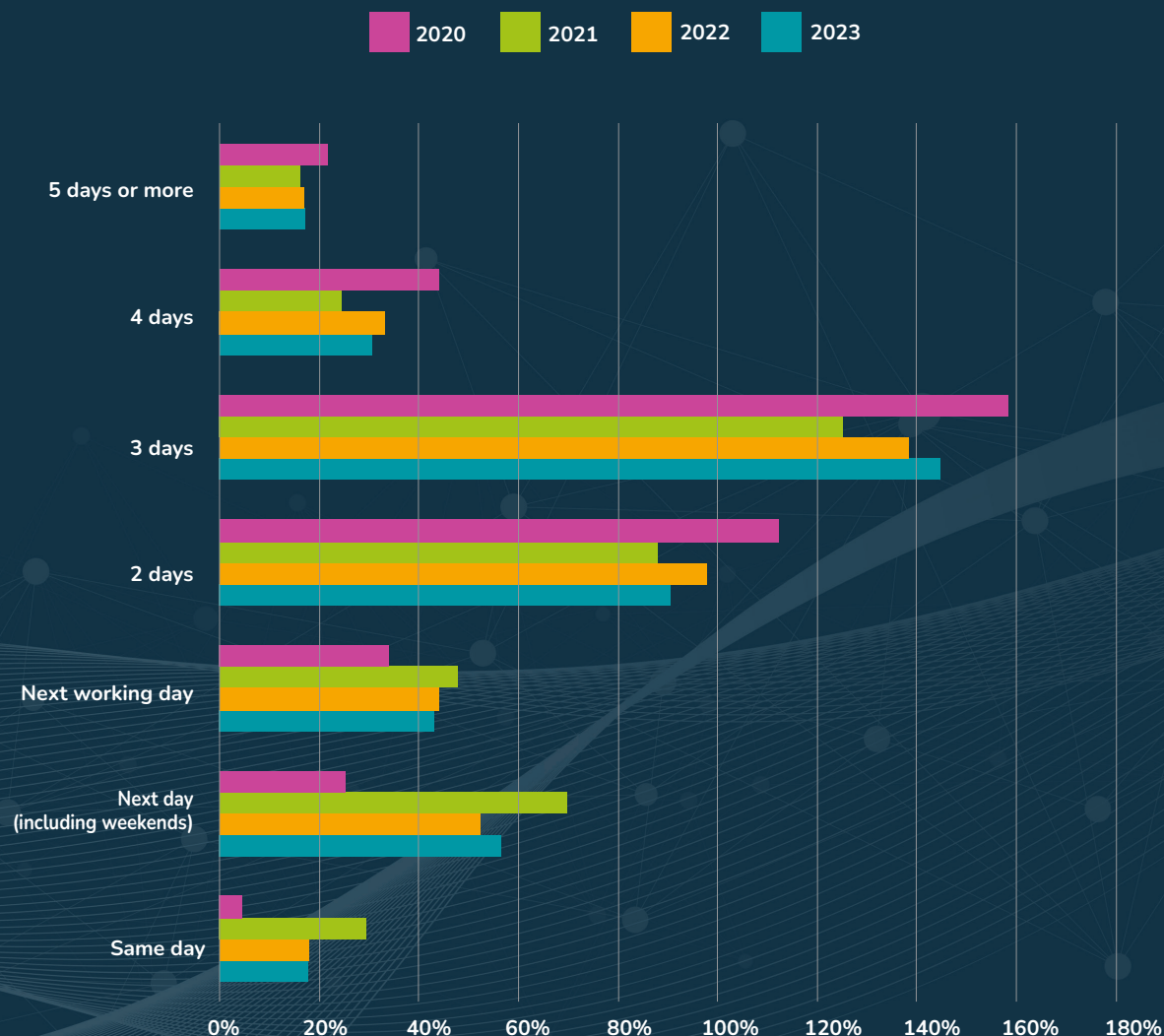
Some customers (14.1%) now expect standard delivery to arrive the very next day (including weekends), due to, for example, the rise of super-fast delivery subscription services. Promisingly for retailers, just 4.4% expect their order on the same day.

As seen on the chart, fast delivery was even more of an expectation in 2021. This was largely due to the rising popularity of apps that offered fast grocery delivery within 20 minutes. As a result, customers began to expect fast delivery across all sectors. However, by 2022, they realised that their expectations were unrealistic.

nShift Comments:

"At the point of post-purchase, retailers have completed the difficult and expensive work of capturing and converting customers, so losing almost a third of them because of slow delivery points to the need to make some simple but effective changes. Indeed, it is clear that choice at the checkout is fundamental to retailers starting the relationship with customers on the right foot."

What is your expectation for how long standard delivery options should take to arrive?

Legend: 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

Categories: 5 days or more, 4 days, 3 days, 2 days, Next working day, Next day (including weekends), Same day
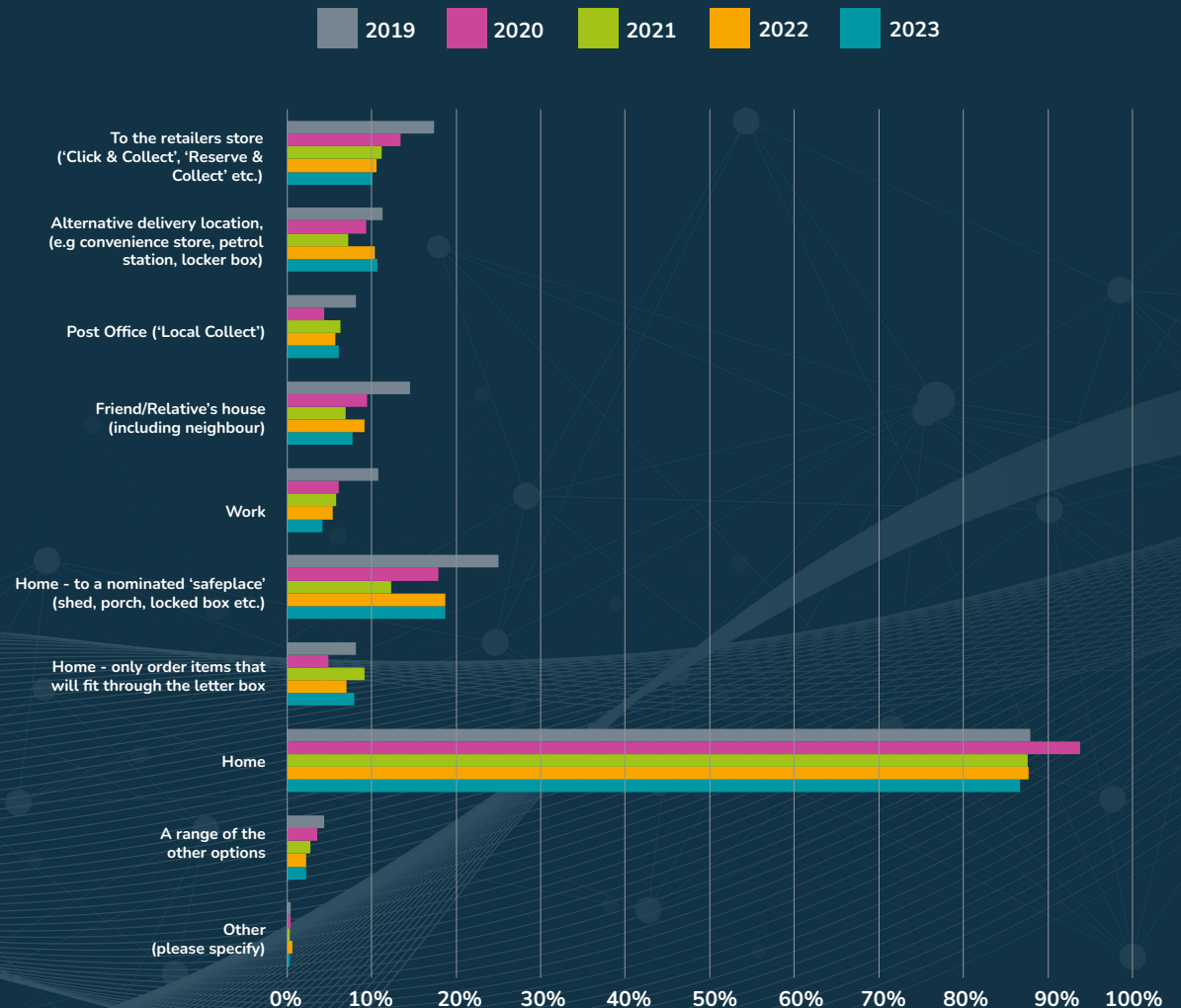
Delivery Preferences

Home delivery continues to lead the way

Year after year, customers reveal that they prefer home delivery over any other option. It is the delivery option that customers are most comfortable with, making it harder for retailers to gain traction on their other delivery offerings.

Looking to the future, 85% of respondents revealed that home delivery will be their most preferred delivery option.

Despite the predominance of home delivery, there are some signs that the growing network of lockers has increased the number of customers who used them in 2023. More people are using alternative delivery locations (10.7%) and 5% believe lockers will be their location of choice in the future.

Where do you normally have items delivered?
(Tick all that apply)

Legend: 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023

Horizontal bar chart showing delivery location preferences by year:
- To the retailers store ('Click & Collect', 'Reserve & Collect' etc.)
- Alternative delivery location, (e.g convenience store, petrol station, locker box)
- Post Office ('Local Collect')
- Friend/Relative's house (including neighbour)
- Work
- Home - to a nominated 'safeplace' (shed, porch, locked box etc.)
- Home - only order items that will fit through the letter box
- Home
- A range of the other options
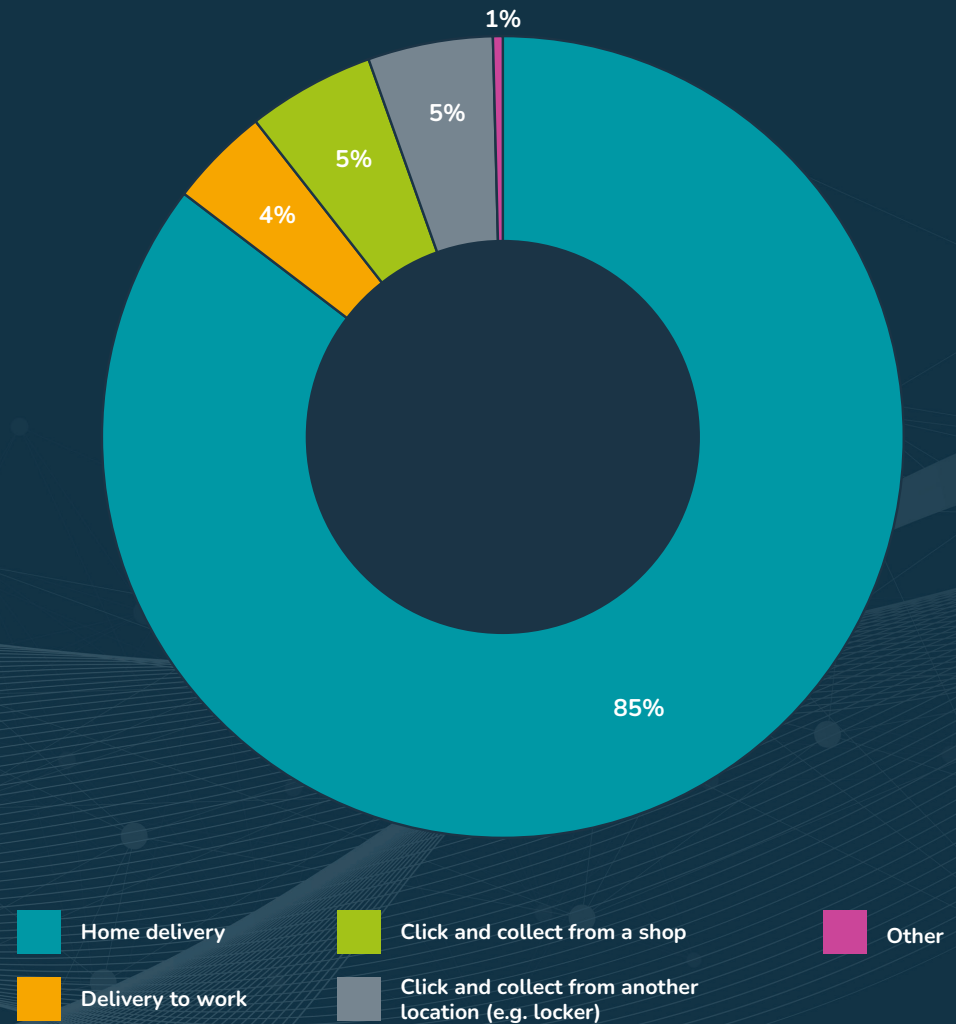- Other (please specify)

Axis: 0% to 100%

nShift Comments:

"Shoppers have become accustomed to the convenience of deliveries to their door and it doesn't seem like it's going anywhere any time soon despite the plethora of options available. It means that retailers must find ways to go above and beyond to differentiate. This includes offering a wide range of delivery options, providing a personalised and branded tracking experience, and making it easy for customers to return items."

And looking ahead to the future what delivery option do you think will be your most preferred option?, 2023

- 1%
- 5%
- 5%
- 4%
- 85%

Legend:
- Home delivery
- Delivery to work
- Click and collect from a shop
- Click and collect from another location (e.g. locker)
- Other

Customers' usage of Click & Collect (C&C)

As seen in the previous charts, Click & Collect (C&C) is not typically the offering customers will choose when completing a purchase - home delivery is.

When investigating how many customers have ever used C&C over home delivery, we can see that the propensity for customers to do so has decreased substantially in 2020-3 relative to 2015-9. This could be attributed to the rise of hybrid work in 2020, where more customers were at home to receive their items and were less dependent on alternative delivery.

However, the 41.3% who said 'yes,' they have used this service, in 2023 is still a considerable number. When combined with the 11.2% who plan to use C&C in the future, it shows that more than 50% of the respondents still consider it to be a desirable option.

Interestingly, only 1.3% of respondents do not know what C&C is, demonstrating that retailers should foreground its benefits rather than provide pure logistics.

Have you, or those in your household, ever used Click & Collect services (either from the retailers store or a third party network) instead of having orders delivered to home?

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No ■ No - but I intend to use it in future ■ I don't know what that is
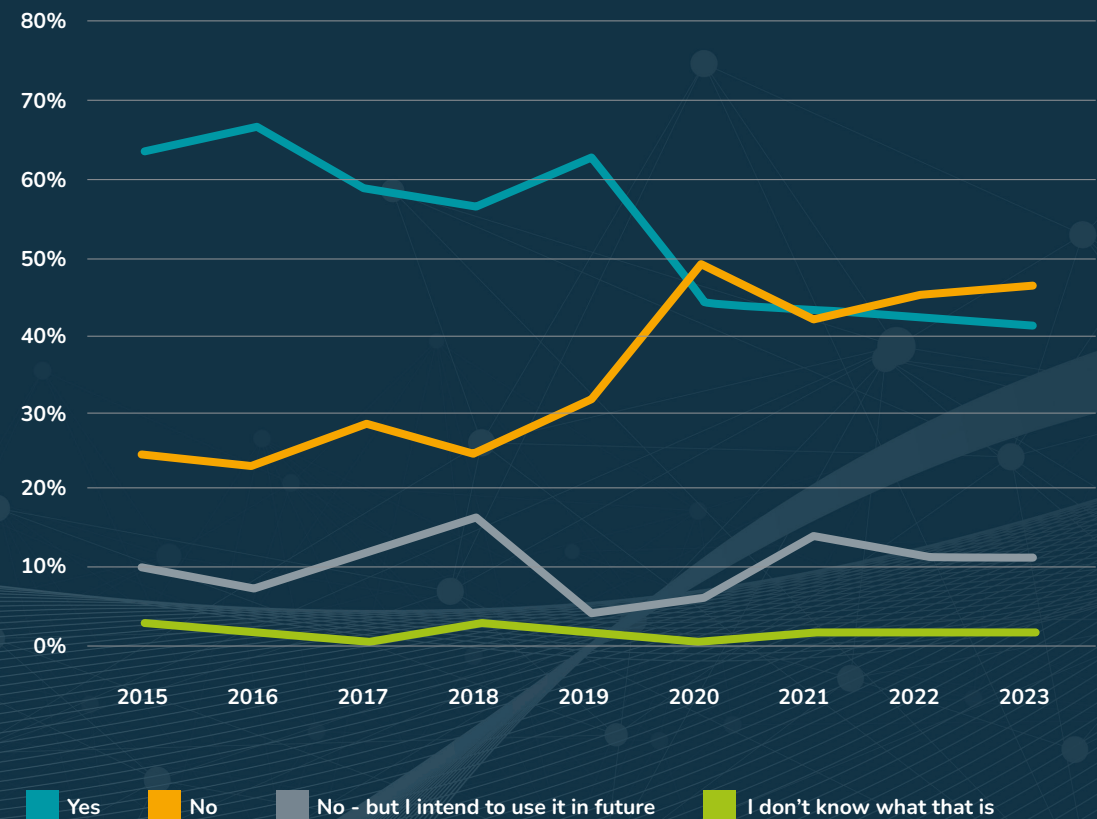
The reasons for using Click & Collect (C&C) from store

Unsurprisingly, the biggest factor that influences customers to opt for Click & Collect (C&C) from a retailer's store is related to cost; 78.4% (2023) of respondents said that it is because 'delivery is free/cheaper than home delivery.' Therefore, it might be beneficial for retailers to target their lowest spenders with C&C campaigns to boost conversion.

Promisingly, the second biggest factor is that they can combine it with other shopping activities(40.1%). Store collections are a chance for upselling. Retailers can ensure bestsellers are in stock and placed prominently, especially near the front of the store and click & collect locations.

The third most popular reason for C&C in-store is that it makes it easier for customers to start a return/get credit if they no longer want the item (22.8%). A benefit of this is that if the item is in excellent condition, retailers can add it to their in-store stock without having to hit customers with returns fees or absorbing the returns costs themselves.

When using Click & Collect / Reserve & Collect from the retailers' store, is it because...
(Please tick all that apply)

Legend: ■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023
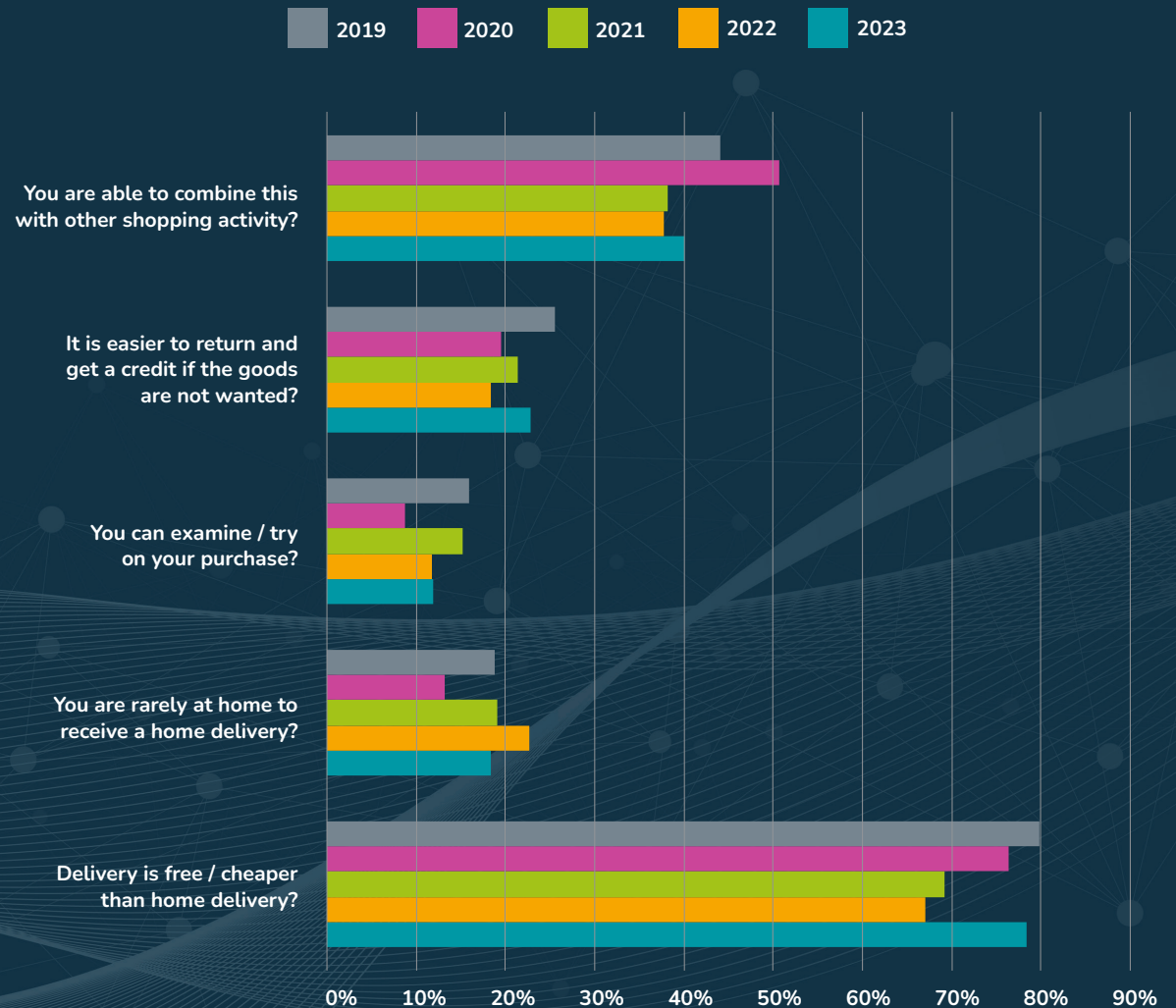
The delivery options customers use the most

The most popular delivery option in 2023 was adding specific delivery instructions to orders, with 48.5% of respondents reporting that they always use this feature. Coming in close second is the use of an in-transit SMS or email to change the delivery day or location (45.9%). Timeslot delivery selected at the time of order also proves to be popular among customers (43.2%).
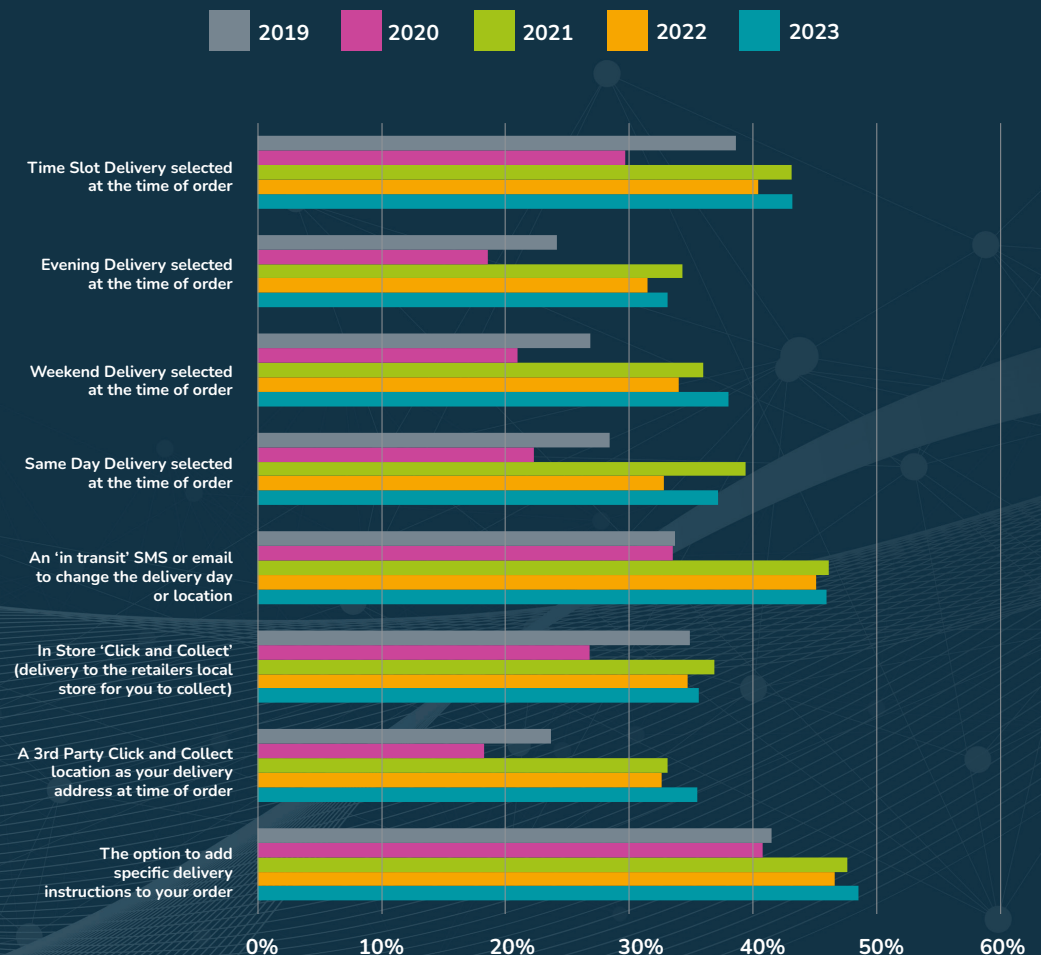
Customers want to have a say in the delivery of their orders to ensure their needs are met. By offering various delivery options, especially ones that promote customer communication, businesses can reduce the chances of delivery problems.

Other delivery options that have grown in popularity include the ability to select weekend delivery (38%) and a third-party C&C location as their delivery address at the time of order (35.5%).

nShift Comments:

"Providing a range of delivery options to your customers is vital for ensuring they have the best chance of finding which one suits them. For example, many retailers are now offering options such as same-day delivery, or 'eco' delivery, allowing customers the option for quick, or carbon neutral, services. Customers themselves are demanding the option to directly message the retailer regarding the status of their delivery at every stage on the channels they prefer, be it social media or SMS. All of this is indicative of a wider trend - that the customer wants to be in control from the beginning."

How often have you used the following delivery options? Proportion of respondents scoring 4 or 5 where 5 is 'Always'

Legend: 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023

Categories:
- Time Slot Delivery selected at the time of order
- Evening Delivery selected at the time of order
- Weekend Delivery selected at the time of order
- Same Day Delivery selected at the time of order
- An 'in transit' SMS or email to change the delivery day or location
- In Store 'Click and Collect' (delivery to the retailers local store for you to collect)
- A 3rd Party Click and Collect location as your delivery address at time of order
- The option to add specific delivery instructions to your order

Making Delivery More Convenient

The top things that boost convenience

Looking at the chart (Chart on the next page), it is undeniable that the best way to offer customer convenience is by providing them with lots of information about their orders. Most importantly, customers want access to online order tracking (80%, 2023). They want to know where their order is at all times, and in fulfilling this, retailers can reduce the amount of 'Where is my order' (WISMO) queries they receive, saving time and resources.

There seems to be a high demand for email and SMS services among customers. 74.8% of respondents want an in-transit SMS or email that advises them on when to expect delivery. These results emphasise the need for frequent post-purchase customer communication.

Just shy of 73.5% of respondents revealed that they want clear delivery and returns information before ordering. Each year this is becoming more important to customers so this information should be easy to access. According to recent IMRG research*, over 90% of retailers offer dedicated pages for delivery and returns information, but, for many, these were hidden in the website footer.

Also, customers do not want to feel limited. 63.8% find it very important that they can select a specific delivery day, representing a three-year high.

*IMRG Delivery Service Index, State of the Delivery Nation, 2023

nShift Comments:

"Customers need to feel as though they're in control, as from the moment they part with their money, until the delivery arrives, they are likely to be feeling anxious. As the research shows, email or SMS text message remains key to this but, in today's digital era, consumer expectations are higher than ever when it comes to online shopping experiences. Customers crave transparency, communication, and convenience throughout the post-purchase customer service. But this can also benefit retailers too. By integrating feedback forms and review requests into the WISMO parcel tracking page, merchants can gather valuable insights into the customer experience and improve their online reputation."

What would make receiving online orders more convenient?
Proportion of respondents scoring 4 or 5 where 5 is 'Very Important'
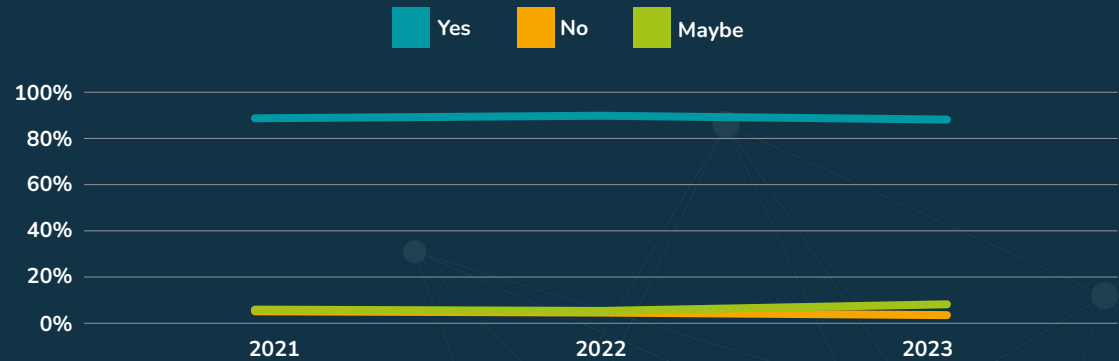
2021   2022   2023
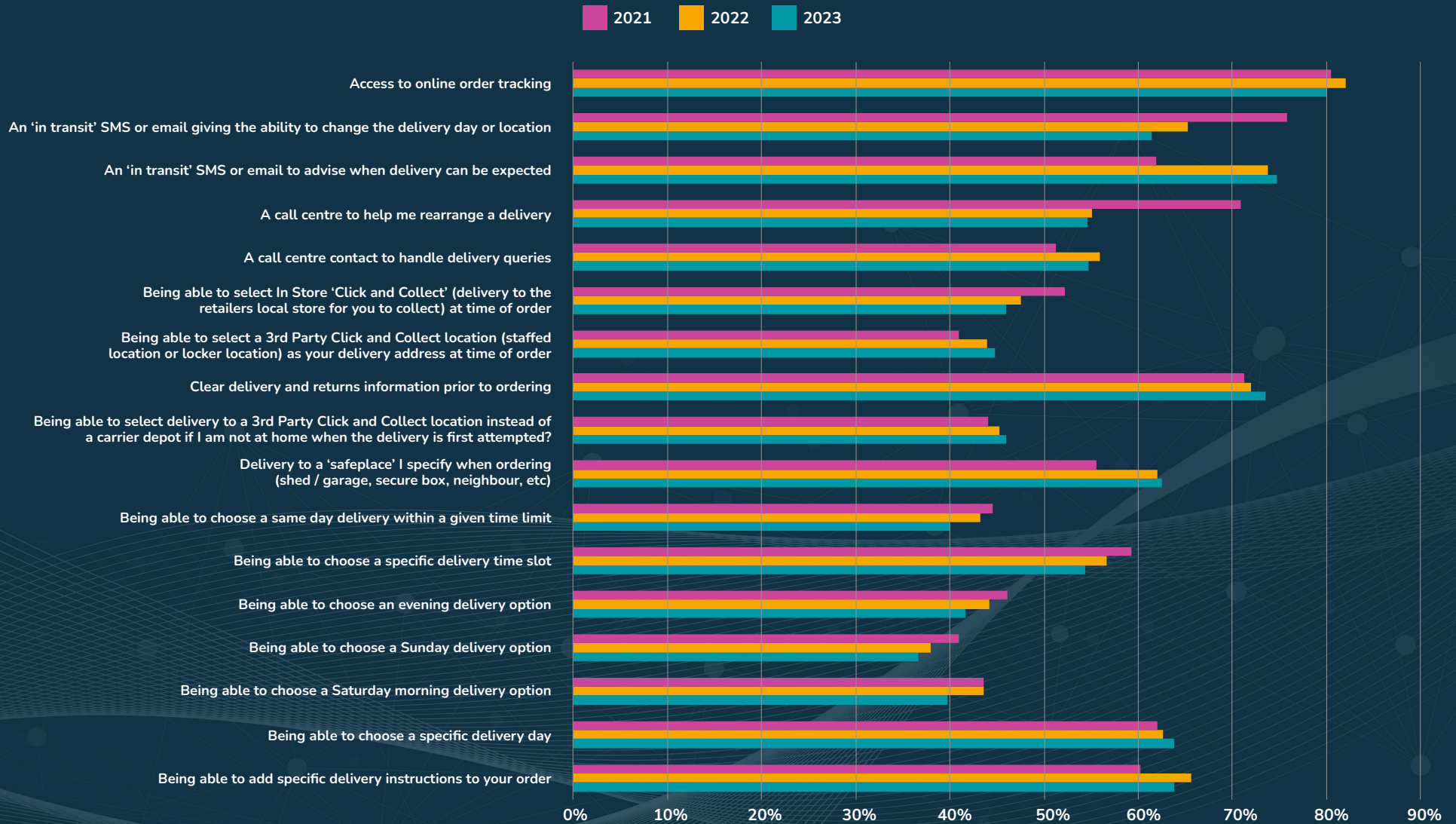
How to effectively update customers on the progress of their delivery

We know that customers want to be informed about the progress of their delivery (88.3%), but the question is, what parts would they be happy to be updated on?

The respondents revealed six key areas they find very important to be updated on (see chart). The most important thing for customers is to be informed about a failed delivery (89.3%). However, they also want an advanced warning if there is any problem or delay with the delivery. Also, they'd like to know the dispatch date and tracking number of their order, to receive communication that confirms the expected delivery day before delivery, to have confirmation of the expected time slot they will receive their delivery, and lastly, to be updated on the progress of their order.

Each of these needs represents 74.6% and above of respondents, meaning they are integral to offering a great delivery proposition.

Would you like to receive information about the progress of your delivery?

Legend: Yes (teal) | No (orange) | Maybe (green)

Chart axis: 100%, 80%, 60%, 40%, 20%, 0% — years 2021, 2022, 2023

What parts of the delivery process would you be happy to be updated on? Proportion of respondents scoring 4 or 5 with 5 as 'Very Important,' 2023

- Informing you of a failed delivery
- Warning in advance if there is a problem / delay with delivery
- Informing the dispatch date and tracking number
- Confirming the expected delivery the day before delivery
- Confirming the expected time (slot) when you can expect delivery
- Informing you about the progress of your order

Chart axis: 65%, 70%, 75%, 80%, 85%, 90%

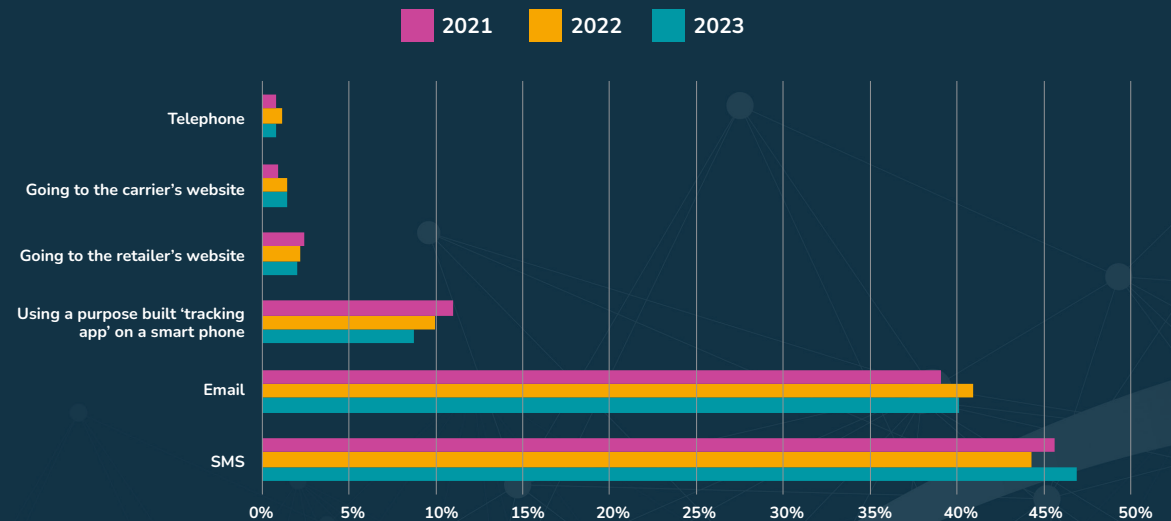# The most convenient time to send pre-delivery alerts

Mostly, customers want a pre-delivery alert on the morning of delivery, with the time window specified (64%). This option will enable customers to be prepared to accept the item, limiting the number of reattempted deliveries and thus reducing the retailers' carbon footprint.

Receiving an alert the day before delivery with no time specified also proves popular (47.6%). Having enough pre-warning will allow customers, if the option is there, to redirect their deliveries or change their delivery date if needed.
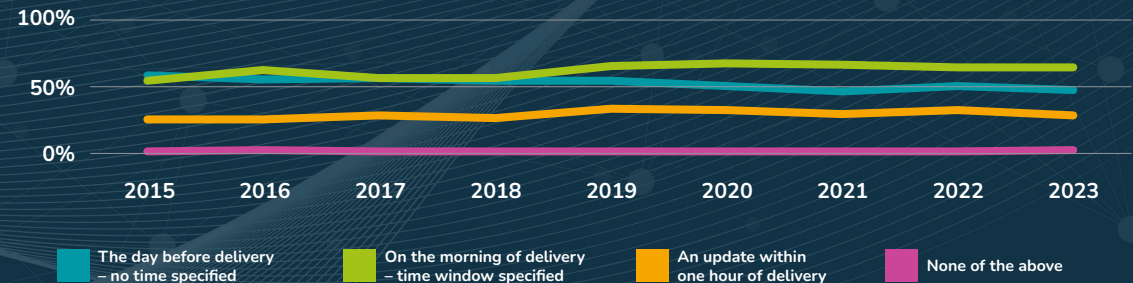
A considerable number of respondents (28.3%) would like an alert within the hour of delivery, which can showcase that the retailer values transparency and the customer experience.

Again, Email and SMS lead the way!
How would you prefer to receive information about the progress of your delivery?

Legend: ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023

Categories (top to bottom): Telephone, Going to the carrier's website, Going to the retailer's website, Using a purpose built 'tracking app' on a smart phone, Email, SMS

X-axis: 0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45% 50%

When receiving pre-delivery alerts, of the following options, which would be the most convenient for you? Select all that apply

X-axis: 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023
Y-axis: 0% 50% 100%

Legend:
■ The day before delivery – no time specified
■ On the morning of delivery – time window specified
■ An update within one hour of delivery
■ None of the above

International Delivery

Do UK customers like to shop internationally?

The propensity for UK shoppers to buy from non-UK retailers seems to have reduced in the last four years. Astonishingly, the rate at which respondents have bought goods from an international retailer has gone down by roughly ten percentage points since 2019.

Of the 43.4% of respondents that haven't ever purchased from a non-UK website, 76% would not consider buying goods from a non-UK website in the next 12 months. Therefore, we can infer that UK customers much prefer to shop from their country of residence.

Have you or anyone in your household ever bought goods from a 'non-UK' website?

Yes ■   No ■
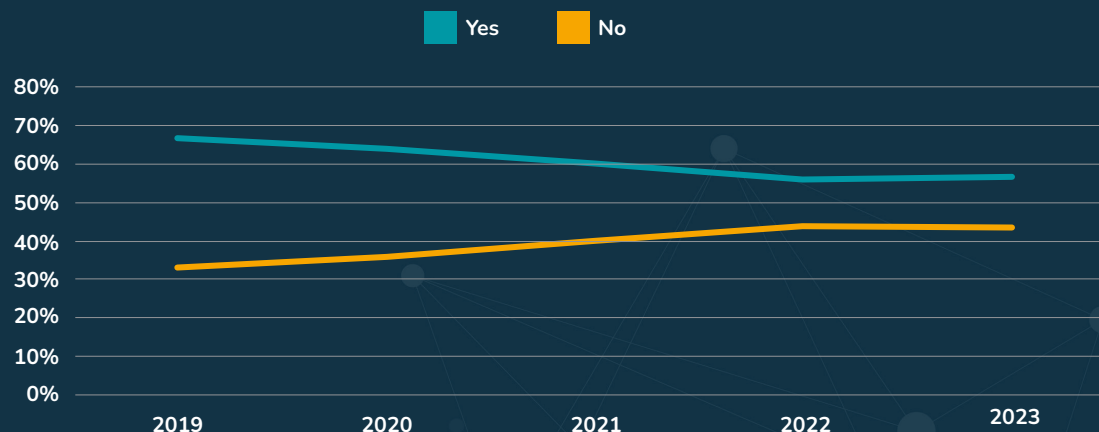
Would you ever consider buying goods from a non-UK website in the next 12 months?
(of those who have not yet purchased cross-border)

Yes ■   No ■
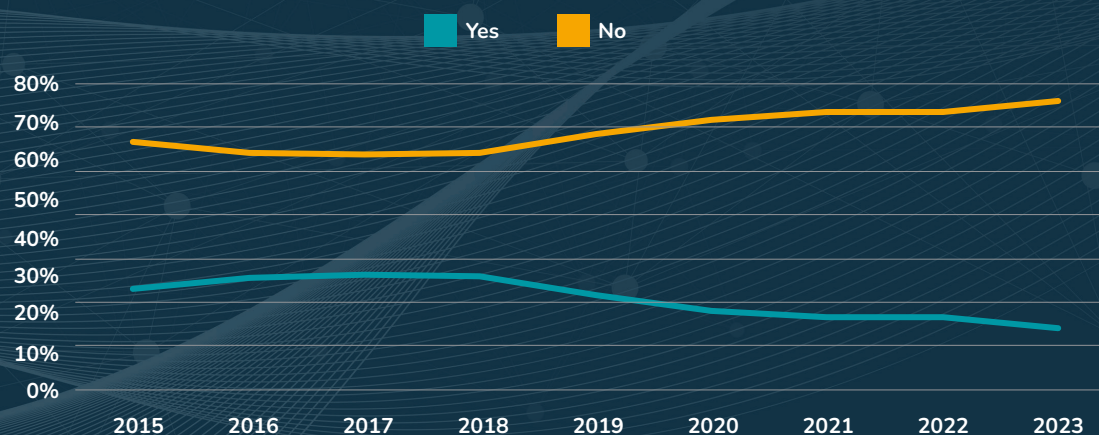
Customer purchase frequency from non-UK retailers

Out of the 56.6% who have purchased from a non-UK retailer, 76.9% would do so again. However, as seen in the line chart, much fewer are willing to order again compared to over a decade ago. For example, in 2015, 90.3% would purchase from these retailers again.

Of those who purchase from non-UK retailers, most have shifted from purchasing 1-2 times a year in 2019-22 to once a year or less in 2023 (29.9%). Despite this, there has been growth in customers who purchase from non-UK websites at least once a month (9.3%, 2023). This can be attributed to things such as the rise of interactive shopping experiences on social media platforms, which expose customers to more choices.

Based on your past experiences, would you buy goods from a non-UK website again? (of those who have purchased cross-border)

Yes   No
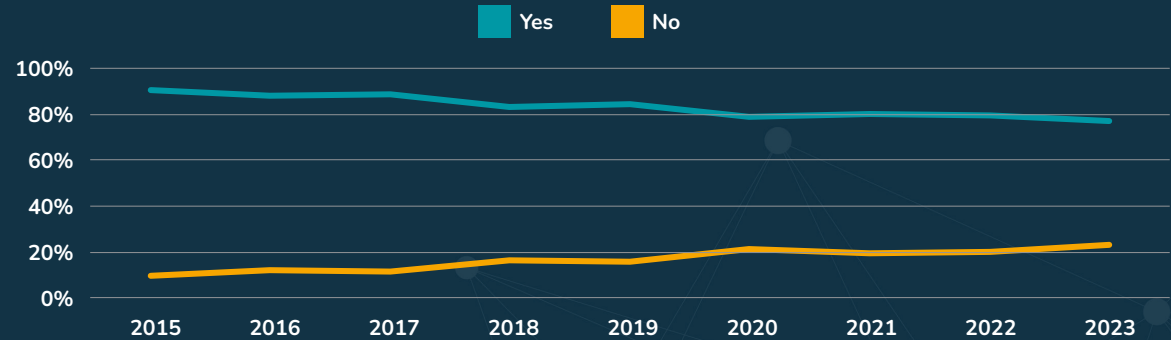
How frequently do you and those in your household buy from a non UK website?
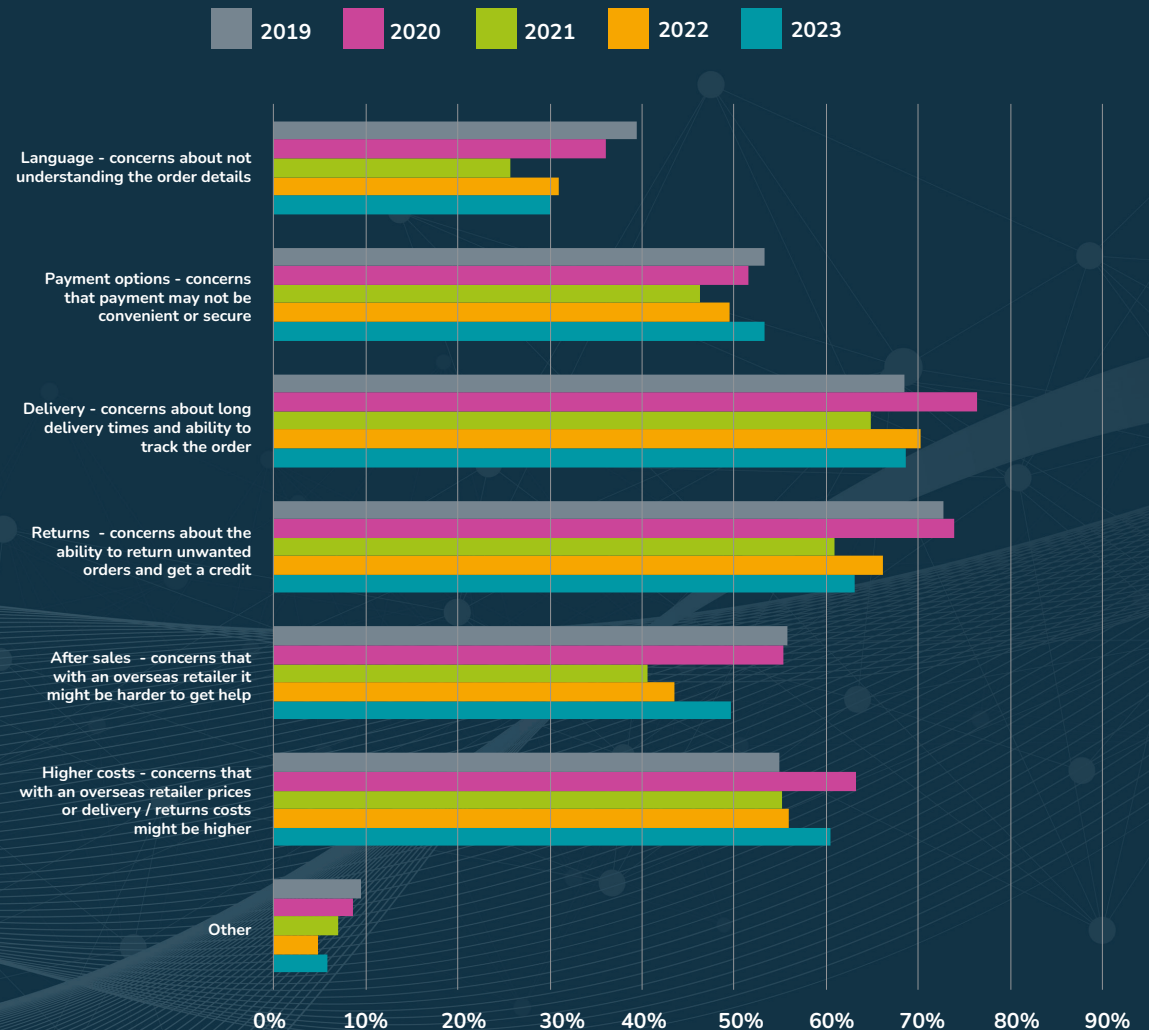
2019   2020   2021   2022   2023
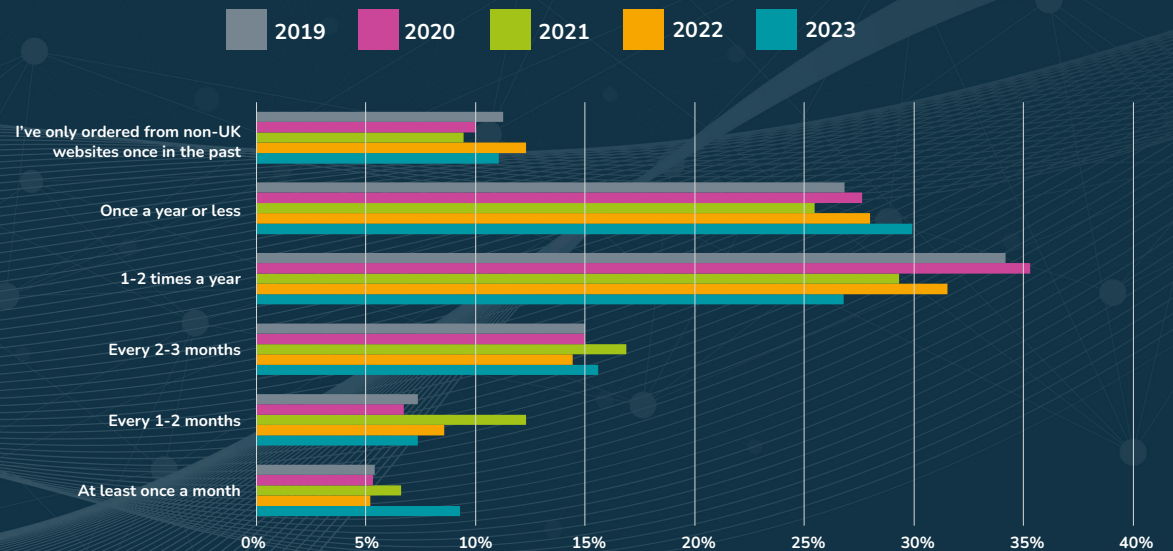
The biggest barriers to purchasing from an international retailer

The biggest barrier for customers when purchasing from a non-UK retailer is delivery. In 2023, just under 67% were concerned about long delivery times and their ability to track orders. Similarly, returns are a big issue for 63.1% of respondents owing to the worry of not being able to submit a return and get some form of credit back.

To help subdue these concerns, retailers should detail the average waiting time for international customers, present all delivery prices upfront (including all hidden costs), and consider strategies that enable all customers to track the progress of their orders. Equally, international returns information should be detailed and easy to understand.

The higher costs associated with international delivery and returns were amongst the top barriers for customers in 2023 (60.5%). This figure is almost on par with 2020 (63.2%), the year of Brexit, which left many customers facing higher shipping costs and longer waiting times. The cost-of-living crisis through 2022-3 is a likely explanation for this.

What do you feel are the biggest barriers to buying goods from a non-UK retailer?
(Respondents were asked to tick all that apply)

Legend: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

Horizontal bar chart categories:
- Language - concerns about not understanding the order details
- Payment options - concerns that payment may not be convenient or secure
- Delivery - concerns about long delivery times and ability to track the order
- Returns - concerns about the ability to return unwanted orders and get a credit
- After sales - concerns that with an overseas retailer it might be harder to get help
- Higher costs - concerns that with an overseas retailer prices or delivery / returns costs might be higher
- Other

X-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

nShift's three strategies for successful international shipping

Delivery is the biggest barrier for customers when shopping internationally. We've developed three strategies to help online retailers and webshops overcome this challenge:

1 ··▶ **Create the right carrier connections.** Shipping internationally requires relationships with carrier companies that serve the relevant territories. Having to establish these carrier connections takes time and limits retailers' ability to manoeuvre. This is best overcome by using delivery management software that offers ready-made connections to a large number of carriers.

2 ··▶ **Prioritise the customer experience.** When shoppers are ordering from a vendor that has only recently entered their market, they must be assured that their delivery is in safe hands. Regular and relevant communication to the customer during the shipping process is an essential means of building trust. If this communication is branded and user-friendly, it also creates opportunities to remarket to the customer at a time when they are most engaged with the brand.

3 ··▶ **Make returns easy.** Some shoppers might be nervous about buying from a retailer outside their country. But if they can quickly see that there is a clear and simple returns process in place, they may be more likely to purchase.

By following these strategies, businesses can overcome the shipping and logistics challenges of international ecommerce and deliver a positive customer experience.
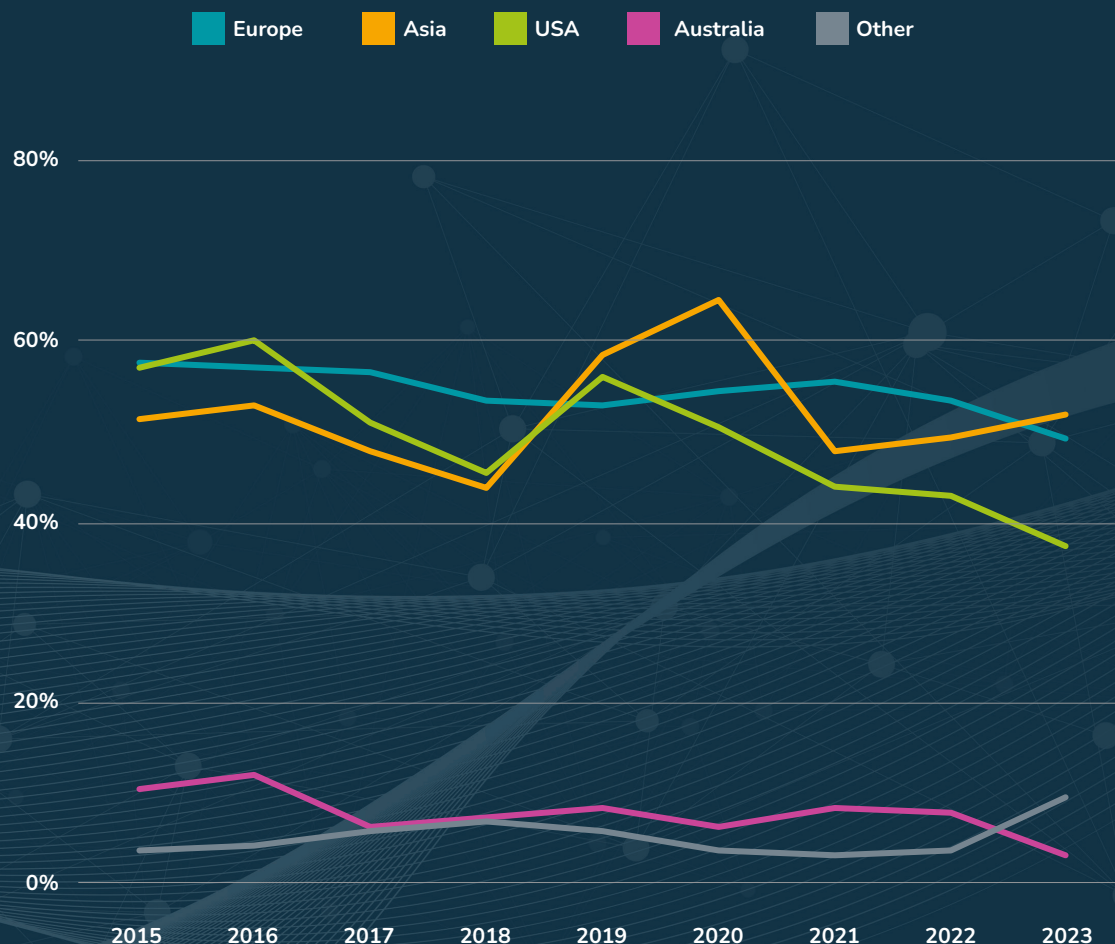
The places customers are most likely to buy from

The USA was among the most popular places that respondents purchased from in 2015-6, but since 2020, the USA has seen consistent declines while Asia and Europe have been leading the way. Customers are attracted to Europe due to its proximity to the UK, and the rise of social commerce has bolstered the popularity of now well-known Asian-owned brands.

Australia has consistently been the least popular country for purchasing, most likely due to distance. In 2023, only 3.3% of respondents said they have purchased from Australia, the lowest rate since tracking began.

When ordering from a non-UK website in the past, where were the retailers based?
(Respondents were asked to tick all that apply)

Legend: ▬ Europe ▬ Asia ▬ USA ▬ Australia ▬ Other

Y-axis: 0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%
X-axis: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023
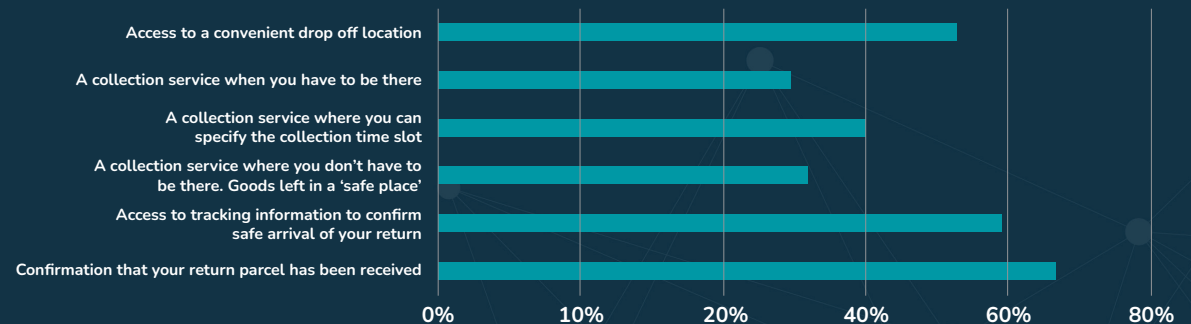
Improving Returns

Aspects that make returns more convenient

The top thing that would make returns more convenient for customers is, as voted for by around 87% of the respondents, giving them confirmation that their return parcel has been received. One of the main reasons for this is that they know when to expect store credit or their money back.

Access to returns tracking information to confirm the safe arrival of their return is also very important to customers, and by offering this, retailers remove a layer of anxiety for customers. Good experiences such as these can inspire loyalty and positive word of mouth for increased customer acquisition.

Retailers should consider presenting their customers with all their local returns locations, as not having a convenient option was marked as a concern for 73% of respondents. To ensure this is possible for all customers, retailers can work with post offices, lockers, convenience stores, and other third-party locations to make the returns process as frictionless as possible.

How important would the following aspects be in making a returns service more convenient for you? Proportion of respondents scoring 4 or 5 where 5 is 'Very Important', 2023

Chart categories (top to bottom):
- Access to a convenient drop off location
- A collection service when you have to be there
- A collection service where you can specify the collection time slot
- A collection service where you don't have to be there. Goods left in a 'safe place'
- Access to tracking information to confirm safe arrival of your return
- Confirmation that your return parcel has been received

X-axis: 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80%

nShift Comments:

"In today's ecommerce environment, providing a clear returns policy is essential. If they can't see how they can send back a product, many shoppers simply won't complete the purchase. But returns also serve as an opportunity to build the business. When retailers get this right, they will convert more returns to exchanges, create new marketing opportunities and reduce returns volumes over the long term. To make the most of returns, online retailers and webshops should deploy a returns software solution that creates a cutting-edge consumer experience and captures useful data on seat-back items."

Case study: Hunkemöller

Hunkemöller, Europe's fastest-growing lingerie specialist. It has been able to offer its customers seamless reverse ecommerce experience and seen a spike in sales after using nShift Returns. Since going live, Hunkemöller has seen a marked shift away from return-to-warehouse and towards in-store returns, with the latter increasing by 15%. This has not only created the chance to strengthen customer relationships but also created new remarketing and repurchase opportunities. Prior to using nShift, Hunkemöller was using conventional printed return labels in packages sent to online customers. This meant the company didn't know in advance how many returns might come back every day, or what was driving those returns. By digitising the entire process, Hunkemöller has better intelligence about returns, and can offer a slicker customer experience.

# The positive impact of extended returns

Most respondents (52.4%) expect a 28 day returns policy, which is above the legal requirement of 14 days.

By offering extended returns, retailers can reap the benefits of customers (73.9%) purchasing more items from their website. One of the reasons could be that customers are aware of the reduced risk extended returns brings. For example, they have a longer timeframe to decide whether they like and want to keep the items.
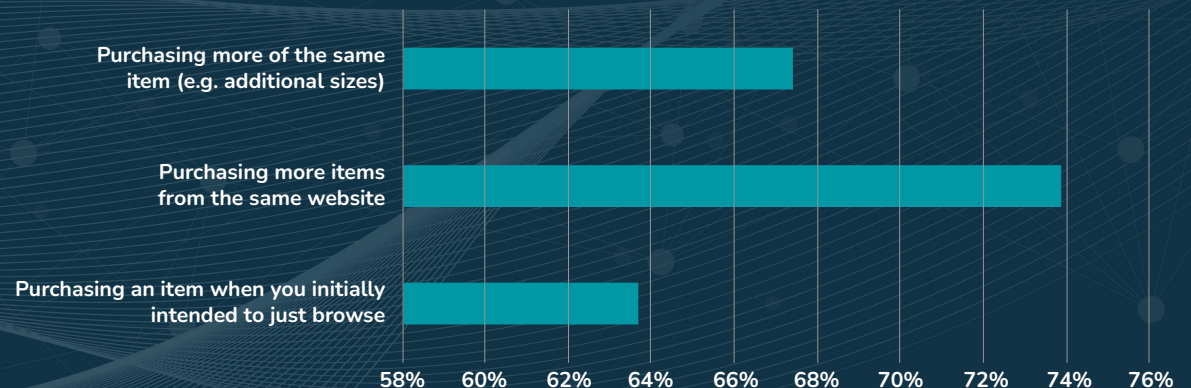
Extended returns can also inspire customers to purchase more of the same item, such as in the case of wanting to try different sizes. For retailers that do not charge for returns, this is a disadvantage. To limit the number of customers that buy multiple sizes, retailers should provide detailed product descriptions that include exact product dimensions.

63.7% of respondents said that extended returns are likely to influence them to purchase an item when they just intended to browse.

What length of returns policy do you think retailers should offer?, 2023

Days	Percentage
14 days	~35%
28 days	~52%
45 days	~7%
60 days	~4%
90 days	~1%
100+ days	~1%
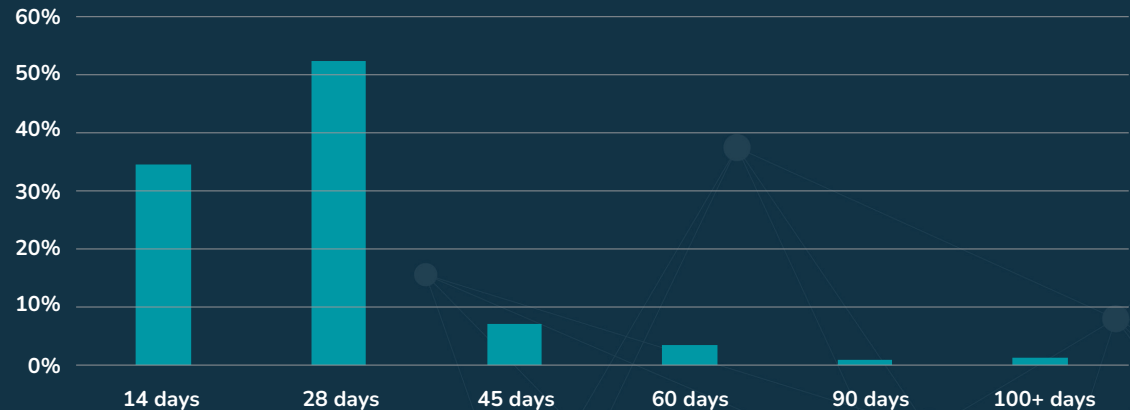
How likely is an extended returns policy to influence your purchases in the following situations?
(Respondents who answered 'Likely' and 'Very Likely')

Situation	Percentage
Purchasing more of the same item (e.g. additional sizes)	~67%
Purchasing more items from the same website	~74%
Purchasing an item when you initially intended to just browse	~64%

## Prompting interaction on returns portals

Year after year, customers reveal that they prefer returns labels included in their package rather than using an online returns portal to book a return. Though, since 2019, there has been an increase in the number of people who find a portal more convenient.

A couple of ways to inspire customers to interact with a returns portal is by providing returns tracking and faster replacement/credit. Both have proven popular among the respondents, especially the latter.

When making a return which of the following offers the greatest convenience?

- Online returns portal to book a return
- Returns labels included in the package

Would you use a returns portal if it offered the following benefits?

- Provided returns tracking
- Provided a faster replacement / credit
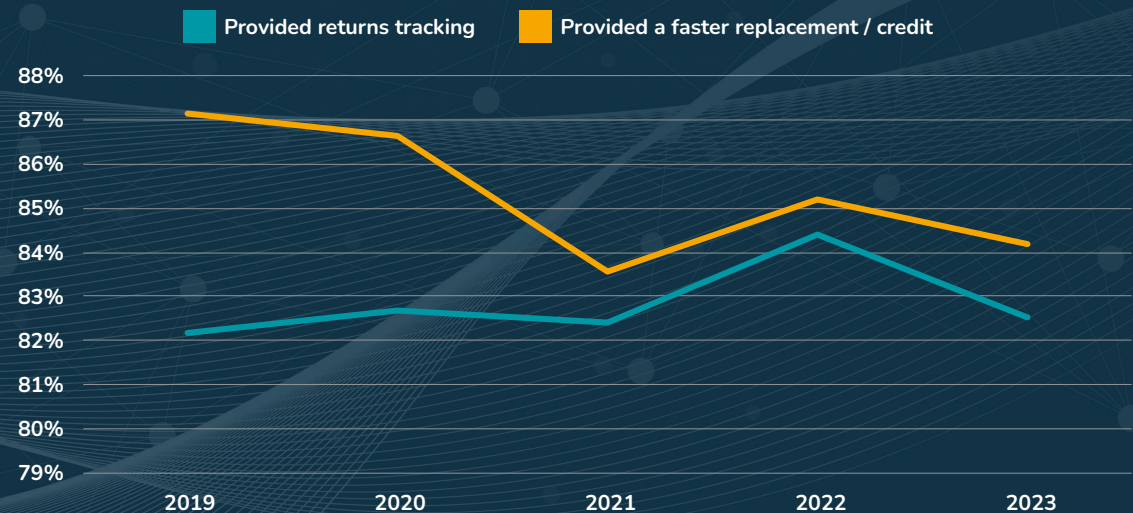
Effective returns management is an important part of the customer experience, especially in ecommerce. Businesses that manage returns effectively can reduce costs and improve their bottom line while giving customers a memorable user experience.

nShift's five tips for managing customer returns:

1 **Clearly communicate your returns policy** - Make sure your return policy is easy to understand and prominently displayed on your website and in your physical store. Customers should know what to expect when returning products.

2 **Provide a hassle-free return process** - This could include providing a prepaid return label, offering a drop-off location, or allowing returns through multiple channels (e.g., online, in-store). Additionally, offer a choice of return shipping options, such as standard or expedited shipping, to accommodate different customer needs.

3 **Offer a generous return window** - Give customers enough time to return their items. This allows them to feel confident in their purchase and reduces return rates.

4 **Use effective reverse logistics plans** - This includes tracking returned items, ensuring inspections are done without delay, and quickly returning items to available stock.

5 **Provide excellent customer service** - Make sure your customer service team is trained to handle returns and provide excellent customer service. This can help improve customer loyalty and the overall customer experience.

Conclusion

Closing thoughts from IMRG

Our research shows that close to 57% of customers will abandon items at the checkout if they are concerned about or have issues with delivery, thus proving the cruciality of excellent post-purchase experiences. Customers also want to feel in control of the delivery process, whereby they receive frequent communication and can make several convenient choices for themselves.

When the delivery experience falls short, even a retailer's best customers are likely to shop around. But, a great customer experience at each stage of the delivery journey can encourage repeat purchases. Offering benefits when fulfilling a return can also build a positive brand image, inspiring acquisition through positive reviews, and prompting loyalty.

While home delivery continues to be the most popular choice for customers, the space for alternative delivery, such as lockers or collection from third-party locations, is ever-growing. Numerous customers have revealed these types of options will be their preferred choice in the future, and as more customers become aware of the flexibility this brings, this is likely to grow.
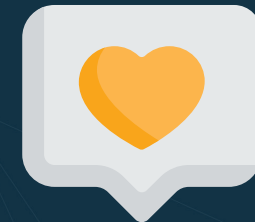
nShift has five top tips for delivering the best possible customer experience:

1 ⋯▶ **Provide and clearly display a range of delivery options at checkout** - some shoppers seek swift deliveries. For others, price is paramount. Offering a range of options at checkout increases conversions. But it's essential that these options are clearly and intuitively badged.

2 ⋯▶ **Ensure transport capacity** - during busy periods, it's crucial that retailers ensure they can keep their promises. This is best achieved through relationships with multiple carrier companies and ensuring that the company's tech stack can quickly facilitate these relationships.

3 ⋯▶ **Maximise delivery success** - giving shoppers the opportunity to identify and choose alternative Out Of Home (OOH) collection options is a welcome alternative to having to wait at home for a delivery. Parcel shops, parcel lockers, and the store itself offer shoppers a more substantial choice.

4 ⋯▶ **Keep in touch** - relevant communication keeps the customer engaged and helps contain any negative feedback. If a retailer distributes communication in their own look and feel, it helps build the brand at a time when shoppers are most engaged. This makes it easier to remarket to shoppers.

5 ⋯▶ **Make returns easy** - countless consumers simply won't complete their purchase if it's not clear how they can return a product. Operating a simple digital returns process gives shoppers confidence in the brand. It also makes it easier for the retailer to track patterns and work out why items are being sent back. This can reduce the volume of returns.

Key takeaway: as and when it is possible, always offer your customers convenience.

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