

REVERSE LOGISTICS magazine®

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**Customer Experience is
Influencing Logistics Strategy**
**CX in Logistics is Revealing
Revenue Opportunities**

CONTENTS

Issue 12 Volume 10

COVER STORY page 10

Customer Experience is Influencing Logistics Strategy: CX in Logistics is Revealing Revenue Opportunities

By Jean Mork Bredeson, Managing Director, SERVICE 800

Have you noticed that everyone is talking about Customer Experience? Major product, service and delivery companies are working very hard to measure and to improve upon the factors that influence Customer Satisfaction. They know that positive experiences and satisfied customers will have the behaviors they want: more likely to continue to purchase or renew, more likely to continue to purchase, and more likely to share positive references to their peers.

ARTICLE page 14

Tis the Season...For Holiday Returns

By Howard Rosenberg, CEO and co-founder of B-Stock

Holiday returns are a lot like the Grinch: out to steal your Christmas cheer. Considering 13% of holiday purchases are returned each year, there's no denying their inevitable arrival in the weeks following December 25. This season in particular is going to bring higher return rates as more consumers than ever are expected to shop online (ecommerce return rates are double that of brick and mortar).

ARTICLE page 18

Reverse Logistics -a winning strategy for customer loyalty

By Dr. Sunnanda Panda, Founder and CEO of RevLog Resources, India

A business organization exists to provide products and/or services that customer's need/ want. In other words, if the customer does not need these products and services the organizations would not exist. So a blindly obvious statement is – **no customer = no company!**

ARTICLE page 28

Leveraging Logistics into Improved Customer Satisfaction and Competitive Advantage

By Bill Pollock, President & Principal Consulting Analyst at Strategies For GrowthSM, SFG

Logistics is crucial to every business - but it is not an end unto itself. In fact, the most successful organizations are those that can leverage their logistics capabilities to provide customers with exactly what they want - and expect - while, at the same time, creating and maintaining a competitive advantage wherever possible.

ARTICLE page 32

Think Customer Journey Mapping to Hit Your Service Delivery Bullseye

By Dennis Gershowitz, Founder and Principal of DG Associates

A while back, I was working with a client who among other responsibilities is responsible for a sizeable Repair and Return facility. In this case instruments are returned by customers, repaired, forwarded back to the customer and, if needed, loaners are shipped and utilized during the repair process. Pretty straight forward or, at least you would think so.

ARTICLE page 34

How Outsourcing Logistics Can Help Ecommerce Merchants Manage Returns This Holiday Season

By Dhruv Saxena, CEO, ShipBob

For ecommerce sellers, the returns process can make or break the customer experience. There are several aspects of the returns process that affect customer perception of a brand or online store. In this article, we will discuss the ways in which returns affect the customer experience, particularly during the holiday shopping season. We will also discuss how outsourcing logistics can improve the customer experience during the busiest ecommerce season of the year.

ARTICLE page 38

Relevance of Branding in Reverse Logistics By Encompass

To many in the reverse logistics industry, a brand is just a logo – a basic design element imprinted on stationery and tradeshow giveaways. But a brand should be much more than merely artwork on a ballcap. When developed thoughtfully, it should serve as the flag for a reverse logistics business in the same way as a flag stands for a country.

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4 Message from the Editor

5 Industry Focus Committees

6 Message from the Publisher

6 RLA Management Team

8 RLA Advisory Board

26 View from Academia

30 What's Up RLA?

42 Industry Events

45 Our Members

51 Ad Index

Message from the Editor



Reverse Logistics includes many different topics, however, I've got a great story on returns, repairs and customer service: My sister recently called me about an issue she had with a retailer and manufacturer. She had bought her 10 year-old an electric scooter for his birthday back in June. He rode it one time, then the second time it suddenly just stopped working. Because it was still so new, she still had the box to the product. On the box it said if a return was needed to contact the Manufacturer NOT the Retailer. So she did.



She contacted the manufacturer, and after several tries, she finally got someone to do some troubleshooting with her, none of which worked. They told her they would call her back to find a resolution. Weeks went by, and she reached out again. After another troubleshoot, they realized a part had gone bad and needed to be replaced. At this time, they told her they would send her the replacement part, and she would need to take the inside of the unit apart, to replace the broken piece.

She did not feel comfortable doing this herself. There were some electrical pieces connected, so she told them she would feel better if they would make the repair themselves. She was told that was not an option, and that she would have to make the repair herself, or return the item to the store. She even asked for them to just send her a whole new unit, and they said that also was not an option.

At this point, so much time had passed, that it was past the time frame of the store's return policy. She decided to see if the Retailer could help since the Manufacturer couldn't. After several chats at the customer service counter, and finally a manager, she was told they would return the product for store credit, which she agreed with since she could do other shopping at the store.

Unfortunately, this is an all too common practice in the returns/repair world with companies who haven't quite figured out their Reverse Logistics best practices. And it's unfortunate. She decided to never buy a product from that manufacturer again, and will never contact a manufacturer as opposed to a retailer again when it came to a similar situation. But the several phone calls and emails did not make her feel like a valuable customer, and she only got more and more frustrated.

At RLA we encourage our Members to find Best Practices to avoid situations like this. Customer Loyalty is a big factor to avoiding loss, and it shouldn't be ignored. In this edition you'll find additional stories on Customer Loyalty - and be sure to check out our committee meetings and our events page for our RLA Conf & Expo in Vegas when topics like this will be discussed.

Felecia Przybyla
RL Magazine Editor
Editor@rla.org

OUR MISSION

The Reverse Logistics Association is a members' driven, global trade association for the returns and reverse industry, offering information, research, solutions and services for Manufacturers, Branded, and Retail companies from Third Party Providers. Our goals are to educate and inform Reverse Logistics professionals around the world, and be the voice of the reverse industry.

Reverse Logistics Association Industry Focus Committees

Industry Committees are set up to provide a standing forum for Reverse Logistics Professionals to meet on a regional and global basis and discuss common Reverse Logistics issues at the RLA Conferences and Expos. Industry Committees educate the industry on reverse logistics:

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- Consumer Satisfaction Issues
- Regulations on a Worldwide & Regional Basis Processes that can Reduce Costs

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Message from the Publisher



Exceeding Customer Expectations is the proven way to reduce returns, a program that I helped develop at Philips and that I learned years ago by engaging with the RLA. This has been proven over the past two decades by manufacturers who focused on making products simpler to use, easier to connect, packaged more efficiently, and marketed correctly without hype. Retailers learned there is a difference between giving an unlimited return policy and a convenient process for returns that would include feedback of the issues. A focus on building customer loyalty through enhanced experience was needed.

Prior to the focus on customer experience, the quality engineers worked on Six Sigma and other quality programs to make better products. The engineers argued returns were due to liberal return policies at retailers. For example, many consumer product returns are checked and tested and usually over 75% are considered "no fault found". When sales were good, no one tried to stop the flow of returns and recognize them as reverse sales.

The costs associated with returns, such as call center support and refurbishment, are assigned to different groups in most companies, and the end-to-end total costs were hidden. Each department worked to cut costs which often resulted in poor customer experiences. An example would be when customer call centers were moved to foreign countries for lower costs and many Americans became frustrated on the calls for help.

Then came customer experience measurements based on tracking expectations, unmet or exceeded. It was no longer good enough to deliver a good product to a competitive market place. Net Promoter Score, Service 800, and other customer satisfaction measurement companies could show that companies with good scores had better financial results, lower returns, and higher customer loyalty.

The paradigm shift that was needed decades ago is complete, and those companies focused on better customer experiences are winning. ***Is your company focused on the best product or the best experience?***

Best regards,

Tony Sciarrotta
tony@rla.org

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Bob Arvin - Walmart, As Divisional Vice President, Bob is a Senior Level Supply Chain Executive with 35 years of experience in forward & reverse logistics, project management, engineering, transportation, Internet fulfillment, and Distribution Center operations. Bob is currently responsible for the Reverse Logistics Network at Walmart Stores, including National RTV & Secondary Market programs for Walmart Stores, Walmart.com, SAM'S Clubs, & SAMS.com. His past responsibilities at Walmart includes the Apparel Distribution Network - replenishment of apparel, shoes, jewelry & GNFR to all Walmart Stores & SAM'S Clubs in the US, plus fulfillment of on-line apparel sales for Walmart.com. In addition, Bob also has past responsibility for regional General Merchandise & Grocery Distribution Center operations.



Tim Brown - Georgia Tech Supply Chain & Logistics Institute, Tim Brown is Managing Director of the Supply Chain & Logistics Institute, an Academic Program Director in Georgia Tech Professional Education, and an instructor in the Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering at Georgia Tech. Mr. Brown has worked in the reverse logistics area for over twenty years; consulting with companies such as Philips Electronics, Apple, and IBM in the development of their reverse logistics and service operations strategies, infrastructure, and procedures. Mr. Brown was selected as a "Professional to Know" by Supply and Demand Chain Executive.



Lisa Cotter - Best Buy, Lisa Cotter has over 20 years experience leading all areas of Supply Chain including Distribution Management, Inventory Management, Process and System Design, and Supply Chain Network Design. Lisa is in a newly created role of Sr. Director of Reverse Logistics for Best Buy. She is responsible for the end to end total company process and system road map as well as managing the 3rd party reverse program for mobile phones.



Jeff Elliott - FedEx. As Managing Director of Sales in Technology Solutions at FedEx Supply Chain, Jeff Elliott spearheads the company's strategic approach to expanding the customer portfolio within the technology vertical, while fostering the existing customer base. In this position, Elliott serves a vital role in driving lead generation, prospect engagement and relationship management for the Technology Solutions business unit. FedEx Supply Chain helps technology customers streamline operations, optimize their logistics networks and drive continuous improvement with its innovative, industry-leading solutions.



Ryan Holden - The Home Depot, Ryan started with The Home Depot in 2003 as a store sales associate. He has held roles of increasing responsibility including bulk distribution center Operations Manager, Manager of Return to Vendor Contracts, and currently Director of Returns and Repair Business. In Ryan's current role, he is responsible for secondary market goods, company repair programs, and return to vendor business functions.



Chuck Johnston - goTRG, Chuck is COO at goTRG, a global leader in the implementation and execution of omnichannel and supply chain solutions. He was formerly the Director of Reverse Logistics for The Home Depot, responsible for all return and repair operations. Prior to that he oversaw the Reverse Logistics operations for Wal-Mart Stores Inc. Chuck

Board of Advisors

has been involved in the Reverse Logistics industry for over 20 years and is considered the foremost expert in the field. He is a sought after speaker and considered one of the most innovative thinkers in the industry. In addition to his experience in the reverse space, he has led numerous Specialty Distribution Operations in his 23 years with Wal-Mart. While at Wal-Mart, Chuck was responsible for the development of a profitable, "best in class" Reverse Logistics organization that is still the benchmark for all other retailers.



Thomas Maher - Dell, Tom Maher joined Dell in 1997 and is the Senior Vice President for Global Service Parts. Mr. Maher is responsible for service parts life cycle support in over 100 countries. Mr. Maher's global service parts responsibilities include: planning, procurement, distribution, returns, repair, inventory management, supplier management and parts disposal. These operations support 100% of Dell's warranty customers across all Business Units and all Product Lines.



Kenny McDaniel - Intel, Kenny McDaniel is a senior program manager within Intel Corporation's Global Reverse Logistics (GRL) group. GRL is tasked with handling returns for all of Intel's products from all of their customers, ranging from world-wide, multi-billion dollar integrators to small, local dealers. Kenny has worked within GRL for over 17 years in a variety of roles, helping to develop the warranty support and RL processes for Intel's products, business units, and customers. He is currently the RL business/finance program manager, focused on strategic RL ops and finance elements.



Steven Nickel - Google, Steven currently leads Google's global reverse logistics operations and value added support services development for all of its consumer hardware products. He's been with Google for nearly five years, but brings 20+ years of experience in consumer technology--building amazing

teams, growing profitable businesses, and improving customer experiences.



Monica Orlando - HP, Inc. Monica Orlando has over 15 years of experience in Supply Chain designing and managing a variety of complex processes spanning across Planning, Manufacturing, Logistic, Order Fulfilment and Inventory Management. As Director of Channel Operations Monica is responsible for all the supply chain aspects of distributing PCs and Printers to the North America HP Retailers/Distributors, including the reverse logistic processes and programs.



Jim Rallo - The Retail Supply Chain Group The Retail Supply Chain Group helps hundreds of the world's top retailers and consumer OEMs maximize return for overstock and returned inventory while enhancing and protecting their brands through multi-channel remarketing, return to vendor outsourcing, and product refurbishment. Under his leadership, the team provides clients with better service, scale, and results than any other provider, ensuring the full value of their surplus is captured. Jim previously served as Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer of Liquidity Services from 2005 to 2015.



Tony Sciarrotta - Reverse Logistics Association, Executive Director, In 2016, Tony took over and became the Executive Director of the RLA after 12 years of active involvement on the Advisory Board and Committees. In over 35 years in the consumer products industry, Tony held various positions including 15 years in returns management at Philips where he developed new reverse logistics strategies. He worked with retail partners and industry groups to implement returns initiatives still in use. Tony has been an evangelist for improving the customer experience to reduce returns and their associated costs. Today, Tony is considered a subject matter expert in reverse logistics, and speaks for the industry at conferences all over the world.

Customer Experience is Influencing Logistics Strategy: CX in Logistics is Revealing Revenue Opportunities

By Jean Mork Bredeson, Managing Director, SERVICE 800 - RLA Bronze Member

ARTICLE



Have you noticed that everyone is talking about Customer Experience? Major product, service and delivery companies are working very hard to measure and to improve upon the factors that influence Customer Satisfaction. They know that positive experiences and satisfied customers will have the behaviors they want: more likely to continue to purchase or renew, more likely to continue to purchase, and more likely to share positive references to their peers. However, all the insight, focus and commitment to satisfy customers can be quickly wasted when a bad return experience erodes memories of good experiences.

At the Reverse Logistics Association annual EMEA conference, **Jean Mork Bredeson**, Managing Director of SERVICE 800, global expert of Customer Experience measurement, lead a discussion on the impact of Customer Experience on logistic strategies. "It takes great effort to create satisfied customers," Bredeson offers. "And it only takes a few lapses in attentiveness to shift a good experience to a poor one. Just a few 'Dissatisfiers' can wipe out great progress toward greater customer satisfaction and loyalty. It takes a clear understanding of customer expectations and an inclusive strategic design of logistics processes to yield a truly customer considerate environment."

Bernard Kiernan, Senior Program Manager of Intel's Global Reverse Logistics Business Solutions

Development group agrees. "At Intel, our responsibilities for identifying current and future Reverse Logistics requirements have continually kept the opportunity to delight customers in mind. For example, Intel's Channel Warranty Replacement Program was designed to make un-complicate product exchanges. By understanding how Intel products move within customer organizations, we learned that a simpler exchange program could strengthen our customer relationships." Kiernan continued, "As we made it easier for customers to exchange products, we learned more about industry segments and the health of our products. The resulting data continues to be shared in our organization, helping us continually improve on the ease of doing business and how our well our products are serving specific segments."

Ryan Holden, Director of Returns and Repair for Home Depot is clear about how important the role of Customer Experience plays in designing processes for product movement and repair. "We found and continue to prove that customers who have had a problem that was well handled will return and even become regular and loyal customers", Holden attests. "Making returns easier and even supporting our associates' quick decisions in the field is revealing patterns to continued purchasing."

Establishing the right processes that suit all the roles isn't an easy objective. Holden continues, "It takes getting all



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the parties to the table. We have to listen carefully to our customers and to understand their expectations. Since our customers tend to be working on specific projects, this can be difficult. From collecting and mining return disposition data, we gain great insight. With what we learn, the Home Depot Returns and Repair team goes to the right parties to share the knowledge. We engage with the merchants. We sit with our buyers as often as daily, not semi-annually like some organizations. We all understand that managing cost is fundamental, but we use customer insights to get a balanced process. We're seeing returns becoming easier and our customers coming back to buy."

At Bose, **Jan Jaspers**, Supervisor of European Return Logistics, sees every return as an opportunity. "Bose has the unique disposition of welcoming returns," Jaspers explains. "Receiving a product back, testing and preparing it for resale in our proprietary channels is our chance to find a new customer. Bose has acquired significant numbers of new customers in this way, making it easy for new customers to experience a Bose product and to come back to Bose to buy upgrades or related products."

Customer demographics and feedback play a significant role in this Bose philosophy. "We work very hard to learn about the customer experience associated with each return," Jaspers continues. "We press our retailers to provide what they can, especially failure reason details. All this data goes regularly to the Bose R&D department that use it for product improvement initiatives."

From the speakers' descriptions of how their respective organizations have been benefiting from customer feedback and customer experience metrics, Bredeson surmised, "It's clear that Customer Experience metrics have great potential in strategy setting. Solid logistical processes can be significantly more productive and cost effective when on-going customer perception and feedback are considered. It isn't just about cost management anymore."

BIOGRAPHIES

Ryan Holden, Director of Returns & Repair, HOME DEPOT, ryan_a_holden@homedepot.com

Ryan Holden started with The Home Depot in 2003 as a store sales associate. He has held roles of increasing responsibility including bulk distribution center Operations Manager, Manager of Return to Vendor Contracts, and currently Director of Returns and Repair Business. In Ryan's current role, he is responsible for

secondary market goods, company repair programs, and return to vendor business functions.

Bernard Kiernan, Global Reverse Logistics Business Solutions Development, INTEL, Bernard.m.kiernan@intel.com

Bernard Kiernan has been with Intel Corporation for over 20 years in a variety of roles from Quality Management, Services Management, Project and Program Management. Most of this time has been in the Reverse Logistics organization in the design, deployment and management of Reverse Logistics solutions across Intel's broad spectrum of products. Senior Program Manager within Intel Corporation's Global Reverse Logistics (GRL) group with responsibilities for identifying the current and future Reverse Logistics requirements of Intel Business Units and the development of Business Solutions which delight the customer and deliver value add Reverse Logistics services."

Jan Jaspers, Supervisor - European Return Logistics, BOSE, jan_jaspers@bose.com

Jan Jaspers is Supervisor - Return Logistics for Bose Europe and leading a global project to create excellence within return logistics. Jaspers is been with Bose for 10 years, the most recent 4 years supervising the return logistics operation for Europe. Jaspers manages the crediting team, the refurbishment team, spare part team area and the repair logistics department.



Jean Mork Bredson, Managing Director, SERVICE 800, jmb@service800.com

For almost 30 years, Jean Mork Bredson and SERVICE 800 have been working with IT and technology trade associations to build standards, collect Customer Satisfaction and Customer Expectation metrics, and to build benchmarks and insights through consortiums of member companies. Based in Minneapolis and London, SERVICE 800 collects customer feedback from customers around the world in 30 languages every day. As Managing Director, Bredson brings hands-on service delivery experience for General Electric and Xerox to her leadership role at SERVICE 800 and to Operations Improvement projects for global service companies.





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Tis the Season...For Holiday Returns

One in three people will return a gift, that's a lot of ugly sweaters to sort out

By Howard Rosenberg, CEO and co-founder of B-Stock *RLA Bronze Member*

ARTICLE



Holiday returns are a lot like the Grinch: out to steal your Christmas cheer. Considering 13% of holiday purchases are returned each year, there's no denying their inevitable arrival in the weeks following December 25. This season in particular is going to bring higher return rates as more consumers than ever are expected to shop online (ecommerce return rates are double that of brick and mortar). Good old buyer's remorse, the expectation of free and easy return policies, and gift-recipient dislike will also play a big role in the reason-for-return (check out last year's [Top Five Gift Flops](#)).

Whether an ugly sweater, problematic consumer electronic, or an ill-fitting pair of shoes, close to \$95 billion worth of merchandise once purchased/gifted/unwrapped, will be heading back to U.S. retailers this holiday season. That's up 35% from 2016. Accordingly, it's essential that retailers account for and have a plan in place for the flow of inventory coming back.

Though much of it will be in functional and cosmetically perfect condition, putting it back on store shelves is logistically inefficient (consider this: it costs twice as much to process an online return back on shelf as it does to sell it). Plus, packing up and storing seasonal items for a year can compromise space in – what's most likely – an already packed warehouse.

Here's where a recovery-generating secondary market solution can come in handy. Chances are you already

have a process in place for your merchandise slated for the secondary market (post holiday or otherwise). If that plan involves selling to one or two big buyers, you may want to reassess for a couple reasons: 1) your recovery is likely much lower than it could be; and 2) offline negotiation is most likely taking you away from core business activities.

A better option is to eliminate your dependence on a few middlemen or liquidators and set up a dynamic that enables many buyers to push prices up rather than one or two to negotiate them down. Most likely there is already a robust secondary market and buyer base for your product(s); in every major city around the globe there are businesses that purchase excess and returned inventory for resale. The secret to success is the ability to gain access to this buyer base.

A B2B marketplace solution is one way to make this happen; think of it like your own storefront to auction off bulk quantities of returned, excess, or other liquidation inventory to the highest bidder. [Nine of the top 10 U.S. retailers](#) are currently using this approach to achieve higher pricing, a faster sales cycle, and real data on secondary market prices. These marketplaces are customized, integrated, and scaled based on the retailer's unique needs. For example, they can handle the uptick in inventory following the holidays without sacrificing the recovery or velocity in which it's sold. They also allow total control over who is buying the inventory



How big is your returns problem?

- + Sell directly to 100,000+ targeted business buyers in 130 countries
- + Online auction platform creates competition, pushing prices up
- + Sell any type of product, condition or quantity; from pallets to truckloads
- + Used by the world's largest retailers to recover more for returns and overstock



and how it enters the secondary market. Here's how and why it works:

Higher Pricing: If done right, liquidation can offset substantial loss for returned or excess inventory, even comparable to reprocessing back on shelf or returning to vendor. By setting up an online auction dynamic where specifically targeted buyers compete to buy your merchandise, pricing goes up.

Better Control: Exposure to the right buyers ensures there is no confusion between primary (a-stock) or secondary (b-stock) channels and that your brand remains secure. By marketing to a database of targeted, vetted secondary market buyers you can control who sees your merchandise and who is allowed to buy it.

Velocity: With a larger buyer base, made up of the right buyers, you can move inventory as needed - regardless of volume, time of year, or product category.

Automation/Efficiency: By automating your liquidation process you'll improve the operational efficiency of your liquidation program. No more spreadsheets. No more faxing. No more negotiating over the phone.

Online Auction Dynamic: Increased competition through auctions means higher pricing; it also drives velocity, creates a sense of urgency and excitement. Auctions also mean no offline negotiating: you'll be able to extract buyers' highest willingness to pay and have real data on secondary market prices.

In addition to using this type of platform to sell their returned and excess inventory, these retailers are also applying data to achieve their goals (be it recovery, velocity, brand control, etc.); the smallest adjustments can drive substantially better results. For example, lot optimization, low start prices, accurate manifests, targeted marketing and other strategies all contribute to better pricing. This is where working with a company that has years of online marketplace experience - and years of compiled data - can make a big difference.

Unless you have a zero-returns policy - which in today's retail environment is unlikely - there is no hiding from holiday returns. By facing them head on and applying fresh thinking to the remarketing process, your returns can become a strategic asset rather than a dreaded post-holiday afterthought.



Howard Rosenberg is CEO and co-founder of B-Stock Solutions, the world's leading auction platform for returned, excess, and other liquidation inventory. Our platform sets up an online auction dynamic where retailers and manufacturers can sell directly to a diverse base of approved business buyers; this drives greater demand, higher pricing and a faster sales cycle, while maintaining the control you need. By applying our auction strategy and data, nine of the top 10 U.S. retailers, along with hundreds of other businesses, are attaining the highest pricing possible for secondary-market merchandise across all categories, conditions, and quantities. To become a part of the world's largest network of liquidation marketplaces, please visit: bstock.com.



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ADOPTED BY INDUSTRY LEADERS:



Reverse Logistics –a winning strategy for customer loyalty

By Dr. Sunnanda Panda, Founder and CEO of RevLog Resources, India - RLA Bronze Member

ARTICLE

Using Reverse Logistics Strategies to Improve Your Customer Service

A business organization exists to provide products and/or services that customer's need/ want. In other words, if the customer does not need these products and services the organizations would not exist. So a blindly obvious statement is – **no customer = no company!**

Companies or organizations who have worked around their customer's -needs, wants, preference, taste, service, experience –are the ones who are successful, while others don't thrive for long unless it is a monopolist market which globally we have moved away from long back. Customers in turn prefer companies that provide

- Value for money
- Delivering acceptable customer service
- Keep promises
- Quality as stated
- Easy to do business – forward and reverse

All the above, make customers loyal to organizations and their products.

Reverse Logistics is an evolving strategy to strengthen the company's customer base and build customer loyalty. **Returns are very much part of the sales process.** Therefore how a company uses reverse logistics directly impact customer loyalty. It starts when a customer calls a customer service representative and how they walk the customer through their returns process, forms the first impression and clearly conveys the company's attitude towards returns. Of course this has to be backed by a strong return policy that balances the

interest of the company and customers. For example, a 30-day return with receipt is a balanced compromise. This return policy must be clearly and transparently available to the customer before they place an order. Any surprises or unexpected cost on returns, inculcate doubts about the organization in the customer's mind.

Returns management and policy is vital especially in online sales. Since customers don't have the touch and feel experience, they are comforted by the fact they can return products with ease and this in fact encourages them to indulge in an online sale.



Here is an interesting case study of how an organization encouraged sales on a product - not preferred to purchase online, and the solution provided to satisfy customers who need to touch and feel the product, thus increasing customer experience and possibly negating returns. Caratlane is one of India's largest online jewellery retailers of diamonds and gemstone jewellery, solitaires and gold coins. Deep-rooted beliefs are tough to crack One such belief in India is that you cannot buy jewellery until you touch and feel it before committing to a sale. To address these concerns, Caratlane created an app for customers with the ability to try and buy jewellery designs 'virtually', aided with an innovative 3D mirror Mirror Mirror, on the wall,

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- Are your returns popping up on eBay and Amazon for low prices and affecting sales of brand new goods?

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REVERSE LOGISTICS
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an interactive experience for all! This app uses face recognition and 3D imaging technologies to provide a life-like immersive try-on experience for customers to discover a range of jewellery designs. So if a customer wants to see how an earring looks on one's ear lobes, the app would superimpose the earring on mirror image of the customer and they can have a 180-degree view of themselves. This app and customer experience has increased the earring business by almost 20 percent, but Caratlane is not limiting oneself to a certain kind of jewellery. Mithun Sacheti, Co-founder and CEO of Caratlane says "No matter how big a jewellery store is, there is only one door to enter, but the online platforms offers multiple doors"... thus they pioneered the virtual jewellery try-on feature and broke the restraints on the online jewellery market. Another recent service offered by Caratlane, is free trial of jewellery in the comfort of one's home at no charge to customer.

Reverse logistics in E-commerce is a necessary part of the transaction to maintain customer satisfaction and directly impact customer loyalty. Companies must ensure the **click-buy-receive service to mirror the click-return-refund capability**; this is crucial to maintain customer satisfaction, loyalty and confidence in ordering again. While e-Commerce dominates the market, reverse logistics require as much concentration as the original sale. To shift from managing rapid orders to rapid returns, there must be innovation, adaptation and evolution in the supply chain.

ARGOS

Argos is a multichannel retailer who offers customers the option to return at store, like most multichannel retailers do. For other customers, they simply need to call up within 30 days for a free collection.



Returns, refunds & exchanges

Christmas gift returns

We've extended our returns window over Christmas. Items purchased from 11 October 2018 can be returned up until 25 January 2019.

Can I return it if there's nothing wrong with it?

Absolutely! We offer a 30 day returns guarantee on most items. (We're nice like that.) So if you need to bring it back, just bring it back to any Argos store. Or if you got it delivered, we can collect it for free and refund your original delivery charge. If it is a small item you can also return it to a store at a convenient time for you and we can refund you immediately. However it may take 5 - 7 days for your bank to process the money.

We'll either refund the cash onto the original payment method or offer you an exchange. Easy.

You just need these 3 things:

- Your proof of purchase
- The item should be unused, in its original packaging and in a re-sellable condition
- Any free items that came with your product unused and in a re-sellable condition

How do I return Tu clothing?

For Tu clothing items bought on argos.co.uk it's a little bit different... here's some [specific information on returning Tu items](#).

What about returns that were paid for partially/fully with Nectar points?

Return your item to a staffed till in any Argos store and we'll refund the Nectar portion of your payment as an Argos Gift Card (as we're not able to refund your Nectar points). The remainder, where applicable, will be refunded via the original payment method, such as cash or payment card.

If you don't collect a Click & Collect item (that was paid for using Nectar points) within 7 days, your order will be cancelled, and you'll be refunded via your original payment method(s).

And a few more things to note... There are some things we can't do returns for, such as food and some jewellery (see FAQ below) unless of course they're faulty. Our website and catalogue clearly show which items are excluded

If the item or the packaging has been handled excessively to assess the goods (ie. more than you would if you were buying it in a shop) we reserve the right to reduce the amount of refund to you

During the returns process, we might ask for the product serial number or similar, to check the item was actually supplied by us.

Naturally, none of this affects your consumer rights.

Returns affect conversion



Even if a customer has had an excellent experience with a retailer through the buying and delivery process, returns is one area where things may go wrong. Making the returns process easy and free for customers is one way to ensure they retain a positive impression of the retailer, even if the product isn't suitable for them. This ensures that they will return and make purchases in future. Charging for returns is one sure-fire way to annoy customers and deter them from future purchase.

Retailers should do everything they can to minimise returns rates, by providing detailed product information, images, and product videos (the instructional product videos have done wonders for its returns rates), but a proportion of customers would still want to return items. This may be because clothes don't fit as well as they thought when they try them on, something just doesn't look right when they see it at home, etc. While returns is a cost to the retailers, they may have to loom in an average return rate and factor it into the cost of the item and its initial delivery charges rather than penalise customer for returning items. Here are how some online retailers handle this issue of returns...

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- 50% to 75% Increase in Extended Service Plan Revenue



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GLASSES DIRECT

Glasses Direct offers free home trials and free returns, prominently mentioned on their website and thus have gained an excellent reputation among customers.

M&S

Marks & Spencer has always had a no-hassle returns policy in its stores, and the online version is also simple enough with a 35 working day refund window.

Changed your mind? No problem. Our goodwill returns policy means you can return an item within 35 days of when you purchased or received it (14 days for sale items bought online, unless otherwise stated; exclusions apply). If the item is unused, in its original packaging and accompanied by a valid proof of purchase, we'll offer an exchange in our clothing and home stores (store returns only) or a full refund. This does not affect your statutory rights.

NEXT

With Next you can return products by post, charges to be borne by the customer or by Smart label where they deduct \$7 from the refund amount.

SPORTS DIRECT

Sports Direct's returns policy could deter customers from a purchase as their tone seems pretty harsh and customers are charged for returns and since the amount is not clearly stated it's a further deterrent.

We would recommend that you return your items via registered post. Please clearly state on the invoice the reason for return and whether you require a refund or exchange, We are only able to exchange items for the same product.

Personalised Items are non-returnable. Some goods are non-returnable for hygiene reasons. Please note that this does not affect your statutory rights.

If a full refund including the original delivery costs is required, we need to be informed fourteen (14) days after the receipt of the order. The order must be then returned to us within fourteen (14) days after we have been informed of the cancellation, however you will be responsible for the cost of returns the goods



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Convenient, quick and absolutely free, our Home Trial is the smarter way to buy glasses. Choose up to 4 frames (boutique frames are excluded from Home Trial) and we'll send them to you within 2 to 4 working days. Try them at home for up to 7 days to see how they look, fit and feel. When you're done, return your trial box to us using the free postage enclosed; you can just pop the trial box into a mailbox! Found the pair for you? Place your order online.

How can I return an item?



LIVE CHAT

Click here to chat to one of our Customer Service representatives.

Not completely satisfied or ordered the wrong size/colour? You can return any unworn items (in their original condition) within 28 days of receiving your order for a full refund. This doesn't affect your rights to return faulty items. Also, cosmetics, grooming products, certain jewellery and items with a security seal can only be returned if faulty.

Our returns process is simple, just use the returns note in your parcel and follow the steps below:

Returns by Post

- Complete and detach the returns note on the right of your delivery note and enclose it in your package. We need this information to refund you. If you don't have a returns note anymore, please contact us so that we can help you.
- Remove any old labels and barcodes from the outside of the parcel.
- Attach the new label to the front of your package with the following address details:

Next
Global Response
3580 NW 56 St
Suite 100
Ft Lauderdale
FL 33309, USA

- Return the package via the post; you'll be required to pay the postage, which won't be refunded by Next.
- Please allow 14 days for your refund to be processed.

Returns using Smart Label

A Smart Label is a quick and easy sticky label. It allows you to return your package(s) via the U.S. Mail from a location most convenient to you, e.g. at home, work or your Post Office.

No postage is paid at the time of making the return, as we'll deduct \$7 from your refund.

Just follow the steps below:

- Complete and detach the returns note on the right of your delivery note and enclose it in your package. We need this information to refund you.
- Write your address on the Smart Label, then simply peel off, and stick to the outside of your package. Please make sure you remove any old labels and barcodes first from the outside of the parcel!
- Drop your package in the U.S. Mail wherever is most convenient. If you prefer, you can arrange a USPS collection from your address (where available) by scheduling a 'carrier pickup' at www.USPS.com

Please allow 14 days for your refund to be processed.

You can track your return with the tracking number on your Smart Label at: <http://Returnstracking.shipmentmanager.com/1389>

Items not returned in line with the above policy may not be refunded, may be refunded at the last/current selling price or may be retained by Next.

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to us. If a return is payable to you we will process the refund as soon as possible and, in any case within fourteen (14) days of receipt of the original order back to us.

The returned goods do not need to be in their original packaging however they need to be in a sellable condition. Return postage is at your own cost and risk.

You have a legal obligation to take reasonable care of the goods while they are in your possession. If you fail to comply with this obligation, we may have a right of action against you for compensation. This applies to all goods that are returned.

Our returns policy does not affect your statutory rights.

If you return goods claiming they are defective, we will examine the returned goods and will notify you of your refund via e-mail within a reasonable period of time. We will process the refund due to you as soon as possible and, in any case within thirty (30) days of the day we confirm via e-mail that you are entitled to a refund for defective goods.

If a refund or reimbursement is payable to you, we will transfer the money using the same method originally used by you to pay for your purchase. If we cannot refund via the original payment then a cheque will be raised to the address on the order (except in the case of a full or part purchase of goods using a Gift Card, as detailed below).

If any product purchased with a Gift Card is subsequently exchanged for a product of a lower price, any money owing will only be issued as a Gift Card. If your purchase was partially paid for on Gift Card and a refund is payable to you, your Gift Card will be refunded up to the card's original value, any outstanding balance owed after this will be refunded via the other payment method originally used for your purchase. If you no longer have the Gift Card used to purchase the returned good(s), we will issue you with a new Gift Card to the value payable to you up to the amount of the card's original value.

ZAPPOS

Zappos is an online shoe retailer under Amazon. They offer a ultra-generous 365-day, free two-way shipping

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If you are not 100% satisfied with your purchase for any reason, just go through our easy online return process, or call us 24/7 at (800) 927-7671 to print out a **FREE** return label.

You have **365 DAYS TO RETURN*** an item to us in its original condition.

*Returns must be un worn, in the state you received them, and in the original packaging. Some items ship with an attached security tag. Merchandise returned without the original security tag attached or a damaged tag may not qualify for a refund.

and return that invites customers to orders shoes, try them on at home and send them back if they don't want to buy them.

Zappos believe that customer service is their new marketing strategy. Their well managed and operated, return policy actually drives growth. Infact their top customers who purchase the company's most expensive footwear actually return 50% of everything they buy. The margins made on these expensive footwear offset the added shipping costs and returns. Thus their best customers who have the highest return rate were the ones who spend the most money and therefore are their downright most profitable customers.

Therefore in conclusion, retailers need to work hard to retain customers, and a free returns policy is one way to achieve this. One greatest motivator for online purchase is if the customer knows that they can return them if they don't like the product. If the return charges are steep or unexpected, or they have to inconvenient themselves to return the item, then this negative experience is held against the retailer and their products, online and offline. Retailers can charge shipping cost for cheaper items to deter customers from returning them but on the expensive ones it should be factored in. Hence, **Retailers need to tradeoff the cost of covering returns charges against the risk of losing customers.**

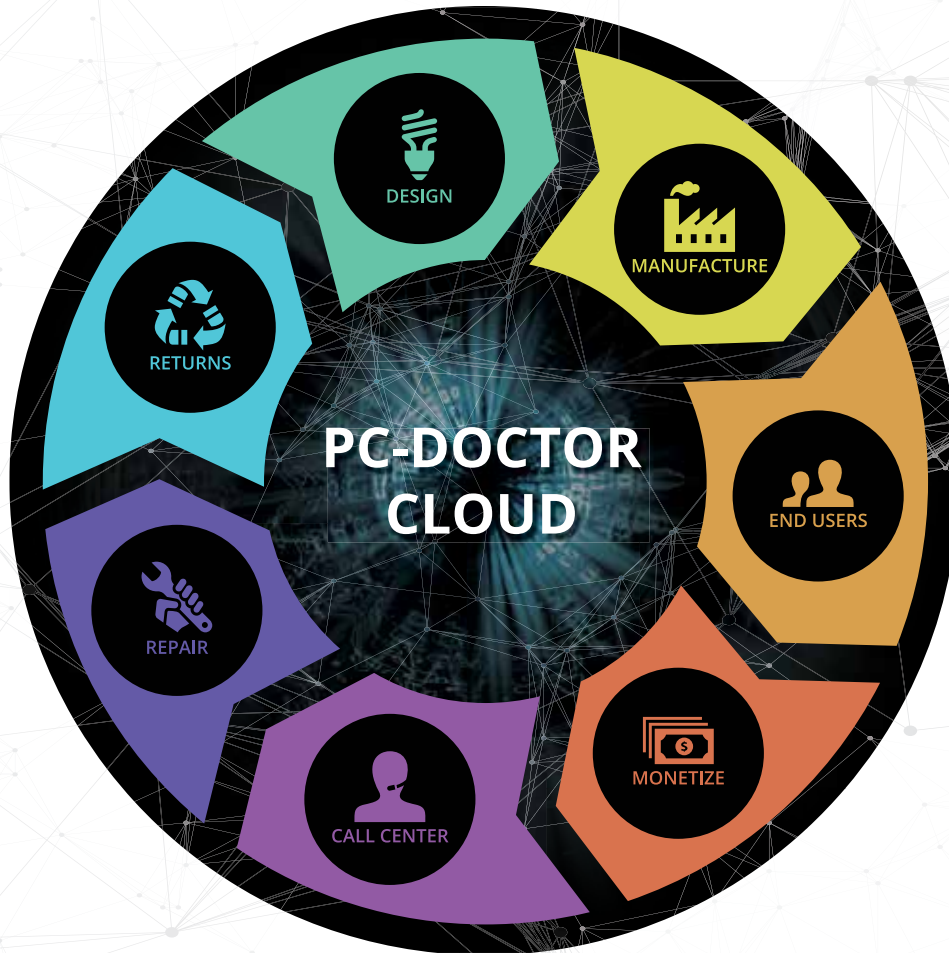


Dr. Sunnanda Panda, logistics professional with a PhD in reverse Logistics. Founder and CEO of RevLog Resources, India



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How do Consumers Choose Between Multiple Product Generations and Conditions? An Empirical Study of iPad Sales on eBay.

By Mark Ferguson, Michael Galbreth, Guangzhi Shang

Many companies are reluctant to enter the remanufacturing market because of concern with cannibalization of new sales, competition from current remanufacturers, and the willingness of consumers to purchase remanufactured products. What is often missing, however, is an in-depth understanding of how consumers make complex purchase decisions involving remanufactured items among numerous other options. This study examines how consumers evaluate remanufactured products when there are multiple conditions and generations of the item available, and evaluates the risk that remanufactured products pose to new product sales. We leverage transaction data of iPad sales from eBay because this is one of the few platforms where a product is sold side-by-side with competing versions of the same product but in different conditions and by different sellers.

We find that the generation of the product (first, second, third generation), condition, and seller attributes are all highly influential in shaping consumers' purchasing decisions and that the relationship between new and remanufactured products is much more nuanced and context-specific than previously shown. Counter to

industry intuition, we find that remanufactured products pose the same amount of threat to new-condition goods as do used goods of the same product. This leads us to conclude that remanufactured products carry almost no additional risk of cannibalizing new product sales than does the always present used product market. Through these and other findings, we provide insights on how manufacturers and other organizations exploring entry into the remanufacturing business may achieve more profitable remanufacturing strategies.

The above is a condensed summary of McKie, E., Ferguson, M., Galbreth, M. and S. Venkataraman, 2018, "How Consumers Choose Between Multiple Product Generations and Conditions" *Production and Operations Management* 27(8), 1574-1594

An online copy of the paper can be found here:
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/poms.12884>

¹ This recurring series provides plain-English summaries of leading academic research in the area of consumer returns. It is co-produced by Mark Ferguson (Univ. of South Carolina), Michael Galbreth (Univ. of Tennessee), and Guangzhi Shang (Florida State Univ.).





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Leveraging Logistics into Improved Customer Satisfaction and Competitive Advantage

By Bill Pollock, President & Principal Consulting Analyst at Strategies For GrowthSM, SFG

ARTICLE

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION



Logistics is crucial to every business - but it is not an end unto itself. In fact, the most successful organizations are those that can leverage their logistics capabilities to provide customers with exactly what they want - and expect - while, at the same time, creating and maintaining a competitive advantage wherever possible. However, this will require a good understanding of how to use both the real - and perceived - benefits of logistics to enhance the organization's customer service capabilities, as well as its overall competitive market position.

WHAT IS LOGISTICS?

Logistics World defines logistics as "having the right thing, at the right place, at the right time". Webster's Dictionary defines it as "the procurement, maintenance, distribution, and replacement of personnel and materiel". The Indian Institute of Materials Management (IIMM) defines it as "forming the system that ensures the delivery of the product in the entire supply pipeline", and the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP) defines it as "the process of planning, implementing, and controlling the efficient, effective flow and storage of goods, services, and related information from point of origin to point of consumption for the purpose of conforming to customer requirements".

These are all good definitions, but what is logistics? Really? Is it moving the right things, to the right place,

at the right time? Nothing more than procurement, maintenance, distribution & replacement? A system for the entire supply pipeline? Or, simply a process that conforms to customer requirements? Well, the short answer is: it's all of these, tied together into an all-encompassing process. As such, we prefer to define logistics as "a process and tool for moving goods, services and information between the supplier and its customers, resulting in increased customer satisfaction and competitive performance."

EFFECTIVE LOGISTICS CAN IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Satisfaction occurs when logistics services meet or exceed customer expectations. Customers care more about having their product, service and support requirements met, and much less about how you do it. What customers really want is to have their voices heard - and then, to have something done about it; i.e., they want to see results.

Logistics performance is really about the 2 Q's: **Quantity & Quality:**

- For Quantity, it is about the delivery fulfillment rate; a low fulfillment rate implies a high volume of complaints and a long list of dissatisfied customers. Quantity is, in fact, the basic requirement.
- For Quality, it is about the order to be delivered



within the agreed time window, and the overall responsiveness of the organization, etc. Quality comprises the extra values that ultimately impress the customers and keep them loyal to the enterprise.

Many companies use logistics as a market differentiator. The intent is to keep customers so satisfied with their services, that they remain loyal, repurchasing the product and/or service again, and again, and again. However, customer satisfaction may be viewed either as transaction-specific or cumulative: In the former, the emphasis is on the customer's evaluation of a specific product/service transaction (i.e., product sale, service event, part order, etc.). However, in the latter, the evaluation is based on the customer's total purchase and usage experience with the company's products, services and support over time (i.e., the "total customer experience"). Firms that also integrate new technologies, such as remote diagnostics, predictive diagnostics, connected services, etc., into their logistics offerings are generally more likely to establish and maintain strong customer relationships over time as a result of their technology-enhanced capabilities.

THE LOGISTICS/CUSTOMER SATISFACTION CONNECTION

Past market research has shown that customers believe the following logistics-related attributes to be of the greatest importance:

- Availability of the product/parts
- On-time delivery/improved reliability
- Completeness/accuracy of orders
- Products/parts arriving undamaged and according to spec
- Efficient and frequent communications
- Reduced inventory levels/paperwork
- Value-added service and support (e.g., inventory management/planning, etc.)
- Ability to place/track orders via the Internet

However, for there to truly be a "bond", or "partnership", between the provider and its customers, there must first be the following shared attributes:

- Mutually high expectations for the success of the partnership
- Mutual loyalty (at least, at the beginning)
- Framework/capability for technical data/

information exchange (e.g., EDI)

- Willingness to share risks/provide assistance in critical situations
- Willingness to negotiate/mediate differences of opinion/interpretation
- Use of joint provider/user task forces/teams
- Two-way, frequent communications and feedback channels
- Joint performance monitoring and tracking (i.e., against pre-set goals)

USING LOGISTICS TO BUILD COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE

Staying ahead of the logistics/customer service curve requires the following:

1. Listening to, and capturing, the "voice of the customer"; knowing what delights and pains the customer, and maintaining an ongoing dialogue.
2. Thinking ahead of the customer; anticipating its wants and needs before it even does itself.
3. Realizing you cannot build a wall around your customer; and never assuming that just because your company is already embedded in the customer, they'll stay with you forever.
4. Appealing to your customers on both an intellectual and emotional level; making them think they made a good choice and they feel good about it.
5. Cherishing your good reputation and doing everything you can to keep it strong.

The more you know about your customers, the more responsive you can be to their logistics needs and requirements. Being a partner with your customers will allow you to be the kind of responsive and interactive logistics provider that they are seeking - and one upon which they feel they can ultimately rely on for "total customer support".



Bill Pollock is President & Principal Consulting Analyst at Strategies For GrowthSM (SFGSM), the independent research analyst and consulting firm he founded in 1992. Bill is a prolific author and speaker on all things service, and a long-time contributor to Field Service Digital. For more information, Bill may be reached at (610) 399-9717, or via email at wkp@s4growth.com. Bill's blog is accessible at www.PollockOnService.com and via Twitter at www.twitter.com/SFGOnService.

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What's up RLA?

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Think Customer Journey Mapping to Hit Your Service Delivery Bullseye

By Dennis Gershowitz, Founder and Principal of DG Associates

ARTICLE



A while back, I was working with a client who among other responsibilities is responsible for a sizeable Repair and Return facility. In this case instruments are returned by customers, repaired, forwarded back to the customer and, if needed, loaners are shipped and utilized during the repair process. Pretty straight forward or, at least you would think so. Not at all, logistic issues, turnaround time challenges, return and recycle loaner challenges, etc. And, my client, meaning well, attacked these issues as they arose. But, what was missing was an overall strategy and roadmap that aligned itself, not with my client's needs, but with the needs and expectations of their customers.

So, we agreed to take on a Customer Journey Mapping (CJM) effort. Why? Well, if you understand CJM, you would not ask and if you do not, I will explain why. CJM is a very effective tool to illustrate what customers truly want through a real world experience of service delivery, product involvement, and at many times the combination of both. The more touch points within a customer experience, the more detailed the map. The purpose of CJM is to understand service delivery from start to finish and before start to after finish and identify the barriers to success, so that companies can improve these processes and deliver customer success.

CJM provides an opportunity to gather valuable information that forms a foundation for an improved

customer experience. Taking the time to completely understand the path the customer will take including staff and role interfaces, related metrics and business challenges they face along the way, CJM showcases the customer experience. The key is to develop the CJM from the customer's perspective. The result is a transformed plan of action with very specific outcomes, optimized services, and customer satisfaction, all of this having been thoroughly thought through.

Ask yourself, do you really have a customer experience (CX) strategy in place for your Repair Return Function? Think about how often you may fail to deliver a quality customer experience regardless the investment made. It's clear in my recent experience that the process had never been thoroughly vetted from a customer's perspective, which is where the CJM process was so useful and effective. This was evidenced by the complexity of our having to weave through multiple barriers to resolution and poor execution on the company's behalf.

THE PATH TO DELIVERING SUCCESSFUL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES BEGINS WITH UNDERSTANDING THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY AND THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

As I have coached and presented numerous times, delivering the customer experience is more challenging than one realizes. Organizations learn that there is much more to the job of engaging and retaining customers

than just putting something in place and moving on to the next challenge. While they may recognize the need to provide easy and rewarding experiences, they are challenged with designing, developing, executing, and delivering an integrated customer experience strategy. In fact, too many still do not walk the journey from their customer's view.



KNOW HOW TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROCESS

The challenge is to move your game to the next level by taking an approach which links strategy, vision, measurements, technology, organization, engagement, etc. And, at the same time, nail down the customer outcomes and design around this.

I strongly recommend CJM as a powerful tool of choice. CJM is a proven tool allowing you to focus on the customers' experiences with your company. This way, you learn more about your customer, how they define success, how to deliver success and how to make them happy while growing your profits.

To move from delivering a good experience to a better or great experience requires that you set aside past practices and thinking and consider some changes...for example, these are some questions to begin with:

1. Have your processes been customer journey mapped?
2. Have the barriers to successful performance been identified and removed?
3. Has the journey map allowed a good look at your internal technology and is it easy to use and does it make the right information available to the right people when they need it?
4. Is there organizational alignment?
5. Has the journey map added clarity to your rules of channel engagement?
6. Has the journey map provided the clarity to demonstrate why your silos must melt away and set the course for a mindset that foregoes silo thinking to facilitating customer success?

MY TAKEAWAY

Depending on how you answer these questions will give you the insight on whether a process is built on a house of cards like too many businesses or built to execute and demonstrate a team capable of delivering that customer loyalty building experience or, as I like to say, that Aha customer moment, one that delights your customer as you deliver customer success.

There are many benefits to CJM. Don't miss out on this useful tool.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dennis Gershowitz is the founder and principal of DG Associates, a consulting firm that specializes in driving service revenues and profits through the development and implementation of customer experience management (CEM) strategy and service operations improvements. Dennis can be reached at dennisg@dgassociates.net or 914-552-7827



How Outsourcing Logistics Can Help Ecommerce Merchants Manage Returns This Holiday Season

By Dhruv Saxena, CEO, ShipBob

ARTICLE



For ecommerce sellers, the returns process can make or break the customer experience. There are several aspects of the returns process that affect customer perception of a brand or online store. In this article, we will discuss the ways in which [returns affect the customer experience](#), particularly during the holiday shopping season. We will also discuss how outsourcing logistics can improve the customer experience during the busiest ecommerce season of the year.

48 percent of shoppers' report having returned an online purchase in the last year, with apparel being the most commonly returned product category^[1]. With so many shoppers returning online purchases manually, offering a good customer experience throughout the returns process is vital for online sellers: 95 percent of shoppers who are happy with the returns process said they intend to purchase with the same retailer again^[1].

On the other hand, shoppers who are unhappy with the returns process are three times more likely to never purchase from that retailer again^[1].

MEETING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

The returns experience begins before a shopper completes a purchase from an ecommerce website or marketplace: 49 percent of shoppers actively check an ecommerce retailer's return policy before buying^[1], and 18 percent of shoppers will abandon their items at checkout because the return policy is unsatisfactory^[2].

To that end, the first step to create an excellent returns experience for a customer is to create a return policy that meets expectations. The top two consumer concerns about the process? Restocking fees and return shipping fees — avoiding these fees can encourage more shoppers to purchase with the knowledge they will have access to free returns^[1].

Once you have the returned product in-hand, make sure your process includes quickly refunding or crediting the customer. 72 percent of online customers expect a refund credit within just five days of returning merchandise; 88 percent of customers would limit or stop shopping with a merchant that took too long to credit the refund^[3].



HANDLING HOLIDAY RETURNS

Creating a best-in-class returns experience for your customers becomes especially important during and immediately following the busy holiday shopping season. Holiday return rates are two percent higher than the rest of the year, with one out of every three gift recipients returning at least one item during the holiday season^[4].

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Return volumes peak the first week of January, with an estimated 1.4 million packages returned on January 3, and a total of five million packages returned to retailers throughout the week^[5]. With such a pronounced increase in return volume, it is imperative that ecommerce businesses manage returns strategically. Those who typically manage returns in-

house may find themselves unable to keep up with the influx in return shipments that follow the holiday rush.

OUTSOURCING LOGISTICS

Many ecommerce businesses outsource their logistics — including inventory management, order fulfillment, and returns — to third-party logistics providers, or 3PLs. While order and return volume may be manageable in-house for the rest of the year, the benefits during the ecommerce busy season can make developing a year-round partnership with a 3PL worthwhile.

An unprecedented return volume over the holidays and at the start of the new year can cause ecommerce businesses to fall behind and find themselves beginning the new year by playing catch up. Growing ecommerce companies may reach a point at which they cannot handle both processing returns and fulfilling new orders in-house.

Outsourcing logistics to a 3PL can help merchants streamline the returns process by offering a designated staff to receive, assess, and process each item that is returned to the provider's warehouse. The scale at which 3PLs operate on a daily basis allows them to leverage experience and industry best practices, making them best prepared to handle peak ecommerce season, manage returns, and much more.

During and after peak season, 3PL companies can help ecommerce companies scale at a rate they may not have been able to on their own by automating nearly

the entire logistics process. This includes providing the transparency and integrations mentioned above — features that are essential, especially during the returns process, to creating a customer experience that encourages brand loyalty and repeat shoppers.

3PLs can provide the end customer with tracking information for their return shipments. Some providers may also feature integrations that allow them to send automatic text alerts to customers once their return has been received and refunded.

Partnering with a third party to manage logistics for the holidays and weeks following may be an expense ecommerce merchants are unprepared to take on; however, some retailers may find that the benefits are worth the cost, especially when the opportunity cost of spending time processing hundreds of returns in-house is taken into account.

Whether a merchant chooses to outsource logistics or keep operations in-house, the data shared above proves that a strong returns policy and process can have a significant positive impact on the customer experience — especially during and immediately following the holidays.

SOURCES:

- [1] [Making Returns a Competitive Advantage](#), Narvar, June 2017
- [2] [11 of the Best Ecommerce Stats from 2018 \(So Far\)](#), Salecycle, July 2018
- [3] [Slow returns processing will keep customers away](#), Internet Retailer, October 2016
- [4] [2015 Consumer Returns in the Retail Industry](#), National Retail Federation, December 2015
- [5] [Return to Santa: Consumers are sending more than a million packages a day back to retailers, says UPS](#), CNBC, December 2017

ABOUT AUTHOR



Dhruv Saxena is the CEO of ShipBob, a technology company that streamlines shipping and fulfillment for ecommerce businesses. Saxena co-founded ShipBob in May 2014 with Divey Gulati, out of Y Combinator. Prior to ShipBob, he spent five years as a software developer at InContext Solutions and was also an engineer at Lincoln Electronic. Saxena holds both an MS and BS in Electrical Engineering from Purdue University.



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Relevance of Branding in Reverse Logistics

By Kristin Hurst, Director of Marketing & Communications, Encompass *RLA Bronze Member*

ARTICLE



To many in the reverse logistics industry, a brand is just a logo – a basic design element imprinted on stationery and tradeshow giveaways. But a brand should be much more than merely artwork on a ballcap. When developed thoughtfully, it should serve as the flag for a reverse logistics business in the same way as a flag stands for a country.

BRAND AWARENESS

A company's brand should unite its employees and forge connection with customers. It should convey value messaging and instill positive perception among target audiences. Anything less is a missed opportunity. Reverse logistics organizations that have given little thought to their brand lately may want to step back and take some time to reflect on whether it is still relevant and has evolved with their overall business strategy.

Branding in the context of the reverse supply chain is just as important as the forward – if not more so. When something inevitably goes wrong with a product, consumers must have the confidence and trust in the brand that everything will be made right on the back end.

Those willing to stand behind a brand with generous return times, hassle free policies or other positive gestures are likely to be rewarded with all-important future purchases. Those preferring to play hardball may lose the loyalty of customers who feel unsupported,

abandoned and ultimately burned by their buying decision.

VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

If it's time to update your branding, customers must be at the forefront of the development process. Their voice and perceptions are critical components of creating an identity that will form a connection and help instill loyalty. Some possible questions to consider asking customers as part of a brand reboot:

- How do you perceive Company X – what do you like about doing business with them? What don't you like?
- What is Company X's greatest value to you as a customer?
- If you could change one thing about how Company X operates, what would it be?
- What is your interaction like with Company X employees?
- If you choose to do business with one of Company X's competitors, what are the main factors?

The voice of the customer can help a business discover strengths and weaknesses it may never have thought of previously. Rebranding in a vacuum deprives the process of valuable feedback that could be leveraged as a guiding light to a successful development and transition.

Reverse Logistics Association has partnered with SmartBrief to launch RLA SmartBrief, a newsletter specifically designed for returns and reverse industry professionals

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Report: Majority of companies handle returns themselves
When dealing with returns, 63% of companies reported that they handled the process in-house, 40% used a third-party logistics provider, according to a survey run by Chris Cunnane and DC Velocity. To cover the costs associated with returns, 31% of those polled said they charge consumers for returns.
[Logistics Viewpoints blog](#) (8/16)
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INDUSTRY UPDATE

Consider using ADR to assess vehicle reconditioning
Measuring efficiency in terms of average days in recon can provide clearer insight into the costs waste in vehicle reconditioning, writes Rapid Recon CEO Dennis McGinn. Unlike time-to-market benchmarks, ADR focuses solely on the time a vehicle spends in reconditioning.
[WardsAuto](#) (8/14)
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Is a circular model right for your company?
Circular economy actions can be good for the environment, but companies must be sure they can handle, financially and otherwise, the ability to collect and repurpose old products, write Luk Van Wassenhove and Patricia van Loon. They offer a model for calculating the total costs associated

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Denso among founders of Automotive Edge Computing Consortium
Toyota and Intel have partnered with three other companies to form the Automotive Edge Computing Consortium, with the goal of using data for connective services technology. Others to join the group are Japanese auto-parts manufacturer Denso, Swiss telecommunications company Ericsson and Japanese telecommunications firm NTT DoCoMo.
[Reuters](#) (8/10), [TechCrunch](#) (8/11)
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RLA NEWS

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The challenge with this approach is that a business must actually be dedicated to “living” the brand promise going forward. If an asset recovery business’ new brand is intended to convey environmentally-conscious procedures, it must have the operational procedures in place to make this happen day in and day out.

REAL WORLD REBRANDING

Encompass Supply Chain Solutions, Inc. – a leading provider of repair parts, 3PL and 4PL services and member of the Reverse Logistics Association – just launched a new brand, replacing its original identifier with a fresh, energetic design and color scheme, as well as a descriptive tagline: Simply Parts™.

This rebranding was the result of extensive analysis and customer feedback. Its former identifier had been viewed as too complex, lethargic, staid and cold – all negative attributes for a company flag. The new brand is designed to be more friendly, progressive, easy and modern.

“Simply Parts” is intended to help streamline messaging of the company’s broad services, manufacturer brands and customer segments down to its core business: everything Encompass offers to customers revolves around parts in some way – from supply chain management to distribution to reverse logistics.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The importance of company employees to executing an effective rebranding initiative cannot be emphasized enough. It is vital for staff at every level of an organization to embrace the brand – their flag. They must understand its value messaging and strive to deliver on its customer service promise every day. After all, a flag is meaningless without people behind it to drive its principles.

Comprehensive, effective communication is key to minimizing confusion and engaging customers and

employees with a new brand. Both audiences should be provided with the rationale behind the change, so they understand that the purpose is deeper than just a slick new logo design.

As a company flag, branding must connect and resonate with both the employees who carry it daily and the customers who keep it alive. And it should help foster customer loyalty by delivering on the promises it represents.

Otherwise, a brand really is as worthless as a logo on a T-shirt.



Kristin Hurst joined Encompass in 2009 and is responsible for marketing, sales support, public relations and internal communications efforts for the company. She has nearly 30 years of experience in the marketing and communications field. Most recently, she served as Director of Brand & Communications for HD Supply, a \$10 billion wholesale distributor and spin-off division of The Home Depot.

Previous to HD Supply, Kristin was Content Manager and Account Executive for Inline Marketing, an agency specializing in technology clients. She also served as Corporate Communications Manager for Star Systems, the country’s leading ATM/debit network, and as a staff writer in the Public Relations Department of Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla.

She began her career as a staff writer for the Osceola News-Gazette where she was recognized with numerous journalism awards from the Florida Press Association. Kristin earned a B.A. degree in English with concentration in Communications from Florida Southern College



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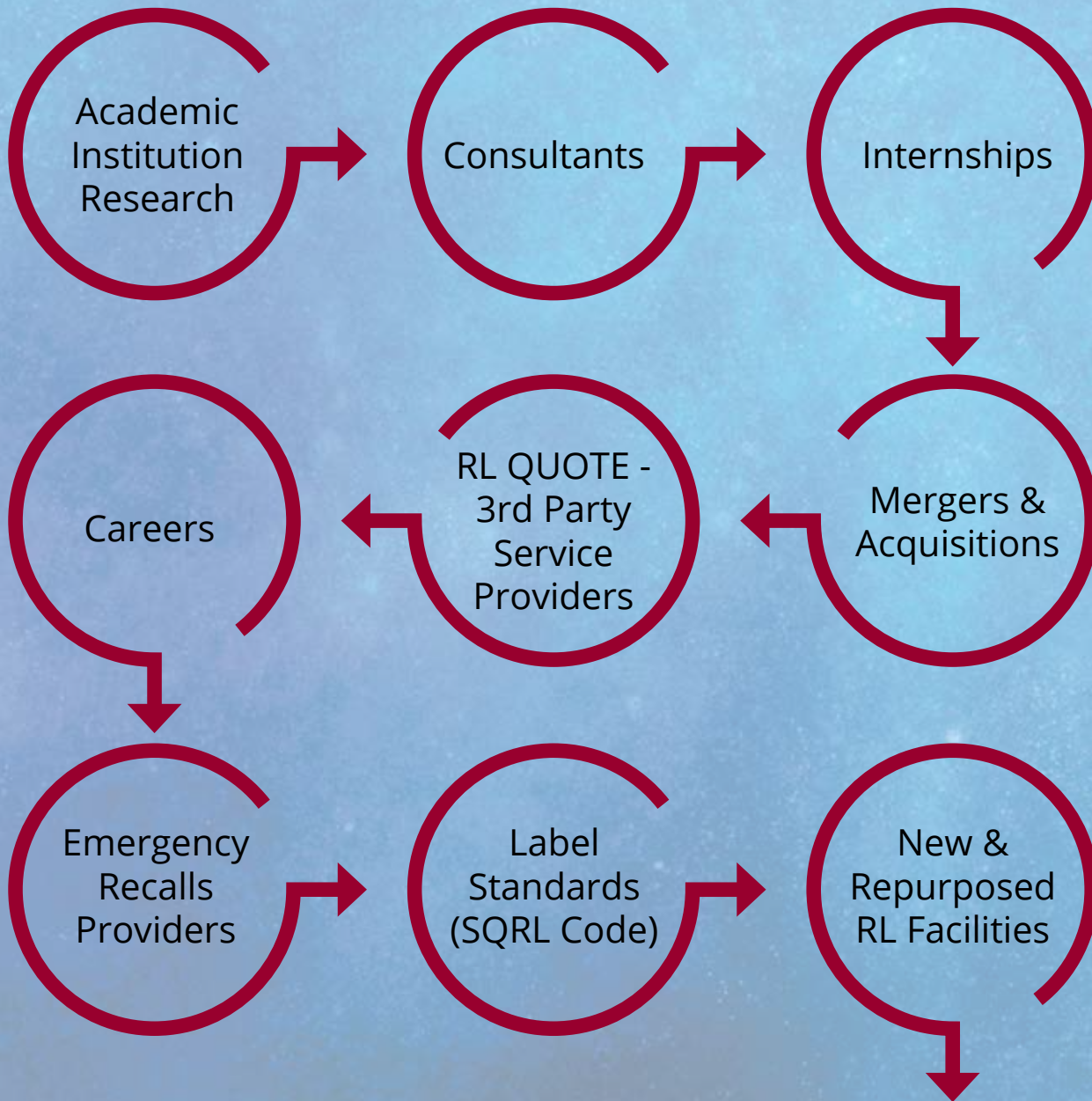
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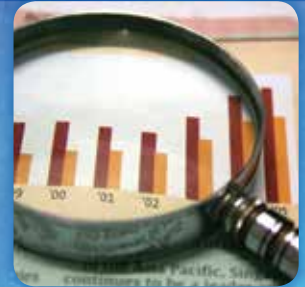
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THIRD PARTY SERVICE PROVIDERS (3PSP)

RL Quote connects you to the companies that need what you offer.

- At this very moment, [*RFIs*](#) are waiting for your response!
- RL Quote takes the hassle out of finding the right customers for your business.
- There simply isn't a more cost effective way to meet new customers and grow your business.
- Get started by downloading the [*RL Quote 3PSP Agreement*](#)

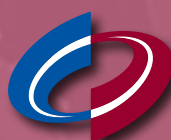
RL SOLUTIONS

We help YOU connect to . . .

- Academic Institution Research
- Careers
- Consultants
- Emergency Recalls Providers
- Internships
- Label Standards (SQRRL Code)
- Mergers & Acquisitions
- New & Repurposed RL Facilities
- RL QUOTE - 3rd Party Service Providers

We are the Association that specializes in Reverse Logistics and we have found that many Manufacturers, Retailers & 3PSPs spend a lot of time, energy and money trying to find a partner. So, we have developed a way to facilitate your search at NO COST to you, while you remain anonymous. And, we call it RL Solutions.

RL Solutions™ Confidential and FREE for RLA members.



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