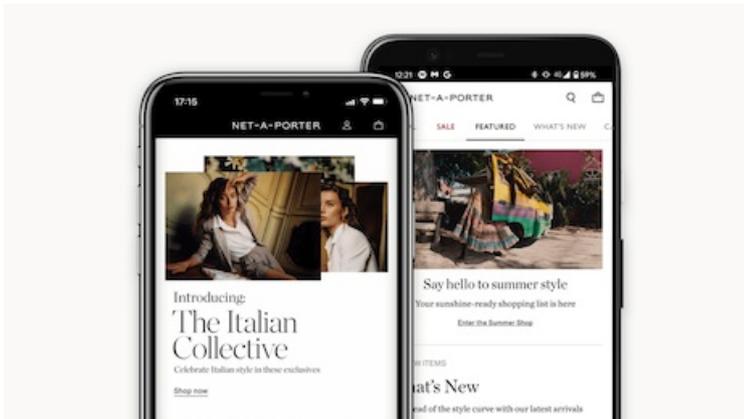


RETAIL

## Retailers must improve online returns, data security to build trust

February 22, 2021



Online shopping still has pain points for many consumers. Image credit: Net-A-Porter

By SARAH RAMIREZ

With the surge of online and mobile shopping, retailers must make sure to deliver quality shopping experiences that build trust and loyalty with consumers.

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According to a report from software platform SOTI, more than half of shopping agreed that a negative online shopping experience would destroy their trust in a brand. Per the "[From Bricks to Clicks: State of Mobility in Retail 2021 Report](#)," more than six in 10 shoppers also want the returns process to be easier.

"The pandemic accelerated the consumer shift from offline to online, and because of this, retailers can't risk a bad shopping experience," said Ryan Webber, senior vice president of enterprise mobility at **SOTI**, Mississauga, Canada. "When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many businesses were still relying on legacy handheld technology and paper and pen processes, which unfortunately delayed the online shopping experience when the consumer needed it the most.

"Over the past year retailers have had to invest heavily in tech modernization to meet increased demands of customer experience, delivery and transaction velocity, and online/in-store experience in this new normal," he said.

The report is based on interviews with 6,000 interviews across the United States, Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Sweden and Australia.

### Shopper expectations

Shoppers are more comfortable with retailers that balance convenience with security. Top priorities for consumers including visibility of product shipping, easier returns processes and expanded in-store safety features.

"Following a surge in online holiday sales and new at-home expectations in 2020, consumers expect the best online experience from the moment they enter a brand's site to when their package arrives at their doorstep," Mr. Webber said. "Retailers realized the need to futureproof their business and service by automating and connecting their in-store devices."

For instance, two-thirds of respondents said they wanted "real-time visibility" into the location of their purchase once

an online order is processed.

Speed and convenience are also concerns for online shoppers. If delivery or pickup of an item are expected to take more than two days, 38 percent of consumers will look elsewhere.

However, in the case that an online purchase merits a return, 63 percent of consumers want the process to be easier and preferably automated.

As it is, more than half of respondents, 57 percent, are frustrated by several aspects of online shopping including shipping, delivery and returns.

Trust and security are also important components of online shopping.

Almost six in 10 shoppers, 59 percent, trust large and well-known online retailers to secure their personal and payment data, but a bad shopping experience would destroy trust in that brand. Forty-eight percent of consumers have also abandoned a purchase because they did not trust a retailer with their payment details.

In addition to using technology to improve online shopping, retailers should also leverage these resources to improve in-store experiences.

Thirty-eight percent of consumers are more likely to return to a store that offers better technological experiences, up from 25 percent in 2019.

More than six in 10 respondents, 62 percent, also expect stores to continue using screens at checkout counters, hand sanitizer stations and other COVID-19 safety protocols such as contact tracing after the pandemic.

Site updates

High-end and luxury retailers are increasingly investing in their ecommerce sites to improve customer experience.

In August 2020, British department store Fortnum & Mason is debuting a new website that emphasizes its commitment to service and convenience.

New features include expanded payment options, improved order management and wish lists. Shoppers with an account on the Fortnum & Mason website can more easily manage their orders, including tracking and returning purchases ([see story](#)).

Department store Saks Fifth Avenue launched a new website in October 2020, marking the first comprehensive website redesign from the retailer in several years. Using Salesforce Commerce Cloud, saks.com now emphasizes fashion, convenience and personalization while ensuring flexibility for future enhancements.

The site allows customers to add items directly to their carts or "Wish List" from a variety of products, while product pages now feature a stylized "Complete the Look" section with the ability to add items directly to cart. Additional filtering options, such as buy-online-pickup-in-store (BOPIS), same-day delivery, preorder and currently available are also offered to provide a more convenient shopping experience ([see story](#)).

"If the retail sector wants to move to a multichannel, always-connected consumer experience, it needs to tackle trust," SOTI's Mr. Webber said. "Nearly half of consumers worry about their privacy, proving it remains critical for both high-end and smaller retailers to invest in solutions that protect vulnerable endpoints against malware designed to steal sensitive data during an influx of online activity."