

Customer Returns Best Practices

1. ***The returns process offers a great opportunity to showcase your customer service.*** How you treat your customers during the returns process impacts overall customer satisfaction. The returns process also offers an opportunity to earn an additional sale.
2. ***Make your returns process and execution easy to understand.*** Whether they are checking before purchase, or finding out how to return an item they've just received, the policy should be clear and easy to understand. Showcase the returns policy online in an easy to find location, and ensure the links are prominent. Ensure you have a returns or customer service number for users to contact you directly.
3. ***Your online returns process should be intuitive and self-service.*** Your online returns process should be easy to understand and you should offer a self-service option. Create an online returns portal that allows users to pick and choose the product (or recent order / purchase) they'd like to return, and allow for a simple returns process that is sync'd with the carrier's return processing. Include features like the ability to print return label.
4. ***If possible, offer various return options.*** Coordinate with your carriers to offer various options for online returns: drop-off locations, pick-up (for a fee), and contact information for various carrier locations.
5. ***Don't quibble over returns.*** Customers may return items for various reasons, and may even blame the company for mistakes when it was the customers' own fault. Don't be too strict when customers call in for a return, and be cognizant that return rates should be baked into overall revenue, margin and bottom line.
6. ***Make your search query highly visible and accessible to the customer.*** A customer should be able to access your search function quickly and effortlessly. Do not make them hunt for it. Display it at the same place on every page, with the exception of checkout. Test different positions on page to see which is most effective.
7. ***Create an automated feedback system when customer returns an item.*** Whether it be an online form in the returns self-service portal, or via an automated follow-up email, make sure you obtain user data around their purpose for return, and how they felt the return process was executed. The easiest way to do this is via a drop-down selection that allows the user to quickly select their purpose for returns and returns experience.
8. ***Provide multi-channel returns, if you are an omnichannel retailer.*** If you have a digital and brick and mortar presence, think about providing the ability for online products to be returned in your physical stores. Having one central pool of inventory and allowing for inventory to be attributed to different channels creates a cross-channel returns strategy.
9. ***Keep customers updated and informed of their return.*** Let customers know when you've received the item, and when their original payment method will be processed with a refund. This helps with customer retention.
10. ***Utilize internal software to track returns management and restocking of product.*** Ensure that accounting upholds returned inventory and that returned items are accurately booked in and re-stocked. This can be managed by your warehouse management system, or your analytics tool (like Google Analytics), or any other third party returns processing system.
11. ***Fully automate returns.*** Build a technology stack that allows you to fully automate the returns process as much as possible to avoid costly customer service calls maintained by human employees (human capital is more expensive than automated returns) and for the automated restocking of products.
12. ***Allow customers to get a replacement item instead of returning the product.*** If you are a retailer of other brands, it may be less expensive to ask a customer to order a replacement item (paid for by the brand / vendor) rather than paying for the shipping costs of the original return product and writing off the order and product as a return.

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