The Last Mile
Exploring the online purchasing and delivery journey
Introduction

The movement of goods between a transport hub to a delivery address, commonly known as The Last Mile, is becoming increasingly competitive and innovative. Strong relationships between retailers and logistics providers have never been more important in ensuring positive experiences for end consumers.

An evolving industry

The online purchasing and delivery markets are growing, and with order numbers increasing rapidly, the use of tablet and mobile devices is driving round-the-clock purchasing habits. As a result, retailers are under pressure to both manage their stock and provide efficient delivery in terms of speed, price, service and quality.

Innovation

A competitive delivery market is driving carriers to continuously review their proposition with investment in technology and innovation, providing more delivery options and quality services for their consumers.

Service standards are continuing to improve through advances in technology offered by both retailers and delivery providers. Recent news coverage has focused on delivery innovations, with delivery drones – unmanned aerial vehicles capable of delivering packages – being a key area of interest for many retailers, logistics providers and consumers.

Retailers are still being challenged to find solutions to support increasing demand for delivery. Click & Collect options can save costs for retailers managing logistics in-house; however, traditional bricks-and-mortar stores may struggle to maintain a single stock view, incurring costs when online purchases are being moved from a central depot to a store unnecessarily.

Within the logistics industry, it is clear that the winners in this growing market will be those that can add value to the retailer by offering flexibility of delivery, state-of-the-art technology and efficient return services.

Supporting your business

This report analyses The Last Mile, from the viewpoint of consumers, retailers and logistics providers, along with proposing strategies that members of the delivery chain may want to consider when tailoring their services.

We hope to support you in understanding this increasingly changing industry, so that you can maximise the opportunities within the online sales and delivery market.
Section one: the market landscape

In 2013, products ordered online generated just over one billion deliveries. By 2018, this number is expected to grow by 28.8% to 1.35 billion.

Unsurprisingly, clothing and footwear sales will continue to generate the largest online volumes, growing by nearly 50% between 2013 and 2018.

By 2018, food orders are anticipated to exceed deliveries and downloads of books. A result of this trend will be that supermarkets and online grocery retailers will need to prepare for an increasingly competitive and busy online market and ensure that their delivery provisions are equipped for increased volumes.

Interestingly, sports goods will remain the least popular of all online orders, which could be a result of consumers wanting to test products before purchase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Type</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Total number of deliveries (m) generated by online orders by product type
| Clothing and footwear | 255.7 | 244.5 |
| Music and film        | 244.5 | 169.6 |
| Food                  | 169.6 | 158.5 |
| Books                 | 244.5 | 186.3 |
| Health and beauty     | 186.3 | 133.7 |
| Electricals           | 133.7 | 133.9 |
| Other                 | 133.9 | 161.3 |
| Homewares             | 161.3 | 150   |
| Toys                  | 150   | 105   |
| DIY and gardening     | 105   | 65.1  |
| Sport                 | 65.1  | 60.8  |

Where a parcel contains more than one product type, it is grouped under the product that constitutes the highest proportion of the overall order value. A food delivery is taken as being one parcel. The other segment includes: furniture, flooring, musical instruments, stationery, and news products.
The regional market

Across all UK regions the fastest growth rate over the next five years will occur in typically rural areas, whilst highly populated regions in close proximity to large retail centres will see lower growth levels.

Research has shown that the Eastern region is set to see an impressive 35.4% growth rate of online orders by 2018, closely followed by Wales and the South West. Indeed, after London and the South East, the North West is predicted to generate the largest numbers of orders in 2018. Conversely, more urban areas, such as London, the South East and the Midlands, are set to see slower growth rates.

In recent years, high-speed internet penetration has not been as common in rural areas, but as internet providers continue to improve services across the UK, web surfing has become faster and more reliable for many rural consumers. These advances are allowing countryside shoppers to take advantage of online opportunities and reducing the need to drive far afield to larger, urban retail sites.
Delivery methods in the UK

The total number of physical deliveries is expected to increase by over 40% between 2013 and 2018; however, the percentage of direct deliveries, which are those specifically to the consumer’s address, is predicted to fall.

Deliveries direct to a consumer’s address are set to decrease from 72.3% to just over 64% of total physical deliveries by 2018, whilst Click & Collect volumes are anticipated to rise from 26.1% to just under 35%. This growth may be a result of consumer collection services offering shoppers a more manageable and often cheaper solution to daytime delivery. As this option can often minimise costs for retailers too, it may be that Click & Collect will be promoted more significantly, ensuring that consumers are aware of the service.

Unexpectedly, by 2018 the number of digital deliveries is also predicted to decrease by over 60% – perhaps a result of the number of subscription services, such as Netflix and Spotify, which encourage consumers to stream goods from online libraries rather than download them.

Growth of all deliveries generated by online orders, across physical deliveries and digital downloads*, between 2013 and 2018

*Direct deliveries are to your home/workplace. Physical deliveries are all deliveries made to a physical location, incorporating Click & Collect and Collect+. Digital deliveries are specifically online downloads.
Packaging in the UK

In 2013, letterbox-sized packages and small parcels made up 59.5% of all deliveries from orders made online.

Our research shows that deliveries of letterbox-sized packages are set to see the highest growth by 2018. A number of retailers are working with logistics companies to decrease the size of packaging, providing numerous benefits for both the consumer and the retailer. Packages that can fit through a recipient’s letterbox can be delivered on the first attempt, leading to a reduction in costs associated with repeat delivery services.

In terms of delivery method, the Royal Mail is considered by over 70% of consumers as the best method for the delivery of letterbox-sized and small packages, whereas consumers prefer large and fragile deliveries to be made by the retailer or a third-party courier. For fragile items, nearly 30% of buyers would prefer to collect their purchases from the retailer’s premises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume of physical packages delivered, by size</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letterbox package</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can fit through standard UK letterbox</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of packages 2013 (m)</td>
<td>185.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of packages 2018 (m)</td>
<td>268.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth rate 2013-18</td>
<td>+44.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small parcel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No larger than a standard UK shoebox</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of packages 2013 (m)</td>
<td>344.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of packages 2018 (m)</td>
<td>479.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth rate 2013-18</td>
<td>+39.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger deliveries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger than a standard UK shoebox</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of packages 2013 (m)</td>
<td>360</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of packages 2018 (m)</td>
<td>507.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth rate 2013-18</td>
<td>+40.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
International delivery methods

While delivery to home or workplace is the most popular option for consumers in Europe and the USA, preferences for alternative methods vary across countries.

For example, the UK is the most active nation in terms of Click & Collect services, whereas France’s collection points are integral to its delivery networks. All countries offer a type of consumer collection service, which may see increased popularity in the coming years with the introduction of new initiatives. In contrast to mainland Europe, many UK couriers will deliver to a neighbour, whilst in France and Germany many homeowners have secure boxes on their property to receive packages whilst out.

Throughout France, Chronodrive’s drive-through supermarkets allow customers to purchase online and collect their order from a specialised distribution warehouse within 90 minutes of placing the order. The ‘Click and Drive’ concept is particularly useful for time-constrained urban customers, who can now order their groceries online and collect at their convenience without booking time slots or incurring delivery costs.

Similarly, US-based The Container Store is a specialist retail chain that sells a range of storage solutions, and allows customers to order online and pick up their order in less than an hour of purchase. As part of their ‘GoShop! Click and Pickup’ initiative, staff bring customers’ orders out to their cars, saving shoppers both time and effort when collecting their purchases.
Section two: the consumer experience

As expected, online purchasing activity spikes at lunchtime and towards 5pm in the UK. However, activity hits its peak later into the evening, showing that consumers are spending even when high-street stores are closed.

Purchasing and browsing activity peaks between 10pm and midnight, suggesting that shoppers may even be browsing the virtual aisles on their mobile or tablet devices whilst in bed, with a significant percentage of consumers opting for late-night shopping opportunities.

Interestingly, evening purchasing habits are driving consumer expectations for longer delivery windows. As such, many logistics companies may need to continuously develop their processes to remain competitive with next-day, or even same-day, delivery options for time-conscious consumers.

Percentage of consumers in the UK engaging with online retail at each time period

![Graph showing consumer activity at different times of the day.]

- **First thing in the morning (6-7.59am)**
- **Breakfast (8-9.59am)**
- **Mid-morning (10-11.59am)**
- **Lunchtime (12-2.59pm)**
- **Early afternoon (3-3.59pm)**
- **Late afternoon (4-5.59pm)**
- **Early evening (6-7.59pm)**
- **Evening (8-9.59pm)**
- **Night (10-11.59pm)**
- **Late night (12am-2.59am)**
- **Small hours (3am-5.59am)**

- **Reading product reviews**
- **Purchasing**
- **Online price checking**
- **Browsing**
Consumers: delivery preferences and priorities

Nearly 30% of retailers would use Click & Collect as their preferred delivery option, yet less than 20% of consumers have used this service in the past 12 months.

Just under 70% of consumers believe that couriers should deliver on a Sunday, and almost 45% would order online if delivery services were improved. These figures suggest that further sales opportunities exist for online retailers, if they can offer consumers more choices to suit their lifestyles.

Although consumers are looking for increasingly innovative and rapid delivery options, they are still conscious of keeping delivery prices low. Cost matters most to consumers when choosing delivery options whereas, unexpectedly, service ranks least important. This may come as a surprise to retailers and carriers, who continue to view service as a vital component of an e-retail and delivery experience.
Consumers: delivery preferences and priorities

According to our research, consumers anticipate that they will use in-store or locker collection services more frequently in the future, and many expect to visit courier depots and Royal Mail offices less in the next 12 months.

This shift away from courier depots may be a result of new delivery options that fit around an individual’s lifestyle, such as Click & Collect and locker collection points, which are seeing a rise in popularity.

Royal Mail services were rated highly by consumers, who ranked them top for speed, reliability and service. Conversely, shoppers preferred to rely on the retailer’s own delivery vehicle for flexibility. Just over 22% also favoured Click & Collect, which was rated third most popular for flexible delivery.

Consumers also said they would request delivery to a neighbour or friend’s home less frequently in the future, as more convenient delivery options and safer methods negate this need. Many carriers are working to improve the reliability of delivery and build trust from consumers, by allowing them to specify a safe place for a package to be delivered.

The following table shows the percentage of consumers using different delivery methods over the next year, compared to the last:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delivery Method</th>
<th>Use Less</th>
<th>Use More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to the shop you ordered it from, by Click &amp; Collect</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to a locker or collection point</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to your home via a courier</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to your home via the retailer’s own van/lorry</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to your home via Royal Mail</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to a different shop to the one you ordered it from, by Click &amp; Collect</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to a neighbour/friend’s home via Royal Mail</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to a neighbour/friend’s home via a courier</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery to a neighbour/friend’s home via the retailer’s own van/lorry</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection from the Post Office</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection from a courier’s depot</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data shows a significant increase in the use of locker collection points and a decrease in the use of courier and Royal Mail offices.
Consumers: satisfaction with services

Although consumers rank cost as one of the most important factors of delivery service, satisfaction with delivery pricing remains low.

Interestingly, consumers seem to be least impressed with innovation surrounding delivery services, despite the range of solutions available to online shoppers scoring highly.

Innovative methods of online delivery do exist and are evolving continuously – for example, the development of station locker services and delivery drones. The methods used to promote new delivery options to consumers may be a reason for the low satisfaction with innovation, with messaging focusing on the technology that makes innovative delivery possible, rather than the benefit to the client.

Increased awareness of flexible, innovative and manageable delivery solutions for internet consumers may result in further business for retailers and logistics providers, as nearly 45% of shoppers would order more online if delivery services were more suited to their needs.

Average consumer satisfaction score, from 1-10 (1 = extremely dissatisfied, 10 = extremely satisfied), across different aspects of the delivery process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Innovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section three: a retailer’s perspective

Whilst the majority of retailers consider online shopping and delivery services to have benefited their sales numbers, over 30% believe it has been detrimental to costs.

Over 50% of retailers believe that delivery services have benefited their sales figures; however, a significant number of retailers are conscious that costs and profits have been detrimentally impacted by online purchasing.

Interestingly, over 44% of retailers think that Click & Collect services can cause capacity issues in store, suggesting that many may not be fully optimised for the multi-platform retail environment, having started as bricks-and-mortar companies.

Consequently, problems may occur for retailers that do not have a single stock-keeping file and are unable to track goods across outlets and warehouses collectively. With Click & Collect opportunities increasing, it may be financially beneficial for retailers to invest in stock tracking technology, to avoid central stock being delivered to stores which can already offer the goods.

![Retailers’ views on how delivery from online purchases has impacted their sales, costs and profits (%)](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very detrimental</th>
<th>Slightly detrimental</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly beneficial</th>
<th>Very beneficial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profits</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Retailers: delivery preferences

Just over 29% of retailers would prefer to offer their own Click & Collect scheme to consumers as a delivery service.

Click & Collect remains popular with retailers: research states that 38.2% are expecting it to grow more in terms of usage than any other delivery option. 22.6% anticipate that third-party Click & Collect services will increase the most, and just over 17% expect to see a rise in the use of lockers and collection points.

Royal Mail delivery services ranked highly with retailers; however, even Royal Mail – which consumers scored highly in terms of speed, reliability and service – is a secondary preference, for retailers, compared to Click & Collect. This service may be favoured as retailers look to minimise costs associated with delivery, as well as encouraging further purchasing opportunities when consumers collect in-store.

43% of retailers are investing more in Click & Collect, as nearly 84% believe it is a permanent fixture of the delivery market. With almost 53% of consumers not realising the benefits of this delivery option, however, it is difficult to say whether retailers’ predictions will be realised in the coming years.

#### Retailers’ preferences for delivery methods

- **Own Click & Collect**: 29.2%
- **Home delivery via Royal Mail**: 21.4%
- **Own delivery van**: 19.3%
- **Home delivery via a courier**: 18.2%
- **Third party Click & Collect**: 8.6%
- **Locker or collection point**: 2.5%
Retailers: operational efficiency

For retailers, one of the major issues with delivery is coping with peak seasonal times such as Christmas. Although warehouse capacity does not seem to be a large problem, over 50% consider integrating systems across retail platforms and demand forecasting as areas of concern.

With more orders being placed via mobile and tablet devices, shopping has become a 24/7 experience for many consumers. For retailers this can cause a problem with demand forecasting and, as a result, meeting consumer expectations.

Integrating systems to cope with the logistical complexities of new delivery services such as Click & Collect, as well as the return of online purchases to stores, can cause imbalances of stock across stores and warehouses. Interestingly, warehouse capacity seems to be less of a problem than handling returns and managing inventory.
Retailers: return services

In 2013, consumers made approximately 39 million clothing returns. As a proportion of total deliveries of clothing to consumers, this is just over 30%.

The majority of consumers return clothing items through the post or via a courier, with just under a third opting to return purchases to a physical store.

The cost of clothing returns brought about by ordering unwanted items is estimated to have totalled nearly £100m in 2013. 81% of this was borne by retailers, costing just under £80m.

By 2018, there will be an estimated 256 million clothing and footwear deliveries, making up over 20% of total parcels generated from online orders. This market has almost doubled in size since 2008, which may be a result of increased online presence and intelligent digital advertising from fashion retailers.

Another factor which may support the growth of online fashion sales may be the ease of return services. Many retailers, such as ASOS, are driving sales and loyalty by advertising their no-cost return options both at the point of sale and on their packaging.
Section four: the logistics landscape

Last year, Royal Mail had the largest share of the retail delivery market; however, collectively, other logistics providers had a greater market share.

During the past five years, logistics providers have increased the variety of delivery options available to their customers. Over 22% of logistics providers were able to offer their customers five or more delivery options in 2013, compared to only 16% in 2008 – none of which could offer more than six options at the time. Just under 9% of carriers now offer only one option, as opposed to 20% in 2008.

This increased range of delivery options may be a result of more competition within the logistics market. It may also imply that consumers are becoming more vocal about their needs, with many logistics companies enhancing feedback tools so that recipients can support new process development.

*Other refers to all remaining smaller logistics providers, retailers’ own delivery vehicles and deliveries made by informal, local providers – i.e. from a local shop via a local delivery firm.

UK logistics providers’ share of the 2013 retail delivery market

- Royal Mail: 28.5%
- Parcelforce: 4.2%
- Yodel: 8.2%
- Hermes: 4.5%
- City Link: 4.6%
- UPS: 4.9%
- DPD: 5.5%
- TNT: 7.1%
- Other*: 32.5%
The biggest issue facing logistics firms is delivering goods when recipients are not present, with over 63% of carriers stating this as a concern.

Similar to retailers, managing peak times and costs is a concern for the majority of logistics firms, suggesting that there is more to be done between retailers and carriers to prepare for holiday seasons and key delivery times. Poorly packaged goods cause problems for nearly 30% of logistics providers, potentially incurring costs for retailers also, who will bear the price of returns on faulty items.

In comparison to retailers, systems and technology issues are less of a concern for logistics providers with just over 12% citing this as a problem area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage of Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumers not in to receive delivery</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing costs</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing peak times (e.g. Christmas)</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues caused by poor packaging</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling consumer complaints</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing retailer expectations</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong items from retailers</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems and technology issues</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient warehouse capacity</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping track of deliveries</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 18 of 26 cases, these issues cause problems for logistics firms.
Logistics providers: future developments

Improved tracking and consumer notifications attract the most interest in terms of future developments, whilst integration with Click & Collect remains a low priority for the majority of logistics providers.

35% of logistics providers state that Sunday delivery is an area of interest for future development, yet less than 12% feel that this service will specifically drive the growth of their business in terms of sales or profits. This disparity may be a result of logistics providers feeling pressure to offer Sunday delivery to compete with other carriers and drive further transactions, whilst understanding the negative cost impact that this may bring.

Over 24% view Click & Collect as an area which can provide growth opportunities, given that consumers may be more inclined to purchase online when given the opportunity to collect goods from a hub or store. Just over 16% of logistics companies are interested in developing their integration with this service, perhaps as a result of complex technical processes necessary to achieve this.

With 31% of logistics providers stating Click & Collect schemes as a threat, it could be that some providers are more concerned about larger retail companies absorbing delivery logistics in-house and as such, it is important that logistics firms remain competitive and accommodating when working with mature retailers.
Logistics providers: opportunities and threats

The growth of online shopping will boost business for logistics firms, as will the growth in customer online marketplace sales. Opportunities exist to increase flexibility in delivery options, along with the introduction of more premium services.

In general, logistics providers are optimistic about the future: according to our research, over 92% of providers believe that continued growth in online shopping will provide future opportunities for growth. However, over 50% stated that a key area they see as a threat to future growth was coping with the increased capacity requirements.

Nearly 35% envisage growth potential through better technology and increased international delivery, which may be bolstered by investment in further delivery options. 28.3% are concerned about increased delivery by retailers’ delivery services, and 33.8% are concerned by increasingly price-sensitive consumers, which may result in online shoppers opting for cheaper, retailer-led services.
Section five: strategies for success

When optimising services to appeal to all members of the delivery chain, there are a number of considerations that retailers and logistics providers can keep in mind.

Retailers

- Explore cut-off windows for next-day delivery and how this can affect your business. Many retailers are now offering next-day delivery for orders placed up to 5pm.
- Work with logistics providers to manage peak times, making efforts to forewarn carriers of expected busy periods.
- Ensure that packaging is smart and safe, to avoid returns of faulty items and also to support first-time delivery success.
- Return services may support online sales if consumers are hesitant about purchases. Explore how to promote your return services to support the end consumer.
- Technology providing a single-stock view can be expensive to implement for bricks-and-mortar retailers; however, in the long term, this technology can drive efficiencies and reduce costs associated with delivery services.

Both

- Both retailers and carriers should communicate the range of options that they can provide, to ensure that consumers choose the most suitable solution.
- Retailers and logistics providers can partner to offer swift Click & Collect services.
- Cost remains an important element of online purchasing for consumers; however, many will only value service quality once they've had a bad delivery experience. Try to balance good service with low-costs by exploring in-house operational efficiencies.

Logistics providers

- Explore further delivery options to support the needs of busy consumers – Sunday services and collection options may be key to this success and could lead to increased online purchases by shoppers.
- Technology can improve customer service, with some carriers investing in messaging services to help consumers manage deliveries around their daily schedule.
- As more logistics providers enter the delivery market, it is important for companies to identify their unique selling point. Whether this is technology, service or price, carriers can benefit from clarifying their proposition to their target audience.
Case study: Oasis

Clothing retailer Oasis offers a unique and flexible range of delivery options to meet growing customer demands.

For Oasis, online sales are an integral part of the business, and will continue to grow as a proportion of revenue in the future. Despite the range of delivery services on offer, 90% of orders are delivered using their standard service – delivery within 3-5 working days. Briony Garbett, Head of Ecommerce & Customer Experience at Oasis, explains how the business is working to communicate the range of delivery options available, as well as the challenges faced to meet increasing demand and remain competitive in the crowded online high street.

A unique proposition

Oasis maintains flexibility and fluidity of stock by using a split-order system: orders are fulfilled from a distribution centre, or if the product is out of stock, Oasis uses a ‘Seek and Send’ service whereby products can be sourced and sent directly from one of their stores. This means that the full order can be split, with certain elements fulfilled from the distribution centre, and the rest of the order being deployed directly from the store.

Delivery options include standard, next-day and nominated delivery. The customer can also choose hourly timeslots throughout the week to suit their needs or a 90-minute delivery service, both powered by Shutl and available in selected cities throughout the UK.

Communicating the offering

The business has a wide range of delivery services available, and communicating these clearly to customers poses a real challenge. “We launch each service with an email to the whole client database to promote it and clear communication on the homepage,” comments Garbett. “Our suite of service messages in-store also promotes the various options.” By understanding the online reading habits of their consumers and testing the page layouts of marketing emails, Oasis ensures that clients are fully informed and can choose the most convenient service for them.

“As our brand goes from strength to strength, it can be a challenge to ensure legacy systems are coordinated, particularly during seasonal spikes.”

Briony Garbett, Head of Ecommerce & Customer Experience, Oasis

Challenges remain

“As our brand goes from strength to strength, it can be a challenge to ensure legacy systems are coordinated, particularly during seasonal spikes,” comments Garbett. In addition to managing stock through fluctuations in the year, achieving unity between Oasis and the carrier can also be a challenge, particularly when multiple logistics providers are used.

Oasis currently uses multiple carriers to meet demands, to enable a full suite of services and innovation which is seen as more attractive to the business. Delivery remains a large cost for the brand and, in order to remain competitive and meet growing customer expectations, the business is working to optimise their existing offering, as well as considering alternative delivery options such as Click & Collect services.

The future of delivery

Adapting existing services to meet trends and refining how customers can return items is key to increasing sales value. “We need to develop better ways to track the returns journey, so that customers are more comfortable buying larger orders,” says Garbett. In addition, the business already ships to over 20 countries; however, achieving the required scale and volume needed for international fulfilment will be an area of focus for Oasis in the future.
Case study: DPD UK

Using leading technology, DPD UK provides tailored, reliable delivery services to everyday consumers and retailers.

In a competitive delivery market, express parcel carrier DPD UK has experienced growth of £100m per year since 2012. Tim Jones, the company’s Director of Marketing, discusses how advances in technology, as well as attention to customer needs, has helped DPD to develop a successful business strategy and grow its share of the market.

Understanding customer needs

The UK delivery market has become increasingly crowded. As online consumer numbers continue to increase, carrier companies must be able to distinguish themselves from competitors. As Jones says: “At DPD, we have our clients (retailers) and then our clients’ customers, who are the end consumers receiving deliveries. Despite these being two very different audiences, they both value quality service, fast delivery and attention to detail.”

By building close working relationships with its customers, DPD has identified ways to achieve all three factors, using an impressive and unique piece of technology that tracks the delivery process from start to finish.

Investing in technology

DPD is currently the only UK carrier service that can provide a one-hour delivery window on all purchases. Having identified 50% of households as empty during the day, the company has seen a rise in successful delivery since introducing notification services. By messaging delivery recipients via text or e-mail, DPD can confirm the hour in which a delivery will be made, helping consumers to manage their schedules. Should this time be unsuitable, recipients can ask DPD to leave packages with a neighbour or at an identified safe place on their property. Failing this, an option exists to arrange delivery at a later date.

Since using this technology, DPD’s clients have noticed an uplift in repeat purchases, providing mutual benefits for both parties.

The technology also allows delivery staff to photograph goods left at a safe place, and send a picture of the successful delivery to the recipient. This provides proof of delivery to both consumers and retailers, and helps to minimise fraud risks within the process.

Quality service

Feedback services are essential to DPD’s continuous improvement. Customers can register queries via their “How can we help you?” website portal, or can engage via Twitter and Facebook. Social media has proved successful for DPD, as they have turned any public negative posts into positive experiences, by monitoring and resolving any flagged issues with immediate effect.

When looking to the future, Jones predicts that technological developments will pave the way for further enhanced service, and people will want more specific delivery information with more options, including inflight options and alternative pick-up points. One thing is for sure, the company will continue to focus on quality in order to remain a key player in an ever-evolving market.

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Tim Jones, Director of Marketing, DPD UK
Focus on innovation: Barclaycard Anywhere

A more compact version of a traditional card-reader, Barclaycard Anywhere connects to a smartphone allowing instant card payments to be accepted on the move. For delivery service providers, Barclaycard Anywhere offers consumers a simple way of paying for their order on delivery.

Barclaycard Anywhere is a mobile payment solution that allows a merchant to take a consumer’s payment independent of traditional point-of-sale technology. As long as a data connection, or WiFi coverage, is present and the merchant owns a smartphone, the software can be used on the move for issuing refunds as well as taking payments.

With nearly 52% of consumers nervous about paying online for goods and services*, one potential use for Barclaycard Anywhere could be to allow shoppers to pay for products on delivery. Such a solution could be beneficial to online grocery retailers, who, because of substitutions and weight variations of some products, do not know exactly what a consumer will be charged before delivery has been made.

Payment upon receipt of goods could also help logistics companies who want to offer flexible delivery options for which they charge extra. For example, a consumer may have opted for a standard delivery when placing an order with a retailer but, having missed their initial delivery window, may opt to subsequently have the delivery made before 10am on a Saturday at an increased cost. Using Barclaycard Anywhere, the logistics company would be able to take payment for this as the product is delivered.

More than just a payment device service, Barclaycard Anywhere gives users access to a 24/7 online account for in-depth business management, providing access to sales and stock monitoring, customer data and payment history.

Although this technology is at the early stages of development, over the next few years it could change the online delivery landscape – potentially increasing the number of online orders as a result of increased confidence around payment. It could also allow a split between payment for items and payment for delivery, with consumers selecting the delivery company, method and option they want from a retailer’s site but then paying the company that delivers when they turn up.

*Source: Conlumino Consumer and Business Panel, May 2014.
Section six: key takeaways

- The delivery market is growing and logistics providers are facing increased competition, not only from other carriers but also from retailers choosing to deliver via in-house services.
- Consumers prioritise cost over service, whilst retailers and logistics providers are being pushed to invest in delivery innovation to meet consumer needs.
- Retailers that offer their customers a variety of delivery options are differentiating themselves in the market.
- High-quality delivery service is much more than a well-trained driver: carriers should provide flexible service, based around technology and reflective of a consumer’s preference.
- Click & Collect remains popular with retailers, with over a third expecting the service to grow in use; however, less than 20% of consumers have used this service in the last 12 months.

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