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Full stop

Delivering an engaging customer experience whilst managing supply and demand in an online retailing operation is challenging and can be costly, with Duo this is easy.

For more than 28 years Duo UK has delivered packaging solutions that deliver business results for some of the world's leading online retailers.

- Free stock management service
- Online order management
- Specialists in packaging for online retailers
- UK manufacturing site
- International distribution

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Packaging: The hidden secret to maximising profitability and customer loyalty

FOR AN ECOMMERCE business, packaging to protect a product in transit from the warehouse to the delivery destination is an unavoidable spend, although the type of packaging used can have the power increase profitability and influence customer loyalty.

Converting this necessary spend into a business asset requires some clever planning and collaborative thinking. Anthony Brimelow, Commercial Director at leading packaging manufacturer and supplier Duo UK, shares his top tips on how to add value to your outbound packaging and make it work harder for your business.

Destination Packaging

Consumer convenience is driving demand for a wider range of delivery options, when the customer wants the item and what the item is, influences their choice of delivery service and location. There has been a lot of investment in offering a vast range of delivery options but are the needs of the onward journey of the customer reflected in the style of packaging the item is contained in? Design enhancements such as carry handles allow the consumer to pick up and easily carry their purchase when collecting on-the-go. Whilst this is more expensive than a regular mailing bag, this multi-purpose packaging item delivers a smooth, convenient shopping experience and assists in building a long-term loyal customer.

Delivery is not the finish line

Where delivery used to be the end of an online shopping experience, retailers are now challenging their end to end consumer experience to include a seamless returns procedure.

When it comes to delighting consumers, helping them to return what they do not want goes a long way to building a loyal consumer base. Easing the returns process for consumers limits the amount of time an item is off the shelf and minimises any potential losses in margin. Delivering the consumer's order in a compact, lightweight mailing bag not only eradicates the common pet hate of excessive packaging but also avoids the consumer incurring additional time and cost of buying a new packaging item as they can use the mailing bag to return their item – and importantly the unwanted item is on

its way back to your stock without hesitation. To evolve your outbound mailing bag into a re-usable, return-ready packaging, include a second glue line and a perforation between the glue lines to make the package easy opening and preserve the packaging for returns. Clear communication and labelling on the packaging is key to informing the consumer on the benefits and how to re-use the packaging.

Image Protection

Consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental impact of their purchases so helping them to re-use and reduce packaging waste is one way to help create deeper, loyal relationships between a consumer and your brand. Your consumers are happy but the disposal of the waste becomes the responsibility of your returns centre, problem or opportunity to profit? There's a huge shortage of waste polythene in the UK, but the demand for recycled polythene products is growing. To encourage more companies to close the loop and stop this valuable material ending up in landfill we introduced a closed loop recycling service. We collect segregated waste polythene, weigh and pay. This helps companies rest assured that their waste will not go landfill but be recycled and manufactured into a new packaging product with the added bonus of a payment for doing so.

About DUO UK

Duo UK manufactures and supplies bespoke packaging products for leading e-retail, retail, mail order and industrial brands.

For further information on Duo products and services visit www.duo-uk.co.uk, email enquiries@duo-uk.co.uk or call 0161 203 5767.



Flexibility and convenience

Free delivery has been a favourite carrot within retail but customers now expect more, reports **Sean Fleming**

OFFERING FREE DELIVERY was, for a long time, the default marketing plan for new customer acquisition. In some cases, it still is. But it's an increasingly costly strategy which could well disappear altogether within the next five years or so.

You might be wondering how something so ingrained in the ecommerce world's outlook is going to fade away and what the cause might be. The answer is simple: things will change due to customer expectations.

It may well be that ten years ago, customers expected free delivery and that if retailers weren't offering this, a lost sale could result. But a decade ago, free delivery was about as exciting as delivery options got and that's certainly no longer the case. There's always a question mark over the perceived value of anything that's offered free – it quickly becomes so taken for granted that retailers are no longer seen as adding any value. As delivery choices have expanded, and for the most part centred themselves around value propositions rather than giveaways, customers' expectations have expanded too. Free delivery on a day that suits the

// The good news for retailers and carriers is that customers see the value in faster delivery services and are actually willing to pay for them //

carrier has become an offer that fewer and fewer people are interested in. Instead, customers want things done on *their* terms, which means specifying precisely when they want their delivery to take place, down to the day and, increasingly, the time too.

For years, the twin competing needs of service provision and buying on price have been a millstone around the neck of the delivery industry – think of the collapse of City Link or the fiasco of 2014 Black Friday.

The upside for retailers is that if free delivery has become a burden, now is a perfect time to be looking at alternatives such as faster delivery. After all, retailers can charge for this and add value to the customer.

The further good news for retailers and carriers is that customers see the value in such services and are actually willing to pay for them, which is a welcome step away from having to soak up the cost of giving away delivery.

Being more like parcel delivery behemoth DPD isn't easy, however. With hundreds of glowing comments on social media day-in, day-out, and an enviable reputation for not over-reaching and putting consistently high service levels first, DPD is the one to watch. From its network of PickUp shops to its new app, DPD is a case study of what businesses can achieve if they commit to investing in constant improvement.

In short, if retailers want to be more like DPD, they're going to have to find the funds to invest as DPD does. Realistically, only a few larger companies will go down this path. For other retailers, an alternative approach is to choose delivery partners by considering what the best companies in this sphere do. How do delivery companies create and maintain their routes? Are these routes centrally controlled? Can drivers over-ride lists by making decisions on the fly to accommodate last-minute changes?

With customers now demanding more flexibility, an overly centralised approach may leave retailers being blamed for a failure to deliver, for example, a dress or shirt purchased at the last moment and needed for a night out.

Flex, don't break

In short, customers are demanding flexibility. Any retailer that doesn't offer this throughout its operations will, sooner or later, hit the limits of what can be achieved. Meanwhile, businesses will continue to feel the pressure as customer expectation continues to grow and rivals close in, ready to snap up interactions that

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Ten issues to consider

- 1** **SPEED KILLS:** Retailers need to consider what they are realistically capable of. If three-five days is a sweet spot but next-day is still painful, be sure to develop a manageable plan.
- 2** **CONVENIENCE FOR ALL:** Offering the choice of multiple collection points only equates to convenience if the locations suit customers' needs. Offer a blended collection service.
- 3** **HAPPY RETURNS:** If retailers can't process returns at least as efficiently as sales orders, trouble lies ahead. Delays here will mean eroded margins and ever-increasing costs.
- 4** **COLLABORATE ON COST:** Larger retailers with spare network capacity should consider offering it to others as sharing capacity means sharing costs. But to do that, retailers will need complete visibility of networks.
- 5** **RELIABLE NOTIFICATIONS:** If there's one thing customers rave about, it's getting accurate delivery notifications to their mobiles. This is fast becoming a must-have for every business.
- 6** **ON-THE-FLY:** As delivery choice expands, so does door-step complexity. Retailers will alienate customers if systems cannot accommodate potential complications, such as driveway locker boxes.
- 7** **DRIVERS AS HEROES:** Retail relationships can be trashed on the doorstep, so don't scrimp on driver training and never partner with a company that has a reputation for poor customer service. No IT system can protect retailers from poor service execution by a person.
- 8** **PRAGMATISM IS COOL:** Have systems that will cater for the unexpected but don't invest in covering every eventuality under the sun. An unwieldy system could be an expensive regret.
- 9** **DATA SECURITY:** Never lose sight of the importance of protecting data. Customers give data to retailers but carriers see it too. Stay on the right side of the law at all times.
- 10** **STRATEGY AND STORIES:** Retailers need to consider what they stand for. If retailers are going to embark on a substantial change within a delivery offer, a communications strategy to help tell that story is vital.

are currently beyond the retailer's reach. The next wave of delivery expectation is going to be around same-day services. Amazon has already done a lot to promote same-day but it is far from the only retailer offering it and, in the delivery sector, there are plenty of couriers with a pedigree in this line.

Proceed with caution, however. While the move from three-to-five days to next-day has been painful and costly for many, it has essentially been about improving existing operational performance. The same cannot be said for the shift to same-day, which calls for so much more than new IT systems. Same-day services greet each new day as a blank sheet of paper, waiting for orders to come in. To succeed at same-day delivery, retailers will need a completely new business strategy that includes redefined relationships with delivery partners whose drivers might well be left watching the clock from time to time. Consultancy expertise may be required.

If retailers get this wrong, rushing boldly into a future of same-day delivery could easily feel less like taking a giant leap into the future and more like going from out of the frying pan and straight into the fire.

In summary

The old rules no longer apply. Scale is important, of course, but bidding on price alone will buy retailers nothing more than a little more time. Now is the right time for retailers to think less about how to make the business more customer-centric as a top-down exercise, and more about paying attention to what customers actually want. Within this approach, flexibility in delivery options has to be a retailer's new best friend.

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We make it easier and cheaper for companies to deliver parcels to their customers by developing and providing smart delivery management software that includes all stages of shipment and delivery on just one platform. As the leading provider of delivery management solutions, Consignor combines in-depth knowledge of transportation and logistics with outstanding software design. We provide our customers with the world's largest national and international carrier library. Our platform creates more than 100m shipments a year and lets over 10,000 customers choose the best solution, regardless of the carrier, ERP or ecommerce solution.

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100% owned by PostNord, the merged Swedish and Danish post offices, Direct Link are experts in creating borderless B2C ecommerce solutions for direct mail, packets and parcels. Our comprehensive offering includes tracked services, returns and unique services for market entry. We customise solutions that expand our clients' markets worldwide. As part of PostNord, the leading supplier of communication and logistics solutions in the Nordics, we combine entrepreneurial flexibility with corporate stability. As specialists, we recognise that international delivery is a complex arena. We welcome the opportunity to hear your thoughts and discuss your delivery requirements.

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Protecting products and engaging consumers by utilising the power of online and in-store packaging, Duo UK has been manufacturing and supplying branded mailbags, garment covers, store bags and back of house packaging to leading retail and e-retail brands for more than 28 years. When it comes to packaging we've got everything you need.

- Free stock management service
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EC Group is one of the UK's leading providers of specialist third party logistics services, providing a range of fulfilment, warehousing, storage and distribution services. Operating from our 80,000 square foot fulfilment centre 30 mins from central London, we provide full service support for a range of ecommerce operators. Our operations are fully managed to ensure maximum process efficiency and control of every project, from concept to completion, with all aspects being securely reportable using the latest online technology. EC Group offers reliable, flexible and innovative fulfilment backed up by world-class data management and process control.

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ELECTIO

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Electio is the new generation delivery management platform designed to help retailers compete. Its resilient Service Orientated Architecture (SOA) offers carrier integration in as little as three weeks, significantly lower set-up costs, a lower total cost of ownership and the ability to present personalised delivery options in the checkout. Unlike other solutions on the market, Electio's SOA has been cheered by developers, who see the potential to transform their operational efficiency and customer experience. The powerful combination of RESTful APIs, 99.5% uptime and a market-leading Software Development Kit (SDK) mean simple set-up followed by fast realisation of benefits.

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Intersoft has been the intelligence behind deliveries since 1993, creating delivery management software that powers global deliveries. With our cloud based system, Intelligent Shipper, we are bringing our expertise to the world of ecommerce, offering a genuine alternative in delivery management software. Our dedicated team based in the UK offers a personal customer experience, creating and maintaining flexible systems designed for retailers' needs. Intelligent Shipper's unique Route Management Engine controls the life of a shipment from order and delivery to invoicing and billing. The returns portal completes the delivery cycle, ensuring customers have the best delivery experience possible.

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Europe's largest independent producer of ecommerce postal packaging to internet retailers.

At Lil Packaging it is our mission to provide internet and mail-order businesses with a greatly improved, cost-efficient fulfilment operation so that they can 'mail happy'. We will achieve this by delivering uniquely engineered solutions that reinvent their view of packaging, through the application of unmatched expertise in packaging design and world-class manufacturing.

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NetDespatch provides a reliable, scalable, secure web shipping platform for retailers to seamlessly integrate with their chosen carrier. We enable 100,000+ businesses to streamline operations, speed order fulfilment and eliminate data duplication. In partnership with most leading ecommerce platforms and order processing systems, we enable customers to produce the correct barcoded shipping labels, required manifests and pre-advice. NetDespatch is retained by carriers including Royal Mail, Yodel, UK Mail and APC Overnight to provide shipping solutions for their customers, so our services are provided free to both partners and retailers.

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As a leading global provider of comprehensive ecommerce solutions, PFSweb enables brands and specialty retailers to achieve their commerce goals. PFSweb crafts customised solutions that combine consulting, agency, technology and operations to deliver unique and branded customer experiences, creating 'commerce without compromise'. From creative digital marketing strategies and web development to order fulfilment with high-touch customer care, PFSweb's custom omnichannel commerce solutions are trusted by brands and retailers throughout the world.

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Smurfit Kappa is one of the leading providers of paper-based packaging solutions in the world, with around 45,000 employees in approximately 370 production sites across 34 countries and with revenues of 8.1bn Euros in 2015. We use our extensive experience and expertise, supported by our scale, to open up opportunities for our customers. We collaborate by sharing superior product knowledge, market understanding and insights in packaging trends to ensure business success in their markets. We have an unrivalled portfolio of paper-packaging solutions, which is constantly updated with our market-leading innovations.

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Snapfulfil is a multi-award winning, best of breed warehouse management system developed to level the playing field for companies with big ambitions but without the budget to match. Snapfulfil provides a like-for-like alternative to a traditional on-premise WMS, in a fraction of the time and at a fraction of the cost. From fast-growing ecommerce startups to multinational corporations, more and more retailers are turning to Snapfulfil to optimise inventory, space and resources within their warehouses. Offering a range of deployment methods and payment options, including our unique, No Capex model, whatever your warehousing challenge, Snapfulfil offers a solution. Are you happy with your warehouse? Contact Snapfulfil for a free review.

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Ten10 is the UK's leading software testing consultancy. Through a rigorous and creative approach to software testing – delivered through a combination of best-in-class technology and talented, passionate experts – we give our clients the confidence to embrace innovation and business transformation. Our areas of expertise include test strategy, functional, performance, mobile and automated testing in both traditional waterfall and agile environments. Clients benefit from our flexible and scalable options for delivery, ranging from one-off test consultancy projects, through to on or offsite managed services.

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Anthony Brimelow

Commercial Director, Duo UK



What does your company do?

Protecting products and engaging consumers by utilising the power of online and in-store packaging, Duo UK has been manufacturing and supplying branded mailbags, luxury paper bags, fabric bags, store bags and back of house packaging to leading retail and e-retail brands such as JD Williams, JD Sports and Tesco for more than 28 years.

We turnover over more than £25m and employ more than 130 people across two sites in Manchester and Derby. Having decided to invest heavily to cater for the growing ecommerce market in the mid-2000s, we have seen significant growth and increased turnover by 68% in the last five years alone (2010-2015).

Duo UK recently launched DuoGreen to help customers achieve their environmental goals, and is proud to be

// We understand that the packaging needs of our online retailer customers can change quickly, so we regularly review the performance of their packaging //

Anthony Brimelow, Duo UK

the only UK manufacturer to produce carbon negative, sustainable and organic mailing bags using GreenPE.

What is your USP?

As manufacturers, we have the engineering expertise to design packaging solutions that overcome our customers' problem areas. We talk to CSR teams looking to improve the sustainability of their packaging, and discuss the communications they have

DUO UK IN BRIEF

Date launched: 1988

Global reach: Duo UK has two UK polythene manufacturing sites and a global network of specialist packaging manufacturers. We distribute products internationally

Group Turnover: £25m

Customers: Duo UK's customers range from the UK's largest retailers to small, fast-growing online brands, which include JD Williams, JD Sports and Tesco

Number of employees: 130

Twitter: @duouk

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/duo-ltd

Website: www.duo-uk.co.uk

with their customers to encourage them to recycle or re-use; marketing teams keen to improve the overall customer experience; and also distribution teams to improve productivity.

Being based in the UK, our manufacturing facility can work to incredibly short lead times and of course, customers can also visit our site to meet the team and see their products being produced. If the customer wants to change something or trial something different, we can and do react quickly.

In addition, for ecommerce retailers, we understand that their supply chain assurance is business critical. If they ever run out of packaging, their customers' goods simply don't leave the warehouse. We avoid this eventuality by offering a free stock management service that manages peaks and troughs in usage and 24/7 online ordering.

We understand that the packaging needs of our online retailer customers can change quickly so, we regularly review the performance of their packaging to ensure that it is working at its optimum. The wrong size or style of packaging can have an impact on productivity, cost and customer satisfaction, so we advise on changes to keep the operation running at its optimum.

How would you describe your company's vision?

We always strive to research and develop innovations that help our customers adapt to their needs of tomorrow. Adaptability is key for this and it's one of our passions as a manufacturer. Our engineering expertise enables us to develop unique business-enhancing packaging innovations.

We want to continue to improve our B2B services to replicate those that we all experience as a consumer. We have developed an online order management solution that enables our customers to order their products 24/7 as quickly and easily as it is to order trainers from JD Sports or a dress from JD Williams. We are also challenging the communication and frequency of delivery information to connect departments and locations within our customers' businesses to enable more efficient transactions.

In 2015, we launched DuoGreen to help our customers achieve their environmental goals. After seeing a strong increase in demand for green products, driven partly from our own environmental goals but also our clients' CSR policies and reacting to their own customers' demands, we made the move to offer GreenPE mailing bags. GreenPE is a thermoplastic

Doubling turnover in online sales

Claudio Lugli is a high-end Italian fashion brand that has gained a reputation for producing inspirational, unique garments in strictly limited numbers. The brand is available in more than 250 physical stores across the UK and also sells online.

“We have been selling our shirts in retail stores for more than 25 years and in June 2014, we launched our online store,” says Navid Salimian, Marketing Director, Claudio Lugli. “Selling online was new to us and in the first few months, we had fewer than 100 unique user visits per month. To emulate our success selling in stores, we knew that we needed to deliver the same luxury shopping experience online as you’d receive in-store.

“Although we were new to selling online, it was imperative that the postal packaging we chose reflected our core brand values. We realised very early on that while you can buy cheaper mailing bags that do the same job in terms of practicalities, in that they get the product to a customer wrapped in a protective material, they don’t deliver the same first impression.

“For us, operating in the luxury sector, we want to reaffirm to our customers that when they choose to shop with us, they are buying a high quality garment. We want them to feel excited about seeing what’s inside the parcel when it is delivered to them. We know that the feeling of excitement and satisfaction with a purchase increases brand affinity as we too have experienced this as online shoppers.

“Delivery presentation and packaging design has been a key component to the success of our online packaging sales, which now account for more than £30k of sales per month and receives more than 1,000 unique visits per month. But getting the right sized packaging range provided huge back of house benefits, such as increasing packing speeds and optimising delivery costs.

“Even though Claudio Lugli has a low returns rate, we wanted to make this process as convenient as possible for the customer. So should they need to return an item, we added a second glue line to the mailing bag so that the same packaging can be used to return the item. Any returns we do then receive always arrive back with us in the outbound packaging, so we know that our customer appreciates and uses this additional feature as well as ensuring our goods are protected.

“One out of every two of our online customers is a repeat customer, so we know that the experience they have when they’re purchasing from our ecommerce store is a positive one and we believe that the first impression of the product as it lands in their hands is integral to that success.”



warehouse and marketing, will ensure the final range performs functionally, in-budget, on brand and ethically. Our customers tend to come full circle, from initially wanting just the cheapest and most practical packaging products to actually understanding how more considered packaging is cost-effective in the long term and delivers a greater competitive advantage.

Who are your customers?

Our customer base ranges from some of the UK’s largest retailers and e-tailors to smaller but fast-growing online brands entering an exciting marketplace who require a supply chain partner that will understand them and help them grow. We work with household name brands such as JD Williams, JD Sports and Tesco, to name but a few.

What do you see as challenges in the coming year and what are you doing to meet those challenges?

Expectations of experience and convenience for online retail customers will continue to adapt, so to meet this challenge, we are continuing to collaborate with our customers in order to develop product and service adaptations and innovations that enable them to react to change. Where the delivery used to be the end of the experience, retailers are challenging their end-to-end customer experience to include a seamless returns process. Packaging plays a huge part in making this process convenient for both the customer and the retailer. So, for example, including a twin glue line and perforation that allows the bag to be opened while maintaining a second seal makes it easy for the customer to return the product and process it back in stock as quickly as possible.

Rightly so, sustainability remains high on the agenda for many businesses. Sustainable packaging materials are available and it is our challenge to promote awareness of proven products such as GreenPE and to assist in communicating this message effectively to our customers’ audiences.

resin made entirely from sugarcane ethanol, a 100% renewable material that’s also 100% recyclable and 100% sustainable. This product is unrivalled in its environmental credentials and we are proud to be the UK’s first and only manufacturer of GreenPE mailing bags.

What is particularly impressive about GreenPE is that its environmental credentials extend all the way down the production chain. From a manufacturing point of view, we can use the same processes and machinery we use to create standard polythene products.

What are you doing currently in the ecommerce/multichannel market?

We’ve always been a company that works with our partners and customers collaboratively, and we believe our approach to supplying packaging in this way makes us different from other manufacturers.

Rather than the responsibility of packaging selection falling solely on the shoulders of procurement buyers, we believe that a multi-functional collaborative approach that includes representatives from CSR, logistics and