



Only Six Retailers Rise to the Occasion Receiving the e-tailing group's Annual Customer Service Excellence Award

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THE FACTS

Results of the e-tailing group's 16th Annual Mystery Shopping Study, conducted during 4Q'13, recognize six retailers, out of the 100 benchmarked, as excelling at online customer service. It's important to remember that customer service demands can begin as early as the first trip to a retailer's website and continue post-purchase when shoppers often make inquiries and/or return product. "Retailers must make accessible every means of connecting with their customers, curating comprehensive information and simultaneously providing a streamlined cart that is efficient and effortless for shoppers giving them confidence to buy. Communication should be timely and thorough in order to foster purchasing and meet shopper needs, ensuring that both those who seek self-service and others who prefer assistance are served well," emphasizes Freedman, President, the e-tailing group.

Top Performers (alpha order)

Aveda	Golfsmith	L.L. Bean
REI	Sunglass Hut	Zappos

METHODOLOGY

To qualify as "top performing," each of the 100 merchants were ranked using benchmarking extrapolated directly from results of the shopping study. Criteria were made more stringent in 2013 as a review of each merchant's customer service page was factored into the 8 must-have elements. Winners were revealed via a process whereby sites were systematically eliminated for not possessing "must have" features in the following rank order:

1. Accessibility of 800# on site was a 2.5 or higher
2. Help/Customer service destination page scored 2.0 or higher (on a 3-point scale)
3. 3 or fewer days to receive package
4. 5 or fewer clicks to checkout, or if greater than 5 clicks, had 1-click functionality
5. Overall customer service experience on customer service call was a 2.0 or higher (on a 3-point scale)
6. Answer e-mail question within 24 hours, correctly with a specific answer and personalized in salutation
7. E-mail order confirmation sent with order number and customer service information included
8. Online shipment tracking, where tracking link is found on site

Six metrics from the survey are charted here to demonstrate the commendable performance by these top sites for customer service versus the average of the 100 sites shopped. Notably,

retailers like L.L. Bean and Zappos created cultures dedicated to customer service and were remarkably able to answer emails in under an hour.

MERCHANTS	Customer Service Destination Score	Overall Customer Phone Experience (1-3, 3=best)	# of hours/minutes between to respond to email	Business days to receive item	# of clicks from selection of product through checkout	One Click Settings
Aveda	3.00	3.0	4 hrs. 21 mins.	3.0	5	Y
Golfsmith	2.00	3.0	21 hrs. 48 mins.	1.0	5	N
L.L. Bean	2.75	3.0	16 mins.	3.0	6	Y
REI	2.75	3.0	3 hrs. 14 mins.	2.0	5	N
Sunglass Hut	2.50	2.50	19 hrs. 8 mins.	3.0	5	N
Zappos	2.25	2.50	48 mins.	3.0	3	Y
Average of 6 Customer Service Winners	2.54	2.83	8 hrs. 13 mins.	2.5	4.83	50%
Average of EG100 sites shopped with these features	2.25	2.56	20 hrs. 57 mins.	3.80	4.84	43%

NOTABLE FINDINGS

INFORMATION AND ACCESSIBILITY MANDATORY

Many online shoppers prefer to find their own answers yet today FAQs are only present on 80% of the retailers on par with 2012. Making them searchable only elevates the experience and one-in-four (25%) of those that offered FAQs enabled such functionality.

Retailers appreciate that the shopper landscape is competitive and 65% have product guarantees in place up from 53% in the prior year. With all the talk of showrooming and retailers looking to combat the force of Amazon, we found it interesting that only 21% of the sites where products could be price matched have a policy in place.

Knowing whether a product is in-stock at the shopping cart level saw greater traction this year with 83% of the eligible retailers making shoppers aware up from 77% from last year. Where we encountered out-of-stocks, we were happy to see that 26% of these retailers up from 16% in 2012 had set up email capability to notify shoppers when product was back in stock.

EFFICIENCIES DRIVE BOTH ACQUISITION AND RETENTION

Speed of checkout is paramount for time-starved shoppers and our findings indicated that retailers are embracing some of the tools that power efficiency. Retailers universally pre-populate customer data eliminating unnecessary entry time for those logged in visitors.

Shoppers don't want to face any obstacles when checking out and efforts in that area are centered on a further reduction in those that require membership prior to checking out (12% vs. 20% in 2012).

Clicks to checkout have dropped to 4.84 from 5.22 in 2012 where collapsible carts find more fans and 26% of the retailers (up from 20% in the prior year) are using such interfaces. Unfortunately, this year's EG100 sites only found 43% with one-click checkout down from 49% last year, missing an opportunity to save shoppers even more precious time.

Choices in payment grew particularly for PayPal now present on 62% versus 56% of last year's sites. For the first time, we measured shipping options (provided by 96% of retailers) where the average number of options was 3.59 extending logistical choices. Product delivery was commensurate with 2012 at just under 4 days (3.8 days) though somewhat disappointing given all of the discussion surrounding investments in logistics and distribution.

International reach continues to be on the minds of retailers where the majority (52%) have contracted for such services up from 45% last year.

COMMUNICATION IS CORE TO BRAND PERFORMANCE

Customers choose varying forms of communication when interacting with retailers. Each communication channel has its strengths and shoppers choose accordingly. While email responses were received in less than 21 hours, down slightly from 21 hours and 42 minutes in 2012, many shoppers are willing to wait for such information. Those that have a greater sense of urgency and don't mind crawling through call center hoops receive the quickest response at 4.65 minutes which was commensurate with last year's 4.70. Chat was more challenging this year as our average time rose from 6.89 to 9.66 minutes due to a handful of retailers that took too long to launch the chat and others who had inefficient CSRs manning those interactions.

	% Offering	Response Time	Experience 1-3 where 3 is best
Email	93%	20 hours 57 minutes	n/a
Call Center	99%	4.65 minutes	2.56
Live Chat	59%	9.66 minutes	2.58
Proactive Chat	23%	8.13 minutes	2.71

RETURN PROCESSING SEES GROWTH

Returns are a necessary evil in retail where savvy retailers make online return processing available, now seen on 27% of sites surveyed up from 21% in 2012. Prepaid labels also were more popular and included in packages from 59% of the retailers up from 55% last year.

IN SUMMARY

"Service must be at the philosophical core of any successful retailer. A review of existing self-service experiences and continual monitoring of delivery, communication touchpoints and an emphasis on building a customer-centric shopping experience should top every retailer's 2014

to-do list," concludes Freedman.

THE COMPANY

The e-tailing group, inc. serves as the multi-channel merchant's eye, bringing a merchant's sensibility to evolving the multi-channel shopping experience. A Chicago-based consultancy, they provide practical strategic perspectives and actionable merchandising solutions to merchants selling online as well as to enabling technology firms.

For more background about this research study, including a list of merchants surveyed or for additional information on the e-tailing group, inc. please contact Lauren Freedman at LF@e-tailing.com or visit the e-tailing group website www.e-tailing.com.

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Share the details!

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