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# Qualitative Analysis of Product Returns

Maithreyi Pejathaya<sup>1</sup>, Dr. CK Nagendra Gupta<sup>2</sup>

UG Student, Department of Industrial Engineering and Management, RV College of Engineering, Bengaluru, India<sup>1</sup>

Associate Professor, Department of Industrial Engineering and Management, RV College of Engineering, Bengaluru, India<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Product returns processes are part and parcel of any retail operation and yet it is not looked at as critically as it should be. Reverse logistics of returns processes are usually not well organised since returns are not as well anticipated as demands are, customer experience quality is diminished. A deep dive into the types of returns which are controllable and uncontrollable returns, helps in understanding the ways that these returns can be dealt with. Examples of some successful product handling cases can pave the way forward for many retailers and e-retailers. Understanding of the product returns process which involves the 5 steps (Receive, Sort and Stage, Process, Analyze, Support) is necessary for an efficient process.

**KEYWORDS:** Product returns, Retail, Reverse logistics, Customer experience.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Returns management is not among the top five objectives for 33% of all retailers. Furthermore, 25% of merchants do not handle returns efficiently or effectively. In any retailer's priority list, shipping and logistics expenses take precedence above improving return profitability. This is especially true for e-commerce businesses. Returns from retailers often occur all at once at the conclusion of a season for brands that sell through wholesale and direct-to-consumer (DTC) channels. Price matching and value erosion from rival retailers might result from lowering prices on the brand's own DTC site. And with an estimated 10 percent of all returns ending in a landfill, the environmental impact is immense. Retailers, on the other hand, are not helpless. Basic returns hygiene today encompasses a variety of capabilities, and more sophisticated efforts may assist retailers manage the effect of returns in a consumer-friendly manner, as well as the essential operational model and structural improvements that will enable them. Managing returns does come with a complex set of operational challenges, including consumer expectations, reverse logistics, process ownership, and data limitations.

Paper is organized as follows. Section II describes the difficulty of managing returns. The types of returns are given in Section III. Section IV presents the general product returns process. Finally, Section V presents conclusion.

## II. DIFFICULTY OF MANAGING RETURNS

Returns handling is an issue for retailers across the board, from home goods to consumer electronics, personal care, and food and beverage. While the following four main issues may vary by store, category, or even geography, they are all prevalent.

Consumer-friendly retailers feel obliged to accept high levels of returns. Returns trips provide a lot of opportunity to disappoint customers and a lot of opportunities to develop connections. As a result, 86 percent of survey respondents believe that a flexible return policy is important for growing revenue and share of wallet, and 75 percent believe returns are an unavoidable evil. The fact that the customers with the greatest return rates are typically the most valued is a specific restriction for department stores: loyal customers grow accustomed to return processes over time, and merchants increasingly feel the need to pay for return freight. Given that a merchant frequently pays round-trip shipping while earning no money, this can have a significant negative impact on fulfilment costs as a percentage of sales. For merchants with low gross margins per unit, the decline in fulfilment costs as a percentage of sales is more pronounced.

Reverse logistics process efficiencies are difficult to achieve. Despite the increase in volume, most reverse logistics businesses are still small and scattered. According to our survey results, the fragmentation of the reverse-logistics operations ends in an increasing number of better complexity within the course for a go back to turn out to be to be had to sell, starting from 10 percentage for the maximum honest in-save course to forty two percentage for returns which are again with the aid of using mail, processed centrally, and restocked in the shop or online.

As a result, justifying the investment in the procedures and technology required to enhance efficiency is challenging. To make matters even more complicated, merchants have little control over the timing and amount of returns, which frequently arrive in nonstandard packing. Ownership is difficult to define given the cross-functional nature of returns. While efficient returns processing is clearly the obligation of operations groups, stopping returns and maximizing their resale cost might also additionally require the coordination of merchandising, marketing, e-commerce, and finance groups, to call however a few. Perhaps due to this cross-purposeful effort, fifty eight percentage of survey respondents say that loss of duty for returns control inside any unmarried branch or commercial enterprise unit is a pain factor inside the organization. Furthermore, the absence of aligned incentives throughout applicable groups hinders coordination and decreases impact. Without an owner, structure, processes, or complete metrics, it's far no wonder that organizations have struggled to prioritize returns control.

Data limitations restrict companies' ability to understand and address root causes. Most stores do now no longer apprehend the whole unit economics of returns, together with markdown liability, how go back fees and reasons range via way of means of product category, and what an predicted degree of returns can be for a given product line. Two-thirds of survey respondents say their agency has a method to enhance the economics of returns, whilst eighty three percentage of them strongly agree that returns are a challenge for profitability. Many stores locate it much less highly-priced and logistically simpler to get rid of broken again items in a landfill than discover a separate disposition channel, similarly eroding the economics of the go back. Without this visibility, selections are being made on an advert hoc basis, and the basis reasons can not be addressed.

In the world of retail, returns and exchanges of products are a given. Returns of products by consumers are almost 8% of all retail sales (i.e. 260 billion dollars per year) and can in some cases even reach 30% in the fashion sector. Customers return items for a multitude of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with the quality of the product. As product returns control is a completely critical a part of the retail global for eCommerce sites, it's miles important which you and your workforce understand the way to manipulate them appropriately. From save rules to workforce schooling and mastering opportunities, you could use every of those answers to create the fine revel in for clients and rework a poor procedure right into a effective one. Returns of merchandise are frequently visible with the aid of using clients as a vital evil, a painful and typically inevitable procedure. For retailers, manufacturers and distributors, returns are visible as being annoying, a value centre and a place of capacity dissatisfaction for clients. As lengthy as merchandise are being sold, there'll constantly be returns. However, many a hit corporations have realised that the returns procedure has a sizable effect and that an powerful product go back strategy, this is an critical component of opposite logistics (the time period that consists of returns and some of different sports regarding objects that move "backwards" within the deliver chain), can convey with it numerous advantages.

### III. TYPES OF RETURNS

Controllable returns are caused by problems, challenges, or errors on the side of the vendor or customer, and may be largely minimised by the company's or its supply chain partners' plans and right programmes. Each controllable fact has a source or reasons that may be reduced or eliminated using the most sophisticated logistic procedures, better market projections, better product management or storage, and so on. Products came thanks to injury is eliminated through a mix of higher management, better packaging, and improved transport and storage of the things whereas they're being distributed through the availability chain. Basically, the issues ought to be prevented before they occur. As manageable returns of merchandise are caused by problems, difficulties or errors by the companies, or members of the supply chain, development of systems that handle symptoms, instead of the initial causes, can most likely result in continuous problems or, at least, problems that are solely part addressed. For example, if some products are returned due to quality issues in production, having prime quality logistical problems will do nothing for reducing come backs levels. within the same way, creating it less complicated or maybe harder for purchasers to return things doesn't cut back the amount of faulty merchandise came, which can be returned notwithstanding return policies.

Uncontrollable returns. Uncontrollable returns can't be removed through the corporation within the quick time period and are consequently frequently unavoidable. There are common opportunities for on-line consumers that can't



be managed through on-line stores. For example, it frequently takes place that clients order the incorrect length or variety of objects and could desire to go back them. Another purpose for which human beings go back merchandise is that they'll had offered some thing for a person else (specially at some stage in unique activities which include Christmas or birthdays) and the product become now no longer the only the recipient wanted. Also, in latest times, there may be an growth in a phenomenon called "serial returning" that may be labeled as a worst exercise and that includes ordering numerous sizes or distinctive hues withinside the equal shoe in order that they may be attempted on after which lower back together, after locating which one is proper or actually after having taken pix to publish on social networks. This is likewise a form of uncontrollable go back, as a minimum with cutting-edge returns policies. As shops haven't any manipulate over those variables, those returns are labeled as uncontrollable. The good judgment at the back of the improvement of the returns process, in particular for uncontrollable returns, is a easy one. Companies to now no longer build, hire or rent warehouse area to deal with the most variety of merchandise that can be required through clients. As stock prices may be excessive, businesses frequently attempt to lessen or absolutely take away the stock thru Just-in-Time programmes. Warehouses are configured to manipulate the minimal quantity of product required to satisfy purchaser demands, counting on excessive pace stock or manufacturing levels. Therefore, the most desirable quantity of product returns will be the least possible; i.e. handiest uncontrollable returns. As a fundamental strategy, consequently, businesses ought to attempt to take away the reasons at the back of controllable returns and additionally expand most desirable methods for coping with uncontrollable returns of merchandise. Improving product quality, removal of incorrect orders and cargo errors, along implementation of programmes that produce an stock controlled through providers and green purchaser response, will restriction returns handiest for the ones merchandise with the intention to come again irrespective of what the corporation does or does now no longer do withinside the quick time period. Also, additional robust an improved returns management method will facilitate the corporate to recover a higher share of merchandise that will be revived or regenerated and a higher percentage of components or parts which will be recovered for resale. Managing product returns may also considerably scale back costs, up operational efficiency, improved client product disposal strategies, higher recovery rates for unsellable products and a spread of different strategies. economical process of returns brings with it a mess of advantages. In essence, an efficient process each reduces the amount of returns and makes the returns process more efficient, so of the less merchandise comed, a better share will return into the distribution pipeline to be sold. For example, Road Runner Sports Inc. of San Diego, California, a multichannel distributor of trainers and gear, focuses on each aspects. the corporate trains its salespeople to be advisors and counselors to the customer. They perceive sport shoes and coaching regimens in order that they can suggest products best suited to the customer. As a result, Road Runner's return rate on running shoes is 12%, significantly below the business average of 15%–20%. However, once returns do occur, Road Runner adopted the SmartLabel from Newgistics, a supplier of intelligent comes management solutions primarily based in Austin, Texas. The SmartLabel could be a prepaid, preaddressed, barcoded return label that a client can take away from the acquisition invoice, placed on the package and drop it off in any us communicating mailbox. This approach makes the returns method fast and simple for the customer, and Road Runner has found that nearly 80% of their returns come back via the SmartLabel approach. Also, a more robust returns process will facilitate the corporate salvage a higher share of merchandise which will be refurbished or remanufactured, and a higher percentage of the components or parts which will be salvaged for resale. For example, some makers of engines and pumps take back items that are defective, being replaced or came back for warrant work. parts are typically replaced and also the items returned to service or resold as refurbished parts. a number of the bearings and different parts that are replaced are absolutely serviceable however don't meet company specifications. However, the specifications for this stuff are more than for an equivalent parts utilized in other applications by other manufacturers. Thus, they will be oversubscribed to other original instrumentation manufacturers to be used in their products. Previously, these components would are oversubscribed for scrap, however prices obtained by marketing them to OEMs are considerably higher, leading to higher levels of profits for the seller. Product returns management may also vitally scale back costs by improved operational efficiencies, higher disposition methods for salables, higher recovery rates for unsalables and a range of different strategies. Effective returns process typically produces multiple benefits. an honest example is Altec Electronica Chihuahua, a Mexican producer of electronic merchandise adore radios, amplifiers and servo motors for power-train systems. the corporate regularly intimate with significant injury to the delicate physical science replacement components as they moved to customers. In addition, it absolutely was fraught to cut back purchasing, storage and disposal prices for the massive volume of packaging materials utilized in the supply process. the solution for Altec was to use revertible packaging product of reusable polythene with cross-linked foam inserts. every returnable instrumentation accommodated a hundred and twenty parts. The new packaging not solely eliminated damage, it additionally reduced the utilization of disposable films, covers and cardboard boxes. world wide web edges were significant: elimination of lost and broken parts, accrued handiness of storage space,

reduced freight cost, improved stackability and handling and elimination of the disposal method for used packaging materials. By eliminating the issues inflicting returns, the corporate saved \$5 million in an exceedingly single year.

#### IV. THE PRODUCT RETURNS PROCESS

The returns process, for the most part, is what happens when a retail customer returns an item to a shop or sends it back to a catalogue or Internet firm. The five steps of the process are the same for nearly all businesses, regardless of industry or product type: receive, sort and stage, process, analyse, and support.

Stage 1 — Receive. During the initial stage of the method, product returns are received at some centralized location, sometimes a warehouse or distribution center. In several cases, a primary step during this process is to produce a return acknowledgment. Within the bookselling business, for example, returns from retailers are huge, and this a part of the business should be handled effectively and with as very little value impact as possible. As a result, many giant publishers have machine-driven their returns process to realize cost and repair goals. Generally, came things could embrace a good assortment and style of products, returned via a range of carriers and in a on the face of it infinite variety of packages, either on full pallets or in individual containers — a way totally different procedure than once the things were originally shipped dead set customers. The way that items are came and received greatly influences however merchandise are sorted and staged within the next step of the returns method. For example, one physics manufacturer fast-tracks returns that are full pallets through the system in order that they're on the market purchasable additional quickly, generally in below twenty four hours. Some firms are finding that it's value effective to “jump-start” the returns process at this stage, that is, to make a disposition call a few came item as early within the returns method as doable. Very like the speculation of postponement for forward provision processes, the conception of prepostponement will be applied to returns. Postponement refers to waiting till the last possible moment to produce added services to a product. For instance, Sauder woodwork Co., headquartered in Archbold, Ohio, sells ready-to-assemble furniture. Since prices are supported product worth, that will increase as value is added to the product, suspending value-adding activities may result in lower costs. Conversely, in reverse distribution, process returned things nearer the point-of-sale, that is, early within the returns process, saves each time and money. The thought behind this approach is that returns are evaluated as before long as doable after they are received to assess their retrievable worth. The advantage is that process expenses will be avoided for things that are actually wasted and incurred just for those items with important value (that is, those items that may basically be ameliorate back to the traditional distribution channel).

Stage 2 — Sort and Stage. Once gadgets are received, merchandise are taken care of for similarly staging within the returns process. This type might be primarily based totally on how the gadgets were returned (for example, pallets, cartons, packets); the form of return (which might be recognized from the cope with at the object; the colour of the label, or a few different sort of without problems identifiable feature); or length or range of the object being returned. Combinations of those alternatives also are possible, with subsorts taking place. Typically, the same old for this type-and-degree pastime blended with the receipt pastime is 3 days or less, with maximum organizations having one-to-day standards.

Stage 3 — Process. In this level, lower back objects are subsorted into objects, primarily based totally on their stock-retaining unit quantity, which may be lower back to stock/inventory; whilst supplier returns (if applicable) are taken care of in step with the precise supplier name. It is at this factor that patron credit may be given, even though maximum businesses do now no longer trouble credit till later within the manner, typically in Stages four or 5. Items pass from the sort-and-level vicinity to the processing station(s). Persons at those stations can manner the objects so as in their receipt, in step with the sort of product, through patron kind or location, in step with the bodily length of the objects or a few mixture of those and different factors. Handling a aggregate of objects evens out the workflow and makes it less complicated to increase piece-managing metrics and standards. In one consumer-merchandise company, returns are located on a conveyor belt after receipt, then pass to processing stations in which diverters direct objects to every station in order that every processing line has an identical quantity of go back objects of their queue. Having the right records at the go back label at the product permits for objects from the identical patron to be diverted to the identical conveyor line for simultaneous processing. At this level, the office work that followed the go back is separated from the object and those files are then bodily despatched to the executive vicinity for contrast with the digital statistics must discrepancies occur.

Stage 4 — Analyze. It is at this level that personnel need to be the maximum tremendously trained, on account that that is in which the maximum essential disposition choices are made. Because the fee of the lower back object varies relying at the product disposition method employed, people concerned on this level need to be very informed

approximately the merchandise, repairing or refurbishing opportunities, allowable as opposed to nonallowable returns and the monetary blessings related to every disposition option. For example, gadgets that may be repackaged for resale will go back extra monetary praise than gadgets that need to be refurbished or remanufactured previous to sale. Repackaged or refurbished gadgets constantly bring about better sales than gadgets being offered as scrap or salvage. A very last step on this level, and one which desires to be deliberate in advance, is advertising of merchandise which have been repackaged, repaired, refurbished or remanufactured. Many remanufactured or refurbished merchandise are offered in secondary markets for extra revenue, regularly to a marketplace section unwilling or not able to buy a brand new product. This may encompass the usage of repaired merchandise as spare parts. The markets for those merchandise need to be handled simply as any marketplace — with an information of consumer desires, fee elasticity and right channels of distribution. Effective advertising techniques for repackaged, repaired, refurbished and remanufactured merchandise regularly decide whether or not a enterprise will make a earnings of their returns process.

Stage 5 — Support. At this point, the disposition of every returned object has been determined. Items are allotted in keeping with wherein they need to go. Back-to-inventory or returned-to-save gadgets are lower back to stock. If restore, refurbishment or repackaging are required, suitable diagnostics, maintenance and meeting and disassembly operations are done if you want to get the gadgets right into a salable circumstance. Relative to costs, the diploma of restore or refurbishing that takes place need to be correlated with the capacity price of the product as soon as it has been “improved.” Because recuperation fees for repaired or refurbished merchandise are excessive, exceeding different disposition options, appearing restore and refurbishment successfully at low value is essential to a company’s go back on investment. Likewise, getting gadgets right into a salable circumstance speedy additionally reduces stock sporting costs. From a carrier perspective, those salable gadgets are made geared up for resale to clients sooner, for this reason enhancing carrier levels. This could be specially essential if there may be excessive call for for the gadgets and ordinary inventories had been depleted. Items which might be going to be lower back to companies should be dealt with speedy, inasmuch as supplier go back home windows may be very short, specially while the time to get the gadgets returned from clients or shops is taken into consideration. The pace of the returns manner additionally has essential coins-go with the drift implications. Speedy processing of returns will lessen the quantity of coins tied up in returns stock, thereby growing the profitability of the manner. In a few instances, processed gadgets could be resold in outlet shops, function replacements for guarantee maintenance or bought to wholesalers, off-rate stores or offshore buyers. Returned gadgets may be donated to local, nearby and country wide charities or comfort organizations. If the gadgets aren’t salable to a few form of customer, they’ll probably be bought to a salvage or scrap provider who will buy the gadgets for the price in their components.

To eliminate small objects, connected component labelling is applied to the resultant image. (c) represents text detection by applying second set of criteria which eliminates all the objects whose area is less than 300 and filled area is less than 500. Too often, businesses are greater than satisfied simply to decrease the fees of handling and administering the price of product returns. However, product returns control can emerge as a earnings middle if controlled and administered properly. Turning product returns right into a earnings middle calls for that similarly to price savings, businesses enhance the restoration cost of returns and, if possible, attain sales from diverse opposite logistics activities. More efficient product returns packages can lessen variable expenses, ensuing in progressed margins. Companies frequently discover that they could lessen processing expenses with the aid of using as much as 50%, now and again more, if their present methods are inefficient. Because an awful lot of the product returns technique is manual, mainly withinside the processing of purchaser credit and withinside the assessment of product returns for disposition, the removal of exertions inefficiencies or the development of exertions productiveness can gain huge fee benefits.<sup>7</sup> Strategically and operationally, however, how can opposite logistics be a profit center? The following illustrate a number of the essential approaches that efficient returns control can lessen expenses, enhance sales and beautify profitability as a result.

Improved customer service and customer knowledge. Effective product returns control generally outcomes in client credit being issued greater speedy and decreases the quantity of reconciliation problems, so clients are greater glad and sales are increased (client delight has been verified to have a effective effect on profitability). Additionally, clients are much more likely to have interaction in repeat buying with the equal business enterprise. In addition, returns are an exceptional supply of records at the shopping for expectancies and conduct of clients. Few businesses are organized to acquire such records, however L.L. Bean Inc., an clothing business enterprise primarily based totally in Freeport, Maine, and Nordstrom Inc., a prime branch shop chain primarily based totally in Seattle, Washington, are businesses that do acquire records thru returns and locate that the records have helped them growth their income volume. By

tailoring follow-up advertising and marketing applications after a return, the businesses are capable of stimulate extra purchases via way of means of the client.

Effective inventory management and product dispositioning. When performed effectively, greater price is made out of the disposition of again merchandise (there are numerous alternatives to be had for dispositioning returns, and the alternatives have one-of-a-kind fee and sales implications). A accurate instance of prepostpone-ment, mentioned earlier, is Logitech International SA, which inclinations returns as early withinside the go back cycle as feasible, setting product lower back at the shelf or into an opportunity channel hastily, thereby rushing coins waft and minimizing garage fee. Logitech, primarily based totally in Switzerland, is a \$1.4 billion manufacturer of joysticks, pc mice and keyboards. Returns for Logitech frequently constitute 10% or greater of outbound shipments. Because of the short tempo of generation on this business, stock needs to be moved speedy to keep away from excessive charge erosion. Logitech follows a procedure of progressive dispositioning, in which the intention is to hastily and constantly disposition (repair, refurbish, liquidate, recycle and scrap) again stock as early withinside the cycle as feasible. One manner they accomplish this intention is to apply an internet web page that inclinations extra stock thru numerous channels, including intranet auctions. On balance, a key monetary intention of the returns procedure is to lose as low as feasible on a go back. To accomplish this intention, the point of interest in designing the machine is to limit the lack of product price, due to the fact every step withinside the returns procedure and every dealing with of the object incur fees that subtract from the product's price.<sup>8</sup> It is vital to maintain in thoughts that efficiency (low fee) in returns processing isn't always continually the pleasant strategy. Speed is the crucial variable in lots of cases, and executives want to do not forget that fee-green deliver chains aren't always rapid deliver chains. The longer it takes to retrieve and procedure a again product, the decrease the probability of economically possible reuse alternatives. Logitech offers an awesome instance of the want to cognizance on velocity as opposed to fee. For objects with quick existence cycles (for instance, clean produce, a few pharmaceuticals) the greater green the returns procedure, the greater product is "saved" from destruction or markdowns.

Personnel and Training. A general rule of thumb is that the businesses that perform the simplest job of process returns are those with regular managers answerable for the activity. Additionally, the best companies give each formal and informal coaching of staff in product returns processing. normal in operation procedures manuals are provided to new and continued employees responsible for processing returns. every of those procedures is mentioned full through explanations of every step within the process; review of the instrumentation which will be utilized in the processing activity; and explanations, with diagrams, of pc inputs needed at each stage of the returns process. In addition to written policies and procedures, new staff are mentored for a few amount of your time by competent personnel.

Good Communications. Without well-designed personal and technological communications procedures that allow the smooth and quick exchange of information, an effective and efficient returns process will fail. When considering the processes involved in returns — open, inspect, repair, remanufacture, scrap, and so on — it is clear that these steps necessitate communication with a variety of internal and external departments, customers, vendors, liquidators, and, in the case of hazardous materials disposal, a variety of governmental bodies. Communication is especially crucial in Internet transactions since buyers want credit card accounts to be credited quickly.

## V. CONCLUSION

Although the nature of product returns varies appreciably from organisation to organisation because of form of industry, product, marketplace and different factors, pinnacle control at maximum hit agencies acknowledges that full-time management of the product returns procedure is a concern due to the fact it is able to bring about fee savings, sales enhancements, carrier stage upgrades and, in a few instances, sustainable aggressive advantage. Most of those hit agencies put into effect the policies, approaches and practices offered right here and difficulty them to non-stop measurement, assessment and improvement.

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