

Retailers must deliver on delivery



“A sale isn’t a sale till you’ve got the cash.” So said the sign in my cab in my days as a Co-op milkman. But for most retailers this is not really an issue any more with both electronic payments and cash proving to be

fast and secure.

The final stage of a purchase, both internet and in-store ordered, is not payment, but the delivery. Psychologists tell us that people’s memory of a particular event is dominated by their last experience of it. This is one reason why bricks-and-mortar retailers put such emphasis on the checkout.

So isn’t it curious that retailers can be so cavalier about the last customer experience – the delivery? Their website may be fantastic the prices great, but what happens when the product is finally on its way home?

The slickest deliverers are the food retailers. They use their own employees, as the repetitive nature of grocery purchasing would soon kill their online sales if delivery were poor. So they offer flexible, accurate, narrow time-windows with well-trained, friendly staff.

So it surprises me how many other retailers subcontract such a vital customer interaction to a third party. How much trust do retailers have in the man and a van?

Recently, I ordered a new bed and furniture from Dreams. Bed duly delivered by Dreams employees exactly as promised. Matching furniture delivered – or rather, not delivered



Food retailers invariably use their own staff for deliveries to ensure the best service and standards

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– by Yodel. Three different delivery dates were all missed. The call centre doesn’t answer the phone. Try calling Dreams itself, and you find it also has a call centre and a local branch that don’t answer the phone.

Dreams is of course not alone in not caring enough about customers getting their products. After all, Yodel serves over 350 retailers. Call centres that keep customers waiting on a premium line while playing musical monstrosities are the norm. It’s usual to hear recorded messages that they’re experiencing record customer calls or that all their operatives are busy answering calls. You see it’s the customers’ own fault.

Why are companies putting customers through this, especially when it’s usually due to the business’s own failures? Why don’t delivery companies seek and respond to customer feedback? Well of course the problem is that their customers are the retailers, not the recipients.

Of course not all retailers get this wrong. Amazon, for example, demonstrates both that it can be done and that others can’t afford not to get it right. Retailers should make it clear how – and by whom – they will deliver customer’s products.

Digital technology is transforming retail, providing extraordinary improvements in the online retailing experience. Yet many retailers are letting themselves down by abandoning customers in that last – that fundamental – delivery process. Nowadays my milk float motto would be ‘A sale isn’t a sale till the customer’s got the product’.