# Five Ways for Independent E-Retailers to Improve their Customer Experience

The rise of online shopping behemoths like Amazon strikes fear into the hearts of independent online fashion retailers. While Amazon is likely to continue to corner the lion’s share of the market, there will always be customers who favor independent retailers. In certain areas of the online shopping experience, independent online retailers can possess an edge over major e-tailers. Chief among these is the field of [customer experience](http://blogs.gartner.com/jake-sorofman/gartner-surveys-confirm-customer-experience-new-battlefield/), which has already become the most important factor for online shoppers. Thanks to their size, enthusiasm and creativity, independent retailers are well placed to provide an exemplary shopping experience from the first click to unboxing. Here are five ways that independent retailers can improve their customer experience and their bottom line.

## Personal Shopping Assistance

In the world of fashion retail, shoppers are accustomed to personal advice and knowledgeable store assistants who help them locate the most flattering items of clothing. This is backed up by a Forrester [report](https://www.forrester.com/report/Free%2BShipping%2BContinues%2BTo%2BBe%2BEvery%2BRetailers%2BFrenemy/-/E-RES100141https%3A/www.forrester.com/report/Free%2BShipping%2BContinues%2BTo%2BBe%2BEvery%2BRetailers%2BFrenemy/-/E-RES100141) that 61% of customers value the ability to ask a customer support worker for product suggestions. A dedicated and detail-focused independent retailer is better placed to offer this level of personal support than a more extended online store. Knowing each customer’s sizing, favorite colors and personal style helps independent retailers to present themselves as supportive shopping assistants who know what their customer likes and deliver on those preferences.

## Sizing technology

New [sizing technology](http://www.mytotalretail.com/article/sizing-technology-can-bring-online-apparel-returns-zero/all/) is a boon for independent online fashion retailers addressing the challenge of fit, and brings them an opportunity to outshine larger online stores. [Everlane](https://www.everlane.com/), for example, shows their products from multiple camera angles as well as a video of the model wearing the product, so that customers can get a clearer idea of how the item looks ‘in real life’. Accompanying this with a sizing guide and information about a model’s height and size adds to the practical value for shoppers. Other companies like [ASOS](http://www.asos.com/) use [Virtusize](http://redirect.viglink.com/?format=go&jsonp=vglnk_150167405432312&key=04456be58835e205f828e5b67d31a137&libId=j5uvr6u7010001or000DA4qpz3hsb&loc=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ecouterre.com%2Fonline-retailers-use-high-tech-sizing-technology-to-reduce-returns%2F&v=1&out=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.virtusize.com%2F&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.co.il%2F&title=Online%20Retailers%20Use%20High-Tech%20Sizing%20Technology%20to%20Reduce%20Returns%20%7C%20Ecouterre&txt=Virtusize) to help customers compare the fit of the online product with clothes that the already own. Providing this clear and accurate information is key to creating positive and realistic expectations and reducing the rate of returns.

## Customer service

Customer service is an obvious key to positive customer experience. For example, live chat permits independent retailers to build a relationship with their customers before they even make a purchase. [63%](https://blog.kissmetrics.com/live-chat/) of customers are more likely to return to a website that offers live chat. These real conversations also give the retailer rich information about their customers’ interests, concerns and motivations so that the company can make an ever-more personal offering.

Accurate product descriptions and a smooth and transparent returns service are well known milestones on the road to satisfied customers, but they can still be overlooked by online retailers of all sizes. Smaller independent e-stores should focus on these opportunities to outshine the larger competition. Finally, delivery is a key step in customer service which independent retailers cannot afford to ignore. Missed deliveries and poor delivery service are [not quickly forgiven](https://econsultancy.com/blog/61816-what-can-retailers-do-to-improve-online-delivery). It is doubly important for independent online stores to make delivery a smooth process through services such as email and SMS notifications and bookable delivery slots.

## Packaging

It goes without saying that poorly packaged items that arrive damaged, messy or unattractive are a big disincentive to repeat business, but good packaging can actually build the foundation of a successful online business.  Some online retailers such as [Birchbox](https://www.birchbox.com/) and the [Dollar Shave Club](https://www.dollarshaveclub.com/) have built a solid part of their reputation on their unboxing experience. The [popularity of unboxing videos](https://blog.ordoro.com/2016/04/19/7-best-unboxing-experiences/) on YouTube shows how much customers enjoy receiving well-packaged items. Adding inserts that thank shoppers for their custom or invite them to send feedback are [further building blocks](https://moz.com/ugc/how-to-build-a-great-online-fashion-brand-34-things-that-really-amazing-fashion-retailers-do) in the consumer relationship.

## Personalized Retention programs

Independent retailers have an opportunity to build a relationship with their customers that is far deeper than that created by large chains. With segmented emails, retailers can target customers based on their shopping style, and follow up on purchases with personal emails that suggest new products that are directly relevant to each recipient. A survey by Invesp found that [56%](https://www.invespcro.com/blog/online-shopping-personalization/) of shoppers are more likely to return to a site that recommends suitable products.

By borrowing a leaf out of Amazon’s book, independent retailers can make personalized suggestions of future purchase items in the course of the shopper’s browsing journey. For example, ASOS upsell further items at checkout by recommending that customers ‘complete the look’. Clever use of cookies permits stores to immediately direct customers to the area of the store that most interests them. Tracking customers’ locations also enables retailers to make suggestions based on local weather conditions, special events like major sporting or national celebrations and even in-store sales in the customer’s nearest bricks and mortar store.

These are just five prime ways for independent retailers to increase their customer share through an enhanced customer experience. With services like personal shopping assistance, sizing technology and great packaging, smaller stores can establish themselves as more relevant, useful and fun than the larger online e-tailers. Better customer service and personalized retention programs enable smaller online stores to nurture their existing customer base so that each customer becomes a valuable asset and an ambassador for their brand. What other approaches would you add?