

**Stepping outside** the postal environment and into the wider e-logistics world for a moment, all the talk is about how to improve the customer experience. Retailers are increasingly aware that in a shop environment they have direct control over their brand and the experience the shopper gets in association

# On your doorstep

**ANDREW STARKEY** LOOKS AT HOW POSTS NEED TO GAIN MORE DATA ON THE DOORSTEP THROUGH ADDED-VALUE SERVICES IN ORDER TO IMPROVE DELIVERY SERVICES

with it. But in e-retail the handover experience is in the hands of others – the delivery agent.

E-retailers want to have more influence and control over this customer ‘doorstep’ experience. Fortunately the technology now exists to improve it, which will give the e-retailer a level of control and confidence they need.

Handheld devices provide the ability to pass on delivery instructions and useful information to the agent that the consumer has provided, and pre-delivery alerts enable both the delivery agent and the shopper to cooperate in a virtual environment to smooth the delivery path.

In this respect, postal operators should be leading the field, but my experience is that this is not usually the case. Perhaps restricted by historic practices, investment limits, regulatory requirements and suchlike, posts seem to be lagging behind in their ability to use this technology when compared with their ‘commercial’ counterparts.

Yet supported by the USO, which generally requires the post to cover every address at least five to six days a week, the postman is one of the most frequent visitors to your door and as

such has the opportunity to gather information about shoppers’ preferences and requirements, which can be passed on to the retailer. As such, there must be a strategic opportunity for postal delivery agents to gain this information using existing ‘doorstep’ technology in a more extensive way than any competitor.

Posts need to consider what value retailers would place on receiving information about their customers’ delivery preferences, which could be captured at the time of delivery and would enable them to anticipate the shoppers’ needs better on their next order. It’s also important to take into account what value the shopper would place on being able to pre-book a return hand-over to the delivering postal agent rather than having to make a separate trip to a post office. Finally, postal operators also have the opportunity to collect delivery feedback scores while on the doorstep, to enable the retailer to monitor customer satisfaction and respond to any potential product or delivery problems. What value would the retailer place on gaining this information, which could improve their delivery service?

Even if the fee that can be generated from these kinds of transactions is very small (less than the price of a stamp?), the multiple is huge and the revenue return for the postal operator is incremental – and at no cost as they are at the door anyway.

It’s my view that the ability to pass on the data that is currently and potentially available to delivery firms (especially posts) will be the basis for the next level of differentiation between carriers in the industry. Those that can move fastest and develop services that can help e-retailers improve their delivery services will find the most favour with their e-retailer clients. If postal operators don’t move to make the most of their strategic ‘frequent delivery’ advantage in this respect, I am sure others will.

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