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State of Delivery Performance 2026: U.S. Consumer Benchmarks

Insights from 1,000+ U.S. shoppers on delivery expectations, trust signals, and performance standards.

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Foreword

Consumers now evaluate brands through delivery performance.

Before 2020, delivery windows were wider, and occasional delays were easier to accept. As online shopping became embedded in daily life, volumes increased, and delivery expectations tightened. Performance became more visible. Missed windows and inaccurate updates began shaping how brands were judged.

Today, expectations have settled around clear and measurable standards. 53% of shoppers expect delivery within two to three days. Our survey of more than 1,000 active U.S. online shoppers shows that delivery execution functions as a measurable brand KPI. 93% say shipping performance influences how they evaluate a company. In U.S. markets, fewer than 1 in 10 believe delivery promises are always met. Missed windows, inaccurate notifications, and return friction shape trust more than transit speed.

This shift has important implications for enterprise retailers and logistics leaders. Competitive advantage in delivery will come from orchestration across routing, carrier management, visibility, and returns, not from faster promises alone.

In this report, we share the benchmarks shaping consumer expectations today and the operational priorities required to meet them at scale.

Delivery Is Now a Measurable Brand KPI

Consumers in the United States now evaluate delivery as an operational promise. Delivery Performance is judged on three measurable dimensions:

☑ Timeline accuracy

☑ Tracking reliability

☑ First-attempt completion and handling quality

When these fail, brand trust declines immediately.

Introduction and Key Findings

In the U.S., 93% of consumers say shipping and delivery influence how they evaluate a company. Logistics execution is a visible part of the customer experience and directly contributes to brand credibility.

Missed delivery windows are cited by 21% of consumers as their biggest irritation, making timing precision the leading performance signal. Failed first-attempt deliveries and "sorry we missed you" notices are each reported by 17%, highlighting the importance of successful doorstep execution. Unsafe package placement is also reported by 17%, while 15% cite damaged packages and 11% identify inaccurate tracking as a concern.

Together, these indicators define the operational benchmark for delivery performance in the U.S. market. Consistency across these touchpoints strengthens consumer confidence and reinforces brand reliability.

Executive Insights from the Survey

Communication reduces dissatisfaction

93%

of U.S. consumers say proactive updates during delays at least partially offset frustration.

Return costs lead to post-purchase friction

25%

of consumers in US markets identify return shipping fees as the most difficult part of the returns process.

Confidence in delivery promises is moderate

69%

of U.S. consumers say brands deliver on time "most of the time."

Delivery promises are not assumed

9%

of U.S. consumers believe brands always meet their fast or guaranteed delivery promises.

Holiday delivery is closely monitored

51%

of consumers expect holiday shipping to be the same or faster than regular delivery speeds.

Missed delivery windows remain a top U.S. frustration

21%

of U.S. consumers cite missed delivery windows as their biggest irritation.

The U.S. Delivery Standard in 2026

| CATEGORY	U.S. BENCHMARK	WHAT THIS MEANS FOR RETAILERS
Delivery Window Standard	**65%** say 2–3 days is appropriate. Only 20% accept four days or longer.	Structure fulfillment networks to reliably support a 2–3 day standard. Inventory placement and carrier allocation should align with this benchmark.
Impact on Brand Perception	**93%** say delivery performance affects how they evaluate a company.	Delivery execution directly influences brand equity and repeat purchase behavior. Treat logistics as a customer experience lever.
Trust in Fast Delivery Claims	**69%** say promises are kept "most of the time."	Align advertised delivery speeds with actual operational capacity to strengthen credibility.
Top Delivery Signal	Missed delivery windows lead at **21%**, followed by first-attempt completion and placement quality.	Prioritize timing precision and first-attempt success to reinforce performance reliability.
Role of Communication	**93%** say proactive updates improve perception during delays.	Invest in real-time visibility and accurate customer notifications across systems.
Returns Experience	**25%** cite return shipping fees as the biggest challenge.	Simplify return cost structures and accelerate refunds to improve post-purchase satisfaction.
Holiday Expectations	**51%** expect holiday delivery to be the same or faster than standard speeds.	Plan peak capacity without lowering SLA standards.

In the U.S., delivery expectations are clearly structured around defined timelines rather than extreme acceleration. Performance is shaped by consistent execution, accurate tracking, and a seamless returns experience. For enterprise retailers, this clarifies investment priorities toward stronger orchestration, real-time visibility, and coordinated carrier performance management that support reliable delivery at scale.

Defined Delivery Windows Set the Baseline for Performance

When asked what they consider an appropriate delivery timeframe for online orders, U.S. consumers converge around a clearly defined window. Expectations are structured around two to three days, with limited demand for same-day fulfillment.

This concentration establishes the current delivery benchmark in the United States.

Defined Delivery Window Preferences
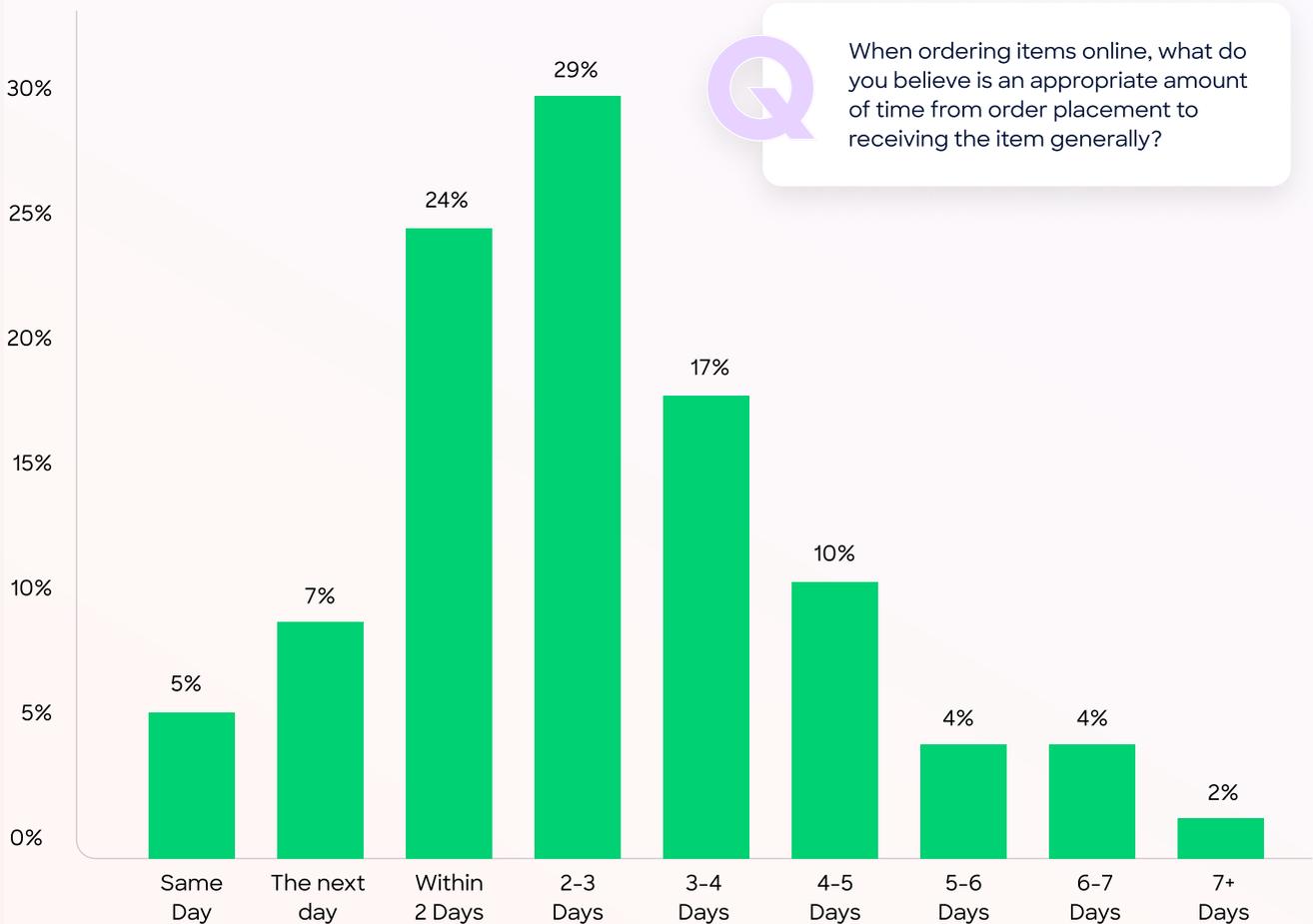
Q — When ordering items online, what do you believe is an appropriate amount of time from order placement to receiving the item generally?

Same Day	The next day	Within 2 Days	2–3 Days	3–4 Days	4–5 Days	5–6 Days	6–7 Days	7+ Days
5%	7%	24%	29%	17%	10%	4%	4%	2%

U.S. shoppers cluster expectations around a 2–3 day delivery window, with limited demand for same-day fulfillment.

2–3 days is the dominant expectation (29%), making it the single most accepted delivery window and establishing it as the current standard benchmark.

A combined 53% expect delivery within two to three days (24% within two days, 29% in 2–3 days), indicating compressed expectations across the majority of shoppers.

Only 12% expect next-day or same-day delivery, suggesting ultra-fast fulfillment remains a minority expectation rather than a universal demand.

Just 6% accept delivery timelines beyond five days, reinforcing that extended delivery windows fall outside mainstream consumer standards.

Holiday Shipping Expectations

Q During the holiday season, do you expect and plan for shipping speed from brands to be:
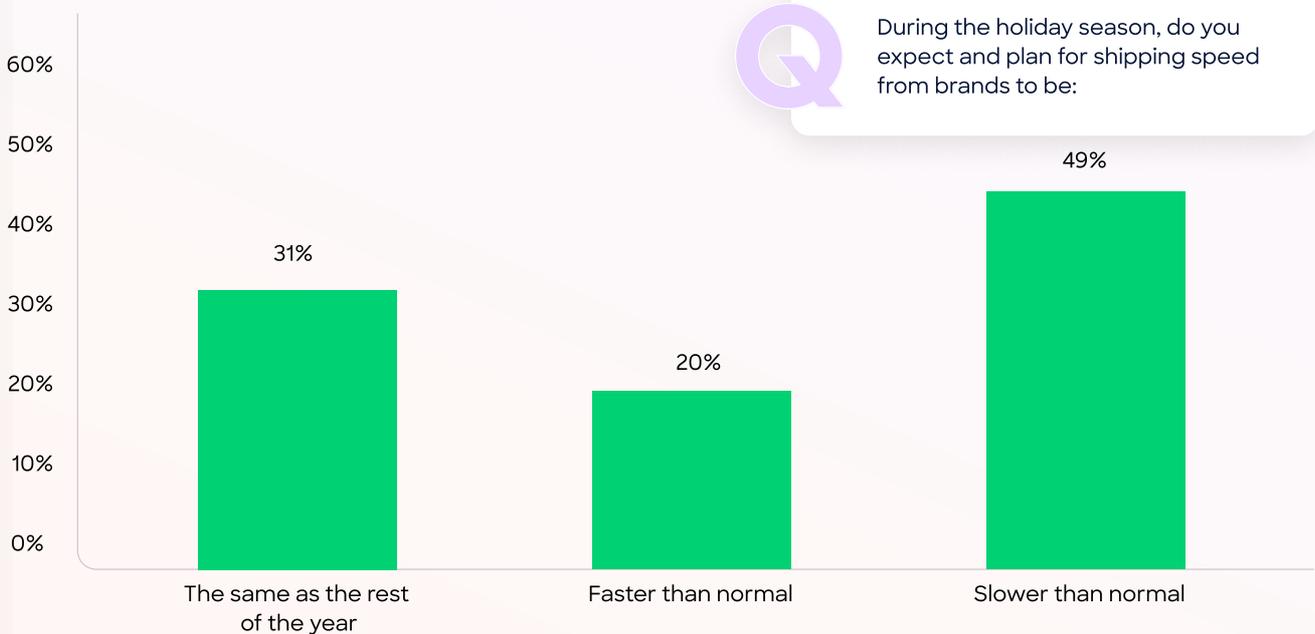
Half of consumers expect holiday shipping to be the same or faster than standard delivery speeds, despite peak season volume.

During the holiday season, some anticipate slower delivery due to peak volumes, but many still expect standard or improved performance.

31%
expect shipping to be the same as it has been for the rest of the year.

20%
expect shipping to be faster than normal.

49%
expect shipping to be slower than normal.

With 51% expecting performance to match or exceed normal delivery speeds, peak season does not significantly reset consumer standards. Delivery reliability during high-volume periods remains a visible component of brand performance.

Building a Delivery Network That Meets Consumer Expectations

Here's how to align your delivery operations with what consumers expect today.

1

Design Your Network Around the 2-4 Day Delivery Standard

Insight:
53% of U.S. consumers expect delivery within two to three days.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:
If customers expect delivery within this window, verify whether your operation can truly meet it.

Break down your delivery timeline to accommodate:
- Inventory placement across regions
- Carrier mix and reliability
- Linehaul transit times
- Routing performance during peak volumes

Set customer delivery promises based on measured on-time performance, not marketing targets.

Enterprises that align network design with realistic delivery windows achieve higher SLA consistency without increasing logistics costs.

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2

Make Communication Part of the Delivery SLA

Insight:
93% of U.S. consumers say delivery performance influences how they evaluate a brand.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:
Delivery communication must be treated as an operational SLA, not a CX add-on. Ensure:
- Single source of truth across WMS, TMS, and carrier systems
- Real-time status synchronization across partners
- Predictive delay alerts based on route and capacity signals

In multi-carrier networks, inconsistent tracking data erodes trust faster than slow delivery.

Enterprises that invest in integrated visibility reduce escalations, protect brand perception, and improve customer retention.

3

Align Customer Promises With Network Reality

Insight:
69% of U.S. consumers say brands deliver on time "most of the time.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:
Delivery commitments must be generated from network performance data, not marketing targets.

Leading retailers now:
- Base delivery windows on lane-level on-time performance
- Adjust promises dynamically during peaks and disruptions
- Align marketing, CX, and logistics on achievable SLAs
- Track promise vs. actual as a core operational KPI

In multi-node networks, inaccurate promises usually come from fragmented planning across WMS, carriers, and regional teams.

Enterprises that link customer promises to real-time capacity and routing data improve trust, reduce reattempt costs, and stabilize delivery economics.

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4

Treat Returns as a Core Logistics Workflow

Insight:

25% of U.S. consumers identify return shipping fees as the most challenging part of the returns process.

19% cite drop-off coordination as a key consideration.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:

At scale, returns are a network problem involving inventory visibility, carrier allocation, and refund workflows.

Leading retailers now:

- Integrate returns into routing and carrier planning
- Use localized drop-off and pickup networks to reduce customer effort
- Trigger refunds from the first scan or proof of receipt, where risk allows
- Track return cycle time as a core KPI

Modern logistics platforms treat returns as a planned flow alongside outbound deliveries.

Enterprises that redesign reverse logistics reduce cost leakage, improve inventory recovery, and protect customer trust.

Nishith Rastogi

CEO / Founder

Speed is not the only benchmark. Reliability is the benchmark.Consumers still value fast delivery. But what shapes trust is consistency at scale. Every failed delivery creates reattempts, extra miles, and avoidable costs.

Reliability comes from aligning planning, dispatch, carrier management, and customer communication in one operating layer. Brands that match delivery promises to operational reality earn stronger trust than those that simply promise faster timelines.

Delivery Reliability Drives Brand Trust

Delivery performance is now a measurable brand KPI. 93% of U.S. consumers say shipping and delivery influence how they evaluate a company, making logistics execution a visible driver of customer trust.

Impact of Delivery Execution on Brand Evaluation

Q How does a company's shipping and delivery performance impact your overall view of the company?

Response	Value
It heavily impacts my view of the company	37%
It somewhat impacts my view of the company	56%
It does not impact my view of the company	8%
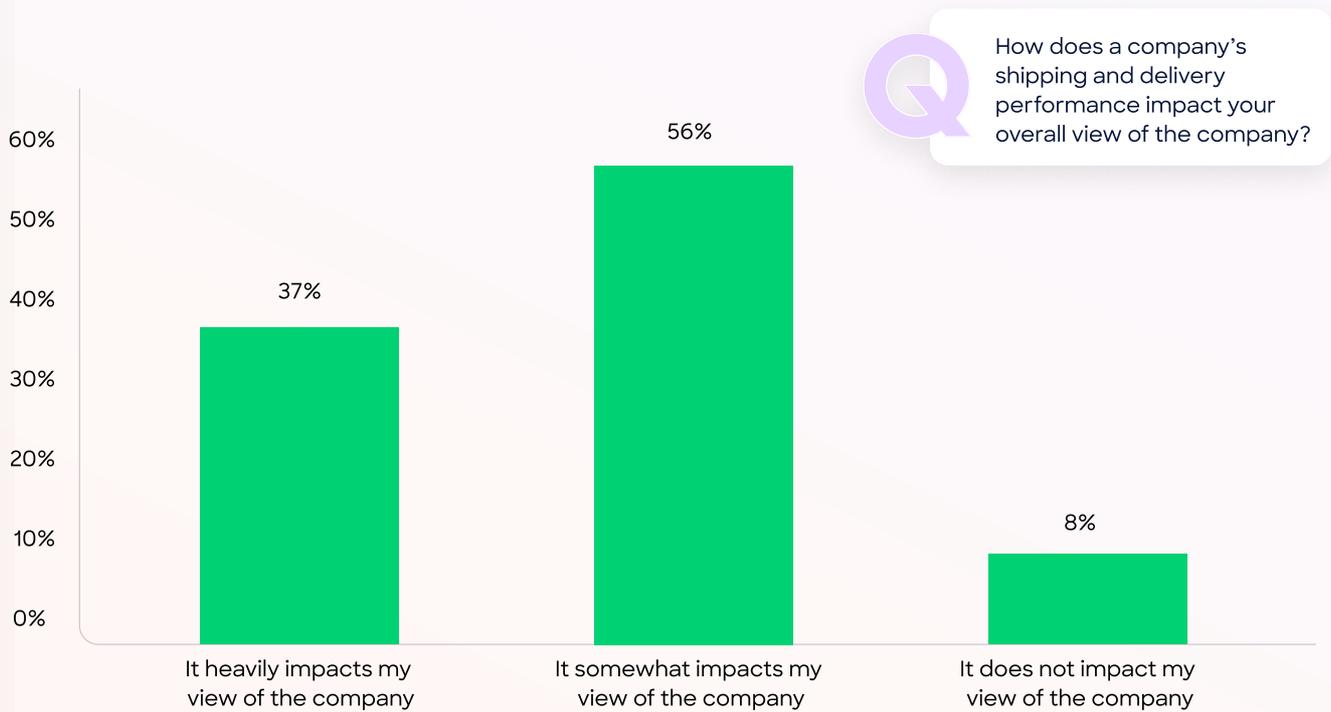
93% of U.S. consumers say delivery performance affects how they evaluate a brand.

37% **report that delivery heavily influences their opinion,** showing that for more than one-third of consumers, logistics performance is a defining factor.
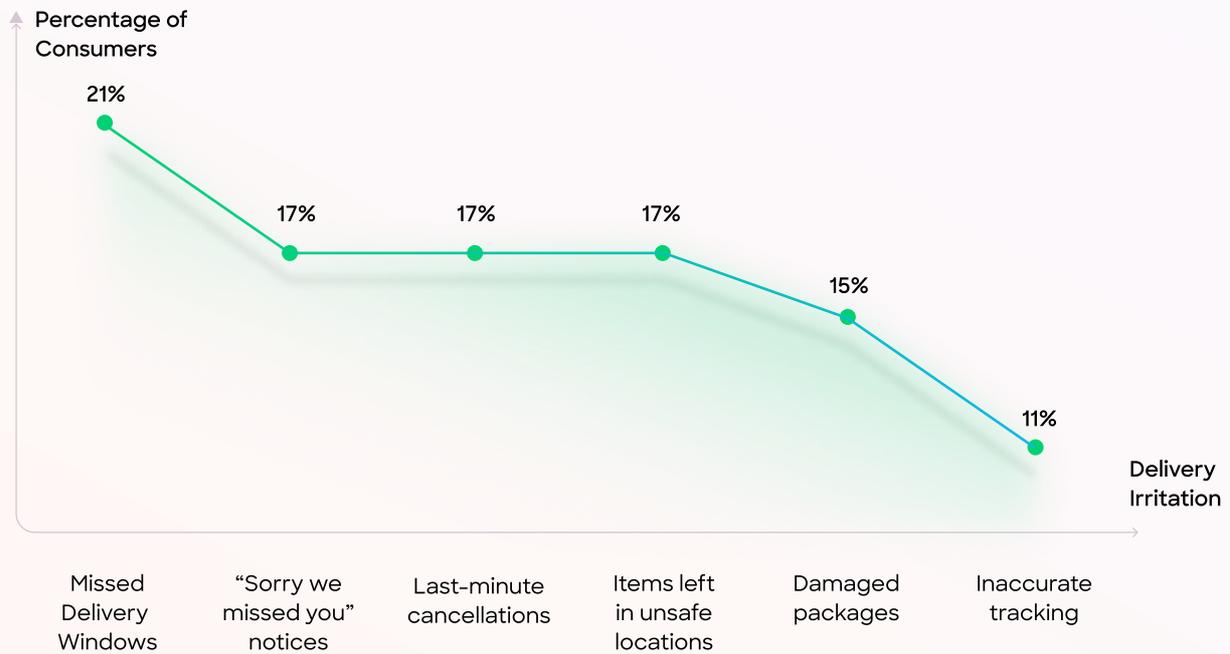
56% **say it somewhat affects their view,** reinforcing that delivery remains a meaningful consideration even when it is not the primary factor.

8% **say delivery does not impact their view,** confirming that shipping performance is relevant to nearly all consumers.

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Execution Failures That Erode Trust

Missed windows, failed first attempts, and unsafe placement are the primary trust breakers in last-mile delivery.

Percentage of Consumers

21%

17%   17%   17%

15%

11%

Delivery Irritation

| Missed Delivery Windows | "Sorry we missed you" notices | Last-minute cancellations | Items left in unsafe locations | Damaged packages | Inaccurate tracking |

Timing accuracy and first-attempt delivery remain primary last-mile challenges in the U.S. market.

21% cite missed delivery windows, making it the most reported frustration and highlighting the importance of timing accuracy.

17% report "sorry we missed you" notices, and **17% report last-minute cancellations,** indicating disruptions in successful first-attempt deliveries.
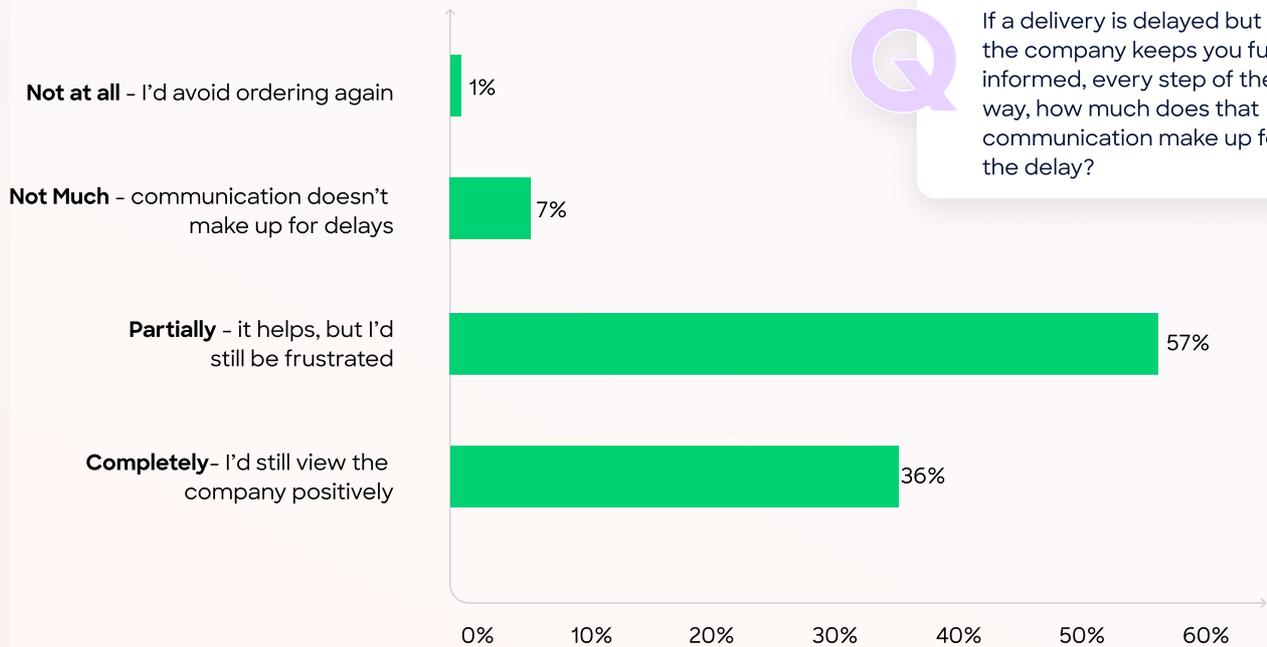
17% mention items left in unsafe locations, and **15% report damaged packages,** showing that handling and placement influence customer trust.

11% identify inaccurate tracking, reinforcing that visibility and real-time accuracy remain important to delivery performance.

Proactive Communication Protects Customer Trust

Proactive communication materially improves customer perception during delivery disruptions. Even when delays occur, accurate updates reduce dissatisfaction and protect brand trust.

Impact of Proactive Updates on Delivery Experience

Not at all – I'd avoid ordering again — 1%

Not Much – communication doesn't make up for delays — 7%

Partially – it helps, but I'd still be frustrated — 57%

Completely – I'd still view the company positively — 36%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

Q If a delivery is delayed but the company keeps you fully informed, every step of the way, how much does that communication make up for the delay?

Proactive communication significantly reduces dissatisfaction during delivery delays in the U.S.

36% say communication completely makes up for the delay, indicating that more than one-third would still view the company positively if kept informed.

57% say it partially makes up for the delay, showing that updates reduce dissatisfaction even if frustration remains.

Only 7% say communication does not make up for delays, suggesting limited tolerance for silence during disruptions.

Just 1% say they would avoid ordering again, despite providing proactive communications.

Turning Communication Into a Delivery Performance Lever

Here's how to operationalize proactive communication across your delivery network.

1

Communication protects trust during delays

Insight:
- **36%** say updates completely make up for delay.
- **57%** say it partially helps.
- Only **7%** say it does not help.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:
Embed Communication Into Delivery Execution

- Send accurate ETAs at dispatch based on real capacity
- Trigger automated delay alerts across all channels
- Synchronize warehouse scans, carrier updates, and customer tracking
- Measure tracking accuracy and notification latency weekly

Accurate communication reduces escalations, lowers reattempt costs, and protects brand perception.

Consumers Don't Trust Delivery Promises

Consumer confidence in advertised delivery timelines is measured and data-driven. In the United States, 69% say brands deliver on time "most of the time," indicating general trust supported by real-world experience. At the same time, only 9% believe delivery promises are always met, reinforcing the importance of consistent execution.

In the U.S., delivery promises are trusted, but not assumed.
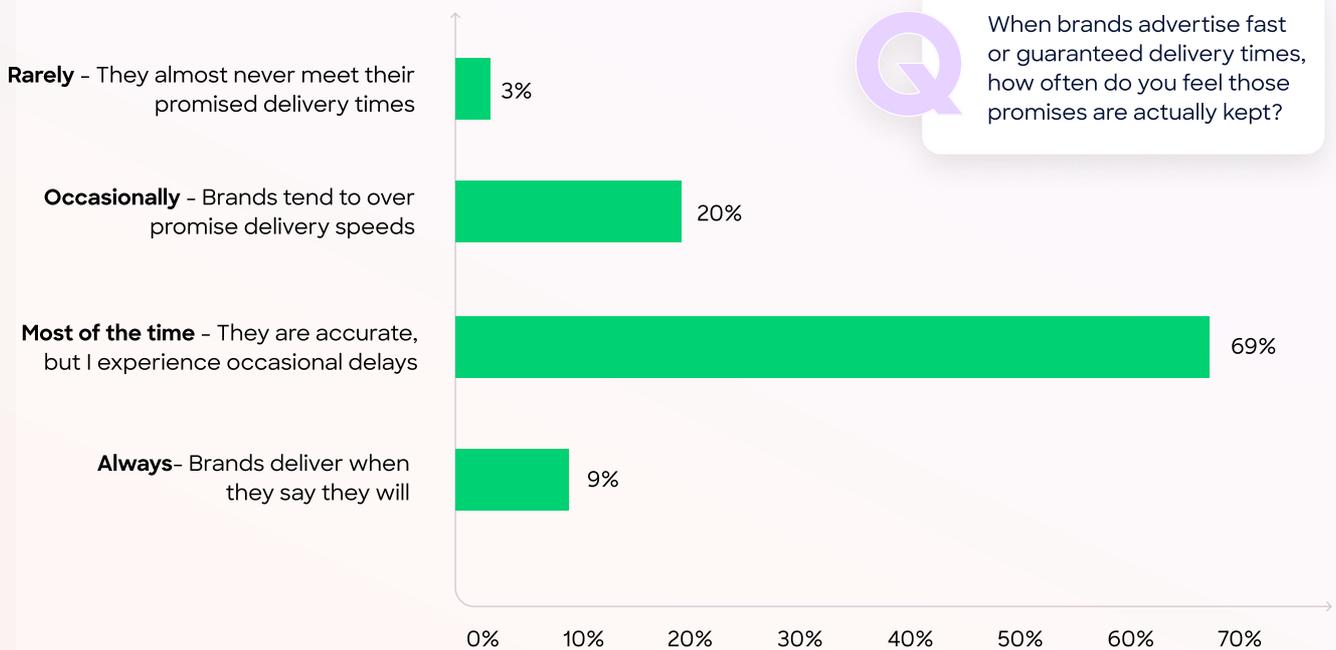
Q When brands advertise fast or guaranteed delivery times, how often do you feel those promises are actually kept?

Rarely – They almost never meet their promised delivery times — 3%

Occasionally – Brands tend to over promise delivery speeds — 20%

Most of the time – They are accurate, but I experience occasional delays — 69%

Always– Brands deliver when they say they will — 9%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

Most U.S. consumers believe delivery promises are kept only most of the time, indicating room for execution improvement.

69% say brands deliver on time most of the time but experience occasional delays, indicating moderate trust with room for inconsistency.

20% say brands occasionally overpromise delivery speeds, suggesting that expectation gaps remain between delivery promises and actual deliveries.

Only 9% believe brands always meet their delivery promises, showing that consistent precision is present but rare.

3% say brands almost never meet promised timelines, indicating persistent failure.

Market Insight

Consumers in the United States evaluate brands based on delivery reliability, not advertised speed. Even small inconsistencies reduce confidence in future purchases. At scale, inaccurate delivery promises increase support costs, reattempts, and churn risk.

Consumers factor in prior delays and variability when assessing brand credibility, making consistency a measurable driver of trust.

How Enterprise Retailers Improve Delivery Promise Accuracy

To improve confidence in delivery commitments, retailers should align advertised delivery speeds with operational capacity.

✅ Base promised delivery windows on lane-level historical performance

✅ Adjust commitments dynamically for peak periods and regional capacity

✅ Align marketing SLAs with transportation planning constraints

✅ Track promise vs. actual performance weekly across carriers

In multi-carrier networks, inconsistent SLAs and fragmented tracking are the primary causes of broken delivery promises.
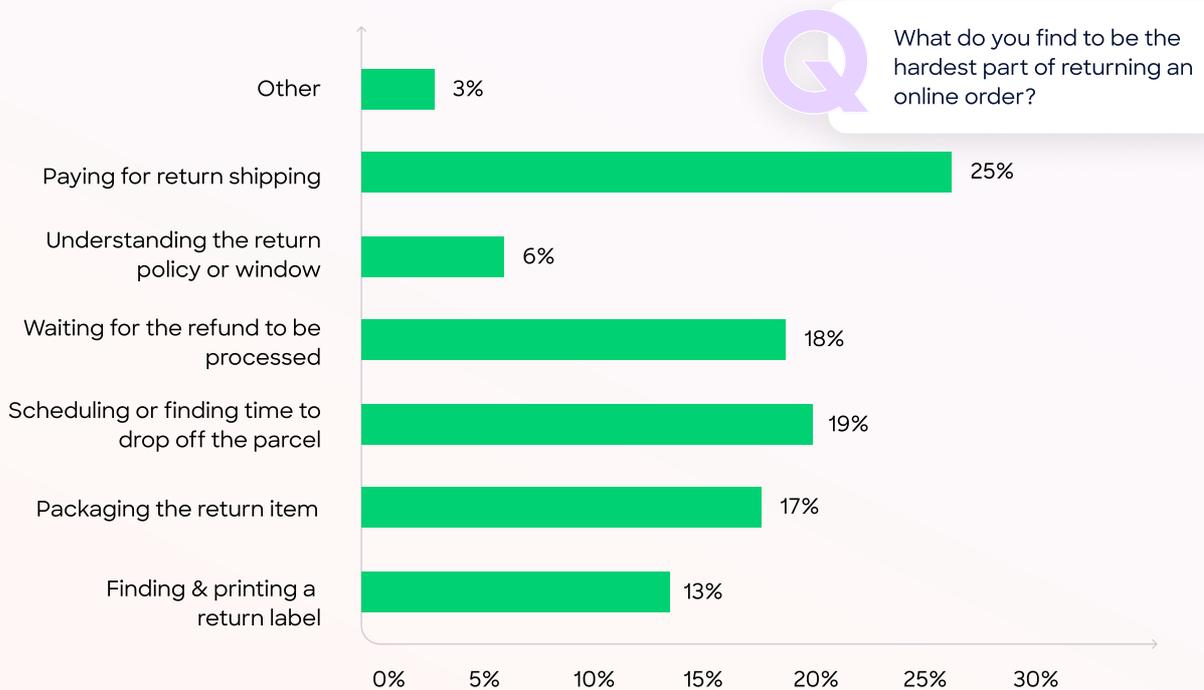
Promise accuracy is a supply chain orchestration problem.

Returns Frictions Are Driving Post-Purchase Churn

Across the United States, consumers are less frustrated by return intent than by return friction, especially return fees, refund delays, and drop-off complexity. For enterprise retailers, returns policy and reverse-logistics execution are now as important as forward delivery performance.

Return Costs Drive Post-Purchase Dissatisfaction

Q What do you find to be the hardest part of returning an online order?

Category	Value
Other	3%
Paying for return shipping	25%
Understanding the return policy or window	6%
Waiting for the refund to be processed	18%
Scheduling or finding time to drop off the parcel	19%
Packaging the return item	17%
Finding & printing a return label	13%

Return shipping fees lead dissatisfaction in the U.S., but convenience and refund speed also influence perception.

Return shipping fees are the top pain point (25%), making cost the single largest barrier in the returns journey. Pricing policy directly affects customer satisfaction.

Convenience challenges are significant, with 19% citing drop-off scheduling and 17% citing packaging as difficult. This indicates that physical effort and time investment remain key points.

Refund speed also impacts perception, with 18% pointing to waiting for refunds. Post-return processing timelines shape the final customer impression.

Label access and policy clarity still matter, as 13% struggle with printing labels and 6% with understanding return policies. While not dominant issues, they reflect avoidable procedural friction.

Redesigning Returns for Cost Clarity and Customer Retention

Here's how to design your returns experience around cost clarity, faster refunds, and simpler processes.

1

Return Fees Drive Post-Purchase Friction

Insight:
25% cite return shipping fees as the top challenge in the returns process.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:
Review return economics as a CX lever.

- Introduce category-based free returns where the margin allows
- Use threshold-based policies (loyalty tiers, minimum order value)
- Eliminate hidden or inconsistent fees across channels

Return cost clarity directly improves trust and repeat purchase intent.

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2

Refund speed determines final brand perception

Insight:
18% cite waiting for refunds as a key returns consideration.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:
Shorten refund cycles.

- Trigger refunds at first scan, not warehouse inspection (where risk allows)
- Integrate carrier scans, OMS, and finance to trigger refunds earlier
- Automate refund approvals low-risk returns
- Provide real-time refund visibility alongside delivery tracking

The return experience ends with the refund, not the pickup.

3

Return convenience drives return purchase

Insight:
19% cite drop-off scheduling and **17%** cite packaging as key considerations in the returns process.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:
Reduce customer effort across the return journey.

- Expand pickup and drop-off options through carrier network orchestration
- Enable doorstep pickup for high-value or bulky items
- Use reusable or pre-labeled packaging for frequent-return categories

Lower return friction increases repeat purchase and protects margin.

4

Process Friction Still Drives Return Abandonment

Insight:
13% cite label printing as a challenge in the returns process.
**6%** cite policy clarity as a consideration.

What It Means for Enterprise Teams:
Remove procedural friction across the reverse-logistics journey.

- Enable label-free returns via carrier integrations
- Standardize mobile return workflows across channels
- Simplify policy language and automate eligibility checks

Small process delays scale into higher return costs and lower customer retention. To achieve this, enterprises need reverse-logistics orchestration across carriers, warehouses, and customer channels not isolated return workflows.
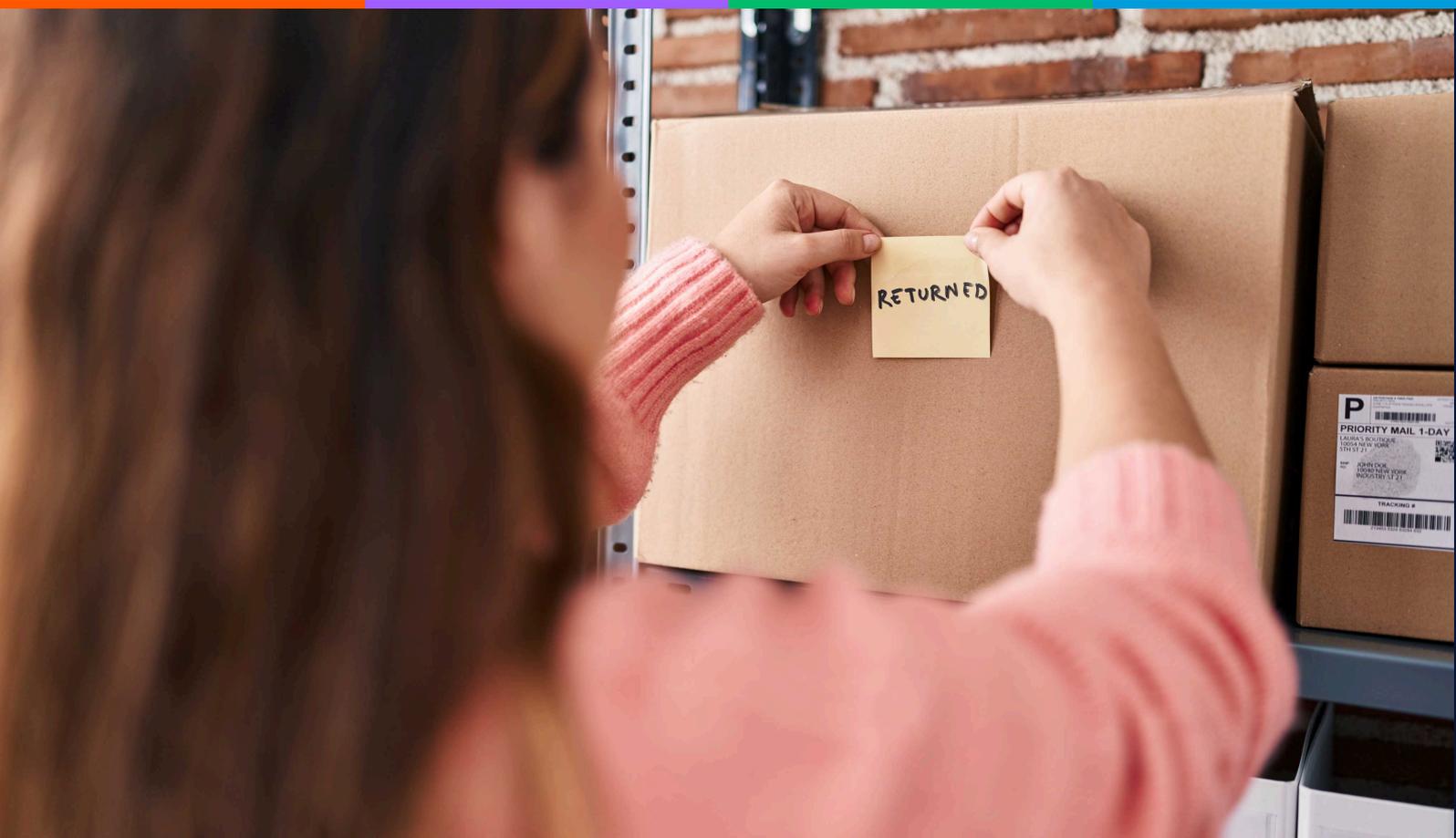
Key Takeaways for Retail and Logistics Leaders

The findings point to clearly defined operational benchmarks.

Design Networks for the 2–3 Day Standard: U.S. expectations cluster around a two to three-day window.

Inventory placement, routing logic, and carrier mix must support this baseline consistently.

Execution Consistency Drives Trust More Than Speed: Missed delivery windows, first-attempt completion, and placement quality shape delivery perception.

Invest in routing precision, carrier performance management, and real-time visibility.

Communication Is Part of Delivery Performance: Proactive updates reduce dissatisfaction during delays.

Customer notifications must be driven by real operational data across WMS, TMS, and carrier systems.

Promise Management Matters: Fewer than 1 in 10 U.S. consumers believe delivery promises are always met.

Delivery timelines should be set using historical performance rather than marketing targets.

Returns Are a Cost and Experience Lever: Return shipping fees, refund timelines, and process simplicity influence post-purchase satisfaction.

Reverse-logistics orchestration should be integrated into transportation planning.

Bottom Line: Improving delivery trust requires orchestration across routing, carrier management, real-time visibility, and exception handling, not just faster shipping options.

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How Petshop Built a More Efficient Last-Mile Operation with Locus

Petshop (dubaipetfood.com), a leading pet supplies retailer, partnered with Locus to optimize its last-mile delivery operations.

Results achieved

✅ **70%** reduction in delivery planning time

✅ **20%** increase in delivery rate

✅ Improved driver productivity per day

✅ Accurate bulk route planning with precise location mapping

"This partnership helped us increase the per-day productivity of our drivers. Locus is able to plan bulk deliveries with unmatched accuracy, and the backend is very robust in identifying pinpoint locations, ensuring a hassle-free delivery experience."

Kashif Nawaz
Technical Project Manager, Petshop

Future of Delivery: From Speed to Orchestrated Execution

The next phase of delivery performance will be defined by execution discipline, not faster promises. As consumer expectations in the United States center around predictable delivery windows, performance will be measured by how consistently retailers meet commitments across the entire order lifecycle.

Delivery operations are evolving from fragmented workflows into orchestrated transportation networks. Inventory placement, carrier selection, routing decisions, and customer communication must operate as a single system driven by real-time data. For enterprise retailers, three shifts will define the next phase of delivery:

Promise Dates Will Become Data-Driven
1

Delivery commitments will be calculated from network capacity, historical performance, and real-time constraints rather than marketing targets.

Carrier Management Will Become a Core Competency
2

Multi-carrier orchestration, performance tracking, and dynamic allocation will replace static carrier contracts.

Visibility Will Extend Across the Full Order Journey
3

From warehouse scan to doorstep confirmation to returns processing, real-time execution data will drive customer communication and operational decisions.

Organizations that align operational capacity with promised timelines and manage delivery as a network-level system will strengthen customer confidence while improving transportation efficiency.

The future of delivery will not be built on faster shipping. It will be built on transportation systems that can predict, commit, and execute reliably across fragmented carrier networks.

Methodology

To assess current consumer delivery expectations across the United States, Locus conducted a structured survey in Q4 2025. The study gathered responses from 1,000 active online shoppers from U.S

Participants were asked structured questions covering delivery timelines, reliability, communication practices, returns experience, and trust in delivery commitments. Responses were analyzed to identify performance benchmarks and areas shaping delivery expectations in the U.S. market.

About the Research

This study was conducted to assess current consumer expectations for delivery performance across the U.S. markets. It evaluates how shoppers define acceptable delivery timelines, assess reliability, and respond to communication practices throughout the post-purchase experience. The findings establish measurable benchmarks that reflect how delivery performance is currently evaluated in the United States.

*All responses were collected through standardized questionnaires to ensure consistency across respondent segments.

About Locus

Locus is a decision-intelligent, agentic transportation management system (TMS) that plans, executes, and optimizes delivery networks using AI-driven decisions across cost, capacity, and service.

Operating in 30+ countries, Locus enables retailers, 3PLs, and enterprise brands to achieve higher on-time delivery rates, reduce logistics costs, and scale operations — with 1.5B+ deliveries optimized across 360+ enterprise customers globally.

Study Snapshot

Fieldwork Period:
Q4 2025

Total Respondents:
1,000 consumers

Geographic Distribution:
United States

Respondent Profile:
Active online shoppers

Survey Scope:
Delivery timelines,
reliability,
communication practices,
returns experience,
trust in delivery commitments

Comparability:
Consistency: Questions were standardized across all respondent segments to ensure reliability

This approach provides a benchmark view of how delivery performance is currently evaluated by U.S. consumers.

Close the Gap Between Delivery Promises and Execution with Locus

Schedule a Delivery Performance Audit

Explore Locus TMS Platform →