

How to optimise click and collect at peak

Click and collect offers a great solution for deliveries during peak trading but it's not without its challenges so how should retailers best optimise click and collect ahead of peak? *Liz Morrell* reports.

When it comes to peak trading ensuring customers can get their hands on their goods in the fastest and most convenient way possible is key and means that click and collect is increasingly popular. According to GlobalData the click and collect market will grow by 55.6% over the next five years totalling 13.9% of total online spend in 2022 and worth £9.6bn. Its benefits mean it's easy to see why.

"The real value comes in conversion in store," says Mike Richmond, Chief Commercial Officer of Doodle Parcel Services. He points out that in a GlobalData review of 10 of the biggest multichannel retailers in the UK click and collect was responsible for more than 25% of online sales but across those retailers 41% went on to make additional purchases instore with an average basket value of more than £20. "With figures as compelling as those, there should be no limit to how hard retailers push to get online customers collecting in-store," says Richmond.

But at peak, when a store is already busy with traditional customers, retailers have to ensure the instore click and collect experience is optimised otherwise both sales and customer satisfaction will be hit.

At Debenhams the retailer is seeing click and collect up 10% against last year. It has a dedicated counter, till and staff for click and collect, as well as a dedicated dressing room that allows customers to try on items straightaway. Jay Brown, Multichannel Services Lead at Debenhams, calls it a "one stop shop for the click and collect customer".

Its click and collect desk is manned at all times at peak with staff "trained to actively work the queue to ensure customers are served as efficiently as possible," says Brown. During quieter times staff are able to page staff to serve them.

Speed should always be of the essence, particularly at peak, according to Tom Downes, CEO of Quail Digital. "Our research clearly shows that customers arriving for click and collect expect a seamless transaction, ideally in less than three minutes," he says.

As well as ensuring a well signposted and dedicated click and collect desk with parcels stored close by and adequate, dedicated staffing at peak retailers can also monitor and control the level of click and collect orders sent to store.

"We constantly review the volumes of click and collect parcels through our supply chain and compare them against the actual volumes that were processed last peak,"

STEPS TO OPTIMISE C&C AHEAD OF PEAK

- Consider third party locations;
- Control volume of orders sent to stores at peak;
- Man collection desks at all times during peak;
- Clearly signpost collection points instore (dedicated if possible);
- Keep the customer informed;
- Make the process easy instore for both staff and customers.

says Brown. "We have cubic capacity figures for all of our click and collect locations and review any store that is close to capacity and work throughout the summer to increase capacity in these locations. We also use this data to ensure we have sufficient payroll to meet the needs of the customer. As we head into peak we carry out refresher training with our teams," says Brown.

Jim McGrath, Product Director, Sanderson Multichannel Retail Solutions, says that retailers must examine every stage of the process and see where they can improve. "There are always improvements that can be made. Look at controlling the volume of orders sent to stores at peak, use different devices in store to keep pressure away from the tills, look at simple things like well signposted collection points and consider using third party delivery locations," says McGrath.

THE VALUE OF THIRD PARTY LOCATIONS

Indeed third party delivery locations can be a great option to relieve the pressure on stores and can range from locker services to convenience stores or charity shops. "For regional or smaller retailers it offers a nationwide collection location," says McGrath. "For larger retailers at busy times it lets them keep focus on their instore operations and reduces dependence on retail resource for click and collect processing," he says.

As well as providing extra collection points click and collect can also be a cheaper option for retailers. "It's much more cost effective for retailers to deliver online shopping into hubs rather than individually to each customer's home address," says CollectPlus Chief Executive Neil Ashworth.

Third party delivery locations can drive footfall for other local shops and businesses too. Doodle is rolling out into



Image: Debenhams

▲ Debenhams is seeing click and collect up 10% against last year

both Morrisons and Debenhams allowing customers to pick up goods from retailers such as Amazon, ASOS and Misguided from its stores. Richmond says the company's analysis shows that more than a third (37%) of Doodle customers are new to Debenhams.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Whilst efficient store operations and third party locations can help ease the pressure, wins also come from ensuring the click and collect service is well managed from a technology point of view. However, Richmond says this often isn't happening. "Many retailers are using click and collect services that have been developed in-house, over time and that simply aren't fit for purpose when it comes to offering customers the slickest experience or when it comes to exploiting the potential rewards of offering a great click and collect service," he says. Indeed he claims to know of one major retailer that still calls customers when orders arrive instore. "That's not something customers expect in 2018," he says.

"A seamless click and collect experience is driven by customer experience, technology and product features," says Sebastian Steinhauser, Managing Director, Parcelly. "Customer experience, in relation to collection time and overall service level, does not require further explanation. Technology allows the monitoring and management of outgoing pick-ups for store or third party locations, and facilitates the collection process, engagement, communication as well as convenience for those who collect," he says.

Customers expect relevant, timely and simple communication around their click and collect deliveries, says Richmond. "Consumers are bombarded these days and only want to receive necessary information served in a way that makes their life easier. Now when we alert

customers to the fact their parcel is on its way, we let them know where their nearest Doodle locations are and our new Android and iPhone wallet passes will even serve up the relevant collection codes the minute they walk into the shop, so they don't have to search for emails," he says.

Sanderson's McGrath says making it easy instore is vital for both staff and customer. "It needs to be a simple interface for the solution for the store staff, ideally run on a tablet so there is no need to queue at a till with minimal paperwork, electronic signatures and e-collection receipts for the customer," he says.

Of course, whilst many retailers work on improving process ahead of peak there are many retailers that are reinventing the click and collect experience altogether. At John Lewis more than half of all its online orders are made through click and collect and last year Waitrose launched self-service check-ins with iPads at the welcome desks of 140 stores, allowing customers to register their order numbers and that they were in the store.

At Zara, the fashion retailer opened a refurbished store at Westfield Stratford in May that includes two automated online order collection points from which customers can collect their online orders. The store is serviced by a small warehouse which is manned by a robot arm, cutting out the need for human intervention.

Automation is also playing its part at Asda. The company launched the UK's first parcel vending machine at Asda's Trafford Park in January. The giant parcel vending machine allows customers to pick up orders in less than 60 seconds and is already in more than 100 Walmart stores in the US.

As its use continues to rise many are struggling with how to best optimise click and collect but ensuring good processes instore and technology to better predict and manage flow is a great start. 🌈