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FOREWORD



WHAT WILL YOU CHANGE BEFORE THE NEXT PEAK SEASON?

The main Christmas shipping peak is drawing to a close for several origins, but freight remains expensive, oil prices are still rising, and September brings a lot of extra blank sailings. Anything that still needs to move for Christmas is now at the deadline.

Every year, the incidents look different. This time we have seen typhoons and congestion in China and Vietnam, gas shortages affecting factories in Bangladesh, monsoon disruption in Pakistan, restrictions at Mundra, and continuing uncertainty around the Red Sea and Hormuz. Next season will have its own list.

For supply chain teams, the working week still becomes familiar. A cargo-ready date moves. The planned sailing is no longer available. Someone searches for space elsewhere, the cost goes up, and the business needs a new delivery date. People recover the order and move straight to the next problem.

As this peak draws to a close, how do you evaluate whether it was successful? Did the goods arrive when the business needed them? How much did it cost to hold the plan together? Where did the team depend on personal escalation rather than the process? What did we learn that will actually change next year?

This is where continuous improvement should connect one peak season to the next. Otherwise, the review records what happened and the next planning cycle starts with the same assumptions.

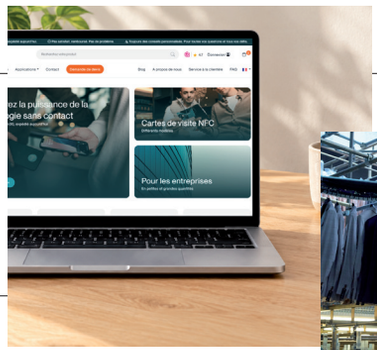
Good planning starts much earlier than the day the goods need to be shipped. It starts when the order is placed. Were likely disruptions considered then? Was enough time built into the plan? Who owned the whole journey, including the weeks before cargo-ready?

You can, of course, keep building buffers. You could start shipping Christmas goods now for Christmas 2027. They would certainly be early, but it would be very expensive. Inventory would sit for too long, and the business would pay for certainty it does not need.

Finding the balance between too early and too late is difficult. How much buffer fits the risk? Which signals should reach the team sooner? When dates move, who can act before the remaining choices become expensive?

Around Christmas and New Year, everyone makes resolutions. A supply chain resolution needs more substance than "we will plan earlier." Look back at this peak. Where did the team spend most of its time firefighting? Which problem had already been developing for weeks before it reached someone who could act? If the responsibilities, data, supplier expectations, and planning assumptions stay the same, why would next year end differently?

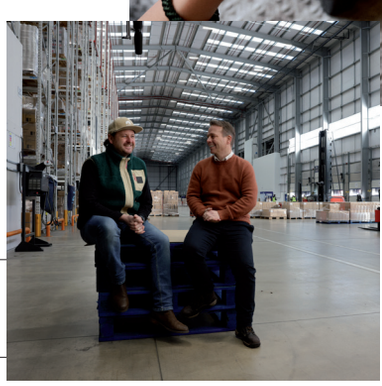
Quentin De Roo
Head of MOOV Netherlands











INDEX

3 FOREWORD
5 COLUMN: SANNE LEENDERS
6 INSIGHTS: CARRIER PERFORMANCE IN CROSS-BORDER
12 INSIGHTS: ELIMINATING FRICTION IN E-COMMERCE CONVERSION
16 INSIGHTS: WHY RETAIL OTIF FROM ASIA IS OFTEN LOST AT CARGO-READY
20 RESEARCH: YOUR CUSTOMERS STILL WANT A HUMAN, THEY HAVE A POINT
22 INTERVIEW: HOW UBSEND TURNED ESG INTO AN INTEGRAL PART OF LOGISTICS IN THE EU
28 NEWS: BUILD AND RUN YOUR E-COMMERCE BY TALKING TO AI
32 RESEARCH: WHY CEE IS EUROPE'S BEST EXPANSION LABORATORY FOR ONLINE RETAILERS
36 INSIGHTS: WHY MARKETPLACES ARE BECOMING THE NEW CROSS-BORDER ENTRY POINT
40 INSIGHTS: €3 TODAY, A WHOLE NEW CUSTOMS REALITY TOMORROW
44 INSIGHTS: WITH AI TRANSLATION, INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS IS JUST A FEW CLICKS AWAY
48 INSIGHTS: E-COMMERCE SALES EVENTS 2026
54 CASE: HOW ESN AND MORE NUTRITION SAVE 85% OF TIME PER CLAIM WITH CLAIM.ME
58 INSIGHTS: NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION TO DATA-DRIVEN CUSTOMS
62 CASE: THE FAST-GROWING FASHION BRAND GETTING THE MOST OUT OF STOCK LOCALISATION
66 INSIGHTS: SCOPE 3 EMISSIONS ARE DEFINING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CROSS-BORDER LOGISTICS
70 RESEARCH: CIRCULAR COMMERCE IS GOING MAINSTREAM IN THE NORDICS
74 INSIGHTS: THE GREAT SHIFT IN E-COMMERCE LOGISTICS
78 INSIGHTS: BEYOND BORDERS: THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF INVENTORY

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COLUMN

THE BORDER IS DISAPPEARING. THE COMPLEXITY IS MOVING ELSEWHERE.





For years, the promise of cross-border e-commerce was deceptively simple: open your webshop to another country, sort out VAT, translate the site and make sure the parcel arrives on time. In 2026, that model is starting to look rather outdated.

One of the most interesting trends is that distance is becoming expensive again. The EU's move to remove the duty exemption for low-value imports, combined with the new €3 charge on small consignments, is making the old model of shipping thousands of cheap parcels directly from Asia considerably less attractive.

But there is a more interesting story behind this: inventory is becoming a competitive weapon again. Shein, for example, is investing in logistics hubs in Europe. Not simply because European consumers suddenly demand faster delivery, but because the supply chain itself is becoming part of the market strategy. Local fulfilment means more than speed. It can simplify customs, regulatory compliance and returns, all of which become increasingly important as cross-border trade matures.

And then there is another shift that many retailers are still underestimating: the consumer may no longer be the one discovering your product.

AI agents are increasingly able to compare products, assess prices and prepare purchases. Deloitte (2026) reports that 56% of European consumers have already used AI while shopping.

That changes the question for international retailers. It is no longer simply: "How good is my webshop?" It becomes: "Can a machine understand my assortment, pricing, availability, delivery promise and reliability?"

That is a fundamental change.

The next generation of cross-border retailers will therefore not necessarily be those with the most translated websites or the longest list of countries in their checkout.

They will be the companies that organise their supply chain, data and compliance so effectively that the border becomes invisible to the customer.

The border is not disappearing. It is simply moving.

Enjoy reading!
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21,464
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View details
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Daily
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100000
75000
50000
Sep 25
Oct 25
Nov 25
Dec 25
Jan 26
Feb 26
Mar 26
Apr 26
May 26
Jun 26
Jul 26
Aug 26
On Time
Delays
Defects
Consignments Status
466,525
Total Consignments
On Time 96.09%
In Transit 3.78%
On Hold 0.09%
Defects 0.03%
Delays 0.01%

CARRIER PERFORMANCE IN CROSS-BORDER: MEASURE BETTER, DELIVER BETTER

Text: Pascal Frick // Photos: MSDirect

Online shops shipping internationally often work with several local delivery carriers in each country for the last mile. This makes sense, but it also creates a blind spot: the more carriers operate across multiple countries, the harder it becomes to see who is actually delivering most reliably. And there is a lot at stake, as around half of total delivery costs are incurred on the last mile. The best decision is not necessarily based on the lowest price on paper, but on actual performance. This turns carrier selection from a one-off choice into an ongoing process.

Why multiple carriers per country pay off

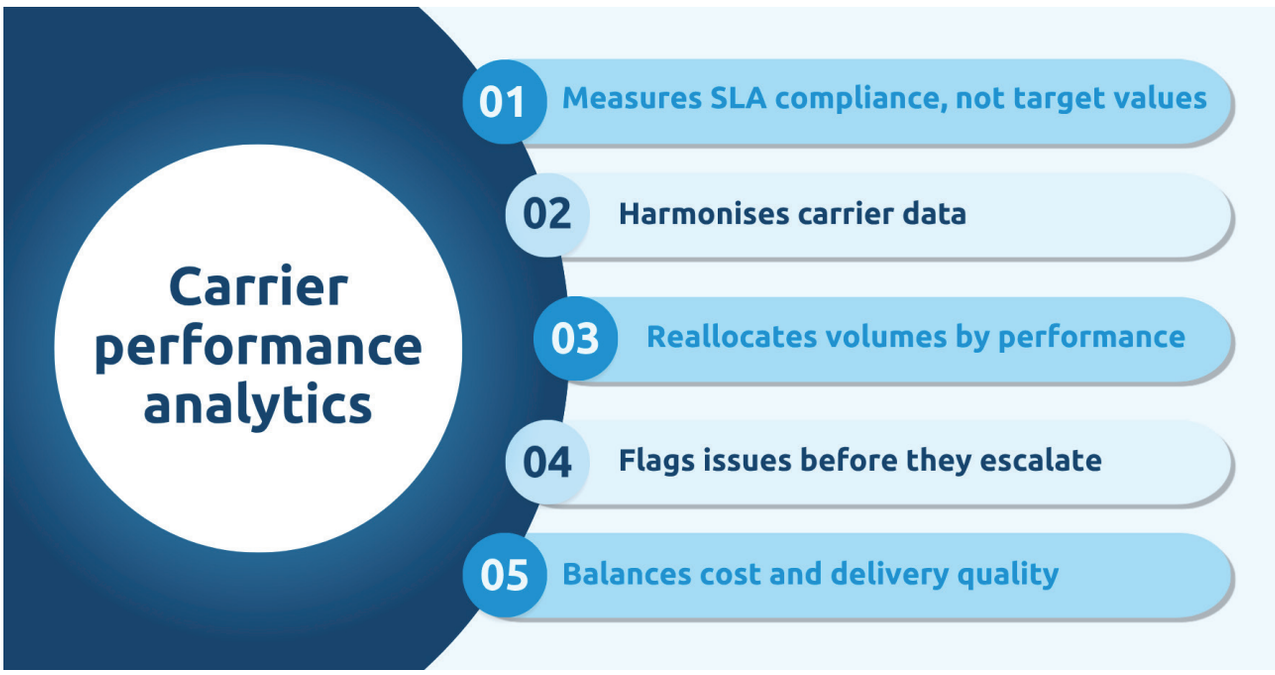
Most online shops start with one delivery carrier per destination country. It is the obvious approach and it works, but it also leaves room for improvement. Few carriers perform equally well across every product range and shipment type within a market.

A small, lightweight parcel comes with different requirements from bulky or high-value goods. And a carrier that handles standard shipments cost-effectively may not be the best choice for express deliveries or rural areas. Using several carriers in each country offers three key advantages.

- First, it allows you to make targeted use of each carrier's strengths, whether that is transit time, network coverage or delivery performance for a particular shipment or region.
- Second, it helps optimise costs by directing volumes to the carrier offering the best price-performance ratio for the respective shipment type.
- Third, it improves the customer experience by assigning each shipment to the carrier most likely to deliver it reliably.

These advantages come with a downside: fragmentation. This starts even with just one carrier per country, as carriers report shipment data differently, using their own portals, status models and terminology. Every additional carrier adds another layer of complexity. A delay in Zurich and another in Manchester may appear in two separate systems and formats, making it difficult to see at a glance which carrier is currently underperforming.

The result is often a reactive approach: the problem only becomes visible when customers start asking where their parcel is. Every WISMO enquiry (Where is my order) ties up customer service resources and can undermine trust.



The operational foundations: selecting carriers, generating labels and tracking shipments properly

Depending on warehouse location and parcel size, cross-border can already make commercial sense from around 5,000 orders per year. Even at this volume, a robust data foundation is worthwhile.

The process starts with selecting the right carriers for each destination country, based on product range, shipment profile and volume. Next comes labelling. In a multi-carrier setup, you either need access to the individual carrier labels or send parcels through a central sorting hub, where they are relabelled.

The label marks the beginning of the shipment's data trail and makes it trackable. Good tracking does not simply show that a parcel has been "shipped"; it provides a complete picture of its journey. Through the MS Direct CrossborderX portal, up to 26 status events can be recorded for each shipment, from the warehouse through to final delivery. This level of granularity is what makes the difference between knowing that "the parcel is on its way" and identifying that "this carrier regularly loses half a day on the last mile".

Viewed individually, these data points are little more than operational noise. Once consolidated and harmonised, however, they become a powerful tool for managing carrier performance.

From tracking to active management: what Carrier Performance Analytics can do

Why is it not enough to track carriers individually? Because tracking tells you what has happened. Performance management helps you decide what to do next.

That shift only becomes possible when data from all carriers and countries is brought together, standardised, continuously updated and enriched with actionable recommendations. The result is five key mechanisms that support better long-term decision-making.

1. *Measured SLA compliance instead of target values:* A carrier may state that its Economy delivery service takes two days. Analytics show how often those two days are actually achieved in day-to-day operations, based on real shipments. What matters is how "on time" is defined. Only if performance is measured all the way to the customer's door, rather than stopping at the destination hub, does it reflect the experience customers actually have. This provides the basis for carrier assessments and evidence-based discussions with delivery partners.

2. *Comparability through harmonised data:* As long as every carrier reports in its own terminology and format, meaningful comparison is difficult. Once the data is translated into a standardised framework, carriers can be compared side by side. A fair comparison, however, requires comparable shipments: destination region, service product, weight and shipment type all need to be taken into account.

3. *Data-driven volume allocation:* Once retailers can see which carrier is performing best in a destination market, they can shift volumes accordingly. What was once a static contractual setup becomes a flexible allocation model that adapts to actual performance.



4. *Early warnings instead of investigations:* Automated alerts flag unusual deviations at an early stage, often before customers notice them, and highlight where action is needed. This shifts the focus from searching for problems to deciding how to respond.

5. *Balancing cost and quality:* Continuously measuring carrier performance helps identify costly weaknesses early and makes it possible to weigh price against service quality instead of simply choosing the lowest rate.

What does this look like in practice?

A carrier may meet its agreed SLA overall, yet repeatedly show issues with damaged parcels and delayed deliveries over several weeks. Analytics reveal this pattern before it results in a sustained rise in complaints.

The retailer can then shift the affected volume to a more reliable carrier, even if that carrier charges slightly more per shipment. The additional transport cost may be outweighed by a significant reduction in complaints and customer service enquiries. The overall result can therefore be positive, even though a simple comparison of shipping rates would suggest otherwise.

Retailers that identify delays early and feed this information into their customer communications can reduce delivery-status enquiries rather than dealing with them afterwards through customer service. One MS Direct customer has reduced delivery status enquiries by up to 70% per day this way.

Delivery promises become more reliable, helping to improve the customer experience and potentially encourage repeat purchases. At the same time, retailers can continuously reassess the balance between price and performance because current data informs every new carrier decision. What was once a collection of individual carrier relationships becomes a system that can be actively managed.

Manage proactively instead of reacting

This is where MS Direct's Carrier Analytics module, "Predict", comes in. Predict brings together performance data from your last-mile carriers across all destination markets in a single portal and standardises it for comparison. Business intelligence dashboards show SLA compliance, transit times and carrier performance side by side, highlight weaknesses and flag shipping issues through proactive alerts. This allows you to act before customers start complaining.

Because the same data and processes are brought together, MS Direct can also manage your entire cross-border flow if required, from shipping and customs clearance through VAT accounting to returns processing.

Predict can also be used as a standalone solution. Volumes handled by other carriers can be integrated into the tool as well, allowing you to bring your entire carrier landscape together in one place.

By measuring and actively managing carrier performance, you gain greater control over your cross-border operations and can use delivery data more effectively to optimise costs and improve customer satisfaction. ••

EXPAND INTO SWITZERLAND, THE UK AND NORWAY
and optimise your carrier performance with MS Direct's modular solution.



HAMDY ELERAKY, HEAD OF TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT & PRODUCT AT MS DIRECT
Hamdy Eleraky has more than ten years of experience in supply chain, logistics and digital transformation. As Head of Transport Management & Product at MS Direct, his responsibilities include transport solutions and product development in the cross-border segment.

A LOOK BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PREDICT
The Carrier Performance Analytics dashboard from MS Direct brings together data from all of a shop's last-mile carriers and makes it directly comparable. Hamdy Eleraky developed the solution and explains how retailers can benefit from it.

Hamdy, what can retailers see in the dashboard that they could not see before?
"Above all, they can see how reliably each carrier actually delivers. A carrier may tell you that its Economy service takes two days. We show you how often it actually achieves that in day-to-day operations.

We also show shipment volumes by month and by day, which has proved surprisingly insightful for our customers. A heat map shows where deliveries are geographically concentrated, helping you identify whether a different injection point could speed up delivery. Based on this information, you can decide whether to switch carriers or redistribute volumes."

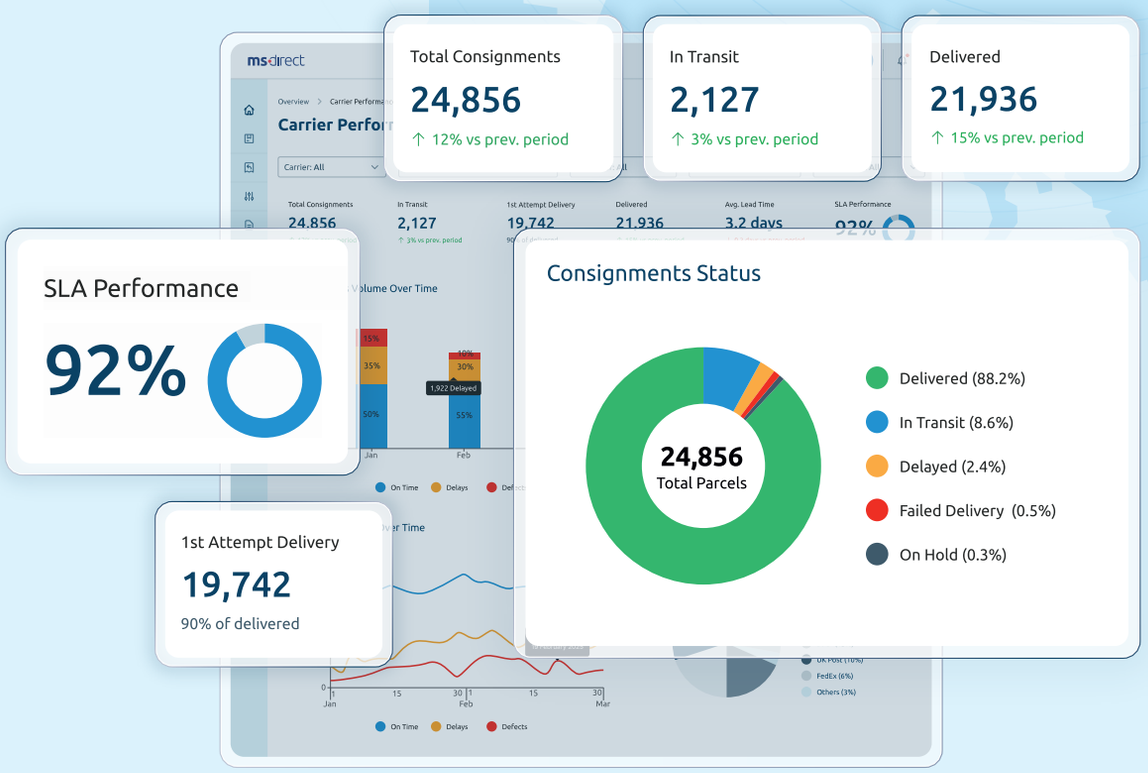
Predict also works for shops that do not ship through MS Direct. How does that work?
"The retailer provides us with just a few shipment details. We retrieve the tracking data through our interfaces and present everything in a standardised format. This means Predict can become the central platform for all carrier relationships, not just for shipments handled through MS Direct."

What is planned next?
"We are continuing to expand our data-driven approach to carrier management. We are preparing daily AI-generated summaries that provide a concise overview of the current situation, as well as automated claims for carrier errors and cost checks.

We are also extending Predict beyond the last mile to cross-border transport, so that the upstream transport leg can be compared in future as well. The objective remains the same: moving from tracking individual parcels to actively managing the entire carrier landscape."

Plug into cross-border e-commerce with full visibility and control

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ELIMINATING FRICTION IN E-COMMERCE CONVERSION WITH OCT8NE

Text: Ilaria Carboni // Photos: Oct8ne

In today's digital landscape, cart abandonment remains one of the biggest challenges for any online store. Behind most incomplete purchases, there isn't a lack of interest, but rather unanswered questions. A doubt about sizing, a technical query about a pricing rate, or uncertainty at the final checkout step are enough reasons for a user to leave the page. When the buying process forces customers to leave the screen to find help, the sale is practically lost.

To eliminate this friction, at Oct8ne we continue to revolutionise how brands interact with their users. Customer service is no longer just about resolving tickets; true success lies in anticipating the buyer's needs, guiding them intuitively, and offering a seamless experience from start to finish.

Driven by our goal to remain the most powerful AI-powered omnichannel conversational platform on the market, we have redesigned our interface. Below, we show you the latest features we have developed to eliminate unnecessary clicks, boost user experience, and accelerate your business conversion.

1. Inpage Widget: Break the limits of the traditional widget

Forget about waiting for the user to decide to open the classic floating chat. With the new Inpage Widget, you can integrate buttons, icons, or text boxes directly into your website's own design. By placing these shortcuts in the most critical sections of your funnel (such as product pages or the payment gateway), you allow visitors to connect with your agents (human or AI) in a simpler, more intuitive way.

How to apply it strategically to your business? Here are some examples:

- *Prevent abandonment at the last checkout step:* Place an interactive text button that says "Have questions about your order?" or "Need help before paying?" right on the payment screen, next to the shipping form or order summary. If the user experiences last-second hesitation, clicking that text will instantly activate your AI Agent to resolve doubts about delivery times, payment methods, or return policies. You fix lack of trust at the most critical moment and ensure they complete the transaction without leaving the gateway.

- *Optimise website searches with a text box:* Add a field like "Type your query" or "What are you looking for?" in your header or next to the traditional navigation bar. If a user enters a term that is too specific or an out-of-stock product, instead of facing the frustrating "0 results" screen typical of classic search engines, your AI Agent will activate instantly. It will understand their real need, suggest similar alternatives from your catalogue, or register their interest to notify them when stock is back, turning a potential website exit into an assisted sale.

- *Instant answers in signup or subscription areas:* If you market complex services or pricing structures (such as insurance or subscriptions), you can embed a quick-query box directly on the page. If the user types something specific (for example: Does this include coverage abroad?), the chat unfolds instantly with the precise answer and suggests the ideal plan for their case. Fewer detours for the customer, more conversions for you.

2. Dynamic carousel inside the chat and variants in the co-viewer: A 100% Oct8ne shopping experience

We have evolved our visual tools with two key launches to make the buying process even more agile: the new multimedia carousel inside the chat window and variant selection in the co-viewer, available both on the web and across all other channels (Facebook Messenger, Instagram, and WhatsApp).

Until now, your team could share product images through the co-viewer, but with this update, we are making a qualitative leap: you can now display multiple recommendations in an interactive carousel format directly within the conversation thread. The customer can easily swipe and explore options through dynamic images and videos, keeping the conversation active at all times.

Added to this is a completely new feature: variant selection from the co-viewer. From now on, the buyer can configure their item's details (such as size or colour) directly within Oct8ne's visual support, add it to the cart, and proceed to payment without leaving the chat. By removing the need to go back to the product page to specify the order, the process becomes immediate, intuitive, and 100% focused on conversion.



Applicable to websites in any industry. Here are some examples:

- *In fashion e-commerce:* If someone searches for "oversized t-shirts", the assistant will display an interactive carousel in the conversation while, in parallel, the co-viewer will show the available sizes and colours to process the order instantly.
- *On service websites:* It allows you to display detailed cards with the available coverages. The customer compares the different plans in the carousel, selects the custom option that best suits them, and signs up with total transparency.

3. Email Integration: Unifying your traditional channel with advanced tools

Email remains a vital communication path in online sales, but forcing your support team to jump to an external platform slows down productivity. To resolve this disconnection, we have expanded our omnichannel ecosystem (which already managed Web, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger) by adding the email channel.

From this moment on, you have the ability to connect and manage all your email accounts directly from the Oct8ne panel. Everything is centralised under a single workspace.

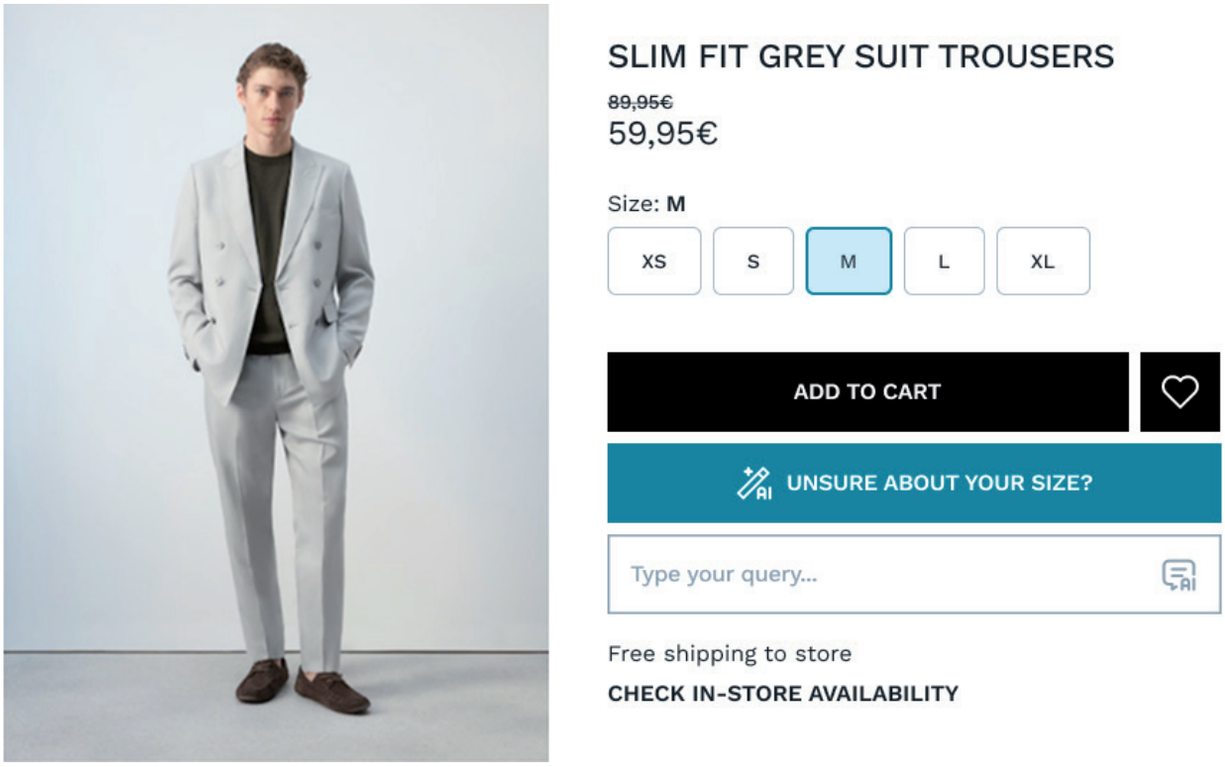
What can you do with this new integration?

- *Multi-account management:* Link different email addresses within a single tool.
- *Interactive catalogue by email:* Attach visual cards of your products into the body of the email very easily to encourage purchases and make attractive recommendations.
- *Centralised analytics:* Review clear performance metrics to audit the impact and success of each of your mailings.
- *Demand strategy with WhatsApp:* Remember that along with email, you also have the option to boost your databases by launching massive and ultra-personalised campaigns via WhatsApp.

Designing the future of digital retail: More human, visual, and direct

These new implementations prove that fixing your store's conversion gaps doesn't require embarking on costly and complex global website redesigns. The most efficient strategy is to introduce smart tools that intervene with precision at the exact moment the customer experiences a doubt.

Businesses that bet on integrated, dynamic, and native interactions will see an immediate evolution in their user experience… and in their business results! ••

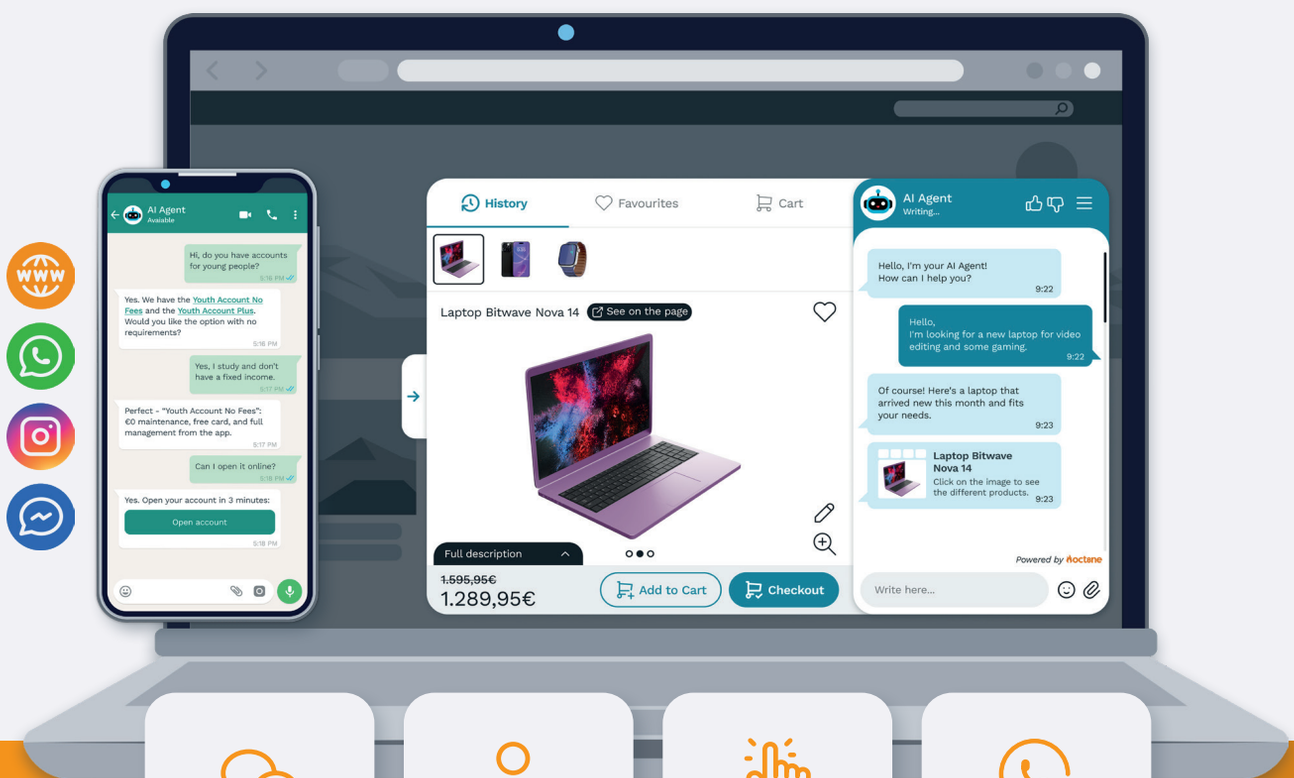


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WHY RETAIL OTIF FROM ASIA IS OFTEN LOST AT CARGO-READY

Text: Quentin de Roo, Head of MOOV Europe, MOOV Logistics // Photos: MOOV Logistics



Every peak season tells the same story. Rolled containers, blank sailings, sky-high spot rates and costly expedites, no matter how solid the contracts looked back in spring. Retail seems obsessed with the last mile, and rightfully so, because that is where the customer is watching. The first mile out of Asia barely gets a look, even though that is where most of those delays and hidden costs actually start. For European retailers sourcing from Asia, the biggest OTIF (on-time, in-full) risk and the least protected money are created 10 to 12 weeks earlier in the chain, at PO placement, cargo-ready confirmation and the booking against your carrier contract. When goods arrive late at a European DC, the event that caused it usually happened weeks earlier.

How one slip at origin causes a multi-week tail at the DC

It starts when a supplier moves cargo-ready by a week. The next vessel on your contracted carrier is full, so the booking rolls. Carriers are more fluid than they used to be, faster to skip a port or drop a customer, so the allocation you planned around disappears. The promo arrives late or short and the DC has to deal with it.

Then the ripple keeps going. Unsold inventory clogs the DC, so incoming containers can't be offloaded and port fees pile up. Back at origin, factories can't ship the next wave because the warehouse there is still holding goods from the last one.

And that's just the logistics side of it. When seasonal cargo misses its selling window it gets discounted, held over to next season or written off entirely, which hits your margins and your growth projections.

Based on data from multiple large European retailers we work with, we've estimated that for every 1,000 TEU a year of inbound volume, you can avoid around $1.9M in commercial loss just by lifting on-time arrival from 70% to 80%.

The hidden cost of a cheap container

A cheap container becomes expensive when 30% of the goods still arrive late. Rate per container is the usual benchmark, but the more useful question is how much of what you shipped actually arrived on time for the money you spent.

Annual contract-versus-spot mixes are rarely checked against how volume actually flows. For the large European retailers we start working with, rebalancing that mix onto a premium service can easily be worth roughly $70K per sailing. Cutting booked but unused capacity can save them about $1.2M a year. Raising container utilisation from 85% to 92% around $2.7M a year, and bringing the air-freight share down from 2.5% to 1.5% adds another $5M.

With that much risk and cost concentrated in the first mile, why do so many retailers still struggle to improve inbound reliability?

A first mile without visibility

A while ago a VP of Operations at a large e-commerce aggregator with roughly a billion in revenue shared a major frustration with me:

"Our supply chain itself is solid. What we're missing is visibility into what breaks. And we usually only find out two or three weeks after it already happened."

His supplier had missed the agreed cargo-ready date, and he only heard about it two or three weeks later. By then the container had sailed, their customer was already running short of stock, and the whole team was firefighting a problem that was almost a month old. He had no idea what was actually going on at the other side of the world.

To find out whether a retailer really has visibility over its first mile, I ask three questions:

- How many of your POs missed cargo-ready by more than five days last quarter?
- Across all factories, by how much did booked quantities diverge from shipped quantities?
- When a container slipped, could you trace it back from the box on the water to the specific PO and supplier that caused it?

Most teams can't answer any of them. Even with a visibility platform, what they see is usually the cargo-ready confirmation and the position of the vessel their container is supposed to be on. The 10 to 12 weeks before that container even existed stay dark.

Most platforms only carry data at the shipment level. In retail you need the whole chain: PO to supplier booking to carrier booking to container.

Visibility without control

A head of inbound logistics at a fashion e-commerce pure-player described something that we see often:

"I wouldn't say we lack visibility. What we lack is full control on the supplier side, and that's a big pain point for us."

I hear visibility pitches all the time (I give a few myself), and most of them assume that once you can see your supply chain, you can also steer it. This person could see plenty. When a supplier moved a cargo-ready date, the new date showed up neatly in the system, and that was about all anyone on their side could do with it.

Their responsibility formally starts at the cargo-ready date. Everything before that (production planning, packing, a supplier juggling orders from customers bigger than you) sits outside their scope. So nobody on their side has the standing to call the factory and ask why the date moved, let alone hold them to the original promise.



Control without accountability

"I renamed our control tower the Shipping Tower, because it doesn't actually control anything. Run an airport like that and you'd have planes crashing."

The logistics director who said this worked for a multibillion-dollar manufacturer that had already invested heavily in dashboards and a dedicated team at origin. Those dashboards were green while customers were still waiting for orders that were supposedly fine. Responsibility was divided across buyers, logistics teams, regional offices, and external partners. Each group reported on its own part of the journey, so every KPI could look healthy without anyone owning the delivery promise all the way to the customer.

Nobody is measured on the only thing that counts: did the goods arrive when we promised?

A plane also passes between several controllers, but the pilot in command still owns the whole flight and every handoff is explicit. In this supply chain, responsibility disappeared into the handoffs.

Partial solutions, and what actually fixes this

If these accounts make one thing clear, it's that while plenty of solutions promise to give you full visibility and control over your first mile, many don't actually provide the real solution: being able to see exceptions coming before they become a problem and to act on them in real time and proactively so they don't ripple through to the last mile.

It starts with one accountable owner across the whole chain, judged on the customer's actual delivery date rather than each team's own scorecard. Green should mean one thing only: the customer got what we promised, when we promised it.

That accountability should begin the day the supplier accepts the PO, not at the cargo-ready date, with a team at origin working on your behalf and staying close to every supplier. They confirm each PO milestone, keep the updates accurate, ask why a date moved and push to recover the schedule while there is still room.

Without people enforcing that discipline, a control tower has little to show. Once the updates are flowing, a potential slip reaches you as it happens, or even before, and the same team can step in while the exception is still avoidable or easier to fix. It's less glamorous than another dashboard, I admit, but it's what turns visibility into something you can act on.

Recovery also needs an option beyond standard carrier contracts, sky-high spot rates and air freight. Keep guaranteed space on a reliable premium ocean service where sailings leave as promised and 40 days means 40 days. But buying the space is only half the job. You have to manage that allocation continuously against actual PO readiness, contracted capacity

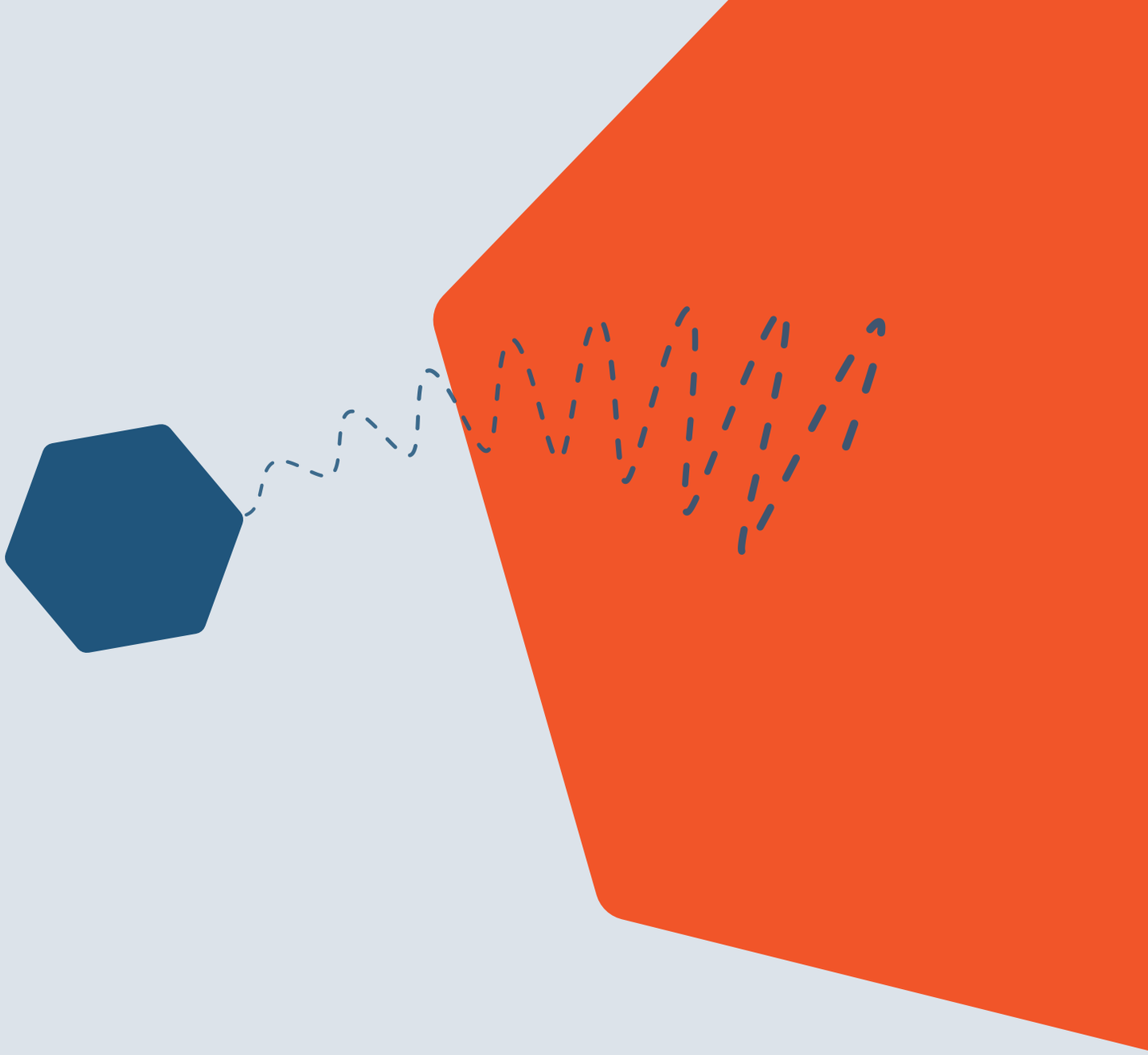


and urgency. That means filling the space you already pay for and keeping enough regular volume on the premium service to keep the option alive. When the main carrier fails, urgent goods move into capacity that is already running. Done well, this improves reliability and cuts both unused capacity and your dependence on expensive spot or air expedites.

Then you can add intelligence. With enough data over time you can predict cargo-ready dates more accurately and book the right container in advance. A simple traffic light view shows which orders are on track and which need action, so the origin team can step in early along agreed SOPs. The hours that used to go into chasing updates go into fixing the slip instead.

Much more to improve

There is a lot more to say about making the stretch from PO to DC more reliable and less expensive. We didn't even cover supplier and carrier performance management, demurrage and detention, invoice audit recovery, customs clearance automation and DC labour scheduling, to name a few. I'm happy to go deeper on any of those in a future article. ••



Don’t let one slip at origin become a multi-week tail at the DC.

Get one accountable team, from PO to DC.

With the specialized 4PL for European retailers sourcing from Asia.

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YOUR CUSTOMERS STILL WANT A HUMAN
THEY HAVE A POINT

Text: Hans Siebum // Photos: Salesupply

In mid-2025, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia cut 45 customer service jobs, explaining that a new AI voice bot had reduced call volumes so fewer people were needed. Within weeks it was reversing course. Call volumes had risen, not fallen. Staff were on overtime, team leaders were back answering phones, and the bank ended up apologising and admitting the roles had never been redundant.

A year earlier Klarna had claimed its AI did the work of 700 agents. Its chief executive later told Bloomberg the company had leaned too far into cost, that the result was lower quality, and that customers should always be able to reach a human. Klarna is rebuilding towards a hybrid model: AI for the volume, people where it counts.

If you run customer service for a cross-border retailer, you know the brief behind both decisions, because you have been handed the same one: cut costs without touching the customer experience. Full automation was sold as the way to do both at once. For those of us selling across borders the pitch was especially seductive. One system that could serve a customer in Milan, Munich and Madrid at the same time, in their own language, at a fraction of what a human team costs. A lot of us leaned in, and I understand why.

Customer's perspective

A journalist at the Dutch newspaper Trouw recently documented what a simple technical problem now looks like: five days trying to reach a human. A case number that wouldn't generate. A chatbot looping the same three steps. An escalation email he couldn't reply to. A phone menu that sent him back to the website where the problem started. He was helped only after he typed his request for a human in capital letters, at which point someone called, understood the context, and solved it in one conversation.

He is not alone. A SurveyMonkey study in December 2025 found that 79% of consumers still prefer a human over an AI agent. The nuance underneath is the useful part: people are relaxed about AI for low-stakes tasks, but the moment something carries weight the numbers jump. 85% want a human for a billing dispute, 78% for a data-security worry, 76% for a product that will not work.

Let me be clear: none of this means AI has no place in customer service. It plays a central role, and it should.

AI is genuinely excellent at the structured, repetitive work that makes up the bulk of any e-commerce service operation. Where-is-my-order questions. Tracking updates. Standard return instructions. Classifying incoming contacts, summarising cases, drafting replies for an agent to check. That is real cost reduction and real scale, and no human team can match it on speed or volume.

But customer service isn't only standard questions. It is also the customer who is angry, or upset, or has a complicated return, or a pre-sales question worth a few hundred euros in basket value. That is where customer experience is made or broken, and it is exactly where full automation isn't able to perform at its best.

For cross-border retailers this matters twice over. Every market you enter multiplies the edge cases: different expectations, different rules, different emotional registers. A bot can produce fluent text in every language. It cannot read the room in any of them.

So the question I put to every e-commerce leader I meet is not "how much can we automate?" It is "Which parts of your customer service can you automate without damaging the customer experience?"

Answer that honestly and you don't end up with AI-only. You end up with both. AI handles the volume. Experienced, native-speaking agents handle the judgement: the emotion, the escalation, the commercial moment.

At Salesupply we see this work every day, and one part surprises people. The agents don't only resolve the difficult cases, they improve the operation. When they see the AI getting something wrong, or a returns policy causing the same confusion every week, they feed it back, and the FAQ or the product description gets fixed. The next cycle is better. A pure-automation setup cannot do that, because no one is watching who can change anything.

This is the thinking behind Hybrid AI Customer Service: the speed and scale of AI, with the certainty of human expertise. Not one instead of the other.

The best customer service was never the one with no human in it. It is the one that solves the problem, takes the customer seriously, and leaves them trusting your brand a little more than before. AI can help you get there. It just can't get you there on its own. ••

Hybrid AI Customer Service	
AI Handles	**Customer Service agents handle**
Order status and tracking (WISMO)	Complaints and emotionally charged contacts
Shipping confirmation and delay notifications	Returns and refund decisions decisions requiring judgment
Standard FAQ responses	Escalations from AI-handled contacts
Contact classification and routing	Pre-sales advice for high-value products
Case summaries for agent handover	Phone support (100% human, all languages)
Draft replies for agent review	Nuanced product questions requiring expertise
First-response on simple product queries	Situations where empathy determines the outcome


UB SEND

BEYOND COMPLIANCE: HOW UBSEND TURNED ESG INTO AN INTEGRAL PART OF LOGISTICS IN THE EU

Text: Frank Calviño // Photos: UBsend

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria are reshaping the European logistics industry. What once functioned as a voluntary sustainability initiative has become a core operational requirement, influencing everything from carrier selection and network design to financial reporting and customer relationships.

For UBsend, a European multi-carrier logistics platform, ESG is not merely a compliance obligation. Instead, the company has incorporated sustainability into its operational model, strategic planning, and customer advisory role.
In this interview, Kasper Nielsen, Procurement Manager and ESG responsible at UBsend, explains how ESG is transforming the parcel industry, how UBsend has adapted its business model, and why the company believes sustainability will ultimately become a source of competitive advantage rather than a regulatory burden.

What ESG Is and Why It Matters in Logistics

But, before we continue, let's begin at the beginning: ESG stands for Environmental, Social, and Governance. It is a framework used by regulators, investors, and companies to evaluate how businesses manage sustainability risks and impacts.

The environmental dimension focuses on climate-related issues, including greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption, and resource efficiency. In logistics, this often translates into decarbonizing transportation networks, reducing packaging waste, and optimizing delivery operations.

The social dimension focuses on people. It includes labor conditions, worker safety, diversity, and broader social responsibility across the supply chain. For logistics companies, this increasingly includes ensuring fair working conditions not only within their own workforce but also among subcontracted drivers and logistics partners.

Governance refers to how companies manage oversight and accountability. It includes compliance systems, corporate transparency, ethical business practices, and the internal structures that ensure ESG commitments are implemented and reported correctly.

Across Europe, ESG is now closely tied to regulatory reporting frameworks and access to financing. Investors and banks increasingly assess companies based on sustainability metrics, meaning logistics providers must demonstrate transparency and measurable progress in areas such as emissions, workforce conditions, and governance structures.

ESG as a New License to Operate in the European Parcel Industry

According to Nielsen, the shift toward ESG compliance has fundamentally changed how logistics companies operate.

"Before, emission reporting was something companies could highlight as a positive feature. Now it has become a necessity. ESG has moved from a nice-to-have to a license to operate," says Kasper Nielsen, Procurement Manager and ESG responsible at UBsend.

Much of this shift has been driven by European legislation, which has expanded sustainability reporting requirements for large companies. However, the effects extend far beyond the companies that are legally required to report.

Large retailers and e-commerce companies increasingly demand detailed sustainability data from their logistics partners. As a result, parcel operators and logistics platforms must be able to measure, report, and explain their environmental and social impacts even if they are not directly subject to the same regulatory obligations.

UBsend experiences this dynamic particularly strongly because many of its customers are major European fashion retailers and online merchants with strict sustainability targets.

"Even if you are not formally obliged to report, if you want to work with the big enterprise companies in Europe, you need to follow the same standards," says Nielsen.

Another major complexity for the industry is the lack of standardized emissions reporting. Although frameworks such as the Greenhouse Gas Protocol provide guidance, companies still use different methodologies to calculate logistics emissions. For integrators working with multiple carriers, harmonizing this data can be a significant operational challenge.

Highlight: Why Transport Emissions Matter in the EU

Transport is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Europe, making logistics a key focus area for sustainability efforts.

Indicator	Value	Year	Source
Share of EU greenhouse gas emissions from transport	~29%	2022	European Environment Agency
Share of transport emissions from road transport	73%	2023	European Environment Agency

Because road transport dominates the sector, parcel delivery networks — particularly last-mile delivery — play a central role in decarbonizing European logistics.

How UBsend Has Adapted to the ESG Agenda

To respond to the evolving ESG landscape, UBsend has integrated sustainability directly into its operational structure. Nielsen's role reflects this integration: he oversees both procurement and sustainability activities within the company.

The procurement team manages relationships with carriers across Europe, while the sustainability team focuses on reporting, compliance, and developing environmental and social initiatives.

One of the company's most significant investments has been in developing a centralized CO_2 reporting platform. This system consolidates emissions data from multiple carriers and translates it into a standardized format for customers' sustainability reporting.

"We have invested in a CO_2 footprint portal where we can report emissions on a company level but also drill down to the individual customer level across carriers in a harmonized way," says Nielsen.

Another key initiative has been optimizing the physical logistics network. By consolidating volumes across customers and routing shipments through optimized hub structures, UBsend can reduce both costs and emissions while maintaining service levels.

"By consolidating volumes and optimizing hub solutions, we can reduce both costs and CO_2 emissions while maintaining or even improving service performance," Nielsen explains.

Highlight: Electrification Trends in European Transport

Electrification is expected to play a key role in reducing logistics emissions in the coming decade.

Indicator	Value	Year	Source
Share of renewable energy in EU transport	8.7%	2022	European Environment Agency
Share of electric vans in new EU registrations	7.7%	2023	European Environment Agency

Electric vans and alternative fuels are increasingly being adopted for urban delivery operations, particularly in cities with stricter emissions regulations.

Integrating ESG Into the UBsend Business Strategy

Rather than treating ESG as a reporting exercise, UBsend has integrated sustainability considerations into its long-term strategy.

"We have taken a clear strategic view on ESG. Our goal is to be as strong as possible within this area, and we believe that in the future it can become a competitive advantage," says Nielsen.

One of the most significant internal projects supporting this strategy was the company's double materiality assessment. This assessment required a comprehensive evaluation of the sustainability topics most relevant to the company, both in terms of their impact on society and the risks they pose to the business.

The process required months of analysis and collaboration across departments, including interviews with internal stakeholders and reviews of governance structures.

"What started as a compliance exercise actually sparked valuable discussions internally about what really matters for our company and where we can make the biggest impact," Nielsen recalls.

The assessment highlighted several priorities, including workforce well-being, governance standards, and the treatment of workers throughout the logistics value chain.

Working With Customers and Carriers on ESG

As a multi-carrier logistics platform, UBsend sits between e-commerce companies and the parcel networks that deliver their products. This position allows the company to influence sustainability practices across both sides of the logistics ecosystem.

The company currently manages relationships with roughly 150 carriers across Europe. Sustainability has become one of the parameters used when evaluating these partnerships, alongside cost and operational performance.

"We manage around 150 carriers in Europe, and ESG is becoming an increasingly important parameter when we evaluate partners," says Nielsen.

UBsend maintains structured supplier relationship management programs with regular performance reviews and strategic discussions. Sustainability roadmaps are now a standard part of these meetings.

"We run structured supplier relationship management with quarterly business reviews and strategic meetings where sustainability is always part of the agenda," Nielsen explains.

On the customer side, UBsend increasingly acts as an advisor on logistics sustainability. The company analyzes delivery networks, consumer preferences, and emissions data to identify ways customers can improve both efficiency and environmental performance.

One example involved analyzing delivery patterns for a fashion retailer. The study showed that shifting more deliveries to out-of-home pickup points could reduce emissions, improve delivery success rates, and lower logistics costs.

Highlight: Emissions Impact of Parcel Locker Deliveries

Research into last-mile logistics shows that alternative delivery methods can reduce emissions under the right conditions.

Delivery method	Estimated CO2 Impact VS Home Delivery	Source
Parcel locker delivery	Up to 21% lower emissions	Academic research on last-mile logistics

The impact depends on factors such as locker density, consumer travel behavior, and route optimization.

The Future of ESG in the Parcel Industry

Looking ahead, Nielsen believes that the next major step for the logistics industry will be greater standardization of sustainability reporting.

"A major step forward would be harmonized standards for how emissions are calculated across Europe," says Nielsen.

He also expects the social dimension of ESG to become more important across logistics supply chains, particularly as companies pay closer attention to labor conditions among subcontracted drivers and warehouse workers.

"In the coming years, I believe we will see much more focus on social responsibility across the value chain — ensuring that workers are treated properly and that companies have the right governance structures in place," Nielsen explains.

For UBsend, the long-term goal is to continue developing its advisory role. By combining logistics data, network expertise, and sustainability insights, the company aims to help customers make better operational decisions.

Highlight: Growth of E-commerce in Europe
The continued expansion of e-commerce is a major factor shaping the sustainability discussion in logistics.

Indicator	Value	Year	Source
EU internet users buying online	62%	2015	Eurostat
EU internet users buying online	78%	2025	Eurostat

As online shopping grows, the number of parcel shipments continues to increase — making the environmental footprint of logistics networks an increasingly important part of ESG strategies across European supply chains. ••



THINK GLOBAL, DELIVER LOCAL



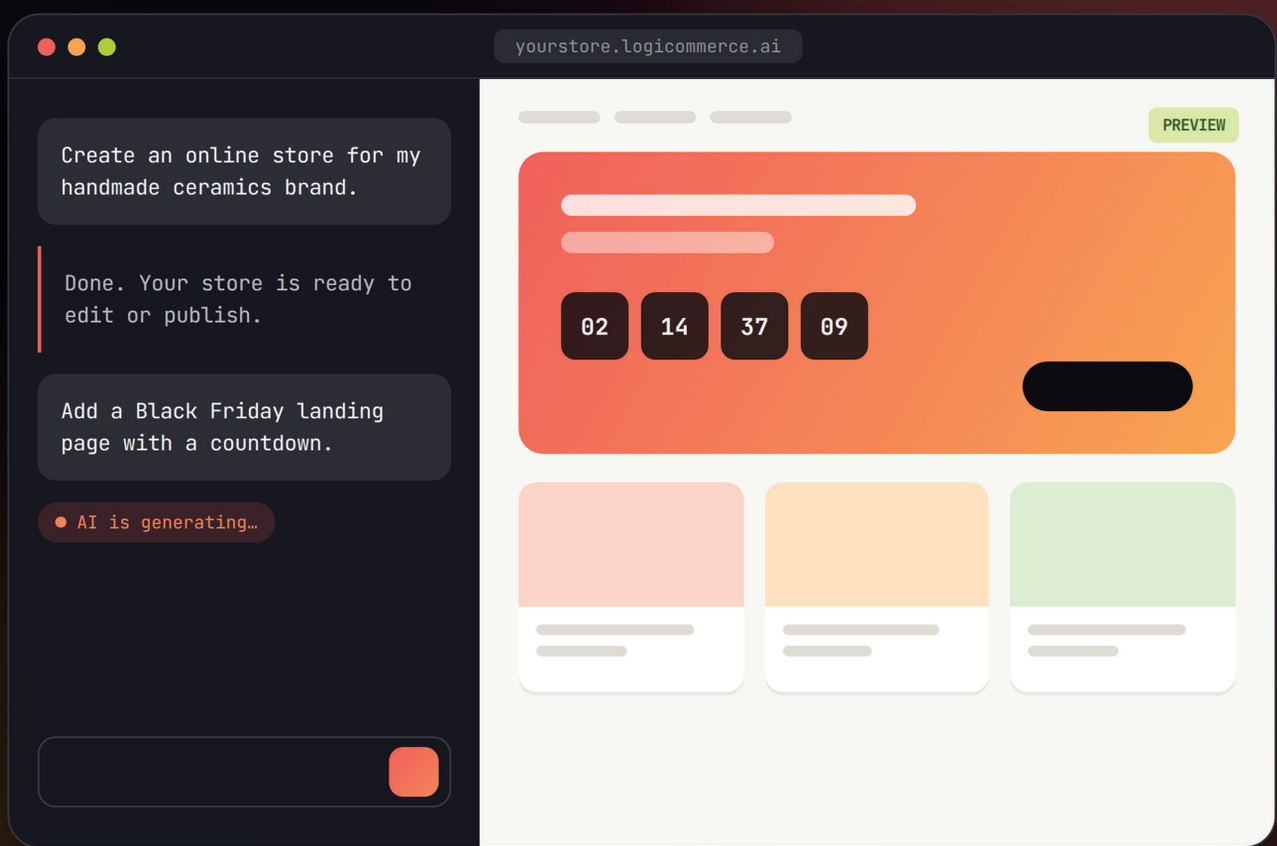
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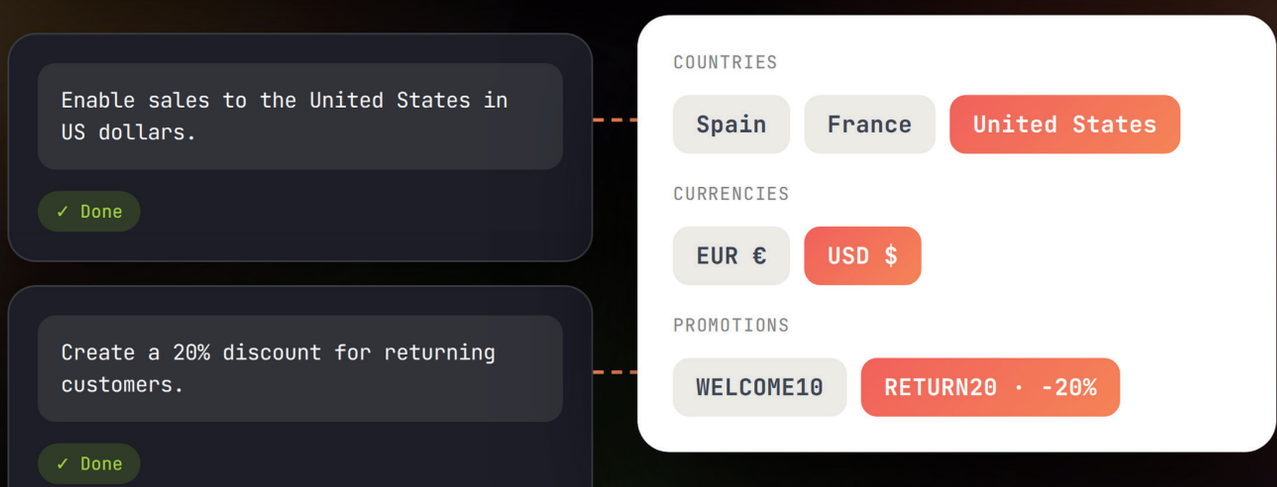
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logicommerce AI





BUILD AND RUN YOUR ECOMMERCE BY TALKING TO AI: MEET LOGICOMMERCE AI

Text: Judit Simon // Photos: LogiCommerce

LogiCommerce is entering a new era. LogiCommerce AI is the next evolution of the e-commerce platform. It brings your storefront and your business operations together in a single place, with artificial intelligence built into how online stores are created, managed, and evolved.

Running an e-commerce has traditionally meant juggling separate tools and teams. One system manages products, orders, and pricing. Another manages the storefront. Every new homepage, campaign landing page, or change to the shopping experience requires weeks of coordination between business, marketing, design, and development.
LogiCommerce AI changes that. Available in early November at logicommerce.ai, lets your team design the storefront and manage the business behind it from one platform, simply by talking to AI. That gives you the autonomy to launch and update whenever you need.

Design your storefront by talking to AI
Describe what you want in natural language, and LogiCommerce AI generates a fully functional storefront. You can then refine it through an AI chat or a visual editor.

"Create a premium cosmetics homepage with a minimalist design, highlighting natural ingredients, best sellers, and customer reviews." or "Design a Black Friday landing page with a countdown timer, featured products, and conversion-optimized sections." or "Redesign the product page to increase add-to-cart conversions by making the CTA more prominent and adding trust signals."

If more context is needed, the AI asks follow-up questions before generating the result. It then creates layouts, components, copy, imagery, and conversion elements automatically.

Prefer to work hands-on? Start from a blank canvas or a pre-built template and use the visual editor to build and publish pages with one click, no AI required.

Manage your entire business by talking to AI
LogiCommerce AI is not just a storefront builder. The same platform where you design your store is where you run it: products, categories, pricing, inventory, promotions, orders, customers, and every other core commerce function.

And just like the storefront, the back office has its own AI chat. Instead of navigating menus and filling in forms, you simply ask: "Create a 20% discount on the summer collection, valid until the end of the month." or "Show me all pending orders from this week." or "Add French and German to my store." or "Enable Mexican pesos and US dollars as available currencies." Front and back no longer live in separate worlds. Your team works both from one place, in natural language, without switching tools or waiting on long development cycles.

AI that understands your business
Because storefront and operations share the same platform, the AI works with your real commerce data, including products, categories, inventory, pricing, promotions, and business rules.

That enables much smarter requests: “Create a summer campaign landing page featuring products with the highest stock availability and automatically apply active promotions.” or “Highlight the fastest-growing categories on the homepage and display each category’s best-selling products.”
The result is shopping experiences that are relevant, personalized, and ready for both B2C and B2B commerce.

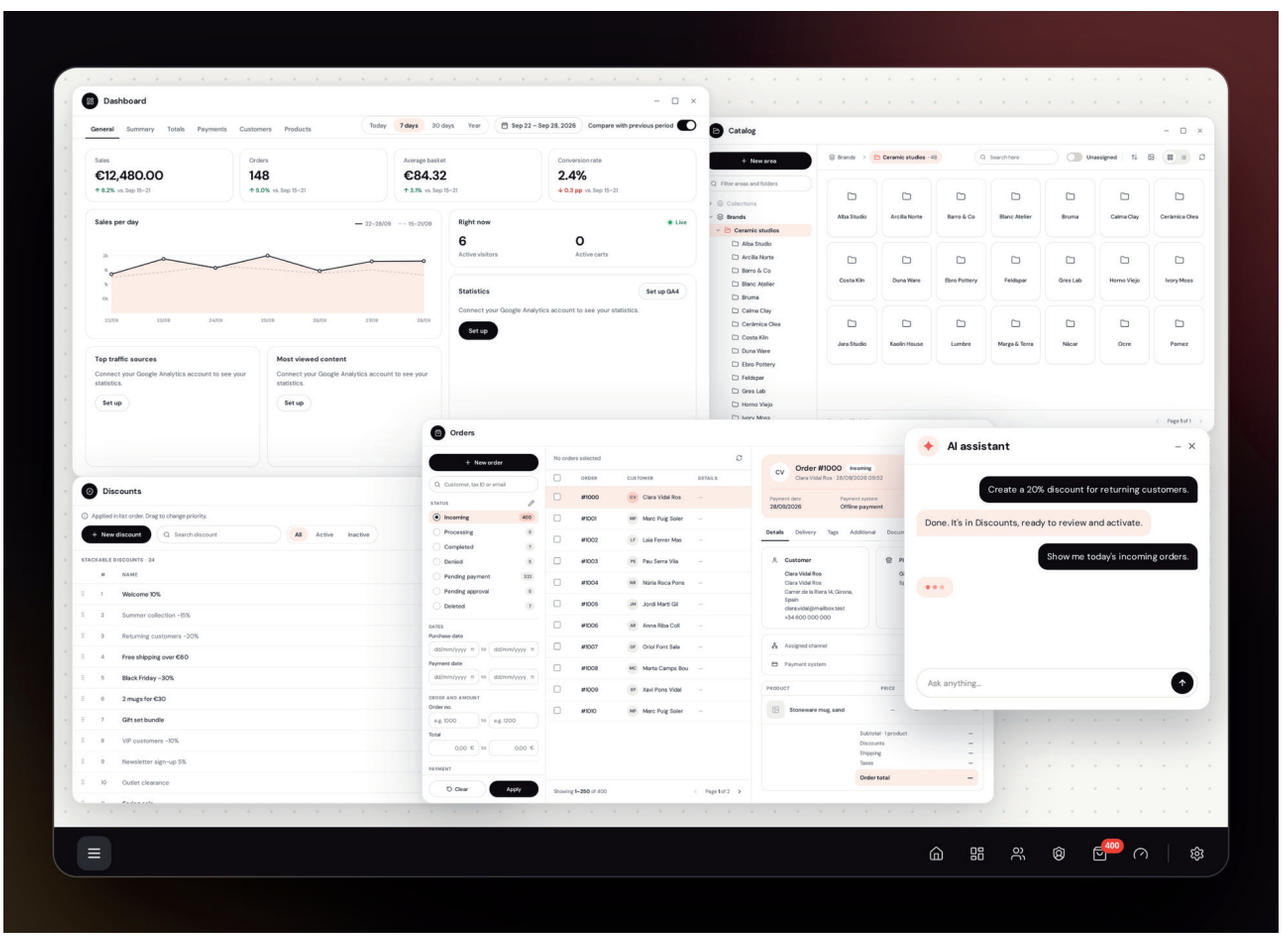
Migration becomes a conversation

Migrating an existing storefront is often one of the most time-consuming parts of a replatforming project. With LogiCommerce AI, you simply provide your current website. The AI recreates the storefront while preserving its structure and visual identity, ready to be modernized from day one.
“Copy my current store (URL).”

This dramatically reduces manual work and accelerates migrations without starting from scratch.

Coming in early November

LogiCommerce AI will be available at logicommerce.ai in early November. Stay tuned to discover its features, pricing, and everything that’s coming with the AI-native evolution of LogiCommerce. ••

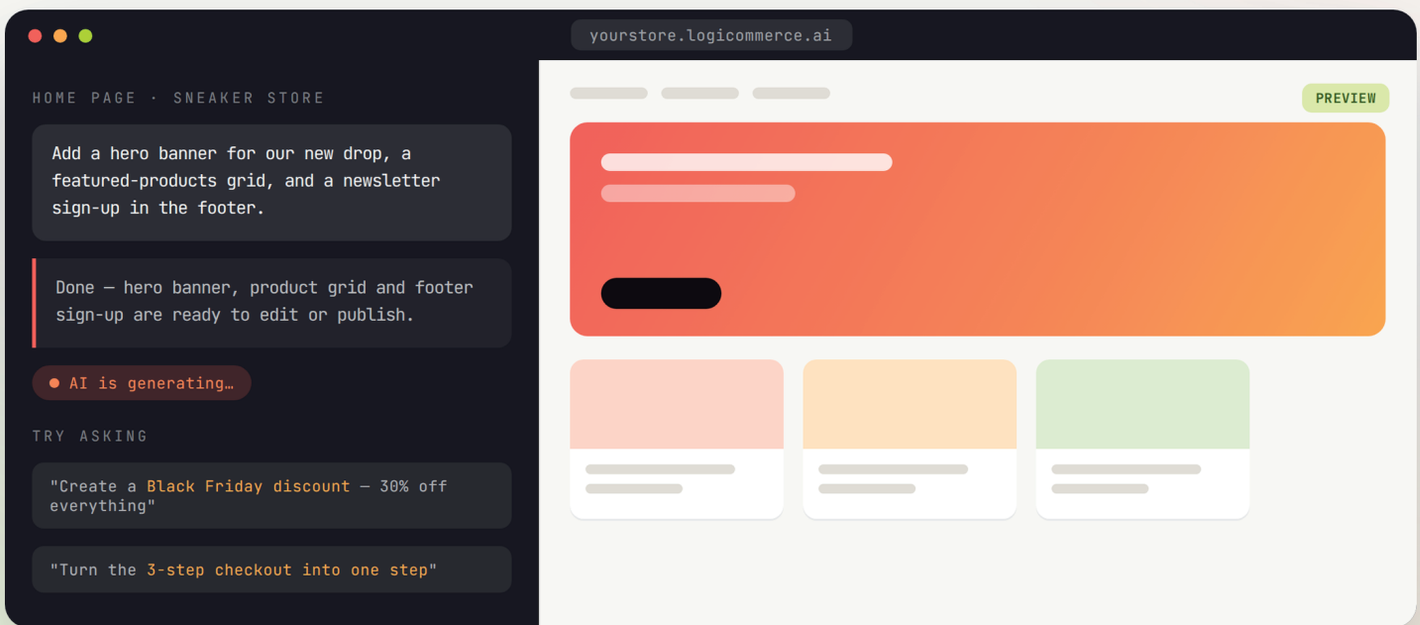


logicommerce AI

AI-NATIVE ECOMMERCE PLATFORM

Build your store by chatting with AI

From a prompt to a live store.



Speed
From prompt to page in minutes.

Autonomy
No developers, no bottlenecks.

Brand-aware
Learns your colors, logo and fonts.

Real data
Connected to your real products and stock.

Templates
Start from a template or a blank chat.

Integration
Syncs natively with your ERP, CRM and tools.

Start building with AI →

Turn your next idea into a store today.

logicommerce.ai

WHY CEE IS EUROPE'S BEST EXPANSION LABORATORY FOR ONLINE RETAILERS

Text: Tomasz Dominik, Sales Director Packeta Germany, Baltics and Scandinavia // Photos: Packeta Group



TOMASZ DOMINIK,
SALES DIRECTOR
PACKETA GERMANY, BALTICS AND SCANDINAVIA

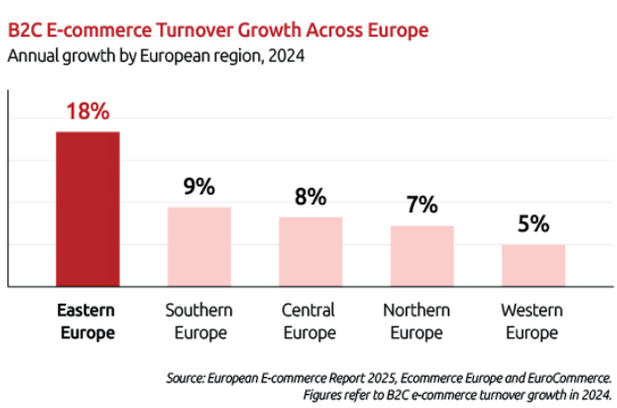
Central and Eastern Europe is often presented to online retailers as a collection of promising individual markets. Poland offers scale, Czechia has a highly developed e-commerce culture, Hungary is increasingly open to cross-border shopping, and Romania still has substantial room for digital growth. Yet the strongest argument for the region is not any single country. It is the possibility of using several connected markets to build a repeatable international expansion model.

Many retailers still approach cross-border growth as a sequence of isolated bets. They choose a country, localise the webshop, invest in marketing and hope that domestic success can be reproduced abroad. When results are slower than expected, internationalisation or the market itself is blamed. Yet treating every country as a separate project means repeatedly relearning which delivery options create trust, which payment methods improve conversion and how returns affect repeat purchases.

CEE offers a different route. The region combines mature e-commerce markets, high-growth economies and a logistics landscape designed for flexible cross-border delivery. Retailers can validate an offer in one market, transfer what works to the next and scale with far more operational knowledge than they would gain from a single isolated launch.

A Region with Momentum, Not a Future Promise

The latest figures support this argument. Eurostat reported that 78% of people in the European Union bought or ordered goods or services online in 2025. Regional growth rates, however, remain uneven. The European E-commerce Report published in 2025, which contains full-year 2024 turnover data, recorded 8% growth in Central Europe and 18% in Eastern Europe, compared with 6% in Western Europe. Western Europe remains the largest region by turnover, but the strongest momentum is increasingly found further east.



Source: European E-commerce Report 2025, Ecommerce Europe and EuroCommerce. Figures refer to B2C e-commerce turnover growth in 2024.

Mature Western markets may offer high purchasing power, but they also tend to involve established competitors, expensive customer acquisition and demanding service expectations. CEE does not remove these challenges, but it often presents them in a different balance: retailers can reach digitally experienced consumers in markets that are still expanding rather than compete only for small shifts in share within saturated environments.

The region should not be reduced to one growth statistic. Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Romania differ in market size, purchasing power, marketplaces and customer expectations. That diversity provides several test environments within a geographically connected area.

Different Markets Answer Different Strategic Questions

Czechia can test whether a foreign retailer is able to meet the expectations of a mature digital audience. Consumers are accustomed to comparison platforms, broad delivery choice and sophisticated online shopping experiences. Success there demonstrates more than product demand; it shows that localisation, pricing and the customer journey can compete in an established ecosystem.

Slovakia can serve as a transfer market. It is not identical to Czechia, but the two markets share enough operational similarities to reveal whether a successful launch can be adapted efficiently. If the core setup can be retained while customer-facing details are localised, the retailer has started to create a regional operating model.

Poland answers a different question: can the business handle scale? The country has a large and competitive e-commerce environment, a strong marketplace culture and consumers familiar with parcel lockers and self-service delivery. Entering Poland tests whether a retailer can coordinate local marketing, marketplace visibility, pricing and high parcel volumes without losing control of the customer experience.

Hungary is relevant for evaluating cross-border acceptance and the importance of localisation. Openness to foreign retailers does not eliminate the need for familiar delivery, transparent communication, local-language service and suitable payment options. Romania offers a longer-term growth case, as digital adoption is still expanding and online shopping is becoming more deeply embedded in everyday purchasing behaviour.

Together, these countries form a portfolio. One can test maturity, another transferability, another operational scale and another future growth potential. This is strategically more useful than asking which market is simply “the best”.

Logistics Is Part of the Market Proposition

The ability to use CEE as an expansion portfolio depends heavily on logistics. Delivery is still sometimes treated as a technical step that follows the commercial market-entry decision. For online retail, that sequence is outdated. Delivery options, carrier familiarity, tracking quality and returns directly influence whether a customer completes a purchase and comes back.

Eurostat’s 2025 data underline the point. More than one third of EU online shoppers reported a problem with an online purchase, and the most common issue was slower delivery than expected, mentioned by almost 20%. Logistics is therefore not merely a cost centre. It is one of the most visible parts of the customer experience and one of the areas most capable of damaging trust.

CEE has an important structural advantage: out-of-home delivery is already integrated into consumer routines. Parcel lockers and staffed pickup points are not fallback options for customers who missed a courier. In many markets, they are actively preferred because consumers can collect parcels when it suits them, avoid waiting at home and often pay a lower delivery fee.

Packeta’s 2025 figures illustrate the scale of this behaviour. The group delivered 184 million parcels during the year, up from 145 million in 2024. By the end of 2025, it operated 12,700 pickup boxes, while its networks in Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary together offered more than one million locker compartments. These numbers reflect both infrastructure investment and customer demand for delivery built around control and self-service.

Local Delivery Can Change Customer Behaviour

A recent collaboration with a major European fashion retailer in Czechia and Slovakia provides a useful example. Following the integration of Zásilkovna, the retailer’s share of out-of-home delivery increased by six percentage points. In Slovakia, customers selected Z-BOXes 2.5 times more often than staffed pickup points. They did not merely accept the familiar local delivery option; they actively changed their behaviour when it was offered as a convenient part of the checkout experience.

For an expanding retailer, this has two consequences. First, delivery should be localised as carefully as language or payment. An unfamiliar carrier, limited pickup coverage or an unclear returns process can weaken an otherwise strong offer. Second, logistics performance becomes a source of market intelligence. Useful indicators include delivery-method selection, checkout abandonment, collection speed, regional return rates and repeat purchases.

These signals help distinguish a weak market from a weak setup. Strong product interest combined with low checkout conversion may indicate unsuitable delivery prices or options. High first-order sales but poor retention may point

to an unreliable post-purchase experience. In this way, the region becomes a learning system rather than a sequence of disconnected launches.

From First Market to Regional Growth Model

A practical strategy can begin with validation rather than immediate scale. The retailer selects a market that matches its capabilities, launches a focused assortment and localises the essential customer journey. The first objective is not national market leadership. It is to establish whether the product, price and service proposition works outside the domestic market.

The second stage is transfer. The retailer enters a neighbouring market using the same technical and operational foundation while adapting the visible customer experience. A reusable model should preserve core integration, reporting and fulfilment processes while allowing delivery options, payment methods, language and marketing channels to change.

Only after these lessons have been captured should the retailer move into a larger or more complex scaling market. The business then has regional evidence on conversion, delivery preferences, collection behaviour, returns and retention instead of relying mainly on assumptions from its home country.

A logistics platform can reduce the operational burden of this process. Rather than building a separate infrastructure for every destination, retailers can connect to several delivery networks through one technical setup and manage cross-border flows more consistently. Packeta currently delivers to 33 countries and works with tens of thousands of online shops, providing access to a broad regional network without requiring a new logistics project for every market.

The Strategic Case for Looking East

CEE is neither uniform nor free of competition. Expansion still requires local language, market-specific pricing, relevant payment methods, customer service and clear returns. Its advantage is the ability to manage this complexity across connected markets and turn each launch into knowledge for the next one.

This changes the expansion question. Instead of asking which foreign country offers the largest immediate turnover, retailers can ask which market will provide the most useful evidence for their next decision. Czechia may validate the customer experience. Slovakia may test transferability. Poland may prove scale. Hungary may test cross-border trust. Romania may position the business for the next wave of digital growth.

For online retailers seeking sustainable international expansion, this portfolio approach is more valuable than another isolated country launch. CEE combines strong regional momentum, digitally experienced consumers, established out-of-home delivery and markets at different stages of development. It gives retailers the opportunity not only to sell more, but to build a repeatable expansion capability.

The companies that benefit most will not be those that treat CEE as one large “Eastern market”. They will be those that understand its differences, use logistics as part of the commercial proposition and turn local customer behaviour into a scalable regional strategy. ••



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FROM EUROPE TO LATIN AMERICA: WHY MARKETPLACES ARE BECOMING THE NEW CROSS-BORDER ENTRY POINT

Text: Rafael Sant'Anna, Founder & CEO, e-CROSS // Photos: e-CROSS

For European brands looking at Latin America, the question is no longer whether the opportunity exists. It is how to enter the region with speed, control and limited upfront risk. Increasingly, marketplaces are becoming the answer. Latin America has long represented an attractive but complex growth opportunity for international brands. A large digital consumer base, increasing appetite for international products and some of the world's most relevant e-commerce platforms make the region difficult to ignore. Yet entering Latin America through a traditional country-by-country expansion model remains challenging.

Setting up local entities, importing inventory in bulk, building local distribution, integrating payment methods, managing taxes and duties and developing local customer operations can require significant capital and time before the first transaction even takes place.

For many brands, this creates a contradiction: the market opportunity is attractive, but the cost and complexity of testing it are disproportionately high. A new cross-border model is changing that equation.

Marketplaces are becoming market-entry platforms

Historically, marketplaces were often treated primarily as additional sales channels — something brands added after establishing their local operations. That logic is beginning to reverse.

Leading marketplaces across Latin America already aggregate millions of consumers, established local payment ecosystems, trusted shopping environments and significant organic demand. For an international brand, this creates an opportunity to use a marketplace not simply as a distribution channel, but as a market-entry platform.

Instead of first building the infrastructure and then searching for customers, brands can enter through platforms where consumers are already shopping. This fundamentally changes the economics of international expansion.

A European brand can test demand, understand pricing, identify successful SKUs and build local brand awareness before committing to inventory localisation or a larger physical presence. In other words, marketplaces can become the first step into a market rather than the final step in an omnichannel strategy.

Cross-border DTC removes another layer of complexity

The second part of this transformation is cross-border DTC.

Traditional marketplace expansion typically required brands to place inventory locally, appoint distributors or establish an importer and operating structure in each country. Technology and cross-border infrastructure now make another model possible.

Products can remain in the brand's origin market and be sold directly to consumers through local marketplaces. Orders are then processed individually and shipped cross-border to the final customer.

This approach allows brands to preserve several important advantages:

- ***Lower upfront investment***, without immediately committing to local inventory.
- ***Faster market entry***, reducing the operational work required before launch.
- ***Greater control over brand and assortment***, compared with traditional wholesale or distributor models.
- ***Access to local consumers and local marketplace traffic*** while maintaining an international DTC operation.
- ***Real market data before deeper investment***, allowing brands to validate demand before moving towards localisation.

This does not mean that local inventory or wholesale models disappear. For brands that reach sufficient scale, they may ultimately become the right next step.

The difference is that brands can now earn the right to localise based on actual demand rather than forecasts.

The challenge is what happens behind the marketplace

Opening a seller account is only a small part of the equation. Cross-border commerce requires multiple layers to work together: catalogue localisation, pricing, foreign exchange, payments, taxes and duties, compliance, international logistics, tracking, returns, reconciliation and customer experience.

These layers become even more complex when a brand wants to operate across several marketplaces and countries simultaneously. This is where a new infrastructure layer is emerging between international brands and Latin American commerce.

Rather than requiring the brand to build separate integrations and operational structures for Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Colombia or Peru, cross-border platforms can orchestrate these components through a single operating model. For the brand, the objective is simple: one integration, multiple markets and marketplaces.

Mexico illustrates the opportunity

Mexico provides a particularly interesting example. It combines a large e-commerce market with strong consumer recognition of established local retailers and marketplaces. For European brands, platforms such as Liverpool provide access to an existing consumer ecosystem and a level of local trust that would take considerable time and investment to replicate independently.

Through Liverpool powered by e-CROSS, international brands can create their official stores within Liverpool while operating



through a cross-border DTC model.

The brand maintains its international inventory and controls its catalogue and positioning, while e-CROSS provides the cross-border infrastructure required to connect the international merchant with the local marketplace and consumer.

The result is a fundamentally different proposition from traditional international expansion. A brand does not need to choose between "enter Mexico" and "do nothing". It can first test Mexico. And if demand is validated, the operating model can evolve alongside the business.

From country expansion to market orchestration

The broader implication goes beyond Mexico. Latin America should increasingly be viewed not as a collection of independent country launches, but as a network of interconnected commerce opportunities.

A brand entering Mexico through Liverpool may subsequently expand into Chile or Peru through other leading marketplaces, while operating from the same international inventory and technology stack. This creates a more modular approach to international growth.

Instead of:

> *Country > entity > inventory > infrastructure > customer acquisition*

the sequence can increasingly become:

> *Marketplace > demand > cross-border sales > data > localisation*

That is a significant change in how international expansion can be planned. It reduces the cost of experimentation while giving brands something far more valuable than a market study: real transactions from real consumers.

A new gateway into Latin America

For European brands, Latin America remains a region that requires local knowledge. Payments, customs, taxes, logistics and consumer expectations vary substantially between markets.

Technology does not eliminate that complexity. But it can increasingly abstract it from the merchant. That distinction matters.



RAFAEL SANT'ANNA, FOUNDER & CEO, E-CROSS:
"The future of international expansion isn't about being present in every market. It's about being able to sell in every market without having to build in every market."

The next generation of cross-border infrastructure is not about asking brands to become experts in every market they enter. It is about allowing them to operate internationally while specialised platforms manage the complexity underneath.

As this infrastructure matures, marketplaces are likely to play an increasingly important role in international expansion strategies. Not simply as another e-commerce channel.

But as a lower-risk, faster and increasingly scalable gateway into new markets. ••

ABOUT E-CROSS:
e-CROSS is a cross-border commerce infrastructure platform enabling international brands to sell directly to consumers across Latin America through local marketplaces and DTC channels. Its technology and operational infrastructure orchestrate payments, taxes & duties, international logistics, compliance, localisation, reconciliation and returns through a single integration.

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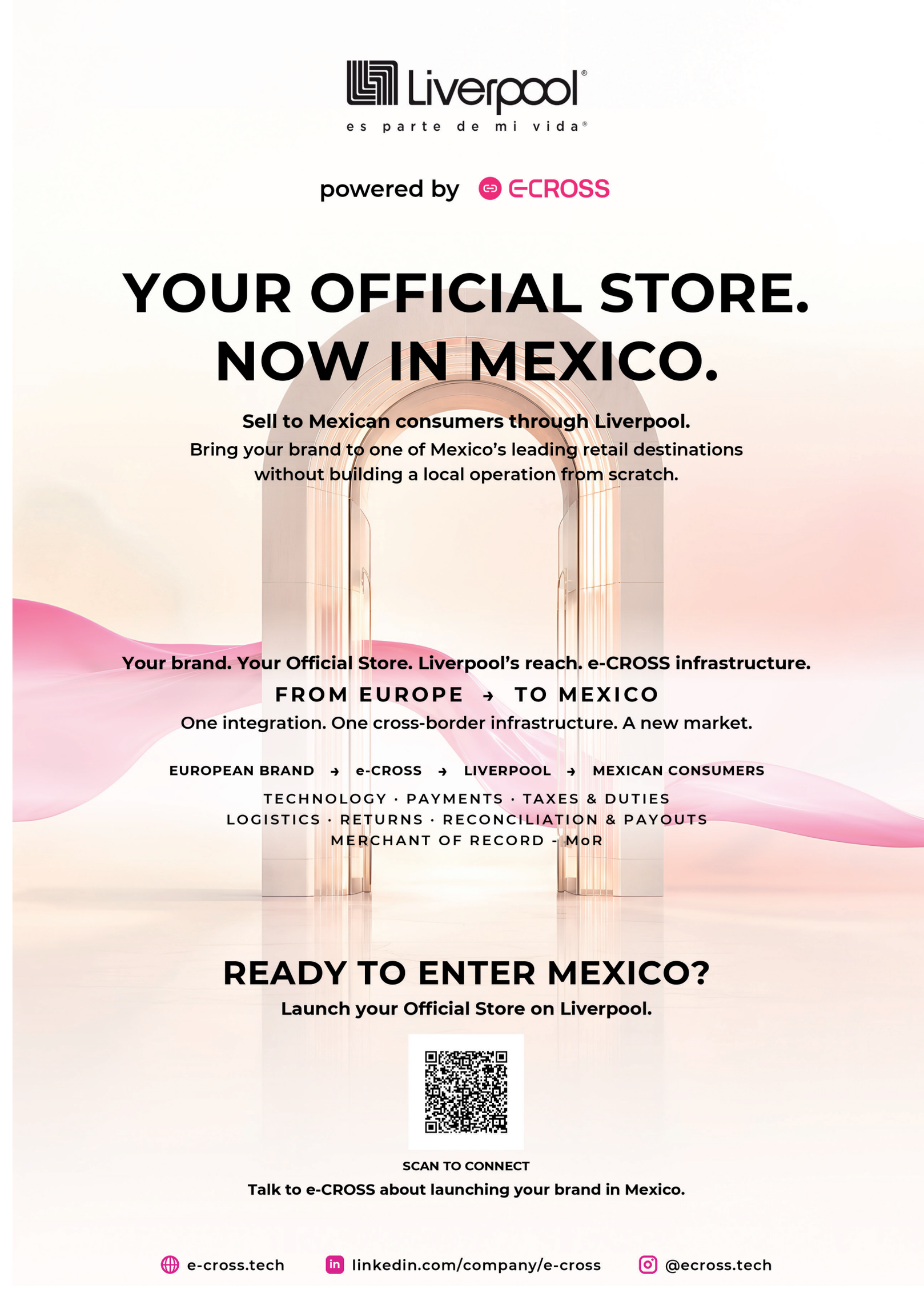
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FROM EUROPE → TO MEXICO

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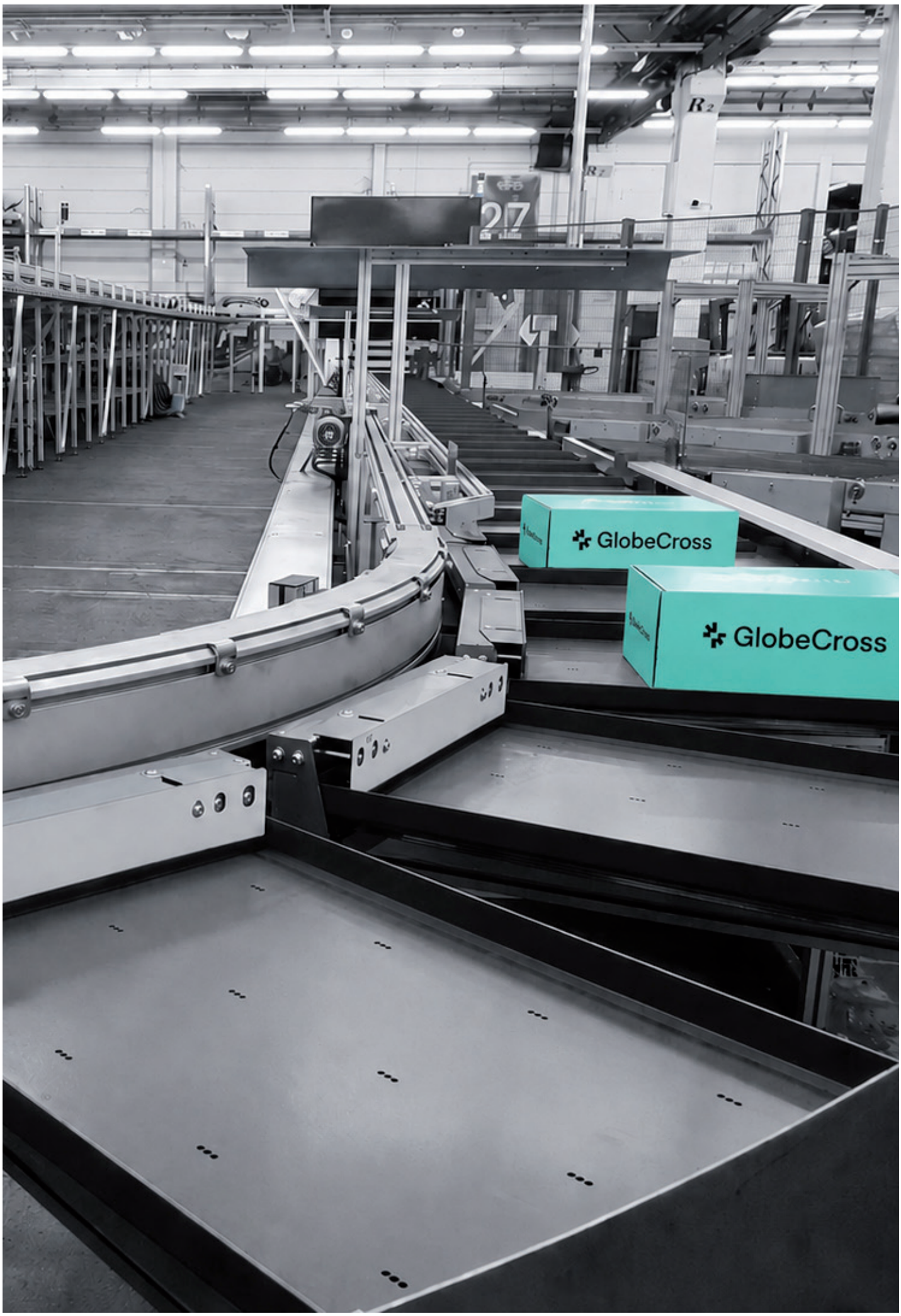
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A WHOLE NEW CUSTOMS REALITY TOMORROW

Text: Maria Rose Mathew // Photos: GlobeCross

Back in 2008, the EU Commission set the €150 threshold for duty-free imports. Now, over 15 years later, with some 5.9 billion low-value items entering the EU duty-free in 2025, the EU Customs Reform imposed a temporary €3 duty on low-value imports. Under the weight of the new import duty, e-commerce marketplaces are now reconsidering their pricing strategy, and customs service providers are struggling to provide a deferment payment service for duties, among other impacts.

Key facts of the new €3 duty on low-value imports from July 2026

The duty is charged for each different product category, based on the HS Code classification.

- The €3 duty is legally payable by the declarant (such as the IOSS holder or Importer of Record), not by the consumer. However, the cost can be passed on to the customer at the point of purchase.
- This is only a temporary duty until July 2028, when the EU Customs Authority has a more permanent plan.

Contents of Parcel	Tariff Categories	Customs Duty
5 T-shirts of the same classification	1	€3
1 T-shirts + 1 watch	2	€6
1 silk blouse + 2 wool blouses	2	€6

How are e-commerce businesses adapting

After just two months in, cross-border e-commerce businesses have seen changes in parcel volumes, fulfilment plans, and pricing.

- The volume of B2C e-commerce imports from China dropped sharply in the week following 1 July 2026 (Source: Rotate).
- EU-based fulfilment is becoming a focus for marketplace giants from China for products with stable demand. Once goods are already inside the EU, an individual order is no longer a low-value import from a third country and is not subject to the duty.
- Some e-commerce businesses are passing the cost of the duty to customers, showing it as import charges for relevant shipments at checkout. Meanwhile, other players are including it in the price of the product with a "Price includes duties and VAT" label where applicable.

- Apart from changes for cross-border sellers to the EU market, customs service providers are also facing the burden of the introduced duty, including the need for customs duty deferment arrangements to manage the additional duty flows.

Relevance of B2C import

Shifting volumes within the EU may seem like an attractive solution, typically with a higher upfront cost in terms of large volume import, warehouse space, risk of holding inventory, etc. Trends and consumer demand tend to shift rapidly these days; therefore, local fulfilment can really hamstring market testing campaigns, new product launches, long-tail SKUs, or products with uncertain demand. For some shippers, holding stock in EU warehouses can create more complexity than it removes.

B2C import remains an option for products that have enough value or margin to absorb the additional duty. For a €10 product, perhaps not, but for a €150 product the impact looks very different.

Looking ahead to further regulatory changes

From November 2026, Product Identifiers (PIDs) will become mandatory for B2C imports of any value. A PID is a code that tells EU customs exactly what the product is, whereas previously the HS code only detailed the product category. With a PID, it is possible to identify the seller, manufacturer, and the product. Three codes are necessary:

1. ***Merchant PID (M-PID)*** – The merchant's unique code
2. ***Manufacturer PID (NS-PID)*** – The manufacturer or the supplier's unique product code
3. ***Standardised Manufacturer PID (S-PID)*** – Where applicable, a code provided by a governing body to a manufacturer or producer where their product meets industry standards, such as a barcode, EAN, etc.

Failure to provide this information will result in customs rejection.

Also, from November 2026, a customs handling fee is expected to be introduced for low-value imports. This fee is expected to be €2 per package, although the exact amount is still to be set by the European Commission, with application due no later than 1 November 2026.

From July 2028, the temporary flat-rate system is expected to give way to normal customs duties through the EU Customs Data Hub. That means the duty will once again depend on the type of product rather than automatically being €3.

GlobeCross Solution

For e-commerce businesses, the right choice of logistics partner is more important than ever. It is no longer simply about finding someone who can clear a parcel. It is about having a partner that can manage high-volume e-commerce customs, handle increasingly complex product data requirements, and keep up with regulatory changes without creating friction for the business.

Based at Frankfurt Airport, GlobeCross streamlines customs clearance, e-commerce handling, and digital infrastructure to manage cross-border volume flows from non-EU countries as well as intra-European businesses.

With over 20 years of experience and as Germany's first ATLAS IMPOST-certified customs broker, GlobeCross processes over 2.5 million e-commerce shipments every month.

The company's vision is to help global businesses turn borders into gateways by moving shipments quickly, compliantly, and at scale. ••

ABOUT GLOBECROSS:

GlobeCross removes complexity from cross-border logistics by transforming fragmented and manual customs and logistics processes into seamless, scalable solutions. GlobeCross' key services are End to end eCommerce Logistics, Customs Clearance and E-commerce Import Terminals.

Through automation, digital technologies, and deep customs expertise, we reduce delays, increase transparency, and help customers maintain compliance in an increasingly complex regulatory environment.
Read more at globecross.com.

Selling into the EU? Let's Talk!

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We design cross-border logistics solutions for businesses of every size.

WITH AI TRANSLATION, INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS IS JUST A FEW CLICKS AWAY. OR IS IT?

Text: Ymke Lathouwers // Photos: Clonable

With just a few clicks, you can launch your online shop in French, German or Spanish. AI tools are making international expansion more accessible than ever. Within an afternoon, your entire product range can be available across borders. The promise is appealing: expanding internationally has never been faster, more affordable or easier. Yet many online shops find that international visitors browse but do not buy. Why is that? If anyone can translate their online shop using AI, how can you still stand out?

The illusion of quick translation

Many e-commerce entrepreneurs see AI translation as the final step towards entering a new market. The texts are translated, the grammar is correct and costs are kept to a minimum. Ready to expand internationally.

However, it turns out that a translated online shop does not automatically lead to increased international revenue. Research by CSA Research shows that 76 per cent of international consumers prefer product information in their own language. Furthermore, 40 per cent say they do not buy from websites that feel unfamiliar or foreign.

But that is precisely where the nuance lies. AI translates words into another language, but does not automatically understand what makes an online shop persuasive. A product title, call-to-action or technical specification requires a different approach from an informative text. As soon as the terminology is incorrect, a sentence reads unnaturally or the user experience does not feel local, doubt sets in. And doubt costs conversions.

Why a standard AI translation isn't always enough

Selling internationally isn't just about language, but above all about trust. A customer doesn't buy because they understand the text, but because they trust what they're reading. That trust is built when an online shop feels as though it's been created specifically for the local market.

A generic AI tool can fall short in three key areas:

- *Context-free translation:* A standard AI model mainly sees individual sentences. Take the word seal, for example. Depending on the context, it could refer to a gasket, a security seal or even the marine animal. Without context, the likelihood of an incorrect translation is much higher. Furthermore, it cannot tell whether a text is a product title, a technical specification, a category page or an 'Add to basket' button. As a result, technical terms are sometimes translated literally, or a commercial text takes on an unnecessarily formal tone. The result is grammatically correct, but doesn't feel natural to the local visitor.
- *Search behaviour varies by country:* A literal translation of keywords does not automatically result in good search visibility. Consumers in Germany, France or Spain often use different search terms

than Dutch online shops expect. Without paying attention to local search intent, you're not only missing out on conversions, but also on organic traffic.

- ***An online shop is constantly changing:*** An online shop is not a static document. Prices change, new products are added and content is constantly evolving. A one-off AI translation captures a snapshot in time, but does not ensure that all language versions remain automatically synchronised. This quickly leads to discrepancies between the source website and international shops.

A good translation makes content understandable. Good localisation makes an online shop compelling.

Why context is becoming increasingly important

AI is developing at breakneck speed. Nevertheless, scientific research shows that the quality of AI translations depends not only on the language model itself, but also on the context provided. Recent studies into AI for e-commerce demonstrate that general language models struggle with domain-specific terminology, product-specific information and the unique structure of online shops. When AI is provided with additional context, such as information about product categories, metadata and the function of a text on a page, translation quality demonstrably improves. Furthermore, this additional context helps AI to resolve ambiguities more effectively and translate more consistently (Li et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025).

This is hardly surprising. An AI model can only take into account the information it is given. The better the context, the better the translation will meet the customer's expectations.

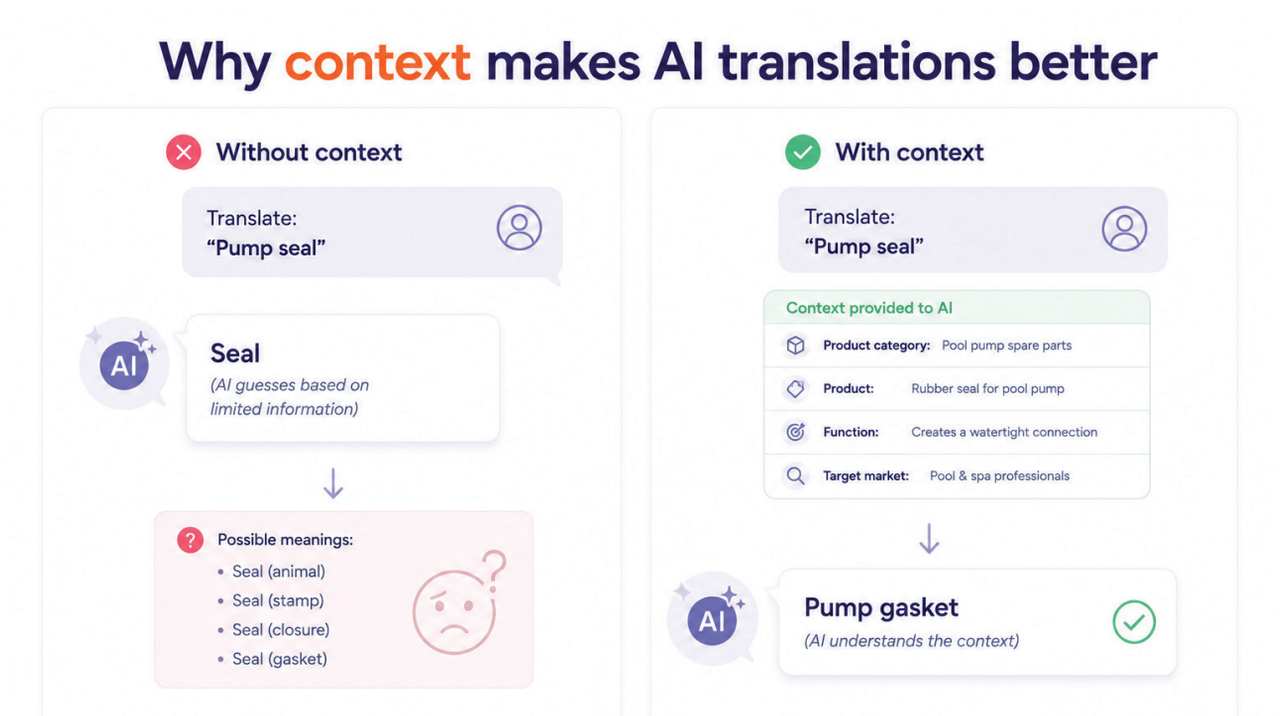
From AI to smart localisation

AI has made international business faster and more accessible. The challenge therefore no longer lies in the translation itself, but in maintaining quality whilst your online shop is constantly changing.

Research by Nimdzi Insights shows that online shops with fully localised content achieve conversion rates that are, on average, 1.5 to 2 times higher than those with generically translated content.

At Clonable, we see this trend every day in online shops that are expanding internationally. That is why we developed the Context Assistant. This supports AI with additional information about the structure, function and content of an online shop. As a result, the model better understands the role a piece of text plays on a page, and product information, category pages, metadata and other content align more closely with the context of the online shop. The result is a more consistent tone of voice, more accurate technical terminology and fewer manual corrections.

In addition, automatic synchronisation ensures that changes to the source website are immediately applied to all language versions. This means international online shops remain up to date automatically, without the need



for additional manual management.

Case study: international growth with less manual work

NFCW.nl, an online shop specialising in NFC technology, faced a familiar challenge. International demand was growing, but managing multiple language versions took increasingly more time. The team had to repeat changes for each language, content drifted apart and new pages did not appear consistently across all versions.

With Clonable, NFCW moved to one central workflow. The team updates the source website once, and changes carry through automatically to the international versions. This reduces repetitive work whilst leaving room for local adjustments.

Automation is only part of the approach. NFCW combines AI translations with manual optimisation and checks by native speakers. The team also uses a checklist to test forms, shipping settings and orders before launching in a new market. This helps keep both content and the shopping experience aligned with local needs.

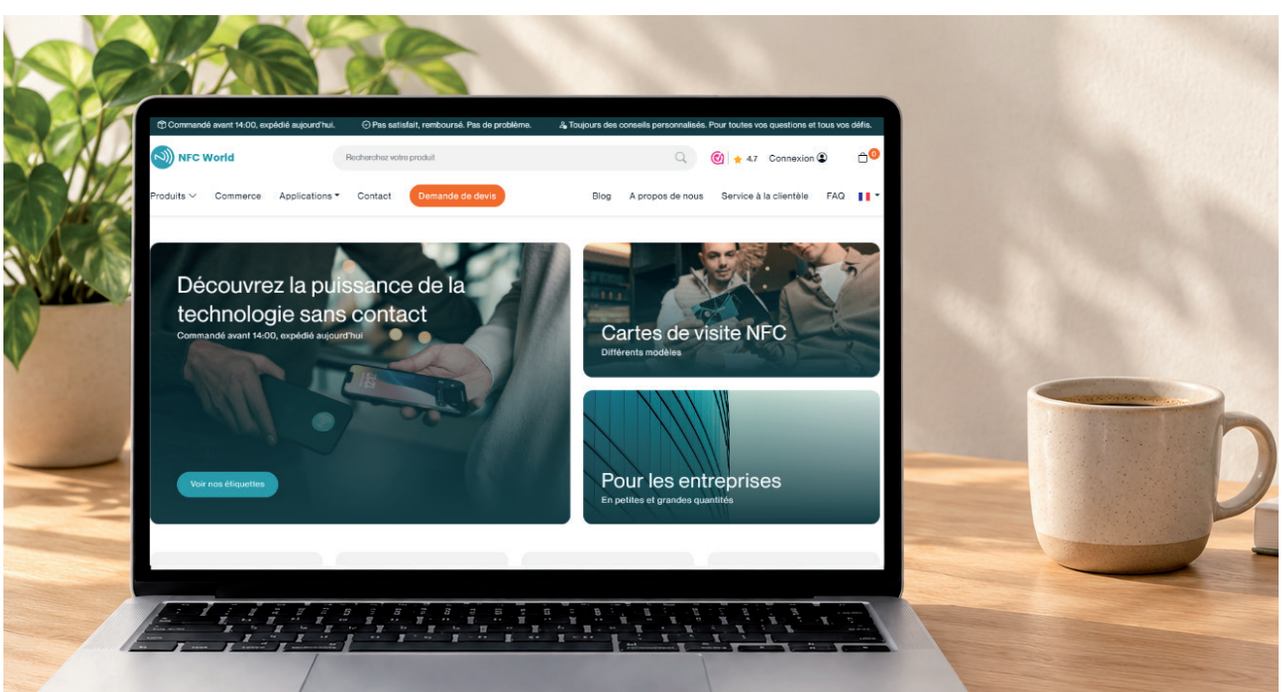
According to NFCW, the new workflow has saved around 1,500 hours compared with its previous approach. The case shows how international expansion becomes more manageable when automated translation, local checks and ongoing synchronisation work together.

What does this mean for your international growth strategy?

AI has made translating online shops accessible to everyone. As a result, a translated online shop is no longer a differentiating factor in its own right.

You make the difference through the quality of the customer experience. Are your product descriptions tailored to the local market? Is your terminology consistent? Are you easy to find? And does all your content stay up to date automatically?

AI makes international expansion more accessible than ever. But international success is still not a matter of a few clicks. It comes from combining AI with context, localisation and smart management. That's where you make the difference. ••



SOURCES:

CSA Research. (2020). Can't Read, Won't Buy: Why Language Matters on Global B2C Websites.

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- ✓ Context-aware translations
- ✓ Automatic synchronisation across all languages
- ✓ Local SEO, content and pricing adjustments
- ✓ One central source for every market

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E-COMMERCE SALES EVENTS 2026:
PLANNING, MARKETS AND TIPS

Text: Katharina Knoop // Photos: Shutterstock

Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Christmas – the same campaign can perform very differently in the UK, Austria and Switzerland. This article shows which sales events are genuinely worth it per market in 2026, and how to get timing, conversion and logistics right.

KEY TAKEAWAYS :

BLACK FRIDAY, CYBER MONDAY AND THE CHRISTMAS SEASON REMAIN CENTRAL REVENUE DRIVERS, BUT NEED TO BE MANAGED DIFFERENTLY IN EACH MARKET.

THE UK IS HEAVILY SALES-DRIVEN, AUSTRIA SHOWS A PRONOUNCED SMART-SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR, AND IN SWITZERLAND TRUST, TRANSPARENCY AND SERVICE CARRY PARTICULAR WEIGHT.

INSTEAD OF TAKING ON AS MANY SALES EVENTS AS POSSIBLE, ONLINE RETAILERS SHOULD PRIORITISE BY MARKET, ASSORTMENT, MARGIN AND OPERATIONAL FEASIBILITY.

PREPARATION SHOULD START 3 TO 6 MONTHS IN ADVANCE – INCLUDING MARKETING, FORECASTING, SHIPPING, CUSTOMS, RETURNS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Sales events such as Black Friday, Cyber Monday or seasonal sales are a fixed part of the annual planning for many online retailers. The temptation to roll out successful German campaigns unchanged to other markets is significant. In international e-commerce, however, that is not enough.

Sales events do not work the same way everywhere. Buying behaviour, perception of discounts and expectations around shipping, pricing and service differ significantly from market to market.

This article shows how to prepare e-commerce sales events 2026 strategically and market-by-market – and how to plan operational peaks for Switzerland, Austria and the UK more effectively.

E-commerce sales events 2026: Why a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work

Many online retailers plan sales events with a standard, centralised setup: one campaign, one timing, one offer – rolled out across multiple markets.

What sounds efficient often costs performance in practice. A Black Friday deal can drive strong revenue spikes in the UK, but have a much weaker effect in Switzerland if shipping costs, duties or returns remain unclear. Austria, in turn, sits close to Germany – but is still not a copy-paste market.

- A one-size-fits-all approach mainly overlooks four points:
- Different buying habits
- Diverging price and discount perception
- Varying expectations around shipping and returns
- Regulatory specifics (e.g. customs or taxes)

Anyone who wants to use sales events successfully across borders therefore does not need a longer list of dates – they need better market logic.

Which e-commerce sales events really matter in 2026 – international vs. market-specific

A look at a classic e-commerce calendar with international sales events answers the question of which events are out there in 2026.

The more important question is: which sales events are worth the effort in which market?

Black Friday and Cyber Monday: High reach, but different impact

Black Friday and Cyber Monday are fixtures in the peak-season strategy of many online retailers. Customers in several markets actively look for deals around these dates. According to DHL, 75% of online shoppers worldwide buy

something around that weekend – but participation, trust in deals and purchase motivations vary by country.

In the United Kingdom, Black Friday is one of the strongest online shopping days of the year. According to Adobe Analytics, British shoppers spent around £3.8 billion across the weekend in 2025, a 4.6% increase year-on-year.

In Austria, demand is also high. At the same time, competition from international providers is intense, according to the Austrian Retail Association (Handelsverband).

In Switzerland, Black Friday should not be approached solely through discounts. Trust, delivery time and clean order processing play a greater role in the purchase decision. But the day clearly works: the University of St. Gallen reported that spending in Black Friday week 2025 increased by 49% compared to the previous week.

Black Friday and Cyber Monday should therefore be part of the plan in all three markets – but with different roles:

- In the UK, lean into offers and visibility.
- In Austria, factor in competition and price comparisons.
- In Switzerland, focus on the overall offer and transparency.

Christmas season: The real revenue driver

For many shops, a large share of peak-season revenue is generated over several weeks during the Christmas season. Anyone who focuses planning too narrowly on Black Friday loses potential in the most important buying phase of the year.

In a cross-border context, cut-off dates are particularly critical: by when do orders need to come in so they arrive on time in Switzerland, Austria or the UK? In markets like the UK or Switzerland, VAT, import processing and, depending on market and product group, customs duties additionally need to be considered cleanly and reviewed for each sales model.

For strong Christmas campaigns, online retailers should therefore define for each market by when orders will reliably arrive, which shipping options to promote and how to answer customer questions on customs, duties or returns.

Delivery times in particular (keyword: guaranteed delivery before Christmas) can be a conversion lever and should be clearly communicated.

Singles Day: Test run rather than main revenue driver

Singles Day is gaining visibility in Europe but remains a complementary date for many online retailers. It is mainly suited to price-driven assortments, trend-oriented target groups and performance campaigns.

Its greatest value lies in preparing for the peak season. Offers, discount mechanics and markets can be tested under real conditions before the most revenue-intensive phase starts with Black Friday and Cyber Week.

Retailers can draw concrete learnings from this:

- Which products generate early demand?
- Which discount level works without putting unnecessary pressure on margins?
- Which markets respond more strongly than expected?

As a standalone revenue driver, Singles Day in Europe is mainly relevant for large international platforms.

Market-specific sales events: An underestimated revenue lever

Beyond international sales events, additional revenue opportunities arise from local peaks, seasonal purchase triggers and cultural specifics. This is where online retailers can stand out from the competition.

UK: Strong sales culture and additional peaks

The British market is highly sales-driven. Alongside Black Friday, Cyber Monday and the classic Christmas season, Boxing Day on 26 December has become particularly established. Adobe reported online spend of more than £500 million on Boxing Day 2025 in the UK.

A staggered strategy can therefore make sense:

- Black Friday for reach, new customers and strong deals
- Cyber Monday for online-affine assortments
- Christmas for gift purchases and clear delivery deadlines
- Boxing Day for clearance, bundles, retention or self-gifting

For these peaks to perform, VAT and customs processes, delivery times, tracking and returns need to work reliably. The purchase should feel as local as possible for British customers.

Austria: Similar to Germany – with its own nuances

Austria is an obvious next step for German and European online retailers because language, media logic and many purchase triggers are close to the German market. But precisely for that reason, campaigns are often under-localised.

Black Friday and Cyber Monday are strong sales moments in Austria: according to the Austrian Retail Association, 98% of the Austrian population are familiar with Black Friday, 63% planned purchases around Black Friday or Cyber Monday in 2025, and 44% intended to shop exclusively online.

What's also interesting: the Retail Association increasingly describes Austrian customers as smart shoppers – they compare prices, plan more deliberately and at the same time remain open to spontaneous deals. Younger target groups are particularly active: 81% of Gen Z and 77% of Millennials planned purchases around Black Friday and Cyber Monday in 2025.

This results in three clear levers for Austrian campaigns:

- Make price logic transparent: Discounts should be easy to follow and not feel like fake offers.
- Optimise the total price: Shipping costs and delivery times need to enter the purchase decision early, not late in the checkout.
- Speak to younger target groups directly: Gen Z and Millennials use sales events particularly heavily.

Switzerland: Less discount focus, more emphasis on experience

Switzerland is also a high-spending market and sales events generate measurable demand. Even so, high discounts alone are often not enough. As in Austria, what counts is a trustworthy overall offer.

For conversion, transparent total costs, reliable delivery times and clear returns processes matter most. Since 1 January 2024, Switzerland no longer levies import duties on industrial goods, which covers most typical e-commerce assortments; agricultural and fishery products remain excluded. What still applies is Swiss import VAT at a standard rate of 8.1% (reduced rate 2.6%), charged as soon as the tax amount reaches CHF 5. Import costs and processing should therefore be explained early in the customer journey, not only after checkout.

Local campaign windows you should additionally have on your radar:

- Dry January: Suitable for non-alcoholic drinks, wellness, fitness, healthy food. An awareness and demand campaign in January can work well here.
- Swiss National Day on 1 August: Suitable for outdoor, BBQ, summer, family, Switzerland-specific offers. An occasion-based campaign rather than a generic discount push can be the better fit here.

In summary: Which sales events are actually worth it?

Instead of taking on every sales event, retailers should prioritise for 2026. Five questions help with that:

1. Is the sales event actively perceived in the target market?
2. Does it fit the product, margin and target group?
3. How strongly are competitors advertising in this market?
4. Are shipping, customs, returns and support set up to handle peaks?
5. Does the event bring in new customers or only one-off buyers?



Put briefly: successful online retailers do not plan as many sales events as possible. They specifically choose the dates that fit their market, assortment and operational capabilities – and focus there.

For Switzerland, Austria and the UK, this could look like the following:

Market	Relevant Sales Events	What?	What to watch out for
UK	Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Christmas, Boxing Day	Sales-driven peak season	Deals, visibility VAT/Customs Fast Delivery
Austria	Black Friday Cyber Monday Christmas, Back to School	DACH-aligned campaigns with local fine-tuning	Shipping costs, price comparison transparant checkout
Switzerland	Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Christmas, Dry January, 1 August	Selective campaigns with an experience focus	Final Price import VAT delivery time, returns

When should online retailers start preparing for sales events?
Preparation for e-commerce sales events should start 3 to 6 months before the main peaks. The more international the setup, the more important the lead time becomes: campaigns, forecasts, stock levels, carriers, cut-off dates, returns and customer service all need to fit together.

6 months out: Prioritise markets and events
This phase is about prioritisation. Which markets should be actively addressed? Which events fit the assortment? Where is a big push worthwhile, where is a test the better call, and where do you deliberately skip a campaign?

The output of this phase can be a market-event matrix made up of:

- Relevant sales events
- Campaign role
- Assortment focus
- Revenue and margin targets
- Operational risks

This is the basis for the decision: push, test or pause.

An example: a fashion shop might plan Black Friday in the UK as a push, use Cyber Monday in Austria as a performance campaign and deliberately skip Dry January in Switzerland. A shop for non-alcoholic drinks, by contrast, would prioritise Dry January in Switzerland and only test Singles Day.

3 months out: Connect forecasts and operations plan
Now marketing and operations should build joint forecasts: expected orders per market, stock planning, carrier capacities, cut-off dates, returns assumptions and support scenarios.

If marketing creates more demand, operations needs to know what volume will realistically hit the processes. Otherwise, the campaign generates demand that cannot be cleanly fulfilled.

6 to 8 weeks out: Check shop, checkout and communication
By this phase, the campaign logic should be in place. Now it's about implementation in the shop and along the customer journey.

Particularly important in cross-border e-commerce:

- Information on customs, taxes and duties
- Local payment options
- Realistic delivery deadlines before Christmas
- Returns information
- Tracking and shipping emails

2 to 4 weeks out: Lock down tests and responsibilities

Test orders from the target markets, finally aligned cut-off dates, customer service briefings, validated returns processes and clear responsibilities for peak days secure the execution shortly before launch.

How do marketing and operations work together during sales events?

Sales events are often planned from a marketing perspective: campaigns, discounts, newsletters, paid ads, landing pages. That is correct – but not enough on its own. What matters is whether the demand created can also be converted and fulfilled cleanly.

Good e-commerce peak season planning connects three levels:

- Demand: What demand are we creating? Via localised offers, fitting creatives, clear USPs and market-relevant messaging.
- Conversion: How does demand turn into revenue? Shop, checkout, payment, delivery time and cost transparency decide whether traffic converts.
- Fulfilment: Can we serve the demand? Warehouses, carriers, customs, taxes, returns and support need to carry the expected volume.

The key lever is bringing marketing promises and operational reality together early. If your newsletter says "delivery before Christmas", that statement needs to hold up at the end.

How exporto supports online retailers in the peak season

International sales events in e-commerce only work reliably if campaign promises and operational processes match. Shipping, customs, taxes, tracking, returns and customer service need to interlock stably, even as order volumes grow during peak season.

Each market brings its own requirements:

- UK: VAT, customs processes, local carriers and fast delivery
- Switzerland: Transparent total costs, reliable order processing and a clear returns process
- Austria: Cleanly aligned setup for shipping, communication and customer expectations

exporto bundles these requirements into an integrated cross-border solution. Online retailers can open up several European markets through one central setup. Instead of building separate processes and service providers for each target market, international operations can be steered and scaled centrally.

That reduces complexity, increases process reliability and creates a customer journey that feels local in the target market. Retailers can focus on what matters during sales events: strong campaigns, relevant offers and sales in the right markets.

Conclusion: Use sales events deliberately rather than taking them all on

E-commerce sales events 2026 offer significant potential – if they are planned market by market and prepared cleanly on the operational side. Black Friday, Cyber Monday and the Christmas season remain central revenue drivers. Discount logic, buying behaviour, shipping requirements and expectations around the customer journey, however, look different in markets like the UK, Austria and Switzerland.

The decisive factor is not taking on as many sales events as possible. Campaigns succeed when they fit the market, the assortment and the operational capacity.

Anyone who starts early, prioritises the relevant peaks and sets up cross-border processes properly can use international sales events specifically for growth – without rising order volumes becoming a stress test.

Sales events bring new customers into the shop. Whether they come back is decided by delivery times, total costs and returns, not by the discount. ••

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PARCEL CLAIMING IN E-COMMERCE:

HOW ESN AND MORE NUTRITION SAVE 85% OF TIME PER CLAIM WITH CLAIM.ME

Text: Ramin Varnhorn // Photos: claim.me

Elite Sports Nutrition (ESN) and More Nutrition, the flagship brands of The Quality Group (TQG), are among Europe's leading names in nutrition, lifestyle, and wellness. Driven by a rapidly scaling omnichannel approach, TQG shipped more than 11 million parcels across 12 countries with 11 carriers in 2025 – marking a record-breaking year. But with scale comes complexity: statistically, 3 out of every 1,000 parcels encounter a problem, be it loss, damage, or a missing item. At TQG's volume, that translates into thousands of claims per year.

The Claims Challenge: 10 Minutes per Parcel

With millions of orders processed annually, TQG faced the unavoidable reality of systemic service failures in high-volume logistics. Before partnering with claim.me, these "service failures" were a significant operational drain.

"We were looking at a manual, 10-minute timeframe for every single claim," says Annika Markmann, Teamlead Customer Service ESN. At TQG's volume, those 10 minutes added up to thousands of hours of lost productivity - time that should be better spent supporting consumers, not dealing with carrier claims.





The Solution: One-Touch Parcel Claiming from claim.me

TQG needed a solution that matched their High Performance-DNA and met the requirements of a rapidly growing, internationally scalable company. They turned to claim.me, the automated claiming platform powered by Seven Senders.

The goal was simple: tackle the parcel claims challenge as soon as possible. The integration process was designed for speed, providing TQG with an easy-to-integrate, low-tech solution that enabled them to immediately start filing claims with claim.me. This allowed TQG to quickly standardise its entire claims management process across their carrier network.

The impact was immediate. claim.me's platform centralised a previously scattered process in multiple systems with different requirements into a single interface. What used to be a 10-minute administrative burden was compressed into a one-touch process taking less than 1.5 minutes.

The Results: from spending time to saving time

By streamlining their claims handling with claim.me, TQG transformed a logistical headache into an efficient process. The results are backed by hard evidence:

- ***85% Time Savings:*** The manual effort required for claims plummeted, allowing TQG to reduce the time per claim from 10 minutes to 1.5 minutes.
- ***Standardised Operations:*** TQG replaced multiple carrier-specific workflows and interfaces with one centralised, standardised process - significantly reducing operational complexity.
- ***Full Transparency:*** Through claim.me's dashboard functionalities, TQG now has full transparency over metrics such as rejection reasons.
- ***Consumer Happiness:*** claim.me enabled TQG to replace paper-based procedures with a seamless digital claims journey - eliminating the need for consumers to print, fill out and manually sign documents.

Looking Ahead: Scaling Without Boundaries

As TQG continues to scale its international D2C presence, the partnership with claim.me provides a scalable "safety net." Whether shipping 10,000 or 100,000 parcels a day, the claims process remains frictionless.

"Through the cooperation with claim.me, TQG is able to reduce the impact of delivery issues while improving operational efficiency with 85% less manual effort, ensuring our team stays focused on what matters: fuelling our community." Aygül Humphrey, Team Lead Customer Support International at ESN. ••

ABOUT THE QUALITY GROUP (TQG):
THE QUALITY GROUP (TQG) IS GERMANY'S MARKET LEADER IN SPORTS NUTRITION AND DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS, BUILDING LEADING CONSUMER BRANDS IN NUTRITION, LIFESTYLE, AND WELLNESS THROUGH ESN, MORE NUTRITION, RAW NUTRITION, AND BUM ENERGY. WITH LARGELY IN-HOUSE PRODUCTION, CAREFULLY SELECTED RAW MATERIALS, AND STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGIES, TQG COMBINES THE HIGHEST QUALITY STANDARDS WITH INNOVATION, AGILITY, AND A STRONG OMNICHANNEL APPROACH - FROM DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER TO RETAIL. WITH ANNUAL REVENUE OF OVER 1 BILLION EUROS IN 2025 AND MORE THAN 1,400 EMPLOYEES, THE COMPANY DEVELOPS PRODUCTS FOR HEALTH, PERFORMANCE, AND WELL-BEING, BUILDS STRONG COMMUNITIES, AND CONSISTENTLY DRIVES ITS EXPANSION FORWARD.

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NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION TO DATA-DRIVEN CUSTOMS: A GUIDE TO WHAT'S COMING AND HOW TO BE READY

Text: Tracy Doyle // Photos: AEB

To date, customs for e-commerce has been treated as a destination-point process. The commercial transaction happens first. Then the goods are packed and shipped, and only when the shipment is approaching the border is customs data assembled and the customs declaration created. That model will change with EU Customs Reform. As we move closer to the launch of the EU Data Hub in 2028, customs is moving upstream. It is becoming an output of quality data on the front end rather than a standalone process performed towards the end of the supply chain. While the data hub isn't scheduled to become operational for e-commerce imports until July of 2028, getting ready for it early will create opportunities that give you a competitive advantage.

Why customs is moving upstream

The EU is making this shift because, in 2025, almost 5.9 billion low-value e-commerce items entered the EU. These consignments represented around 97.9% of imported items. The current customs model, which is based on the manual assessment of individual parcels at the point of entry, can't handle that volume.

The EU Customs Data Hub will give customs authorities a much broader view of products, businesses, supply chains, and movements of goods. But it will be reliant on more detailed data being provided earlier in the process. This will include specific details about the product, who made it, who sold it, where it came from, what rules apply to it, and what happened to the product previously. This information will help customs authorities assess the risk of each import at scale.

What types of data will be required

The European Commission's tender for procurement of the EU Customs Data Hub closed in July of 2026 and the final contract has not yet been awarded. This means that the architecture won't be defined until mid-2027 at the earliest. Yet it would be a mistake to wait on final technical specifications to take action.

The underlying data requirements are already becoming clear. At the centre of the future model lies complete and reliable product master data. That means knowing, at the item level, what a product is, who manufactured it, how it's identified, what it's made from, where it originates, how it should be classified, and what regulatory requirements apply. For customs purposes, this can include information such as the product description, HS classification, customs value, country of origin, seller and manufacturer information, VAT treatment, and product identifiers.



2026 is already demanding more data

The EU's first major step towards the new customs model has already forced companies to enrich their data. On 1 July 2026, the EU removed the customs duty exemption for low-value distance sales and introduced a temporary €3 customs duty.

To calculate the charge correctly, businesses need to supply reliable item-level information and accurate classification. A parcel is no longer simply a parcel. The products contained within it dictate the duty, and how they are listed on the declaration matters. Aggregation of six-digit HS codes for low-value consignments can significantly reduce costs, with AEB's customers averaging 17% in duty cost savings.

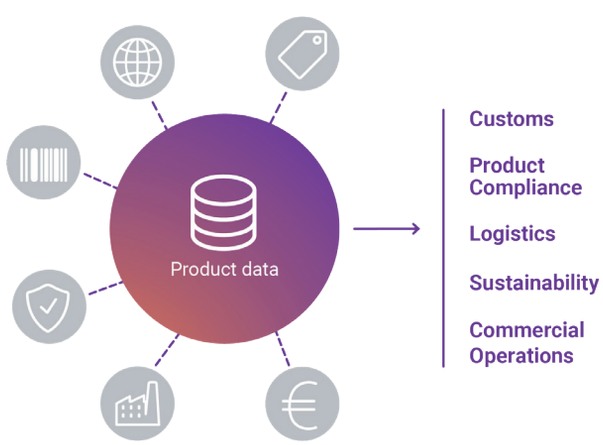
...with more to come

Come 1 November 2026, a generic description such as "shoes" or "electronics" will not be enough. Customs must be able to connect the declaration line to a specific product reference. This will be done with the introduction of Product Identifiers (PIDs). These identifiers will link the customs declaration to the underlying product, and potentially three identifiers will be required: a manufacturer identifier, a merchant product identifier assigned by the seller, and a standardised identifier such as a GTIN, EAN, UPC, or ISBN.

Questions to ask now are:

- Does every SKU have a stable product identifier?
- Can we associate the seller SKU with the manufacturer's part number?
- Do we capture GTIN, EAN, UPC, or ISBN where applicable?
- Can our APIs and sender portals transmit these fields?
- Can our product master data automatically populate customs declarations?
- Can we validate that the data being transmitted actually belongs to the product being shipped?

If the answer is no, November 2026 is a pressing date and you will need to take immediate action to prepare for it.



The Union handling fee adds another level of data dependency

The next change will come with the EU-wide handling fee, which will be introduced 1 November 2026. It is intended to cover the cost of customs supervision, including checking data, performing risk analysis, and carrying out documentary or physical controls. Importers will be charged €2 per item type, and this will apply not just to low-value consignments, but to parcels valued greater than €150 as well.

The Digital Product Passport is the next data milestone

Another data-led change is the Digital Product Passport (DPP), a digital identity card that makes product information accessible throughout the supply chain. Depending on the product category, that can include information relating to product characteristics, origin, materials, sustainability, and compliance. Economic operators placing products on the EU market are responsible for compiling and maintaining this information.

The EU will enforce DPP requirements progressively based on product category. Industrial, EV, and light transport batteries will require a DPP as of 18 February 2027. Textiles, apparel, tyres, and aluminium will follow later in 2027, furniture and mattresses around 2028, and information and communication technology products in 2029.

All roads lead to data quality

The significance for customs is that product compliance data, commercial data, and customs data are all converging. To comply with upcoming requirements, marketplaces, sellers, postal operators, logistics providers, and customs brokers must ensure item-level data flows accurately through the evolving ecosystem.

Treating these developments as individual data requirements will eventually create data duplication and inconsistency. The answer is a holistic approach. Creating a single source of truth for product master data will allow you to maintain data quality and accuracy across customs, product compliance, sustainability reporting, logistics, marketplaces, and commercial operations.

Turning customs data into commercial value

Focusing on data isn't just a compliance exercise for the looming data hub; it will create commercial value today. Clean and complete master data helps identify:

- *Sourcing opportunities:* Comparing classification, origin, and duty exposure across suppliers can reveal where changing the source could reduce landed cost.
- *Portfolio refinement:* Better data can highlight products that are similar but carry different duty or compliance costs, helping companies make smarter

decisions about which products to sell.

- ***Inventory decisions:*** Better visibility into demand, origin, product attributes, and destination markets can help determine which products should be held in EU inventory rather than shipped individually across borders.
- ***Compliance risk:*** Linking products to regulatory requirements makes it easier to identify SKUs that lack the documentation, certifications, or attributes needed for EU sale.
- ***Logistics optimisation:*** Understanding products at the item level allows businesses to model the cost impact of parcel consolidation, fulfilment location, and shipping method.
- ***Pricing:*** More accurate landed-cost calculations allow businesses to understand margins by SKU and destination rather than relying on guesses and assumptions.

How you can act now

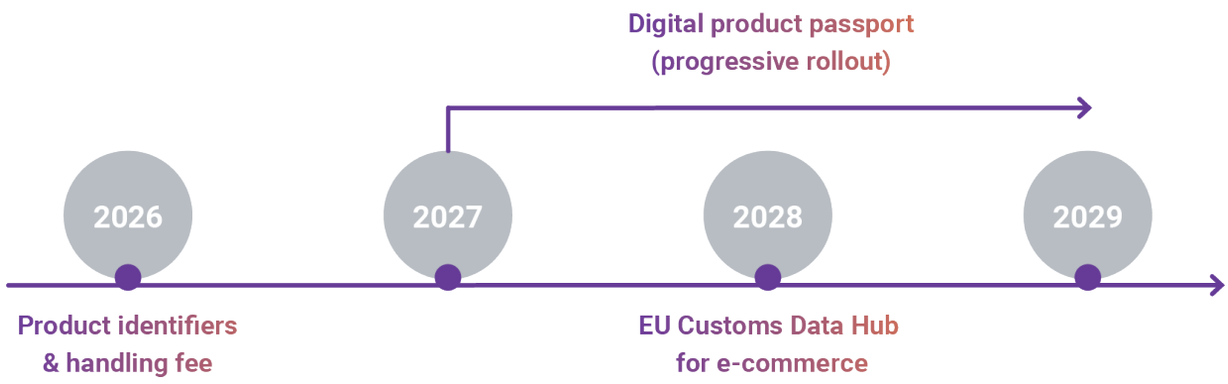
You don't need to know the final architecture of the data hub to start preparing for it. The priority should be to build your own architecture of accurate, structured, governed, reusable, and traceable data. That means starting at the beginning, with the product master rather than the customs declaration, and building connections that allow data to flow automatically into orders, invoices, shipping systems, and customs declarations.

You can start with this data readiness checklist:

- ◊ Assign ownership for every critical product and customs data field.
- ◊ Define validation rules to ensure data is complete, accurate, and consistent.
- ◊ Clean up duplicate product records and establish a single source of truth for product data.
- ◊ Standardise product identifiers across systems.
- ◊ Map commercial SKUs to manufacturer part numbers, model numbers, and standard product codes.
- ◊ Map products to their accurate HS codes.
- ◊ Update sender portals and APIs to capture SKU, manufacturer part/model number, and applicable standard product codes ahead of November 2026.
- ◊ Create a controlled mapping between product master data and the fields required for customs declarations.
- ◊ Establish data lineage for critical fields: where did the data come from, who owns it, when was it last updated, and which downstream processes use it?
- ◊ Build a process for ongoing data maintenance so product and customs data stay accurate as products, suppliers, and regulations change.

Framing the bigger picture

Customs automation has been a strategic focus for companies along the supply chain, but the strategic question isn't "How do we automate customs?" It's "How do we make sure the data generated at the beginning of our supply chain is good enough to automate the decisions made at the end of it?" That is the key to navigating the transition to data-driven customs, and shifting your focus from regulatory deadlines to business opportunities will position you for growth. ••



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THE FAST-GROWING FASHION BRAND

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF STOCK LOCALISATION

Text: Ryan Johnson, Content Manager, fulfilmentcrowd // Photos: fulfilmentcrowd

What OOSC Clothing's international growth reveals about a modern fulfilment strategy

For fast-growing fashion brands, international expansion often creates a problem that traditional fulfilment models struggle to solve.

What begins as a straightforward direct-to-consumer operation can quickly become operationally complex once brands expand across multiple territories and channels. Stock visibility becomes harder to maintain, delivery expectations rise and returns handling becomes increasingly difficult to manage.

For apparel brands in particular – where seasonality, sizing complexity and customer expectations are already high – inventory placement is becoming as much a commercial strategy as a logistics one. OOSC Clothing encountered exactly this challenge while scaling internationally across the UK, Europe and North America.

Co-founded by Nick Marsden, OOSC has built a global audience around bold, retro-inspired skiwear and sustainable apparel. Today, the business ships into more than 110 countries, supported by global fulfilment provider fulfilmentcrowd. Before partnering with fulfilmentcrowd, OOSC faced the common challenge of managing inventory efficiently across multiple regions and sales channels without sacrificing the customer experience.



How international growth creates operational strain
As brands scale internationally, inventory management often becomes disconnected across digital platforms and physical locations. That creates several common issues, including limited visibility of available stock, delayed replenishment decisions, higher cross-border shipping costs or difficulty forecasting regional demand.

For fashion brands, these issues compound quickly during seasonal peaks, especially those selling across several channels. OOSC was managing growing demand across:

- Direct-to-consumer e-commerce
- Wholesale and retail relationships
- Marketplace sales channels
- International customer bases across multiple regions

At the same time, customer expectations around delivery speed and convenience continued to rise.

"We're currently selling to pretty much every country in the world. We've got warehouses in the key hubs, such as the US, the UK and the Netherlands, and those warehouses service our other countries that we sell into as well. It's quite a complex operation, but a fun one," says Nick Marsden, OOSC's co-founder.

Finding an operational model capable of supporting this complexity was a challenge in itself for Nick. Before settling on its current setup, OOSC worked with multiple providers and, during its latest search, assessed over 25 potential fulfilment providers.

OOSC's requirements went beyond simply storing and dispatching parcels. They needed an operation capable of supporting DTC, B2B and Amazon Vendor activity, while giving its teams clearer visibility of global stock and orders.

Their story highlights an increasingly important consideration for internationally ambitious brands: as the number of channels and markets grows, adding more systems and providers can easily create extra complexity.

The benefits behind inventory localisation
Many growing brands initially fulfil international orders from a single warehouse location because it simplifies operations in the early stages of growth. But over time, that model can create inefficiencies, such as expensive long-haul shipping or poor customer experiences in overseas markets. Inventory localisation changes that equation by positioning stock closer to regional demand. For brands selling internationally, that can improve key performance metrics like delivery speed, shipping costs and returns processing, boosting global customer satisfaction. It also gives brands greater flexibility to respond to regional demand patterns. For fashion retailers, where trends and seasonal demand can shift rapidly, that flexibility becomes increasingly valuable.

OOSC evolved its fulfilment strategy to support localised inventory management across key regions including the UK, EU and US markets. Sending products from the UK into the US (and back again for returns) leads to vastly increased shipping miles and costs, especially if demand starts to build in new target locations. By localising inventory, OOSC reduced reliance on long-distance fulfilment while improving visibility across its growing sales operation.

How visibility becomes critical at scale
One of the biggest operational challenges for scaling brands is maintaining accurate, real-time inventory visibility across multiple channels. Without centralised visibility, brands risk overselling products, inaccurate forecasting, marketplace inventory conflicts and inefficient replenishment planning.

This becomes even more difficult when brands are operating across their own website, marketplace channels, wholesale accounts, international fulfilment locations, seasonal product launches – the list goes on. For OOSC, improving inventory visibility became essential as the business expanded globally. The brand now operates across multiple live sales channels (16, to be exact) spanning different territories and customer segments, requiring stock accuracy and synchronisation in real time.

It's important to note that these channels aren't all variations of the same e-commerce model, either. OOSC's channel mix consists of direct-to-consumer Shopify stores, Amazon Vendor and retail relationships with businesses including ASOS, Decathlon, Macy's, Nordstrom and Mountain Warehouse. Each of these relationships brings its own operational requirements. Dispatch documentation that works for a DTC customer, for example, likely won't meet the needs of a major retail partner.

As part of OOSC's fulfilment operation, channel-specific processes have therefore been introduced, including customs dispatch notes for partners such as ASOS and Decathlon, and automation around previously time-consuming Amazon Vendor processes.

And, because fulfilmentcrowd's platform allows brands to manage multiple channels and regions from one place, OOSC benefits from a central interface for its entire worldwide fulfilment operation.

"Previously, when we had different warehouses across the world, we had to download inventory reports, cut the data to mix it all together, and then have our finance team run a macro to get our stock position at any one time – which was then out of date as soon as somebody had bought something," explains Nick. "Having the data at the click of our fingers

on the fulfilmentcrowd platform is already saving us hours. I know that my finance, operations and customer service teams are all loving it."

Localising the returns experience, too

For fashion brands, getting the outbound journey right is often only half of the logistical equation. Returns are unavoidable in apparel e-commerce, which means that an international fulfilment strategy also needs to consider what happens when a product comes back.

A poorly designed returns process can quickly undo many of the advantages created by localising outbound stock. Products can spend longer outside available inventory, return journeys can become expensive and customers can be left waiting. OOSC's operation therefore extends localisation into the post-purchase experience. Returns are processed within a 48-hour window, with more detailed quality-control processes introduced for key products, alongside paperless returns. Getting returned products inspected, processed and back into available inventory efficiently is particularly important for seasonal fashion brands like OOSC. Not only is their operation global, but the commercial window for an item can be relatively short.

The sustainability impact of localisation

Inventory localisation also increasingly overlaps with sustainability goals. Consumers are paying closer attention to shipping distances, packaging waste, delivery emissions, returns processes – the list goes on. For brands positioning themselves around sustainability, operational decisions are becoming part of the brand experience itself. Reducing unnecessary international shipping can help lower delivery emissions while also improving efficiency operationally. For apparel brands with high return volumes, regional returns processing can also significantly reduce cost and complexity.

This is particularly relevant in fashion, where sizing-related returns remain a major operational challenge across international markets. For OOSC, sustainability is a big part of their identity. The brand showcases their commitment to sustainability in their website tagline (Retro-Styled, Sustainable Ski Wear), and makes their skiwear from at least 100 recycled plastic bottles per suit.

By bringing their products closer to global customers, OOSC immediately cut down on shipping and return miles, further strengthening their commitment to sustainability from an operational standpoint. The returns aspect is a key margin-saver and sustainability boost in this instance, as processing products within the region they were sold avoids adding unnecessary international journeys to the reverse logistics process.

The shift from fulfilment to operational strategy

For many growing brands, fulfilment is much more than just a back-end logistics function. It's increasingly tied directly to maintaining a positive customer experience, growing across regions and channels, and overall operational resilience.

Brands that scale successfully across multiple regions are often the ones that treat inventory placement and visibility as strategic priorities early. For OOSC, international growth required a fulfilment model capable of supporting multi-region inventory management across multiple sales channels, all of which needs to be ready to scale as the company grows. As global e-commerce continues to mature, more brands are likely to face similar challenges – particularly in sectors like fashion, where customer expectations and operational complexity continue to rise simultaneously.

The results of an effective partnership

In the first seven months of its partnership with fulfilmentcrowd, more than 13,000 OOSC orders and 35,000 items were fulfilled globally, with the operation achieving a 98% worldwide SLA.

The partnership's results have also received industry recognition. OOSC and fulfilmentcrowd have been shortlisted together for the Warehouse Initiative Award at the 2026 Supply Chain Excellence Awards, highlighting the operational model supporting the brand's continued global growth. The nomination reflects more than just warehouse performance alone. With 16 live sales channels and customers across 110 countries, the operation is the perfect example of how technology and stock localisation can work together as brands become increasingly international. ••



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SCOPE 3 EMISSIONS ARE THE DEFINING OPPORTUNITY FOR CROSS-BORDER LOGISTICS

Text: Sian Docksey // Photos: Spring GDS

Sustainability in cross-border logistics cannot be achieved by any company in isolation. While reducing emissions from an organisation's own activities matters, the defining sustainability challenge for logistics is less about what organisations can control from within, and more about the broader ecosystem within which they operate.

For global logistics partner Spring GDS, this reality is particularly clear. As an asset-light international logistics provider, the company coordinates cross-border deliveries through a network that encompasses airlines, road transport providers, postal operators, and last-mile partners. While individual sustainability actions matter, Spring GDS's Impact Report 2025 highlighted that the company's most significant sustainability opportunity comes from elsewhere: namely, influencing and decarbonising the transport ecosystem in which they operate.
Jeff van Eijk, Strategic Lead ESG at Spring GDS, explains: "The low-hanging fruit of emissions reduction is behind us. We've shifted from offsetting to directly reducing emissions within our own value chain, and we're now tackling difficult carbon-intensive areas such as long-haul road transport and air freight."

Understanding and reducing these indirect emissions, known as Scope 3 emissions, is increasingly becoming the defining challenge for logistics companies worldwide. Spring GDS is contributing to this transition by approaching Scope 3 emissions reduction as a strategic, collaborative effort across the value chain.

The emissions challenge beyond direct control

Greenhouse gas emissions are divided into three categories:

- ***Scope 1*** covers direct emissions from owned or controlled assets, such as company vehicles.
- ***Scope 2*** includes emissions associated with purchased electricity, heating, or cooling.
- ***Scope 3*** covers all other indirect emissions across the value chain, including outsourced transportation, suppliers, and business partners.

For asset-light logistics operators, Scope 3 defines the overall footprint as delivery services are managed through partner networks rather than owned infrastructure. Scope 3 may be the hardest part of the decarbonisation puzzle. But it is also where the industry's greatest opportunity to drive meaningful emissions reductions lies.

Collaboration is fundamental to a Scope 3 decarbonisation strategy

Because Scope 3 emissions are spread across multiple organisations, reducing them requires cooperation rather than unilateral action.

"For asset-light logistics providers, decarbonisation is not something you can achieve on your own. Most of the



emissions are generated by activities that sit outside your direct control, so real progress depends on working with partners who are also committed to reducing emissions." says Tatum Bross, ESG Project Manager, Spring GDS

Collaboration is the driving force behind Spring GDS's decarbonisation approach. The company's first Impact Report was intrinsic to this commitment, published as a tool for Spring GDS's customers, partners, and colleagues to hold the company accountable to their sustainability targets. More than just a summary of environmental and social action to date, the Impact Report was published as a tool to build trust, increase transparency, and invite all Spring GDS stakeholders and colleagues along for the journey. This marks an industry-wide shift away from sustainability being treated as an add-on, and towards it becoming an integrated part of a company's operations. Spring GDS doesn't treat their sustainability strategy as separate, but rather an embedded part of commercial relationships, procurement strategies, and network design.

Collaboration across the value chain in action: reducing middle-mile road transport emissions through the HVO100 biofuel 'Out the Tank' initiative

The distinctive Spring GDS approach is particularly visible in road transport, where the company has worked with fuel partners to support the adoption of HVO100 through their initiative to inject the biofuel HVO100 into the European road transport network.

To date, Spring GDS has applied over 7 million litres of HVO100 renewable fuel into middle-mile road transport, contributing to a reduction of over 15 kilotonnes of CO_2e. The strategy is not limited to replacing conventional diesel fuel with a renewable alternative in select trucks: the action supports wider adoption of such fuels across the network.

Meaningful emissions reductions depend on coordinated action across an entire ecosystem of stakeholders. More than technological capacity, the challenge lies in creating strong alignment across an international network committed to reducing emissions collectively.

Aviation highlights the scale of the Scope 3 challenge

The complexity of decarbonising Scope 3 emissions becomes even more apparent in air transport. International e-commerce relies heavily on aviation because of the speed and reliability it provides. Yet aviation remains one of the most difficult sectors to decarbonise.

There is not yet a scalable zero-emission solution for long-haul air freight. Currently, Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) is widely recognised as one of the most important near-term decarbonisation pathways. SAF reduces lifecycle CO_2 emissions by up to 80% compared to fossil jet fuel.

In 2025, Spring GDS introduced their Book & Claim solution as a collaborative project with customers to support emissions reduction efforts in the aviation sector. Book & Claim allows customers to support SAF adoption within outsourced air transport networks and receive verified documentation relating to associated emissions reductions.



The importance of SAF extends beyond individual emission savings. Increased participation helps stimulate market demand, sending signals to fuel producers, airlines, and investors that sustainable fuel production should continue to scale.

This demonstrates a defining characteristic of a Scope 3 decarbonisation strategy. Reducing emissions depends less on direct ownership and more on influence, partnership, and market transformation.

Transparency as the starting point

Organisations cannot effectively reduce emissions they cannot accurately measure. Where collaboration between logistics providers, partners, and customers is essential, transparent reporting is what turns decarbonisation ambition into action.

Cross-border logistics networks involve multiple transport modes, operators, countries, and reporting systems. Data quality varies considerably across regions and partners. Some carriers can provide detailed primary emissions data, while others still rely on estimates or industry averages.

This is especially true in last-mile delivery networks. Vehicle technologies, electrification levels, fuel mixes, and reporting capabilities differ significantly between markets. The result is a fragmented emissions picture that makes consistent reporting difficult. Before companies can optimise routes, switch transport modes, or engage lower-carbon suppliers, they must understand where emissions occur and how significant those emissions are.

Improving data maturity has become an essential part of Spring GDS's decarbonisation strategy. In 2025, Spring GDS introduced an Emission Tool that enables customer-specific CO_2 reporting based on shipment data, helping customers better understand the emissions associated with their logistics activities.

The significance of such tools extends beyond compliance. Detailed emissions insights help identify where carbon hotspots exist within logistics networks, and support collaborations to address the leaks. Good data reveals which routes generate the highest emissions, and where alternative carriers or transport modes could reduce environmental impact.

This evolution from simple measurement to actionable insight represents one of the biggest opportunities in Scope 3 management. Rather than treating carbon accounting as a reporting exercise, logistics companies are increasingly treating emissions data as a decision-making tool.

Procurement is becoming a climate lever

A key part of an organisation's strategy to reduce Scope 3 emissions is supplier selection. As the urgency of climate action and the demand for sustainable logistics increases, partner carriers are evaluated not just on their cost-effectiveness and service quality, but on their environmental performance.

As reporting requirements increase and customers seek greater transparency, companies are paying closer attention to partners' emissions profiles, fuel strategies, and data capabilities. Better-performing networks increasingly depend on partnerships with carriers that can provide credible emissions data and demonstrate progress towards lower-carbon operations.

For asset-light logistics businesses, supplier management and network design are now among the most powerful emissions-reduction tools available.

From individual initiatives to a structured decarbonisation roadmap

A crucial insight from Spring GDS's Impact Report is that across the logistics sector, there is a collective shift from individual sustainability projects towards more structured, aligned, and strategic decarbonisation management.

Spring GDS CEO Tijs Reumerman highlights in the 2025 Impact Report:

"With the launch of our Emission Tool to generate customer-specific CO_2e reports, the introduction of Book & Claim for Sustainable Aviation Fuel and the scaling of HVO100, we've moved beyond individual initiatives and into a structured roadmap."

That shift is significant because Scope 3 challenges cannot be solved through one-off interventions. Reducing value-chain emissions requires systematic improvements in data quality, procurement practices, transport modes, fuel choices, customer engagement, reporting standards, and supplier collaboration.

The biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity

Scope 3 has become the defining sustainability challenge for logistics. Success requires companies to become orchestrators of change, bringing together customers, carriers, fuel suppliers, technology providers, infrastructure partners, and increasingly sophisticated emissions data into a common decarbonisation strategy.

The first Spring GDS Impact Report reinforces this reality. Sustainability progress is no longer measured only by what happens within company boundaries. Increasingly, it is measured by how effectively organisations influence the networks around them. An approach that prioritises transparency, collaboration, and data maturity will all be essential to that journey. ••

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CIRCULAR COMMERCE IS GOING MAINSTREAM IN THE NORDICS

Text: Malin Herzig // Photos: PostNord

For years, circular commerce was viewed as a promising niche within retail, driven primarily by sustainability-conscious consumers. Today, that perception has changed. Across the Nordic region, buying and selling second-hand products has become a mainstream e-commerce behaviour, supported by digital platforms, changing consumer attitudes, and continued economic caution.

When looking at the four Nordic countries; Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway a clear pattern is seen, and circular e-commerce is no longer an alternative channel operating alongside traditional online retail. Instead, it is becoming an integrated part of how consumers discover, evaluate, purchase, and resell products. While environmental concerns remain important, affordability has emerged as the dominant force behind growth. Consumers increasingly see second-hand shopping as a smart financial decision rather than solely an ethical one. At the same time, digital marketplaces such as Vinted, Sellpy, Plick, Tradera, and local peer-to-peer platforms are transforming the customer experience, making circular shopping nearly as seamless as purchasing new products. Retailers are responding by integrating resale services, second-hand assortments, and circular business models into their core operations.

Nowhere is this transformation more visible than in Sweden, where second-hand e-commerce has evolved into a mature, highly sophisticated ecosystem. In this article we will start by looking into how circular commerce is developing across all four Nordic markets and what these trends mean for European retailers.

Growing Circular Shopping in Sweden

Sweden continues to experience strong momentum in second-hand e-commerce. The share of consumers purchasing second-hand goods online increased from 32 per cent in 2024 to 38 per cent in 2026, while online selling remains consistently high.

Fashion dominates Swedish circular commerce. Clothing and footwear account for 60 per cent of second-hand purchases, up from 55 per cent just two years earlier. The rapid rise of Vinted illustrates the market's maturity. Their platform has become one of Sweden's most popular shopping sites, particularly among younger consumers who increasingly view second-hand fashion as a lifestyle choice rather than simply a way to save money.

Now price sensitivity is the strongest purchasing driver. In 2026, more than half of Swedish second-hand shoppers cited lower prices as their main reason for buying pre-owned products, compared with only 24 per cent who primarily highlighted sustainability. This represents a notable shift in consumer priorities and demonstrates how circular commerce has become a natural part in everyday purchasing behaviour.

Denmark a Stable Market but is about to Shift

Denmark remains one of the region's most established circular markets, although there are signs that online second-hand shopping is slowing down. The share of consumers buying second-hand online declined from 33 per cent in 2024 to 28 per cent in 2026.

Despite this moderation, clothing and footwear continue to gain popularity, reaching 47 per cent of all second-hand purchases. An interesting development is the growing demand for books and media, particularly among younger consumers. Social media trends such as BookTok have helped create new categories of circular consumption by encouraging readers to buy and exchange pre-owned books.

Like Sweden, Denmark has experienced a growing focus on affordability. More than half of Danish consumers now declare lower prices as the primary reason for shopping second-hand. Sustainability remains important but has become a less dominant driver, especially among younger demographics.

In Finland Sustainability Still Matters

Among the four Nordic countries, Finland stands out for maintaining the strongest sustainability-driven argument for circular shopping.

The engagement in second-hand e-commerce continues to grow steadily. In 2026, 31 per cent of Finnish consumers purchased second-hand products online, while 34 per cent sold items through digital channels. Younger consumers remain particularly active participants in resale markets, where buying and selling are often viewed as a normal part of consumption.

Although affordability remains the leading motivation, sustainability has strengthened significantly since 2024. Three out of ten Finnish consumers now state environmental concerns as an important reason for buying second-hand goods, a higher proportion than in the neighbouring Nordic countries.

Fashion remains dominant, accounting for 58 per cent of second-hand purchases. However, the Finnish market is distinguished by the coexistence of economic and environmental motivations. Rather than replacing sustainability concerns, financial considerations appear to be complementing them.

Norway: A Nation of Sellers

Norway presents a somewhat unique circular commerce profile. More Norwegians sell second-hand goods online than purchase them, highlighting the country's strong participation in circular ecosystems.

Online selling remains remarkably stable at approximately 36 to 37 per cent of consumers, while purchasing activity has softened in 2026. Young adults are particularly active participants, with nearly half buying and more than half selling second-hand products online.

As in the rest of the Nordics, fashion dominates the category mix. Home electronics have also become increasingly important as consumers seek value in higher-priced product segments.

Economic motivations are growing stronger in Norway as well. More than half of second-hand shoppers identify affordability as their primary purchasing reason, while sustainability has become somewhat less influential compared with previous years.

A Clear Nordic Pattern Emerges

When viewed collectively, the four markets reveal a similar development. Circular e-commerce is no longer driven primarily by environmental values. Instead, consumers increasingly combine sustainability ambitions with practical financial considerations.

Fashion remains the undisputed gateway category throughout the Nordics, helped by social media, improved platform experiences, and growing consumer acceptance of pre-owned products. At the same time, categories such as electronics, books, collectibles, and home furnishings are expanding the scope of circular commerce.

For European retailers, the message is clear that second-hand is no longer a niche sustainability initiative. It is becoming a core component of modern e-commerce.

Sweden Deep Dive: Europe's Most Dynamic Second-Hand E-Commerce Market?

If the Nordic region represents the future of circular commerce, Sweden may offer the clearest glimpse of what that future will look like.



Today, one in two Swedish consumers has used some form of circular online offering within the past three months. Buying and selling second-hand goods dominate this activity, making resale the engine of Sweden's circular e-commerce economy.

Platforms such as Vinted, Sellpy and Plick have become mainstream sites, particularly among consumers aged 18 to 49. These marketplaces offer convenience, large product assortments, integrated logistics, and increasingly sophisticated user experiences that closely resemble those of traditional e-commerce retailers.

Perhaps most significantly, second-hand shopping is no longer confined to resale specialists. Established retailers including Ikea, Lindex and Bubbleroom now offer second-hand products through their digital channels. Swedish fashion retailer Kappahl is even exploring AI-powered solutions that help identify, value and curate second-hand garments alongside new collections.

Yet a major opportunity remains largely untapped. Despite growing retailer participation, only a small minority of Swedish consumers currently buy second-hand products directly from traditional brands. Lack of awareness is one of the biggest barriers.

Price continues to be the market driver. Nearly half of Swedish consumers mention affordability as their primary reason for choosing second-hand instead of buying new products. This has become particularly important during recent years of economic uncertainty, allowing households to preserve purchasing power without reducing consumption.

However, focusing only on price would overlook a critical aspect of the Swedish market. Sustainability remains an important factor, and many shoppers view second-hand purchasing as a practical expression of sustainable living. Others are attracted by uniqueness, rarity, and the ability to discover products no longer available through conventional retail channels.

The continued growth of second-hand commerce is also being enabled by better customer experiences. Consumers increasingly highlight improvements in search functionality, product discovery, payment solutions, deliveries, and assortment breadth as reasons for increasing their second-hand purchases.

This evolution mirrors developments seen across European e-commerce more broadly. Customers expect second-hand shopping to be just as easy as buying new products. Platforms that eliminate friction are increasingly gaining market share.

Brand loyalty is another often overlooked factor. Many consumers actively seek specific brands when shopping second-hand, and nearly 50% say they would prefer purchasing a pre-owned product directly from a brand if pricing were equivalent. This represents a compelling opportunity for retailers with strong brand equity.

Challenges nevertheless remain. Almost one in five buyers encounters problems when purchasing second-hand online. Inaccurate product descriptions, unclear images, delivery issues and concerns about fraud continue to create friction. As the market grows, consumers increasingly expect professional standards regarding quality control, transparency and post-purchase support.

For retailers, this creates both responsibility and opportunity. Businesses that can offer trusted circular services with reliable product information, efficient logistics and seamless customer service may gain a significant competitive advantage.

However, Sweden demonstrates that circular commerce is not merely an environmental initiative. It is becoming a sophisticated commercial ecosystem built around convenience, affordability, trust and customer experience. The retailers that succeed will be those that integrate circular offerings into their core business rather than treating them as separate sustainability projects.

Conclusion

The Nordic markets offer a powerful lesson for the wider European e-commerce industry. Circular commerce has moved beyond ideology and entered the commercial mainstream. While sustainability remains important, affordability, convenience and platform innovation are now driving adoption at scale.

Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway each have their own characteristics, yet they share a common direction, second-hand commerce is becoming a permanent part of consumer behaviour. Among them, Sweden stands out as a particularly advanced market where resale platforms, established retailers and emerging technologies are collectively shaping the next phase of online retail.

For European e-commerce leaders, the question is no longer whether circular commerce will become important. The Nordic experience suggests that the transition is already underway. The real challenge now is determining how quickly businesses can adapt to a future in which new and pre-owned products coexist within the same digital shopping journey. ••

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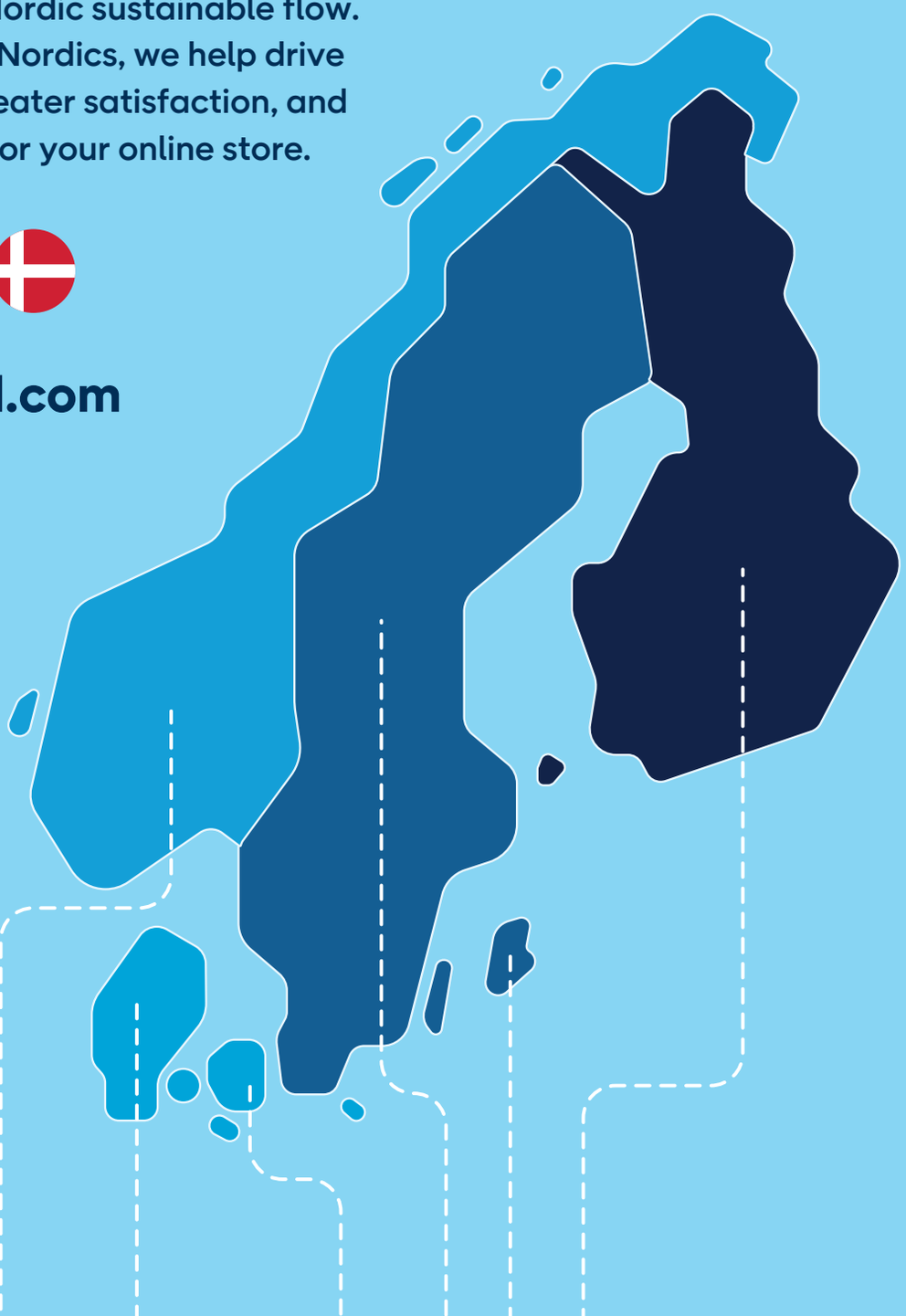
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THE GREAT SHIFT IN E-COMMERCE LOGISTICS: FROM BUILDING SOLUTIONS TO BUILDING CAPABILITIES

Text: Wouter Nederkoorn// Photos: DSV

For years, the logistics industry's response to e-commerce was framed in relatively simple terms: more orders, smaller shipments, and a rapidly growing parcel market. While that undoubtedly changed warehouse operations, it was never the most important transformation.

The real disruption has been far more fundamental. E-commerce has changed what customers expect from a logistics provider. Brands no longer see logistics as a static infrastructure that must be redesigned every time the business evolves. They expect new capabilities to be available almost instantly. A webshop should connect within days. New countries should be activated without lengthy implementation projects. Carrier options, delivery propositions, returns solutions, and marketplace integrations should be added without rebuilding an operating model from scratch. In other words, speed has become a capability in itself.

This is where many traditional 3PLs face a growing challenge. Not because they lack operational expertise, warehouse space, transportation networks, or financial strength. In most cases, they possess all of these in abundance. The challenge is that much of contract logistics was built around a philosophy that emerged in a different era. First win the customer. Then design the solution. For decades, that approach worked exceptionally well. A customer issued an RFP. Volumes were analysed. SKU profiles were assessed. Solution designers created an operating model. IT teams defined interfaces. Procurement evaluated automation options. Operations determined labour requirements. Finance built the business case.

Months later, the operation went live. For large, stable supply chains, this remains a highly effective model. The world's leading 3PLs have built their success on precisely this capability: designing sophisticated solutions for highly complex logistics environments. But e-commerce rarely moves at that pace. A fast-growing brand may decide to launch in Germany next month, expand into France shortly afterwards, connect to a new marketplace, introduce parcel lockers, optimise returns, or add same-day delivery options. In this environment, the ability to build a capability is no longer enough. The capability needs to exist before the customer asks for it. That distinction is reshaping the industry.

The Rise of the Fulfillment Platform

Many e-commerce logistics providers have built their businesses on a fundamentally different premise. Rather than creating a unique logistics solution for every customer, they develop a standard operating platform and allow merchants to plug into it. Storage, picking, packing, carrier connectivity, returns processing, reporting, and system integrations are designed as shared capabilities. The customer is configured onto an existing engine rather than receiving a bespoke logistics operation.

At first glance, the difference may appear subtle. In reality, it changes almost everything. Technology offers perhaps the clearest example. Traditional logistics providers often operate highly capable warehouse management systems. These systems excel in handling complexity, supporting large customers, and accommodating customer-specific processes. Yet they were largely designed around control and customisation.

As a result, onboarding a new customer frequently requires integration projects, configuration work, testing cycles, and involvement from multiple IT teams. E-commerce fulfillment businesses typically start from a very different assumption: the platform already exists. Connections to Shopify, Magento, marketplaces, ERP systems, and carrier networks are not customer projects. They are product features. That difference has enormous commercial consequences.

When every implementation requires months of technical work, smaller customers quickly become difficult to serve profitably. When onboarding becomes standardised, the minimum economically viable customer becomes dramatically smaller. This is one of the key reasons why a new generation of e-commerce 3PLs has been able to grow rapidly in a segment that traditional contract logistics providers have often struggled to scale efficiently.

Data Is No Longer a By-product

The same transformation is visible in the way merchants view information. Historically, logistics data was largely operational. Reports were generated to measure service performance and monitor warehouse activity. Today, logistics information sits much closer to the core of the business.

Inventory levels influence marketing campaigns. Delivery performance affects customer retention. Returns data shapes product decisions. Shipping costs have a direct impact on profitability. Merchants increasingly expect instantaneous visibility into inventory, orders, fulfillment performance, exceptions, carrier performance, returns, and sustainability metrics. For modern fulfillment platforms, exposing this information through dashboards and APIs is often part of the core value proposition.

Traditional logistics providers frequently possess exactly the same data. The challenge is that it often resides across multiple systems, including warehouse management platforms, transportation systems, carrier applications, labour management tools, reporting databases, and customer portals. The information exists.

Accessing it quickly, consistently, and through a single interface is often the harder task. For customers, that distinction is becoming increasingly important. A logistics provider is no longer measured solely by whether an order leaves the warehouse on time. Increasingly, merchants evaluate how effectively operational information can be transformed into actionable business intelligence.

Where the Battle Becomes Visible

The contrast between these models becomes even more apparent once the parcel leaves the warehouse. Consumer expectations around delivery have changed dramatically over the last decade. Home delivery is no longer enough. Shoppers increasingly expect a combination of pickup points, parcel lockers, nominated-day delivery, evening delivery, express services, and frictionless returns.

Offering this level of flexibility requires access to multiple carrier networks across multiple countries. Traditionally, transportation was approached as a procurement activity. Logistics providers negotiated rates with carriers and selected the most appropriate option for each customer.

Digital fulfillment platforms increasingly treat transportation differently. Carrier connectivity itself becomes a product.

Instead of building a new carrier solution for every merchant, multiple delivery services are already connected to the platform. Intelligent business rules determine the optimal service based on destination, delivery promise, parcel characteristics, cost, or customer preference. Adding a new carrier often becomes a configuration exercise rather than a transportation project. That creates a powerful scaling advantage. Connect a new carrier or PUDO network once and potentially hundreds of merchants can immediately benefit. In more traditional environments, the same capability may need to be implemented repeatedly across multiple customers. The result is a radically different model for innovation. Improvements are made at platform level rather than customer level.

The Economics of Shared Scale

Perhaps the most significant difference between traditional contract logistics and modern fulfillment lies in how scale is created. Historically, 3PLs have scaled by winning larger customers and expanding operations. Platform-based fulfillment businesses scale differently. More customers are processed through the same infrastructure. One warehouse system, one returns operation, one carrier network, one automation environment, and one technology layer can support dozens or even hundreds of merchants simultaneously. This fundamentally alters the economics of automation.

A traditional 3PL evaluating an AutoStore system, autonomous mobile robots, or automated packing equipment may ask a simple question: "Does this customer have sufficient volume to justify the investment?" A multi-client fulfillment platform asks a different question: "Do all customers combined generate enough volume to justify the capability?" Once the capability has been built, every suitable merchant can benefit from it without requiring a separate investment case. True multi-client fulfillment therefore goes far beyond placing multiple customers in the same warehouse. Increasingly, businesses are sharing systems, automation, labour structures, carrier connectivity, and operational processes. The capability becomes the asset.

Why Selling Must Change Too

This shift creates a challenge that many established logistics providers are only beginning to confront. A standardised fulfillment platform cannot be sold in the same way as traditional contract logistics. The conventional sales process often revolves around discovering requirements, designing bespoke solutions, preparing cost models, obtaining approvals, and implementing customer-specific operations.

Platform businesses work differently.

The critical question is no longer, "What should we build for this customer?" Instead, it becomes, "Does this customer fit our platform?" That requires discipline. Every custom process, unique integration, special reporting requirement, or customer-specific workflow introduces complexity. Over time, too much customisation can transform a standardised platform back into a traditional contract logistics operation. The most successful platform businesses understand that standardisation is not merely an operational principle. It is a commercial strategy. Sometimes the right answer is not "yes". Sometimes the answer is, "We can support that requirement, but only through our standard capability". For organisations with a long history of tailoring solutions around individual customers, that can be an uncomfortable transition.

The Amazon Effect

The competitive landscape becomes even more interesting when Amazon enters the discussion. Amazon combines characteristics of both worlds. It possesses the physical scale, infrastructure, and operational sophistication of a global logistics provider, while simultaneously operating with many of the attributes of a digital platform. Through services such as Multi-Channel Fulfillment, merchants can access Amazon's fulfillment network for orders generated outside the Amazon marketplace itself. Integrations with platforms such as Shopify illustrate the model clearly. Connectivity is treated as a standardised capability rather than a customer-specific project.

Perhaps more importantly, Amazon increasingly extends its reach beyond fulfillment. Warehousing, inventory replenishment, transportation, and delivery are gradually becoming part of a broader logistics ecosystem. This changes the competitive equation. Traditional 3PLs are no longer only competing with digital-native fulfillment providers moving up-market. Technology platforms and commerce ecosystems are increasingly moving into logistics. And they enter from a position of strength. The infrastructure already exists. The next merchant simply becomes another user of the platform.

The Next Competitive Advantage

None of this suggests that traditional 3PLs are destined to lose relevance. Quite the opposite.

Established providers possess assets that many e-commerce challengers can only dream of: global warehouse networks, procurement scale, transportation capabilities, strong customer relationships, investment capacity, and decades of operational expertise. The opportunity is enormous. Yet capturing it may require more than launching another e-commerce offering within an existing portfolio. It requires a shift in philosophy.

Build capabilities once. Standardise them. Share them across customers. Expose them digitally. Create common carrier connectivity. Use aggregated volume to justify automation. Make onboarding a configuration exercise rather than an engineering project. The winners of the next decade may not be determined by who owns the most warehouses or operates the largest transportation network. They may be determined by who can transform those assets into the most scalable platform of capabilities. Because in e-commerce logistics, the most important customer question is changing. It is no longer: "Can you build this for me?". Increasingly, it is: "Can I use it now?". ••



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BEYOND BORDERS: THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF INVENTORY

Text: Konstantinos Kafritsas, Global Head of Expansion Businesses, GLS Group // Photos: GLS Group

For much of the past two decades, international e-commerce expansion followed a relatively straightforward formula. Retailers entered new markets, reached more customers and expanded their shipping capabilities. Success was often measured by how many countries a business could serve.



KONSTANTINOS KAFRITSAS,
GLOBAL HEAD OF EXPANSION BUSINESSES
GLS GROUP

In recent years, however, a different challenge has emerged. As European e-commerce matures, growth is increasingly being shaped not by where customers are located, but by where inventory is positioned before those customers place an order. With customer expectations rising, next-day delivery becoming an expectation across a growing number of markets and product categories and logistics costs remaining under pressure, inventory placement is evolving from an operational decision into a strategic one.

The limitations of a single fulfilment centre model

For many businesses, international expansion begins with a central fulfilment centre serving multiple countries. This approach offers several clear advantages: inventory is consolidated in one location, operational complexity is reduced and working capital can be managed more efficiently.

For early-stage growth, centralisation often makes perfect sense. The challenge arises when retailers assume that the same inventory strategy will continue to serve every market, product category and customer expectation indefinitely. As geographic reach expands, transport distances increase. Delivery promises become more demanding. Return volumes grow. What once delivered efficiency can gradually begin to create limitations and additional complexity.

There is rarely a single tipping point. Businesses do not suddenly wake up one morning and decide they have become too large for a centralised network. Instead, the decision emerges from a combination of factors: order density, transport costs, demand variability, inventory value, return behaviour and service expectations.

Eventually, many retailers discover that serving Europe efficiently requires more than simply shipping every order from a single location.

Different products call for different networks

One of the most significant shifts taking place in fulfilment is the recognition that different products require fundamentally different inventory strategies.

A fast-moving fashion item behaves very differently from a spare part. A subscription product has different demand characteristics from premium consumer electronics. Oversized goods create different cost structures than small consumer products.

Yet many supply chains still treat inventory as if every product should flow through the same network. That approach is becoming increasingly difficult to justify.

Consider a retailer selling fashion, consumer electronics and replacement parts across Europe. Popular fashion lines may be stocked in multiple locations close to major consumer markets to support next-day delivery and simplify returns. Consumer electronics may be held in a smaller number of regional fulfilment centres, while lower-demand spare parts remain centralised to avoid excessive inventory costs. Despite being sold by the same retailer, each category benefits from a different inventory strategy.

Forward-thinking retailers are increasingly segmenting fulfilment networks according to product behaviour, profitability and customer expectations. Inventory placement

is becoming more tailored to demand patterns, replenishment cycles and service requirements rather than being managed through a single, standardised model.

The future of fulfilment will not be defined by one inventory strategy but by multiple inventory strategies operating simultaneously across the same business.

A more distributed future

The next generation of fulfilment networks is already taking shape. Rather than relying exclusively on large central fulfilment centres, retailers are increasingly adopting a mix of regional fulfilment centres, urban micro-fulfilment locations, shared capacity, marketplace fulfilment schemes and on-demand logistics solutions.

Inventory is moving closer to consumers while remaining centrally coordinated through technology. This transition is being enabled by advances in data visibility, inventory management systems and network orchestration tools. Businesses can now manage inventory across multiple locations with a level of control that was hard to achieve only a few years ago.

For consumers, the result is typically faster delivery, improved product availability, greater service reliability and more convenient returns. For retailers, the benefit lies in balancing cost, service and growth more effectively across multiple markets.

From reactive to predictive inventory

The most significant transformation may not be occurring inside fulfilment centres at all. Artificial intelligence is beginning to change the role of inventory from reactive stockholding to predictive positioning.

"Historically, inventory was replenished after demand occurred. Future fulfilment networks will increasingly seek to position inventory before demand appears."

Machine learning models are becoming more capable of predicting purchasing patterns by analysing historical sales, marketing campaigns, seasonality, weather conditions, local events and broader economic indicators. This enables businesses to anticipate where demand is likely to emerge and allocate inventory accordingly. Over time, inventory allocation may become increasingly autonomous. Digital twins can simulate thousands of potential network scenarios. AI-driven control towers can continuously rebalance stock across locations.

The objective is to create a network that responds dynamically to changing market conditions.

Resilience becomes a strategic priority

Recent years have also illustrated the importance of resilience. Supply chains can no longer be designed solely around cost optimisation. Geopolitical uncertainty, trade policy changes, climate-related disruptions and supplier concentration are creating new risks across international networks. As a result, inventory decisions are increasingly influenced by the need for flexibility.

Businesses are placing greater emphasis on building networks that can absorb disruption without compromising customer experience. The ability to redirect inventory, adapt fulfilment routes and maintain service continuity is becoming a competitive advantage in its own right. Sustainability is also reinforcing many of these changes. Better inventory positioning can reduce transport distances, improve forecasting accuracy and enable more localised returns processing. In many cases, the most efficient network is also a more sustainable one.

The future belongs to network intelligence

Perhaps the most important change is organisational rather than technological. Inventory decisions are increasingly shaping how companies expand, compete and serve customers across Europe.

The companies that outperform in the coming decade will not necessarily be those with the largest fulfilment centres or the fastest delivery networks. They will be the organisations that can continuously determine the optimal location of inventory across an increasingly complex European landscape. Competitive advantage will increasingly belong to businesses that can position the right inventory, in the right place, at precisely the right moment, often before demand has even emerged.

As cross-border e-commerce continues to evolve, retailers need more than transport capacity. They need logistics partners that combine local market expertise with scalable European networks and help them turn inventory strategy into competitive advantage. That is where GLS can support retailers in the next phase of their expansion journey. ••

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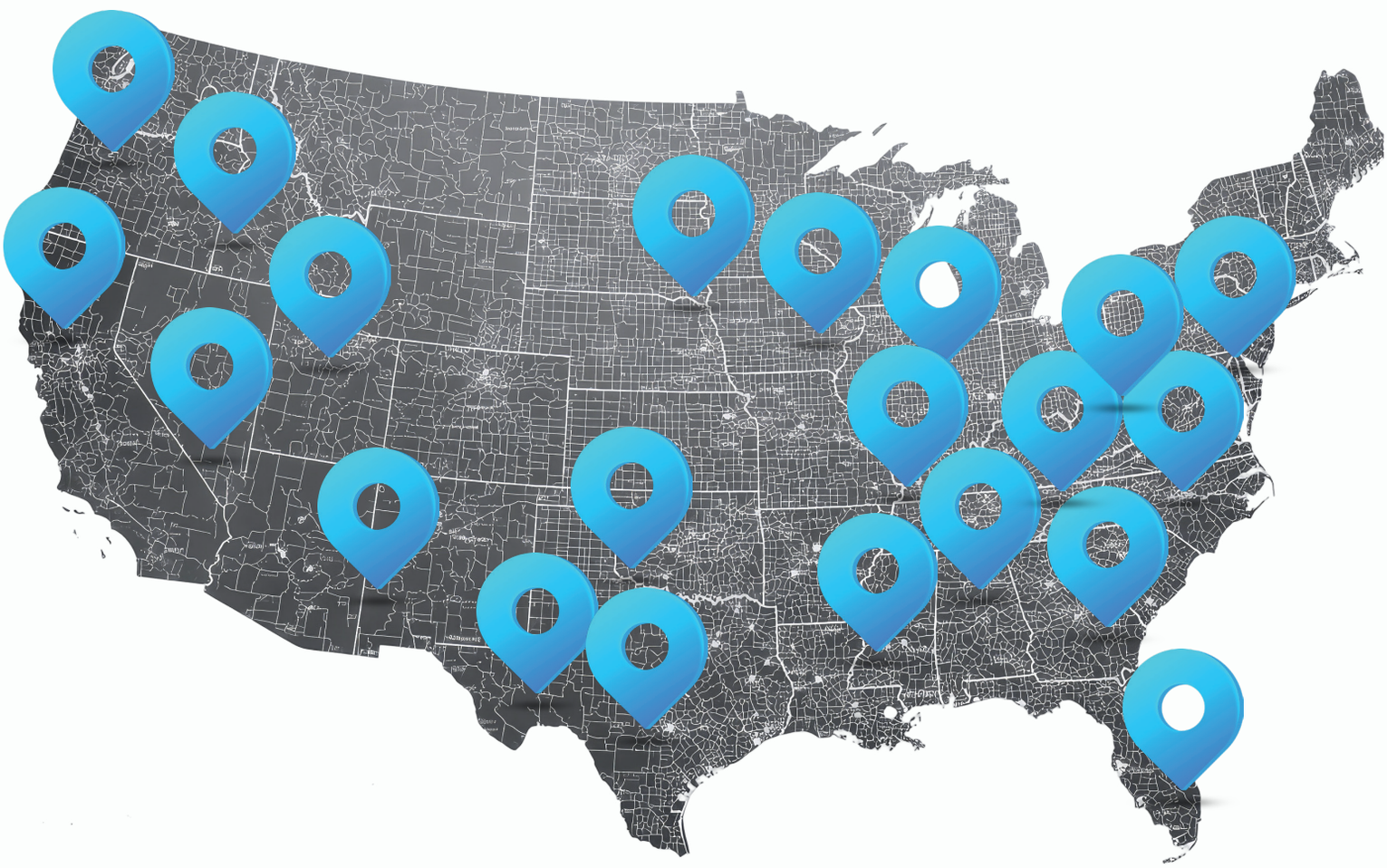
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