The best delivery day starts with the consumer

How giving consumers a choice contributes to a better delivery day for consumers and supply chains

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1. Introduction

Next-day delivery has become a trusted promise in Dutch e-commerce. Fast delivery is therefore an important part of the online customer experience. However, there is an assumption behind this promise, namely, that the earliest possible delivery day is also when the consumer prefers to receive their order.

But do consumers always want that? Scientific studies show that when it comes to home delivery, consumers appreciate being given the opportunity to choose from delivery days that suit their preferences and availability. Speed plays a significant role in that, but the reliability and timing of the delivery also matter. The appeal of each delivery option varies from one consumer to another and depends, among other things, on the preferred delivery day, the length of the time window and the price.[1] Consumer preferences therefore vary, yet most webshops offer customers just one option: next-day delivery.

This uniformity has significant implications for the order-to-delivery chain. After all, weekends are an important time for many consumers to shop online. Scientific research shows that, in 10 of the 16 sectors studied, more online shopping takes place at weekends than on weekdays.[2] Combined with the more limited fulfilment and delivery activities of webshops and logistics service providers at weekends, this causes orders to pile up and volumes to become concentrated. When orders are then routinely delivered the next day, this leads to a significant concentration of parcel volumes at the beginning of the week. This pattern is also reflected in PostNL's figures. In 2026, almost 38% of all parcels were sorted on Mondays and Tuesdays and then delivered the following day. However, this pattern does not necessarily align with consumer preferences. Research by PostNL shows that consumers often have no strong preference for a particular delivery day, and that their preferences can vary from week to week. If they do have a preference, they are relatively likely to choose Wednesday, Friday or Saturday.[3] This creates a mismatch: the days on which parcels are typically delivered in practice are not necessarily the days on which consumers would most like to receive them.

This mismatch shows that there is an opportunity to organise deliveries differently. More choice in delivery days allows consumers to choose a day that suits their preferences. This shifts the focus from how quickly an order can be delivered to which delivery day best matches the consumer's preferences. Webshops play a key role in this. They determine which delivery options the consumer sees during the purchase process and how the options are presented. In doing so, webshops act as the link between consumer preferences and the point at which a parcel enters the delivery chain. By consciously designing the range of options available at checkout, they can give consumers greater control over their deliveries while also creating opportunities to spread delivery volumes more evenly. A simple checkout remains the starting point, ensuring that greater choice does not come at the expense of a smooth purchasing experience. In this way, a relatively small adjustment can improve the delivery experience for consumers while also creating value for retailers and logistics stakeholders.[4]

In this white paper, we explore what greater delivery choice can mean for consumers, webshops and the order-to-delivery chain, and under what conditions that choice can create value for all three. We show how relatively small adjustments to the checkout process can contribute to a better delivery experience for

[1]Amorim, P., DeHoratius, N., Eng-Larsson, F., & Martins, S. (2024). Customer preferences for delivery service attributes in attended home delivery. *Management Science*, 70(11), 7559–7578.
[2] Bussière, D. (2011). The day of the week effect in consumer behavior: Analyzing utilitarian and hedonistic consumer modes. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 17(4), 418–425.
[3] Markteffect study commissioned by PostNL (2026)
[4] Kokkinou, A., Quak, H., & Mitas, O. (2026, June). From preferences to behavior: A comprehensive study of consumer behavior in last-mile logistics [Conference presentation]. 33rd EurOMA Conference, Vienna, Austria.

consumers, potentially higher customer satisfaction for webshops, and more efficient and sustainable logistics operations. Our findings are based on both published and unpublished scientific research by the University of Groningen (RUG) and Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUas). We also draw on various forms of consumer research. PostNL has conducted its own research, commissioned research from a market research agency, and carried out research together with webshops. For example, they used A/B tests at checkout to investigate how different delivery options influence consumer choice.

2. How much choice do consumers get today?

During checkout, consumers often have little or no influence over when an order is delivered. To establish how much choice consumers actually have, researchers from the RUG analysed the checkouts of 100 Dutch webshops[5], selected from the 300 largest webshops on the Twinkle list.[6] They focused specifically on the delivery options that consumers are offered during the purchase process.

The findings paint a remarkably consistent picture. At 27 of the 100 webshops, consumers could not select a delivery option at all. Another 49 webshops offered an alternative in the form of a pick-up point, but no choice of delivery day. Only 24 webshops offered more than one delivery day. Most of the choice therefore concerns where an order is received (at home or at a pick-up point), rather than when. At more than three-quarters of the webshops studied, consumers had little or no influence over the day of (home) delivery. When consumers can choose a delivery day, the fastest possible delivery is usually listed first or presented as the default option at checkout. Alternative days appear further down the list or are less prominent. This pattern is also evident within PostNL's customer portfolio: at many webshops, the fastest possible delivery is still the default option. An analysis of PostNL's 100 largest parcel senders also shows that half of these retailers allow consumers to choose their own delivery day.[7]

This strong focus on fast delivery also affects how delivery volumes are distributed throughout the week. Data from PostNL show that e-commerce deliveries follow a clear weekly pattern, with volumes unevenly distributed across the different days, with Tuesday being the busiest delivery day. This is partly due to orders placed over the weekend, which are then processed and delivered at the beginning of the week.

However, this distribution does not necessarily reflect consumer preferences. Research by Markteffect, commissioned by PostNL, shows that 44% of consumers do not mind on which day their parcel is delivered. Among those who do have a preference, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are the most frequently mentioned days. Monday and Tuesday are less popular.[8] Consumer research conducted by PostNL among 18,000 consumers also shows that speed is not always essential: four out of five parcels are considered non-urgent by consumers.[9] For many orders, therefore, the earliest possible delivery day is not necessarily the only or most suitable option.

The processing and delivery peak at the beginning of the week therefore does not appear to come primarily from a strong consumer preference for receiving parcels on those days, but rather from a combination of when consumers place their orders and a delivery proposition that is heavily geared towards speed. Since many consumers are flexible about their preferred delivery day, there is an opportunity to better align

[5] Wolf, S., Buijs, P., & van Donk, D. P. (2026). Decide or Default? How Defaults, Information, and Financial Incentives Influence Sustainable Delivery Choices in a Field Experiment. *SSRN, 24 July*.
[6] https://twinkle100.nl/over-de-twinkle100/
[7] PostNL internal
[8] Markteffect study commissioned by PostNL (2026)
[9] PostNL internal

delivery days to their preferences and distribute both fulfilment and deliveries more evenly throughout the week.

3. What changes if the consumer chooses for themselves?

Ordered today, but preferably not delivered tomorrow. Imagine: a consumer orders a pair of shoes during the weekend. The earliest possible delivery day is Tuesday, which is automatically set as the actual delivery day. However, the consumer already knows that no one will be at home that day and would prefer to receive the parcel on Friday. Yet many webshops do not allow consumers to specify this. On Tuesday, the delivery driver arrives to find nobody home. The parcel is then taken to the neighbours or a pick-up point, where it stays for a few days. Or there is a second attempt to deliver it at home, resulting in additional kilometres, traffic movements and emissions. The entire supply chain has then done its best to deliver the parcel as quickly as possible, while the consumer already knew that this particular delivery day would not work.

Offering a choice of delivery day can help prevent these kinds of situations. Allowing consumers to choose their own delivery day gives them greater control over when their order is delivered. A survey by Miles Research, commissioned by PostNL, among 1,003 Dutch consumers also highlights this desire for choice: 79% say they would like to choose their own delivery day.[10] A similar picture emerges from a survey by Sendcloud, which shows that 81% of Dutch consumers prefer a specific delivery time slot to the fastest possible delivery.[11] Scientific research also underlines the importance of flexibility. Consumers want delivery options that suit their availability and circumstances.[12] More choice can also increase the likelihood that a parcel is delivered when the recipient is actually at home. This can reduce the risk of failed delivery attempts and potentially limit frustration and dissatisfaction with the delivery experience.

The value of delivery choice therefore lies primarily in the opportunity to select a delivery day that better fits the consumer's schedule. That may still be the earliest possible day for an urgent order. For another order, a later day may be better. Since many consumers do not have a fixed preferred day and do not consider a large proportion of their parcels urgent[13], there is an opportunity to vary delivery days.

Data from webshops available to PostNL shows that consumers do indeed make use of this flexibility. When several delivery days are offered at checkout, between 10% and 20% of consumers choose a later delivery day of their own accord, depending on the webshop.[14] Simply offering a choice can therefore shift some orders to a later date. Various practical tests also show that offering multiple delivery days can make commercial sense. In a PostNL test, explicitly displaying several delivery options led to a relative increase in conversion of 6.7%, measured as orders per visit. At the same time, the proportion of deliveries selected for Monday and Tuesday fell by 4%. Technology and implementation partner Wuunder, which provides webshops with the technology to offer a range of delivery options at checkout, also saw a positive effect on conversion at organic wine producer Neleman. Neleman used Wuunder's checkout tool to move from a single default delivery option to letting consumers choose their own delivery day. Following this tool's introduction, the conversion rate increased by 30% in relative terms.[15] In addition, a survey by Markteffect, commissioned by PostNL, shows that offering multiple delivery days is associated with an increase in

[10] Miles Research study, commissioned by PostNL (2025)
[11] https://www.thuiswinkel.org/kennisbank/kennisartikelen/nederlandse-shopper-wil-grip-op-bezorging-dit-zijn-de-cijfers/
[12] Kokkinou, A., Quak, H., & Mitas, O. (2026, June). From preferences to behavior: A comprehensive study of consumer behavior in last-mile logistics [Conference presentation]. 33rd EurOMA Conference, Vienna, Austria.
[13] Markteffect study commissioned by PostNL (2026)
[14] PostNL internal
[15] https://wuunder.com/neleman-klant-case

purchase intent of around 9%. Scientific research also shows that the delivery speed promised by a webshop can have commercial implications. A faster delivery promise can increase sales and profitability, but it is also associated with more returns and lower customer retention. With a slower delivery promise, the researchers found fewer purchases and lower spending, but also higher customer retention.[16]

In short, the fastest delivery is not automatically the best delivery. By offering the choice amongst multiple delivery days, webshops can better cater to consumers' varying needs and allow them to choose the day that suits them best.

This flexibility can not only benefit consumers but also the order-to-delivery chain. When not every order is automatically assigned the earliest possible delivery day, volumes can be distributed more evenly throughout the week. This can reduce peak demand in warehouses, sorting centres and delivery, and make the entire operation more predictable. Research by RUG also shows that a more even distribution of delivery volumes can contribute to more sustainable deliveries, as fewer vehicles are needed to handle the busiest times.[17]

Delivery choice can therefore benefit consumers, webshops and the supply chain. Consumers can choose a delivery day that better suits their preferences, webshops can benefit from potentially higher conversion rates and customer satisfaction, and the order-to-delivery chain can benefit from fewer failed delivery attempts and a more even distribution of volumes throughout the week. This better distribution can also contribute to more sustainable deliveries.

However, greater choice does not automatically mean that delivery volumes will be more evenly distributed throughout the week. If many consumers find the same alternative day attractive, an existing peak may simply shift. For example, a reduction in demand on Tuesday could lead to a new peak on Friday. More choice can also make the decision-making process more complicated. Additional options give consumers greater control but also require them to weigh up different days. The question is therefore how to present these choices in a way that genuinely spreads delivery volumes more evenly, while allowing consumers to retain control and make their choice easily.

4. How do you steer consumers without taking away delivery choice?

Which delivery day consumers choose depends not only on the available options, but also on how they are presented at checkout. Research by Markteffect shows that 58% of consumers follow the suggestion made by the webshop or delivery service, rather than actively choosing a delivery day themselves.[18] For example, if the fastest delivery option is displayed at the top or preselected, this can influence consumers' choices, even if the webshop does not deliberately intend to nudge them in that direction. The way choices are presented is also called choice architecture. Webshops can consciously use this to make certain delivery days more attractive, for example by providing additional information, discounts or preselecting an option. Consumers do retain the freedom to choose a different delivery day. Below, we discuss these three ways of nudging consumer choices.

[16] Cui, R., Lu, Z., Sun, T., & Golden, J. M. (2024). Sooner or later? Promising delivery speed in online retail. *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*, *26*(1), 233-251.
[17] Zeelenberg, M. J., Kilic, O. A., & Buijs, P. (2026). From willingness to wait to sustainable impact: Smoothing e-commerce delivery volume peaks. *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, *156*, 105349.
[18] Markteffect study commissioned by PostNL (2026)

Information can help consumers weigh different delivery options.[19] RUG, in collaboration with Wuunder, investigated how information and other forms of nudging work in practice at the Dutch webshop Soxs.co over a period of nine months. For this study, Wuunder[20] implemented different variants of the checkout. The researchers then examined the effects of sustainability information, discounts, and preselection on the choice of a more sustainable, later delivery option.

In this study, sustainability information resulted in a slight shift towards the later delivery option. Research by PostNL also finds that showing consumers how busy each day is can nudge them towards a particular delivery day. In several tests, consumers were less likely to choose Monday and Tuesday as a result. In one test, the proportion of deliveries selected for these days even fell by 12%.[21] However, the same tests also show that the effect depends heavily on how the message is worded. An unclear message can actually have a negative effect on conversion rates. This means that it is not only important what information is provided, but also how clearly and specifically it is presented. This is consistent with findings from the EU-funded GreenTurn project, which also highlights the importance of providing clear and specific information about delivery options.[22]

Financial incentives can also influence the choice of delivery day. Consumer research by PostNL shows that 37% of consumers are willing to choose a later delivery day in exchange for a €0.10 discount. This figure increases to 42% when the discount is €0.25.[23] The research by RUG also shows that discounts can have an effect. In the experiment with Wuunder and Soxs.co, consumers were more likely to choose the more sustainable delivery option when a discount was offered. With a €1 discount, the proportion of consumers choosing this option increased to around 20%. Practical tests by PostNL further show that the effect of discounts can vary depending on the situation. In three separate tests, the reduction in deliveries selected for Monday and Tuesday ranged from 3.9%, with no significant effect, to 19.4% when the discount was combined with a sustainability label.[24] Conversion rates remained unchanged in all three tests. Research by BUas also shows that price differences between delivery options do not necessarily have to come at the expense of customer satisfaction, provided they are clearly explained[25] and not perceived as discriminatory.[26]

Preselection can influence choice behaviour by setting a particular delivery option as the default. Of the methods studied, preselection had the strongest effect. The RUG study shows that about 7% of consumers chose delayed delivery when no preselection, discount or additional information was provided. However, when this option was preselected, that figure increased to approximately 75%. A practical test by PostNL also showed a clear shift. Preselecting a later delivery day resulted in 23% fewer deliveries being selected for Monday and Tuesday.[27] At the same time, the test revealed that not all consumers noticed that a later delivery day had been preselected. This led to calls to customer service. These findings highlight the

[19] Wolf, S., Buijs, P., & van Donk, D. P. (2026). Decide or Default? How Defaults, Information, and Financial Incentives Influence Sustainable Delivery Choices in a Field Experiment. *SSRN, 24 July*.
[20] https://wuunder.com/onderzoek
[21] PostNL internal
[22] https://green-turn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/D2.5-Digital-communication-strategies.pdf
[23] PostNL internal
[24] PostNL internal
[25] Kokkinou, A., Quak, H., & Mitas, O. (2026). Leveraging fairness to nudge consumers towards more sustainable last mile delivery options. Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 37, 101956.
[26] Kokkinou, A., & Quak, H. (2026, March). Gemak dient de mens (behalve als het niet werkt); een kijkje in de digitale klaagmuur voor pakketautomaten. In Vervoerslogistieke Werkdagen 2026 (VLW).
[27] PostNL internal

importance of transparency: a preselected delivery day should be clearly visible, and consumers should be able to easily choose a different option.

The various studies therefore present a coherent picture. Offering multiple delivery days gives consumers the opportunity to choose a different day. The way the checkout is designed can then influence which option they choose. Information, discounts and preselection can all contribute to this, although their effects vary depending on the approach and the situation.

These insights show that webshops can use the checkout process to more deliberately influence delivery choices. Rather than focusing on the fastest possible delivery by default, they can highlight a delivery day that better matches the available capacity or the desired distribution throughout the week. Consumers thereby always have the option to choose a different day.

Not every consumer needs to change their delivery preferences to help reduce peaks. Research by RUG, based on data from Wuunder, shows that it is sufficient if around a quarter of orders may be delivered up to three days later. This allows the carrier to deliver with the smallest possible fleet, while those orders arrive only one to two days later on average.[28]

The extent of the effect varies between studies and practical tests, but the overall trend is consistent. More delivery choice and a deliberately designed checkout encourage a significant proportion of consumers to choose a later delivery day. This suggests that the percentage of orders that needs to be shifted to reduce delivery peaks is achievable.

5. What is needed to put this into practice?

More delivery choice and a carefully designed checkout only work if the delivery options are also feasible across the order-to-delivery chain. Retailers can only offer alternative delivery options if it is clear which delivery days are desired, and if that promise can be fulfilled operationally.

Several preconditions need to be met for this to work, with both retailers and logistics service providers having a role to play. First of all, good information exchange between the two parties is essential. After all, the most suitable delivery day in terms of capacity and distribution can vary from one moment to the next. Logistics service providers must therefore be able to provide insight into available capacity and expected demand. Retailers must then be able to translate this information into the delivery options shown at the checkout. This allows the available options to be adjusted dynamically to reflect the current situation across the order-to-delivery chain.

The processes at both retailers and logistics service providers must also be sufficiently flexible to allow for different delivery days. For retailers, this could mean, for example, picking an order at a later stage or storing it temporarily when a consumer chooses a later delivery day. In turn, logistics service providers must be able to support different delivery days and process the volumes throughout the week as agreed. The delivery choice offered to consumers must therefore be feasible throughout the chain.

In addition, understanding consumer preferences can help with offering more relevant delivery options. Retailers with a large number of returning customers may have information about previously selected delivery days or other preferences. By combining this information with operational data from the supply chain, the delivery options can be matched not only to available capacity but also, where possible, to

[28] Zeelenberg, M. J., Kilic, O. A., & Buijs, P. (2026). From willingness to wait to sustainable impact: Smoothing e-commerce delivery volume peaks. *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, *156*, 105349.

individual consumer preferences. Finally, retailers and logistics service providers share responsibility for ensuring that the chosen delivery day is met. When consumers consciously choose a particular day, they develop a clear expectation. Research by BUas shows that consumers are sensitive to deliveries that do not meet the agreed delivery arrangements. If a consumer deliberately selects a suitable option but the parcel is not delivered as expected, the additional control that delivery choice is meant to provide can instead lead to frustration.[29]

The checkout therefore cannot be viewed separately from the operations behind it. In order for delivery choice and targeted nudging to work effectively, retailers and logistics service providers need to know which delivery days are preferable, be able to fulfil them, and reliably meet the delivery promise made to consumers.

Want to explore this further?

The findings in this white paper show how much there is still to discover about the way consumers make delivery choices. That is why researchers from RUG and BUas, together with PostNL, continue to explore new and interesting research questions and opportunities to answer them in practice. The researchers therefore warmly invite retailers and logistics service providers to work together on further research and develop new insights. One example could be experiments in the checkout process to investigate how the way delivery options are presented influences choice behaviour and what this means for sustainability, customer satisfaction and customer retention. Another interesting area for research is how the range of delivery options and the way they are communicated can help reduce product returns. By combining scientific knowledge with the practical experience and expertise of companies, we can discover together which solutions create real value for consumers, retailers and logistics service providers. PostNL is also keen to contribute to this process and explore new opportunities for joint research with retailers to further improve the delivery experience.

Interested in doing research together? Feel free to contact us at s.wolf@rug.nl.

[29] Kokkinou, A., Quak, H., & Mitas, O. (2026, June). From preferences to behavior: A comprehensive study of consumer behavior in last-mile logistics [Conference presentation]. 33rd EurOMA Conference, Vienna, Austria.