Rithum™

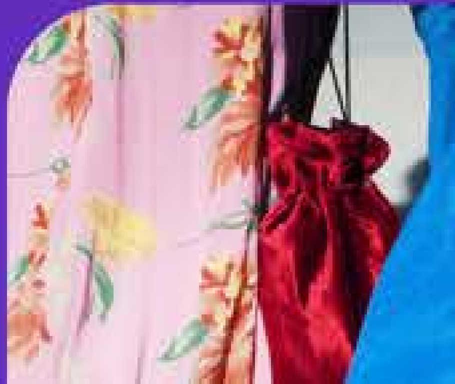
FIXING FASHION'S RETURN PROBLEM

Rethinking profitability in the age of bracketing, seasonality, and resale







FLEXIBLE RETURNS ARE THE NEW FASHION STANDARD.

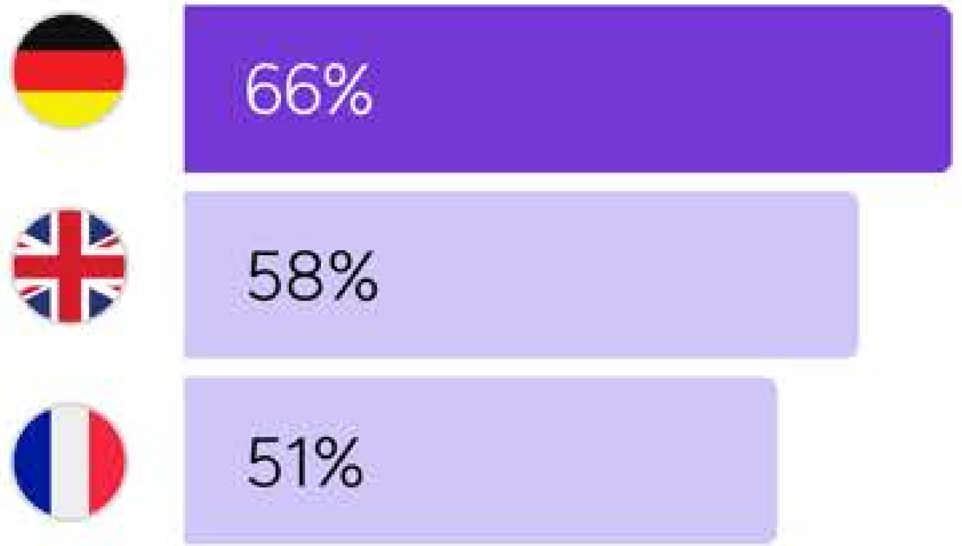
Easy returns aren't a perk, but a purchase prerequisite.

And of course, the easier returns become, the more frequently they happen. In the past year alone, 60% of European shoppers returned at least one fashion item.[2] Generous return policies have unintentionally created a cycle of over-ordering and high-volume returns. Free returns for your shoppers can be deeply expensive for you, the seller.

Yet, for European fashion shoppers, hassle-free returns are the baseline expectation: 88% of European consumers say free returns are an important factor in where they shop, and 47% have abandoned a retailer entirely over a return policy they didn't like.[1]

60% of European shoppers returned at least one fashion item

% of Online Shoppers Who Made a Return in the Past 12 Months (by Country)



Source: Rithum's 2025 Returns and Profit Impact Report

Each return triggers more than just a lost sale—it sets off a chain reaction of shipping fees, labor, and margin erosion. On average, every return costs retailers €26 (£22) to process.[3]

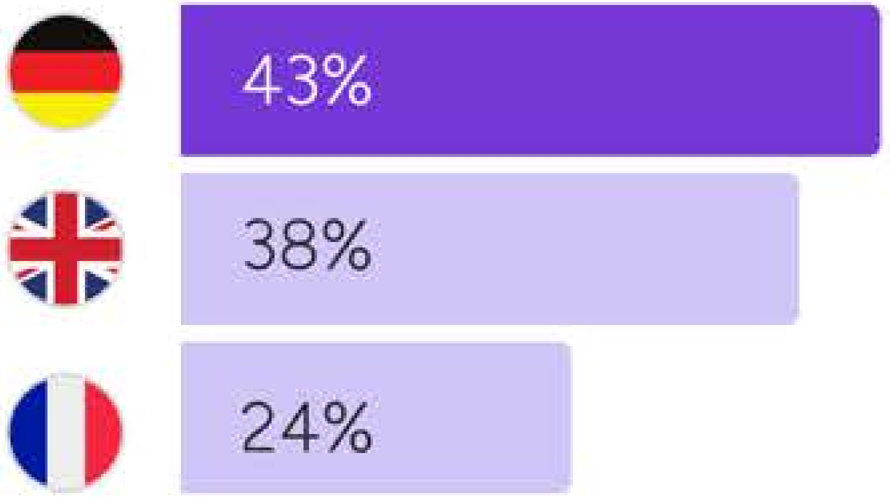
These costs are compounded by bracketing: the practice of ordering multiple versions of the same item and returning most.

Thirty-six percent of global shoppers admit to bracketing, and more than 50% of shoppers under 35 regularly over-buy with the intent to return.[4]

Multiply that across thousands of orders, and the impact is staggering.

50%+ of shoppers under 35 admit to bracketing

Shoppers Who Intentionally Ordered Multiple Versions with Plans to Return (Past 12 Months)



Source: Rithum's 2025 Returns and Profit Impact Report

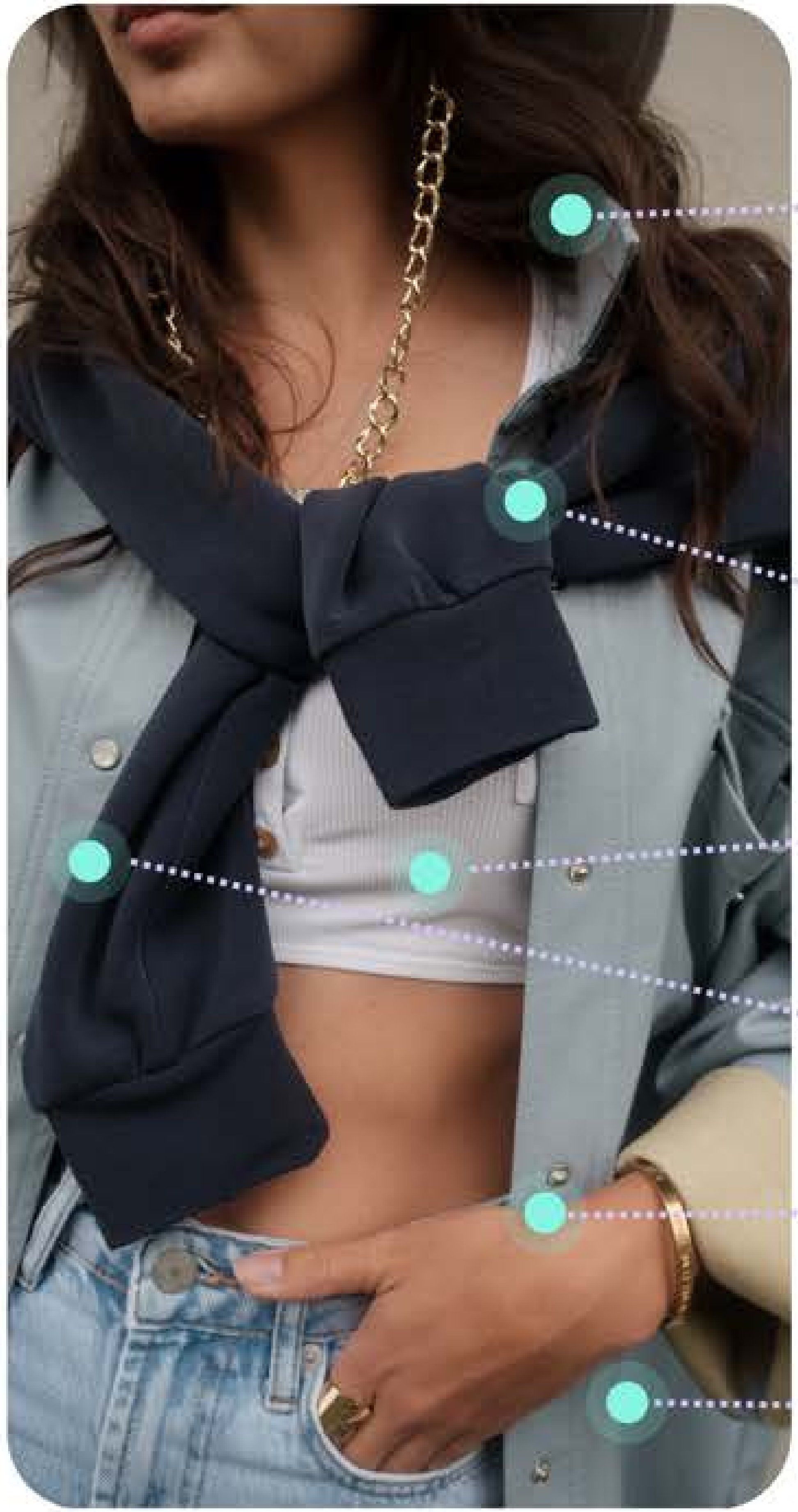
Rithum's internal data shows that bracketing is especially pervasive in European markets.

For example, in Austria and Poland, refund rates on marketplaces can soar above 60% due to bracketing—leaving retailers there to absorb the costs of handling, restocking, and reverse logistics.[5]

FIX THE PAGE, FIX THE PROBLEM,

Beyond bracketing behavior, returns in apparel are often driven by misalignment between what the shopper expects and what they receive.

These returns—whether related to size, colour, quality, or fit—aren't caused by the product. They're caused by your product page.



65% of consumers say wrong size or fit was the top reason they returned clothing or shoes.

50% of consumers say that customer reviews are critical when buying clothing or shoes.

43% of consumers say better size and fit recommendations would significantly reduce returns.

38% want more detailed product descriptions.

33% say a returned item did not match the description or photos.

33% would be less likely to return a product if it included real-life customer photos.

Source: Rithum's 2025 Returns and Profit Impact Report, EMEA Survey Respondents

When consumers can't try items on before purchasing, providing comprehensive product listings can make a significant difference in reducing returns.

Accurate product detail pages (PDPs) can dramatically reduce return rates. High-quality images, clear product descriptions, and detailed fit and sizing guides help consumers build confidence in what they're buying.

And the more confidence a shopper feels before clicking 'buy', the less likely they are to buy multiples with the intent to return (or to regret and return the purchase).

REAL-WORLD RESULTS

zalando

Rithum customer Zalando reduced size-related returns by 10% after implementing more precise sizing tools across product pages.

READ MORE

Nearly 40% of European consumers say they're less likely to return items if listings offer clearer fit guidance, more imagery, or peer reviews. Stronger PDPs reduce uncertainty—and returns—especially for high-volume SKUs.[7]

Common fixes that we've seen lead to fewer returns:

- More accurate sizing guidance, especially for regional markets
- Better product photography, including multiple angles and try-on visuals
- Customer reviews and fit feedback, surfaced higher on the page
- Localised descriptions, tuned for context and clarity

GET AHEAD OF THE RETURN BY FIXING THE PRODUCT INFORMATION BEFORE PURCHASE

- Invest in accurate product listings, clear sizing guidance, and multiple high-quality images.
- Use AI and machine learning to automate product categorisation and minimise listing errors, especially in categories with high size-related return rates.
- Encourage authentic customer reviews and real-life photos: 33% of consumers say this would make them less likely to return.

WHEN RETURNS COME BACK, SO DO OPPORTUNITIES

Enriched product pages can reduce returns without sacrificing customer satisfaction. But you can't stop every return, and the culture of over-buying and consumer convenience isn't going to go away.

The challenge is not just reducing return volume—it's also optimising what happens after the return, and finding revenue in what was once a loss.

European consumers are navigating a landscape of economic strain. More than 59% of shoppers say "good value for money" is their top purchasing priority.[8]

This value-seeking mindset has increased demand for secondhand shopping. While 45% of European consumers say they consider sustainability when making purchases—up five points from last year—only 17% are willing to pay more for sustainable options. Instead, many are choosing the inherent sustainability of secondhand: 20% of Europeans regularly purchase pre-loved apparel.[9]

Consumers increasingly expect environmental responsibility, especially in fashion, where climate impact headlines cast long shadows across the industry.[10] This shift towards pre-loved, sustainable shopping has direct opportunities for your return (and margin) management.

While Zalando and other marketplaces' consumer-friendly return policies boost consumer confidence, they can also back you into a corner. By the time returned inventory makes its way to you, it's post-peak (or entirely out of season) and worth far less. And since relisting those items on Zalando typically requires deep discounting, you're often forced to lose money.

RESALE DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN BIG MARKDOWNS

Rather than relisting returned goods or dead stock into the same over-saturated marketplace, you can offload that inventory onto alternative channels with lower return rates.

By redirecting returned or excess inventory to alternate, re-sale marketplaces—such as Secret Sales, BestSecret, or eBay Pre-loved—you can tap into consumers' appetite for deals and sustainability, while recovering value from returned or excess goods.

Marketplace	Avg. Return Rate	Resale Flexibility
Zalando: one of the highest return rates in Europe, driven by generous return policies and bracketing culture.	~62%	Tight (seasonal)
Bol.com: A leading generalist marketplace in the Netherlands and Belgium, offering steadier sell-through for branded apparel.	~24%	Medium
eBay Preloved: A growing ecosystem for pre-worn, branded fashion to meet consumer appetite for sustainability and value.	Low	High
Secret Sales: Members-only fashion outlets ideal for selling discounted or past-season SKUs while maintaining brand integrity.	Moderate	Medium-High
Localised outlets: Regional options offer fresh exposure, particularly for seasonally misaligned inventory.	Moderate	Medium-High

SOMETIMES, BIG MARKETPLACES ARE STILL THE BEST OPTION.

But when selling there, timing isn't just about seasons, it's about seconds. Their algorithms favor 'newness'. Relisting a returned product can push it back into visibility and sales velocity. But only if it's done right.

When Zalando is your best bet for resale, Rithum can help you not just redirect returned stock but optimise its return to market. Through SKU-level insights and marketplace-specific analytics, we can help you get granular on how to maximise visibility, including:

- Identify which products to relist vs. reroute
- Determine ideal time-of-day and day-of-week windows for Zalando re-listings
- Spot patterns in size, style, or region that correlate with higher resale potential

One UK-based fashion brand using Rithum found that relisting returned SKUs during weekday mornings—rather than weekends—helped boost visibility and conversion.

These small data details can bring big impacts by helping you outmaneuver discount cycles and avoid blanket markdowns or liquidations.

You can also get move visibility for improved intentional inventory planning: not just which SKUs to order, but where and when to resell them.

High return volume is just a fact of the fashion business. But you have more control than you might expect, both around preventing returns and optimising the post-return lifecycle.

Stop more returns by providing accurate product listings, clear sizing guidance, and multiple high-quality images.

Give end-of-season overstock and missed-timing SKUs new life and higher margins by rerouting to alternate marketplaces or relisting strategically.

Together, this dual approach—reducing avoidable returns up front with PDP improvements and maximising recovery on the backend—equips fashion sellers with a more resilient, margin-positive return strategy.

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

#1

Flexible return policies are now a baseline expectation
88% of European consumers consider free returns a key factor in where they shop, and nearly half have abandoned a retailer over a poor return experience.

#2

Bracketing and over-ordering drive up return volume—and costs
More than 50% of shoppers under 35 admit to bracketing, and in some European markets, refund rates exceed 60%, costing retailers an average of €26 per return.

#3

Better product detail pages can prevent unnecessary returns
Nearly 40% of consumers say they'd be less likely to return if listings included better fit guidance, more images, or customer reviews.

#4

Returned inventory can help drive sustainability messaging
Redirecting returned stock to resale marketplaces like Secret Sales or eBay Preloved helps you recover margin while meeting growing demand for secondhand fashion.

#5

A dual approach is key to a resilient return strategy
The most effective strategies combine front-end fixes (such as PDP optimisation) with back-end enhancements (such as data-driven resale timing). Together, these efforts reduce return rates and protect profit margins.

ENDNOTES

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2. Rithum, Rithum's 2025 Global Returns & Profit Impact Report.
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5. Rithum, Rithum's 2025 Global Returns & Profit Impact Report.
6. Rithum, Year-to-Date Orders Analysis, Across Millions of EMEA Marketplace Sales (Internal data, 2025).
7. Rithum, Rithum's 2025 Global Returns & Profit Impact Report.
8. PR Newswire, European Shoppers Hunt for Bargains Amid Rising Economic and Political Pessimism [online]. Available at: https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/european-shoppers-hunt-for-bargains-amid-rising-economic-and-political-pessimism-302477049.html [Accessed 1 Jul. 2025].
9. PR Newswire, European Shoppers Hunt for Bargains Amid Rising Economic and Political Pessimism.
10. Earth.org, Fast Fashion's Detrimental Effect on the Environment [Accessed 1 Jul. 2025]

Rithum (formerly CommerceHub and ChannelAdvisor) is a global commerce solution that supports the full commerce journey: from getting products listed, discovered, and sold, to ensuring they're fulfilled, delivered, and optimised—streamlining the path from product shelf to your customers' door.

With AI-driven automation, unified insights, and performance optimisation, Rithum enables your team to focus on strategy while we handle the complexity of omnichannel orchestration. Whether you're launching new products, growing your operations, or running retail media campaigns, Rithum helps you make every touchpoint count.

With offices in the U.S., U.K., Ireland, Spain, and Australia, Rithum is trusted by leading retailers and brands around the world, including Best Buy, Mercado Libre, Adidas, The Home Depot, Zalando, and more.

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