



Online shopping

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Amazon and Waitrose ban customer for complaints and returning too much

Big online retailers are barring shoppers – sometimes for reasons they don't understand

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Retailers can bar shoppers for – in their view – returning too many items or making too many complaints, as Nannette Herbert has discovered.

Herbert told Guardian Money she has been banned by a number of retailers – including Amazon and [Waitrose](#) – for making complaints and refund requests.

Businesses are sometimes alerted when a customer displays “unusual” activity, such as requesting what might be viewed as a disproportionate number of refunds, and can block them from making future purchases.

Consumers can also be banned for making too many complaints if the retailer believes they

are abusing the process.

Amazon told Herbert, who lives in London, that it was closing her account last month, saying she had “consistently requested refunds for a large number of orders”.

It doesn't say anywhere in their terms and conditions they ban you if you return a certain number of items
Nannette Herbert

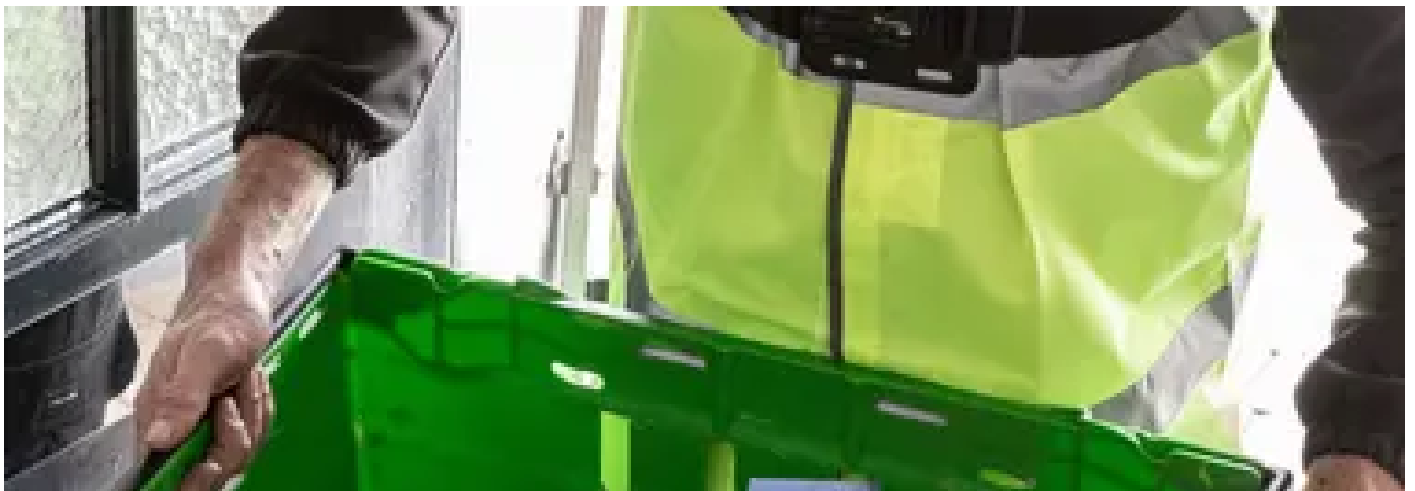
She says the ban – which has since been lifted – had caused “many different problems”, including the fact that the self-published author was locked out of her publishing account.

“They said I had returned too many things, which isn’t true at all,” she says. “I’ve kept most of what I ordered ... and I’ve ordered a lot of stuff. It doesn’t say anywhere in their terms and conditions they ban you if you return a certain number of items.”

Waitrose also blocked Herbert’s online account in December last year after she made repeated complaints about the quality of the food delivered, after “strenuous efforts to satisfy” her needs.

“They were delivering out-of-date things,” Herbert says. “They expect me to pay full price, and if I make a complaint about it, they ban me. I’m blamed for their mistakes.”

In response, Amazon told us that returning purchases on Amazon.co.uk “is easy and free on millions of items”, and that customers can return most within 30 days.





Waitrose says its employees 'are trained to be as discerning as our customers, and will choose produce with the longest date codes available'. Photograph: Waitrose/PA

It adds: "We want everyone to be able to use Amazon but there are rare occasions where someone abuses our service over an extended period, and we take appropriate action.

"We never take these decisions lightly, and if a customer believes we've made an error, we encourage them to contact us directly so we can review their account."

Waitrose told us that its partners (employees) "are trained to be as discerning as our customers, and will choose produce with the longest date codes available".

It adds: "We want all our customers to be delighted when shopping with us and, while we achieve this in the vast majority of cases, we are sorry when any customer is disappointed.

"Despite our strenuous efforts to satisfy Miss Herbert, we weren't able to meet her needs online and felt it would be better for her to select her own food in our shops."

Can I be banned simply for returning lots of items ...?

Retailers can refuse to do business with a customer, so it does not break any rules for them to ban those who repeatedly return their purchases.

"No business can be compelled to have you as a customer if it doesn't want to, and it doesn't have to give a reason," says Martyn James, an independent consumer expert.

Lisa Webb, a consumer law expert at Which?, says: "Retailers may be within their rights to ban customers who consistently return items, or complain. However, they should only do this with a good reason.

"There is an environmental cost of sending items back, so shoppers should bear this in mind

when making their next purchase and try to buy sustainably.”



📷 Was your item as described? Photograph: insta_photos/Alamy

Even if a company decides to ban someone from making further purchases, it does have to honour refund requests if your item is damaged, doesn't arrive or is not as described.

Online retailers also give you 14 days to change your mind – for example, if you want to try on clothes at home.

If you are in debt to a company, it should work with you to set up a reasonable repayment plan before closing your account.

... or for making lots of complaints?

The simple answer is that you should not be banned for making genuine complaints, or penalised for escalating issues to an ombudsman or dispute resolution service.

If the retailer believes you are abusive, or are making “vexatious” complaints, it may decide not to do business with you in future.

James adds: “As long as you're not abusing the process, or abusing staff, then you absolutely should not be penalised as a result of making complaints.”





📷 Online retailers give you 14 days to change your mind. Photograph: Elizaveta Galitckaia/Alamy

Is there any way to appeal against a company's decision?

Webb says if you have been banned and think it is unfair, “follow the company’s complaints procedure to find out why. If you get an unsatisfactory response, consumers can escalate the issue to an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) scheme, or the industry ombudsman.”

Check whether the retailer is signed up to an ADR on its website. If you can’t find any information, get in touch with the company to ask for details of its ADR scheme.

If the retailer does not use one, ask whether it would be willing to do so in this case, advises Citizens Advice. If the firm agrees, it should find one and then provide you with the details.

What steps can I take to avoid being banned?

It’s a tricky area – companies don’t usually reveal what the cut-off limit for, say, refunds is, or which complaints they would consider to be vexatious.

▲ There may be steps you can take to reduce the number of returns and refund requests you have to make

If you have a particular problem, there may be steps you can take to reduce the number of returns and refund requests you have to make.

For example, if you have trouble with parcels being stolen from outside your home after they have been left by couriers, you could get your items delivered to work or a local collection

Ultimately, if you have had multiple causes to complain, it might be better to try to use an alternative provider of the service that you need.

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