



USA 2022

Ecommerce Country Report

In partnership with



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Introduction



Welcome to the USA Country Report, which analyses the American economy from an ecommerce and multichannel retail perspective.

According to findings published at the end of July, **ecommerce growth in the USA was actually predicted to slow in 2022 for the first time**

in over a decade, falling to 9.4%. However, ecommerce sales were also expected to exceed the \$1tn mark for the first time, a truly astronomical 13-figure number. So if this counts as a ‘Lose’ by American standards, most economies around the world would in fact consider it a gigantic ‘Win’.

Although the single most significant event affecting the global economy in 2022 has been the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which commenced on 24 February, it can be argued that this does not actually impact vital US interests. However, the USA under **President Joe Biden has led the way in providing aid to Ukraine and imposing sanctions against Russia**, while avoiding the escalation of actually placing American boots on the ground.

After the turmoil of recent years, there are signs that the political situation in the USA may be calming. While by no

means universally popular, President Biden is nowhere near as explosively divisive as his predecessor Donald Trump. As a result, there is a sense that **the USA has been able to revert to doing what it does best: business.**

The employment situation continues to be positive in the USA, even with the continuing issue of large-scale illegal immigration on its southern border. One source suggests **there are two vacancies for every worker seeking a job.**

By November 2022 the US dollar was reportedly at its strongest for years, with the Federal Reserve increasing interest rates to 3% to combat inflation. However, this has in turn led to widespread fears of a global recession.

Citing such issues as crime and social inequality, the Economist Intelligence Unit does not currently include any US cities in the top tier of its Global Liveability Index. **The highest-placed US city is Atlanta – ranked number 26 in the world** – followed by Washington, D.C. at 29 and Honolulu at 30. Other major US cities featured include Los Angeles (37), Miami (41) and Boston (45).

As ever, we welcome your feedback and comments.

Ian Jindal, CEO, RetailX

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Country profile

The original global superpower, the USA has withstood the forces of a changing world to achieve continued prosperity

The post-1945 era has been defined by historians as ‘The American century’, and yet recent decades have seen many setbacks for the USA. As the leader of NATO and the elder statesman of the UN, **the US bore the brunt of the ideological struggle with global communism in the late 20th century**, but at times drew criticism for its heavy-handedness in foreign policy.

The USA traces its rise from a small English colony in 1620 to **the richest and most powerful nation the world has ever seen** four centuries later. Its achievements – industrial, technological, economic, military and cultural – dwarf those of most other nations, but being the world’s biggest winner has also made the USA the world’s biggest target, for commercial and political competitors alike.

The US Census Bureau currently estimates its population at 333.3mn, though other sources place it as high as 335.7mn. It remains the country with **the third-largest population in the world**, although the figures for China and India are much higher.

With the world’s greatest number of ‘ultra high net worth

individuals’ – people worth \$30mn or more – the USA holds 31% of global wealth, while representing just 4.25% of the total population. This inequality is replicated domestically, with **the top ten percent of earners holding almost 70% of the wealth**. Some of this disparity is generational, with Baby Boomers nearly nine times richer than Millennials.

For natural resources, the USA ranks second only to Russia, with reserves of **coal, timber, natural gas, gold and copper**, along with a gigantic landmass, extensive coastlines, plentiful fresh water and fertile farmland. The USA’s top exports are refined petroleum, crude petroleum, cars, integrated circuits and petroleum gas, while its top imports are cars, computers, packaged medicaments, broadcasting equipment and crude petroleum (of which it remains a net importer). The large and diverse population also provides an advantage, as **the USA has long been able to attract the world’s ‘brightest and best’**.

The USA has been the chief supporter of Ukraine since the initial Russian invasion in 2014. In total the US has provided \$21.9bn in security assistance, which includes weaponry,



USA profile

Area: 9,833,520 km²

Capital: Washington, D.C.

Currency: United States Dollar (USD)

Official language: English

Other languages spoken: Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, French/Creole, Arabic, Korean, Russian

Government: Federal presidential constitutional republic

VAT: 10% | **Reduced VAT:** None

“The chief business of the American people is business. They are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering in the world.” President Calvin Coolidge, 1925

communications equipment and medical supplies. With the escalation of 2022, the US contribution for humanitarian assistance has totalled \$302mn this year alone (\$653mn in total since 2014). **The latest \$400mn package of military aid was announced in November 2022**, emphatically reconfirming US support for Ukraine.

Market context

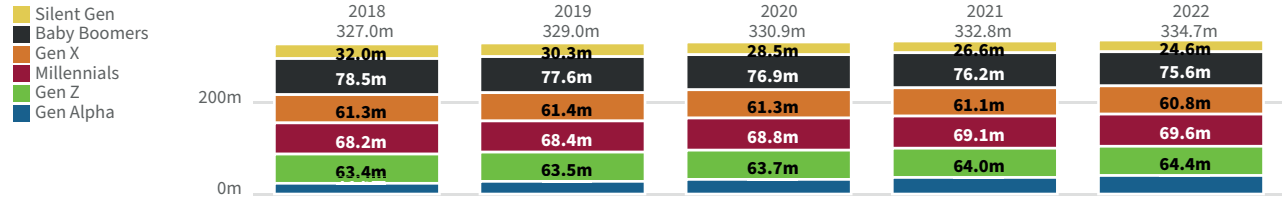
As the US population continues to grow by around 2mn a year, GDP per capita and ecommerce revenue remain high

Examining the US population structure by age group, we see that the Silent Generation (those aged roughly 75-95) has declined by 7.4mn since 2018. Baby Boomers (aged 55-75) still represent the largest proportion of the total population, and **continue to wield formidable spending power**, but they too are in decline – down 2.9mn in the past four years.

As Generation X (aged 40-55) draws nearer to old age its numbers have also declined. However, the Millennial (25-40) and Generation Z (10-25) age groups have increased (due to immigration). **Meanwhile the youngest of all, Generation Alpha (0-10), has healthy growth**, having risen from 23.6mn in 2018 to 39.7mn in 2022.

Although so-called ‘legacy Americans’ in general are having fewer children compared to previous generations, the population of the USA continues to grow, fuelled in large part by immigration. **The main sources for legal migration to the US are Mexico, India and China**, followed by the Dominican Republic, Vietnam and the

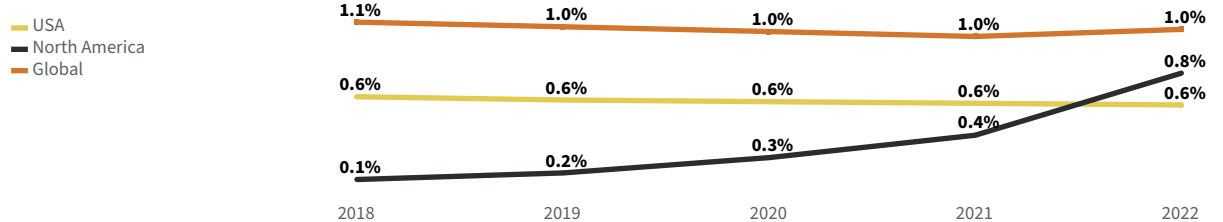
Population structure by age group



Age groups (year of birth): Gen Alpha (2013-present), Gen Z (1998-2012), Millennials (1983-1997), Gen X (1968-1982), Baby Boomers (1948-1967), Silent Gen (1928-1947)
Source: RetailX, drawing on data from UN

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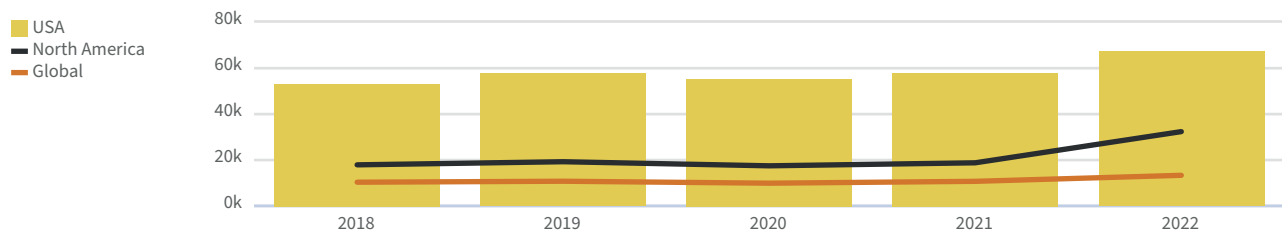
Population growth



Source: RetailX, drawing on data from UN

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GDP per capita (USD)



Source: RetailX, drawing on data from IMF

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Philippines. El Salvador, Brazil, Cuba and South Korea also have significant representation.^[1]

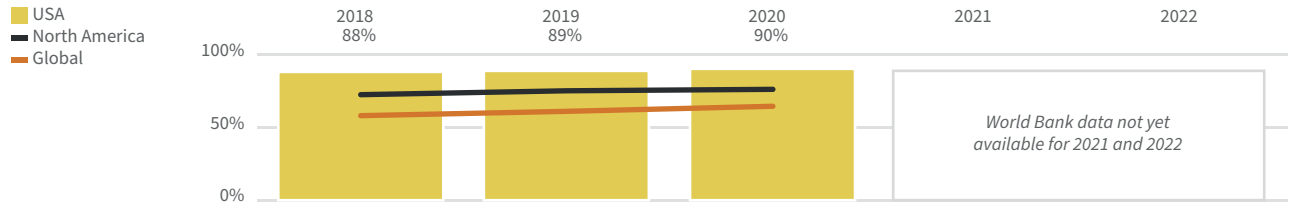
Ancestry and ethnicity have some relevance to ecommerce because **the American online shopper is not a homogeneous unit**. Where people originate and how they identify themselves is reflected in the things they buy and to some degree in the countries they buy them from.

Overall, population growth in the USA is 0.6%, which is lower than both the North American average of 0.8% and the overall global rate of 1%. As is generally the case in older and more affluent societies, what it lacks in fertility it compensates for in wealth – **the USA’s GDP per capita of \$69,300 greatly outperforms both the North American (around \$30,000) and the global rate (just \$12,300)**.^[2]

The most recent World Bank data (from 2020) shows that 90% of the US population are internet users, and according to the latest figures just under 75% of those users are also online shoppers. **According to some commentators, the US technically went into recession in 2022** after experiencing no growth for two consecutive quarters.^[3] And yet it has been largely a case of ‘business as usual’ for the economic superpower, although the effects of inflation have been keenly felt.

[1] <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/us-immigration-by-country>
 [2] <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>
 [3] <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/investing/are-we-in-a-recession/>

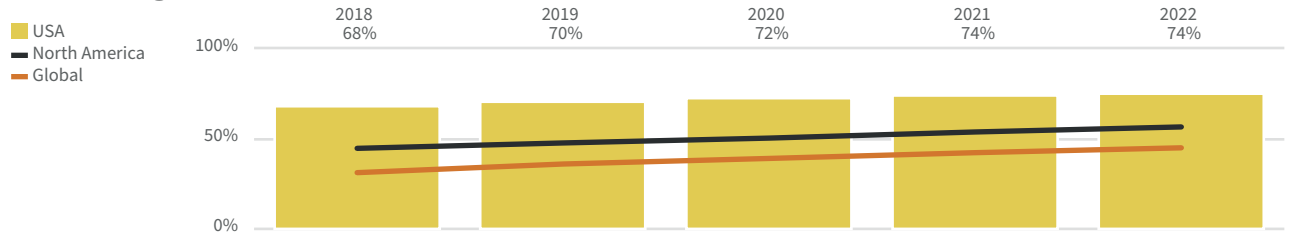
Percentage of internet users



Source: RetailX, drawing on data from the World Bank

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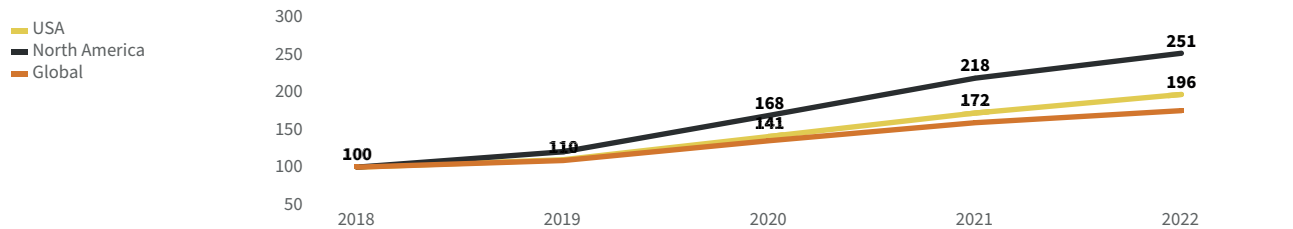
Percentage of internet users who shop online



Source: RetailX, drawing on data from Statista

© RetailX 2022

Ecommerce revenue Index



Index 2018=100. RetailX, drawing on data from Statista

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Indices

Economic development is shown in several international indices, which we track as part of RetailX research

As one of the world's leading economies in both the traditional and digital realms, the USA is ranked 14th overall in the World Bank's **Logistics Performance Index**^[1]. This places it lower than Germany, Japan and the UK, but higher than France, Spain, Italy and China. With an overall score of 3.89, the USA's highest individual scores are for Tracking and Tracing, Infrastructure and Customs.

The World Bank's **Ease of Doing Business Index**^[2] was discontinued last year, after irregularities were detected in the findings for 2018 and 2020. However, as these did not affect the USA's score (sixth out of 190 countries), it is included here for reference.

In the UN's **E-Government Development index**^[3], the USA is ranked ninth (out of 190), and listed as a High Income country, while the UPU's **Index of Postal Development**^[4], ranks the USA the number seven country in the world. Finally, the USA is placed third (out of 100) in the **Inclusive Internet Index**^[5], scoring particularly well in the Affordability and Relevance categories.

Indices	Definition (Data refers to most recent available year)	Global Rank
Ease of Doing Business Index	A high Ease of Doing Business ranking means the regulatory environment is more conducive to the starting and operation of a local firm	6 /190
E-Government Development Index	The E-Government Development Index measures the willingness and capacity of national administrations to use information and communication technologies in order to deliver public services	9 /193
Integrated Index for Postal Development (2IPD)	2IPD is a comparative indicator of postal development around the world built on four pillars: reliability, reach, relevance and resilience	7 /168
Inclusive Internet Index		
Availability	Quality and breadth of available infrastructure required for access and levels of internet usage	13 /100
Affordability	Cost of access relative to income and the level of competition in the internet marketplace	10 /100
Relevance	Existence and extent of local language content and relevant content	3 /100
Readiness	Capacity to access the internet, including skills, cultural acceptance and supporting policy	11 /100
Overall Inclusive Internet Index		3 /100
Happiness Index	0 (unhappy) – 10 (happy)	6.98 /10

KEY: ■ Top quartile ■ Second quartile ■ Third quartile ■ Bottom quartile

[1] <https://ipi.worldbank.org>

[2] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2021/09/16/world-bank-group-to-discontinue-doing-business-report>

[3] <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index>

[4] [www.upu.int/en/Universal-Postal-Union/Activities/Research-Publications/Integrated-Index-for-Postal-Development-\(2IPD\)](http://www.upu.int/en/Universal-Postal-Union/Activities/Research-Publications/Integrated-Index-for-Postal-Development-(2IPD))

[5] <https://theinclusiveinternet.eu.com>

The US consumer

Checking out trends and preferences in the channels and services that online shoppers are using in the US today

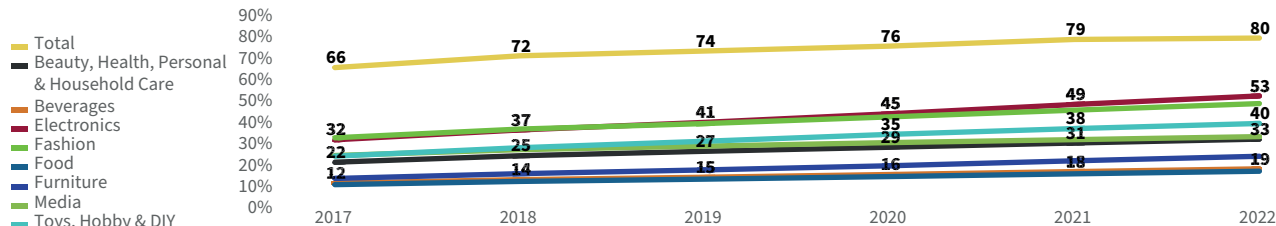
Five years ago only 66% of Americans were using their internet access for online shopping. Since then this figure has steadily risen – with the steepest climb occurring from 2017-18 – reaching its present total of 80%. **The Electronics sector and Fashion are currently the most popular purchasing destinations for online shoppers.**

The average spending per shopper has also increased considerably – from \$2,100 in 2017 to \$3,700 in 2022 – and this had begun to rise steeply even before the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020. **Furniture represents the largest spend here, followed by Toys, Hobby & DIY.**

In terms of monthly ecommerce expenditure, just under 50% of shoppers are spending between \$13 and \$120 per month, while 31% spend between \$301 and \$610, and 6% spend between \$611 and \$1,200.

Perhaps most notable here is the statistic that **the top 1% spend \$1,201 or more each month, accounting for a minimum monthly spend of \$3.2bn just by themselves.**

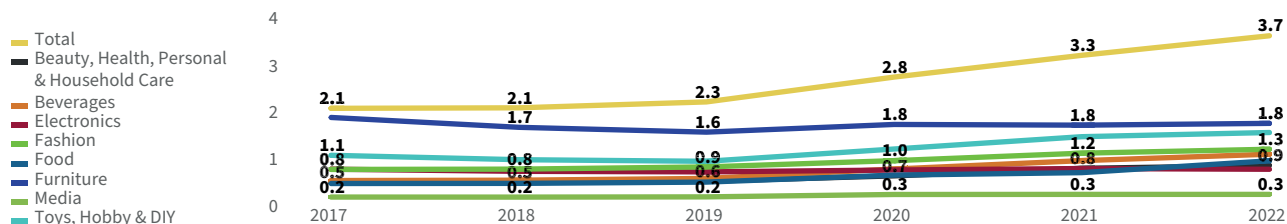
Percentage of ecommerce shoppers, 2017-22



Source: Statista

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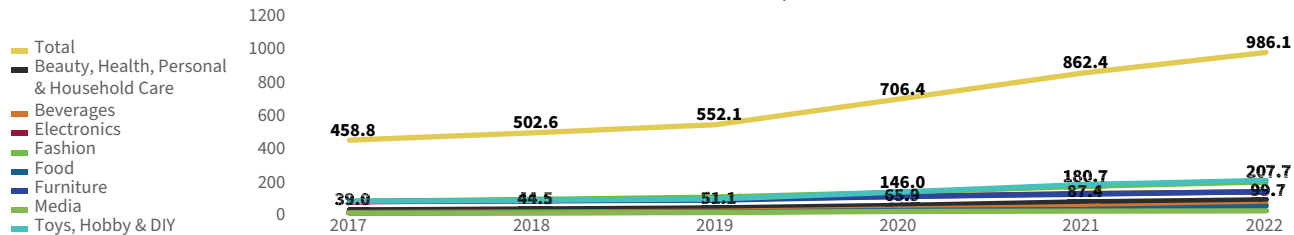
Average spending of the ecommerce shopper (thousand \$), 2017-22



Source: Statista

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Annual revenue for the ecommerce market (\$bn), 2017-22



Source: Statista

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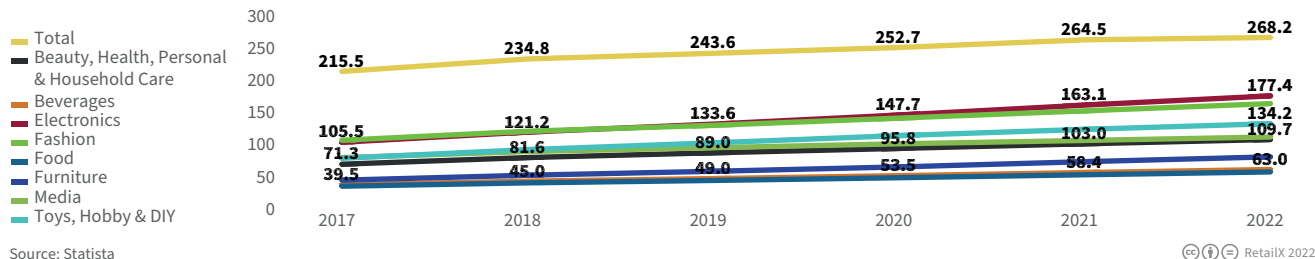
Over the past five years **total annual revenue for the US ecommerce market has more than doubled, from \$458.8bn in 2017 to \$986.1bn in 2022**. Again, the steepest rise was already under way before the 2020 global COVID-19 Pandemic led many shoppers around the world to rely more heavily on ecommerce.

The total number of ecommerce users has risen by more than 50mn since 2017, hitting a total of 268.2mn in 2022. More than 177mn shoppers are buying electronics products online, with 134.2mn making fashion purchases and 109.7mn shopping in the Toys, Hobby & DIY sector.

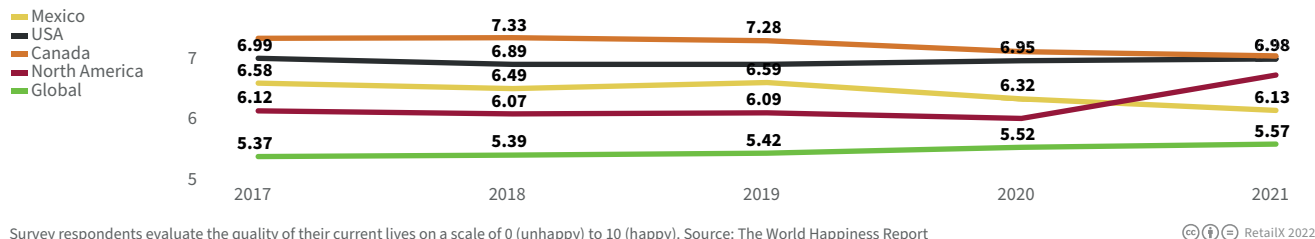
According to a recent survey, **35% of US shoppers mostly buy clothing online rather than offline**, with the figure at 31% for shoes and 27% for books, movies, music and games.^[1] Other categories such as Bags & Accessories (26%), Consumer Electronics (25%) and Cosmetics & Body care (19%) are not far behind.

The World Happiness Report compiles scores based on a survey in which people evaluate the quality of their current lives. **The US consumer scored 6.99 in 2017, before falling to 6.89 for the next two years, and then rising to 6.95 and 6.98 for 2020 and 2021**. This compares favourably with neighbouring – slightly happier – Canada, and is significantly higher than the average global figure.^[2]

Number of ecommerce users (in millions), 2017-22



Happiness Index, 2017-21



Monthly ecommerce expenditure, 2022



Based on 485 residents of the USA aged 18 and over, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "How much do you spend on average per month online?" Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

[1] <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/997092/online-vs-offline-purchases-by-category-in-the-us>
 [2] <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/USA/happiness>

Product categories

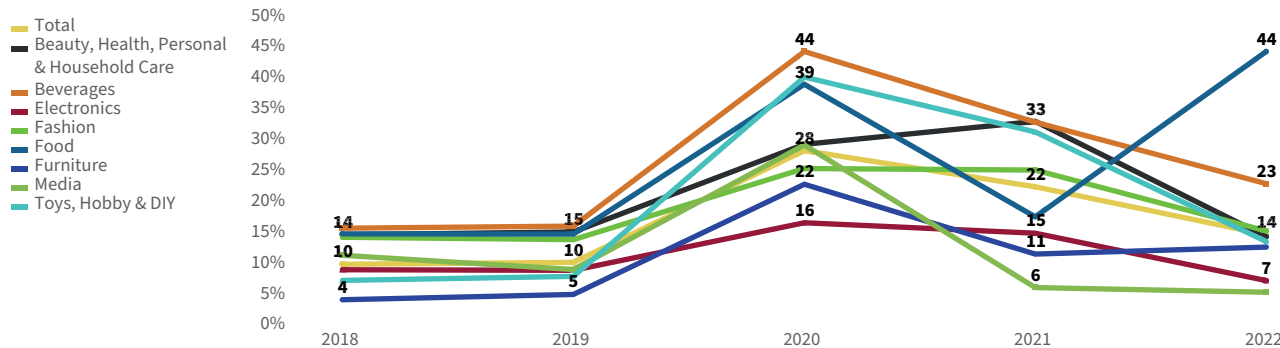
Which items have US consumers been buying online over the past 12 months, and what is influencing their choices?

Our chart of the annual change in revenue for the USA online ecommerce market illustrates some dramatic fluctuations over the past four years. **Some of the causes are fairly obvious, including the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020 and its associated knock-on effects.** Others seem less straightforward to determine.

While the economy as a whole exerts its inexorable gravitational pull on the ecommerce market, the revenues involved are now so astronomical that ecommerce is playing an ever-increasing role in influencing that economy. **The results are tangible and far-reaching as ecommerce becomes an everyday feature in the lives of American consumers of all income levels.**^[1]

According to our survey, the most popular category purchased online in 2022 was Fashion apparel or accessories, with 54% of shoppers making purchases in this category. Here the USA is keeping step with the global trend, as Fashion is the runaway leader in many territories around the world. The success of the fashion industry does

Annual change in revenue for the online ecommerce market (%), 2018-22

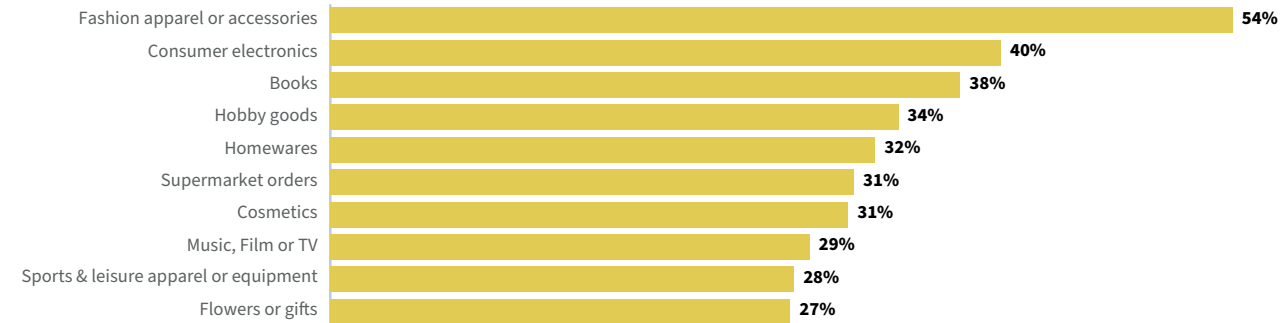


Source: Statista

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Articles bought online

The 10 most popular categories purchased online, 2022



Based on 485 residents of the USA aged 18 and over, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "What do you shop for online?"
Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

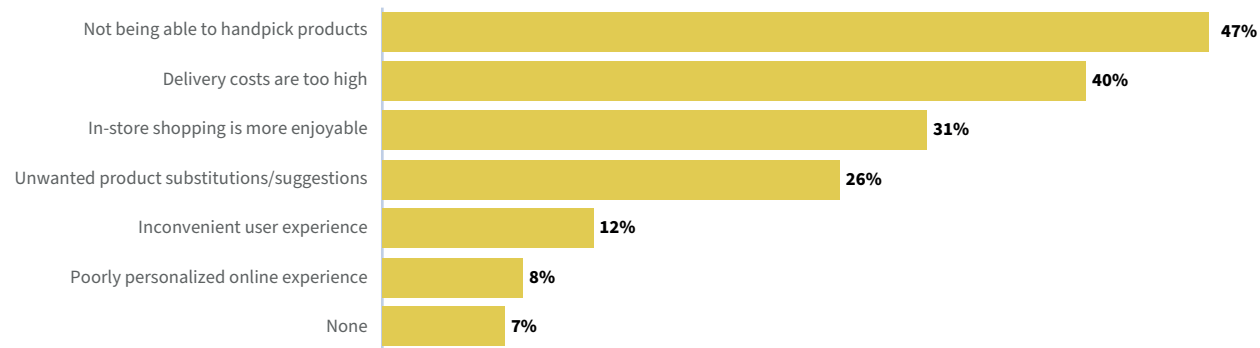
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not appear to have made it any less volatile – as might be expected in an arena which bases its production on ever-changing trends. Intriguingly, the big story of recent years has been the rise of the resale market, **with around 1bn second-hand purchases made online in 2021, which would usually have been given to new products.**^[2]

As the rise to ubiquity of the smartphone has in large part fuelled the online ecommerce revolution, it's no surprise to find Consumer electronics in second place here with 40%, followed by perennial online ecommerce favourite Books with 38%. Hobby goods (34%), Homewares (32%), Supermarket orders (31%) and Cosmetics (31%) also made strong showings, while Music, film or TV (29%), Sports & leisure apparel or equipment (28%) and Flowers or gifts (27%) rounded out the top ten.

When thinking of the American shopper in 2023 we generally picture a trendy young woman making fashion purchases online in an urban setting. And yet the American consumer is also the traditional rural working man, driving his Dodge Ram to the local hardware store to replenish his stock of much-used tools. What both kinds of shopper have in common is their appreciation of new gadgets and their demand for a high standard of customer service. Accordingly, the year ahead could well see the rise of the virtual hardware store, **deploying the kind of Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality services pioneered by the likes of Shopify.**^[3]

Main barriers to online grocery shopping



Note: Survey period September 2021, Number of respondents 2,500, Age group 14-65 years.
Source: Appinio & Spryker

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Despite a long tradition of having takeout food delivered to their homes, **US shoppers seem more reluctant to order groceries online than their counterparts in European countries.** In our September 2021 survey they cited reasons such as ‘Not being able to handpick products’ (47%), ‘Delivery costs are too high’ (40%) and ‘In-store shopping is more enjoyable’ (31%). ‘Unwanted product substitutions/suggestions’ are irksome to 26%, with 12% citing ‘Inconvenient user experience’ and 8% pointing to ‘Poorly personalised online experience’.

According to research from the US Department of Agriculture’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), **American consumers simply do not trust**

couriers to pick the freshest and best choices of meat, fruit and vegetables.^[4] There is also an element of ‘decision fatigue’, where shoppers find it mentally taxing to make the long list of choices necessary for online grocery shopping, especially when it comes to selecting healthier options. Nevertheless, the USDA claims it is committed to expanding the availability of SNAP online shopping “as part of our broader efforts to ensure everyone – regardless of their situation or their location – can have access to the food and nutrition they need to live healthy lives.”^[5]

[1] <https://www.segmentify.com/blog/brief-look-history-ecommerce>

[2] <https://www.shopify.com/enterprise/ecommerce-fashion-industry>

[3] <https://www.oberlo.co.uk/blog/future-of-ecommerce>

[4] <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-10810871/Americans-likely-buy-fruit-vegetables-grocery-shopping-online.html>

[5] <https://www.fns.usda.gov/news-item/fns-0016.22>

Payment methods

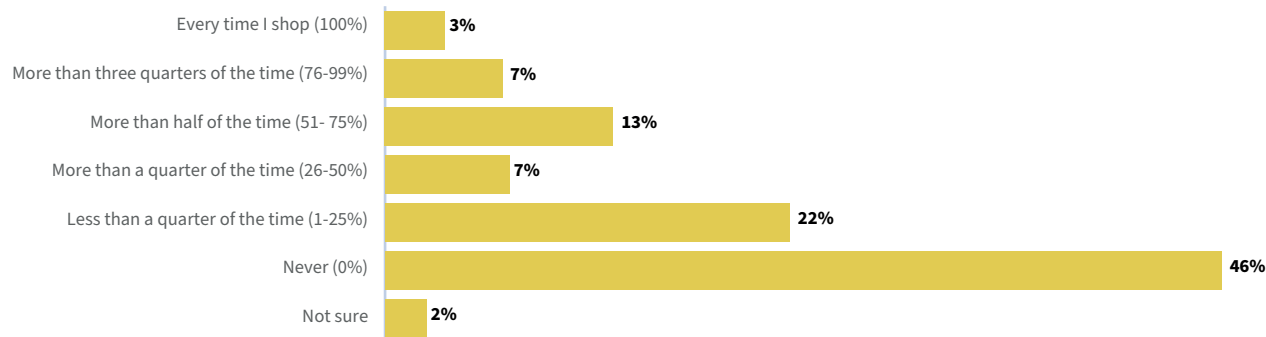
Offering customers a range of payment options should now be standard practice for online ecommerce retailers

The online payment landscape continues to evolve in the USA as retailers strive to balance **customers' demands for choice, convenience and a frictionless experience** with their own need to maximise profit and combat fraud.

Although the term 'Buy Now, Pay Later' seems to evoke an earlier age of commerce, the modern-day iteration of BNPL has become particularly popular among Millennial shoppers and those from Generation Z. It has proved an effective solution **both for shoppers who dislike credit card fees and for merchants who realised customers were abandoning purchases** due to the appearance of extra costs.^[1] Our survey shows that 42% of shoppers use BNPL for at least some of their purchases, with a total of 23% using this option for the majority of their purchases.

Although down slightly from last year, payment by card remains the most popular choice overall (37%), though the e-wallet option has increased its share to 24%. It should be noted that **the figure for cards includes both debit and credit cards, which together accounted for**

Usage of buy-now-pay-later service, 2022



Based on 485 residents of the United States aged 18-64, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "How often do you use a buy-now-pay-later service?" Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

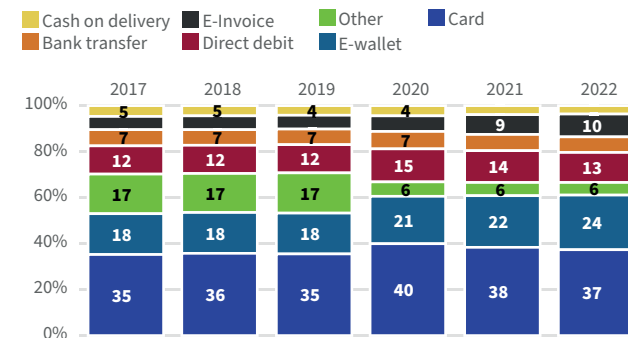


51% of transactions as recently as 2020. Direct debit has also dropped slightly (13%), while a significant 10% prefer to pay via e-invoice, a figure that looks set to rise as the USA seeks to establish a standardised e-invoice model.^[2]

While cryptocurrency was in line to have its biggest year, after enjoying record-breaking advances in 2021, **it has been rocked with traumas in 2022,**^[3] including extreme fluctuations in the value of Bitcoin, along with the collapse of FTX and arrest of its founder Sam Bankman-Fried.^[4]

[1] <https://www.bigcommerce.co.uk/articles/ecommerce/buy-now-pay-later-ecommerce/>
 [2] <https://edicomgroup.com/blog/the-united-states-begins-an-electronic-invoicing-pilot-project>
 [3] <https://time.com/nextadvisor/investing/cryptocurrency/future-of-cryptocurrency/>
 [4] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/dec/12/former-ftx-ceo-sam-bankman-fried-arrested-in-the-bahamas-local-authorities-say>

Preferred payment type for online shopping, 2017-22



Source: Statista



Delivery methods

Arguably the most crucial component in ecommerce is the job of actually getting the product to the customer

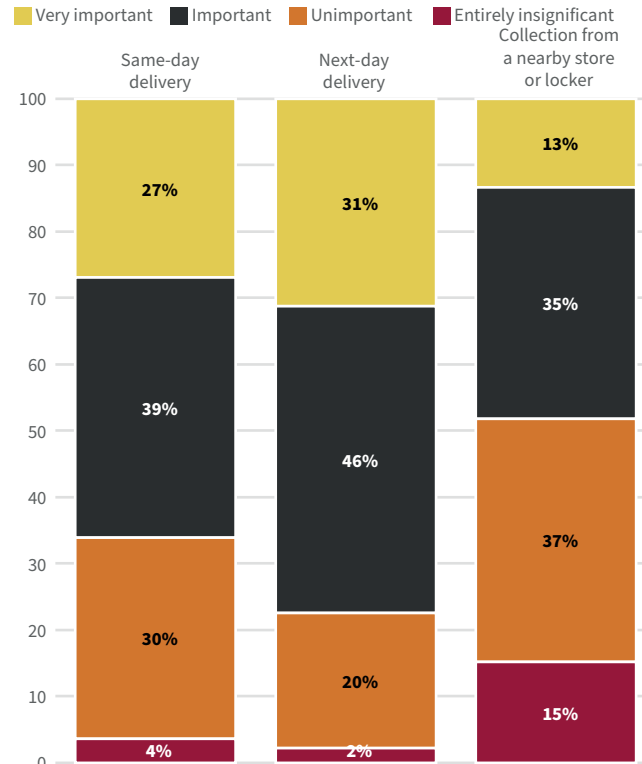
As US shoppers increasingly bring their retail experience online, there has been increasing focus placed on the ‘Last Mile’ stage of the process – the delivery of the goods to the customer at their home or another location of their choice.

While the logistics industry is experiencing a decade of innovation and disruption,^[1] many of the novelties previously predicted – such as fleets of aerial delivery drones – have failed to materialise. The research and development teams at online retail giants such as Amazon now appear to have shifted their focus to the demands of **customers who simply want their goods delivered quicker, cheaper and in a more sustainable way.**^[2]

Engineers at Amazon admit that every innovation they introduce to solve an existing problem ultimately leads to a new and often wholly unexpected problem, or an entire set of problems. **They are encouraged to adopt a ‘first day’ mindset, to tackle problems as though the company is still a start-up** and is looking to do things differently, rather than sticking to “the way we’ve always done it”.

How important is it that online retailers provide the following?

2022



Based on 485 residents of the United States aged 18-64, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "How important to you is it that online retailers provide the following?".

Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

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Self-driving vehicles, autonomous delivery robots and linking the retail process to the Internet of Things have yet to take off, but innovations like 5G inventory management and smart sensor technology are enabling a **faster, more accurate and transparent journey from warehouse to delivery driver to customer.**^[3]

According to our data, 66% of shoppers think Same-day delivery is either Important (27%) or Very Important (39%), while **an overwhelming 77% think Next-day delivery is Important (31%) or Very Important (46%)**. Collection from a nearby store or locker is a less popular option, but while 52% consider it Unimportant or Entirely Insignificant, it remains Important (35%) or Very Important (13%) for a sizeable minority.

The USA offers ecommerce retailers a plethora of highly-experienced shipping partners, including the US Postal service (USPS), FedEx, DHL Express and UPS.^[4] Recent figures claim that **98% of US parcels are successfully delivered on the first attempt**, a 2% improvement from last year.^[5] However, there is potential for parcels to go astray in transit or from the doorstep, with widespread instances of theft by so-called ‘porch pirates’.^[6]

[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkVMchi13rA>

[2] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8J1zRrdGg9c>

[3] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/fedex-express/2021/11/22/technology-is-powering-new-modes-of-delivery-for-an-on-demand-economy/?sh=627db5336783>

[4] <https://rentechdigital.com/swipecart/blog/i/top-10-shipping-partners-for-ecommerce-businesses-in-the-us>

[5] <https://www.parcelmonitor.com/insights/2022-state-of-e-commerce-in-the-us-2021>

[6] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/amazon-train-stolen-packages-thieves-b1993107.html>

Returns

American shoppers are making an ever-greater number of purchases online, and are now sending more of them back

In last year's report we observed that US ecommerce shoppers seemed **noticeably less likely to return an item than their counterparts in Europe and Asia**. Assuming this was in some part due to US merchants making the returns process more painful than many shoppers could tolerate, we suggested the situation would change as companies competed to implement a more frictionless user experience. "Returns tend to be higher when consumers buy online," commented CNBC in early 2022, pointing out that this mode of shopping "makes it easy to toss items into the virtual basket, but hard to visualize in person how they will look or fit".^[1]

While the average ecommerce returns rate is anywhere between 20-30%, the science of returns throws up a number of paradoxical-seeming scenarios.^[2] For one, it is apparent that the more items people buy the more they will inevitably return – the challenge is to keep reducing those return rates. Similarly challenging is the notion that a perfect state is one where every customer is happy with every purchase and there are zero returns. In order

to achieve this, a colossal number of returns must first be negotiated, thereby producing a vast amount of data which can then be trawled to find foolproof solutions.

Despite the former reluctance to return ecommerce purchases, the culture of returns does seem to be taking up residence in the collective psyche. Indeed, it's reported that **delivery workers in the USA have nicknamed the second day in January 'National Returns Day'**.^[3] The sheer size of the USA and the monolithic-seeming nature of its long-established infrastructure means that ingrained practices can be difficult to change.^[4] And yet innovation is apparent as companies adapt their approaches in line with customer demand for greater convenience, along with the need for sustainability at every stage of the process.

Tech giants such as Amazon are now looking to Artificial Intelligence and automation solutions to minimise the possibility of returns in the first place, while implementing hassle-free returns policies when required. There are also **common-sense solutions, such as different retailers (especially non-competitors) working together to share the burden of returns** instead of requiring many thousands of environmentally wasteful journeys to return small items.

Of particular note in 2023 is Beautylish, an ecommerce company specialising in cosmetics, which allows returns up to 90 days after purchase. Shoe retailer Zappos goes



Shipping & receiving companies such as UPS offer multiple returns options

even further, giving customers a full 365 days to return unwanted items. "Longer return windows can actually increase conversions and *decrease* the return rate," reports Webretailer.^[5] "They increase conversions because the customer is more confident that they will be able to return the item if they are not happy with their purchase".

Returns fraud remains an issue for retailers – a larger-scale and sometimes professionalised iteration of the return scams that have plagued individual eBay sellers for many years.^[6] Unfortunately many of the tried and trusted policies for combating return fraud are also guaranteed to inhibit honest customers from making genuine returns, and thereby deter them from using that retailer in future.

[1] <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/25/retailers-average-return-rate-jumps-to-16point6percent-as-online-sales-grow.html>

[2] <https://www.richpanel.com/blog/ecommerce-return-rates>

[3] <https://www.sendcloud.com/state-of-ecommerce-returns-and-beyond/>

[4] <https://www.cfr.org/background/state-us-infrastructure>

[5] <https://www.webretailer.com/shipping-fulfillment-returns/ecommerce-returns/>

[6] <https://www.returnlogic.com/blog/5-steps-to-combat-return-fraud/>

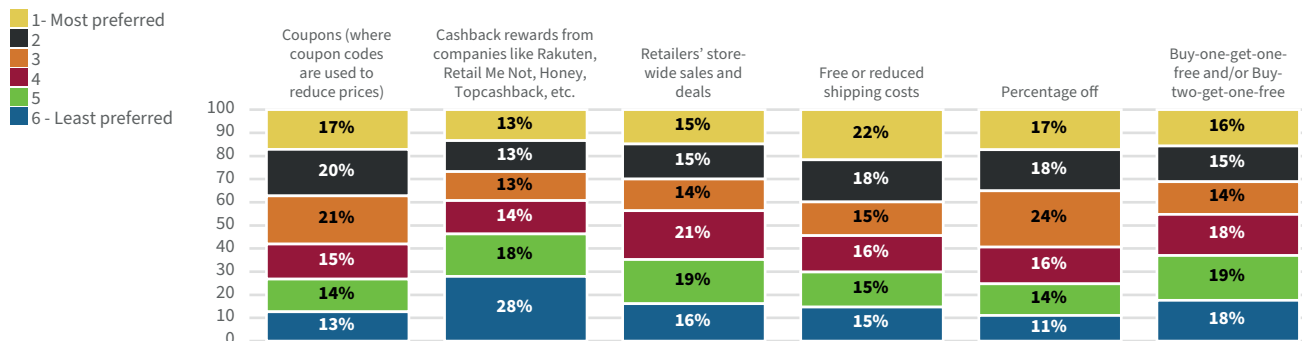
Consumer preferences

A closer look at some of the choices online shoppers in the USA have been making as they seek satisfaction

When examining online shopping frequency in 2022, we see that **in total 75% are now shopping online more than once a month**, a figure which breaks down as 34% more than once a month, 33% more than once a week and 8% more than once a day. Although shopping online much less frequently, it's encouraging to see that **a further 18% shop online more than once a year (and from that number five out of every six shop online more than once every three months)**. At the other extreme, a mere 2% never shop online.

Shopping vouchers have long been a staple of the US shopping landscape, and are proving to be one that is also capable of migrating to online ecommerce. As an excellent way of **funnelling customer activity, encouraging repeat visits and cultivating loyalty, digital vouchers and similar rewards look set to grow in importance**. From our survey, the single most preferred voucher or reward category is simply the one which gives free or reduced shipping costs (22%), followed by reduced-price coupons and percentage off (both 17%).

Preferred vouchers or rewards, by order of preference, 2022



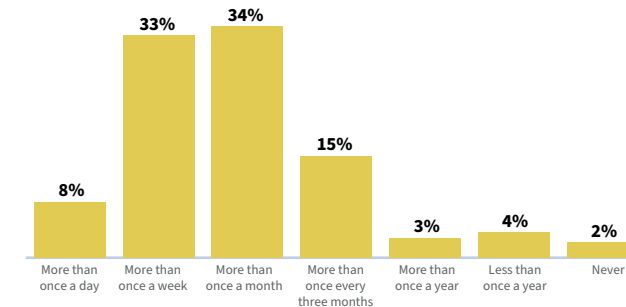
Based on 485 residents of the United States aged 18-64, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "Which vouchers or rewards do you most prefer when shopping? (Please rank the following. Your most preferred = 1)". Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory



Interestingly, the single most unpopular category falls under cashback rewards (from companies like Rakuten, Retail Me Not, Honey, Topcashback, etc.), flagged by 28% as their least preferred option.

Turning to reasons for shopping online, **a full 80% opted for convenience, with 59% citing price and 52% choice**. For 48%, delivery options were key, with 26% citing reviews as important. On the other hand, **'Reasons for not shopping online' saw 53% answer "I only shop in physical stores because I prefer them"**, while 25% indicated that "A family member/other person does all my shopping for me" and for 23% the reasoning was that "I only shop in physical stores because I always have".

Online shopping frequency, 2022



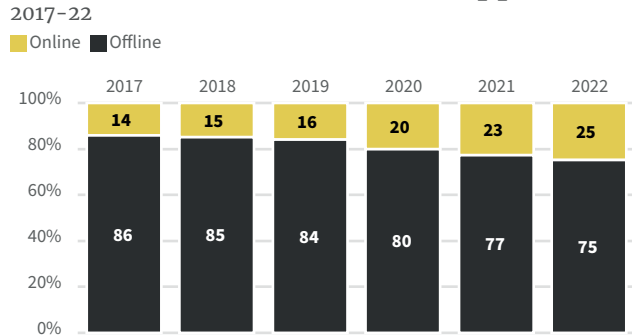
Based on 500 residents of the USA aged 18 and over, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "How often do you shop online?" Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory



The results appear similarly straightforward for the question ‘Why use retailers’ loyalty programme?’, with **66% of participants answering “To get lower prices”, while 56% state “To receive rewards that I can spend/use with the retailer” and 49% “To receive rewards that I can spend/use elsewhere”.**

Three-quarters of Americans still prefer the offline shopping experience, but the number who prefer online shopping has risen by a significant 11% over the last five years. An even greater change has been witnessed in the preferred device for online shopping category, **with 47% now preferring to use a mobile device rather than a desktop computer, a 14% increase since 2017.**

Preferred shopping channel for ecommerce multichannel shoppers (%)

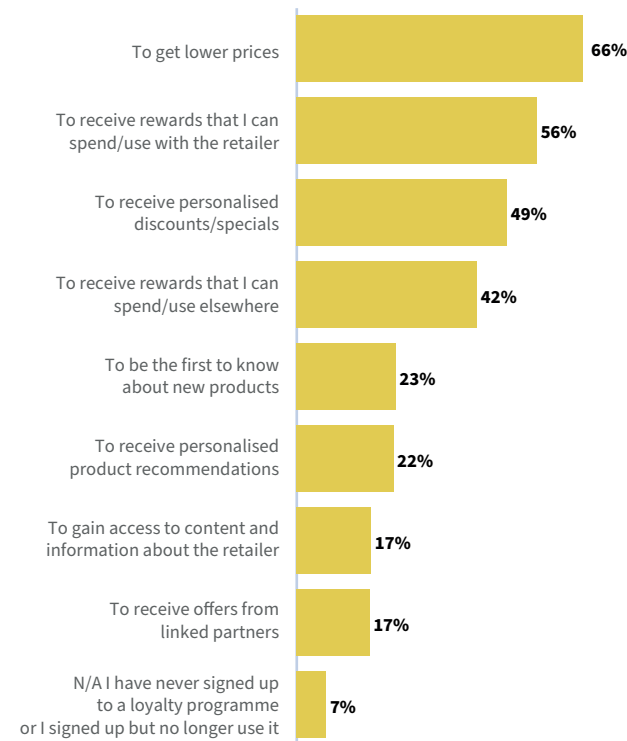


Source: Statista

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Why use retailers’ loyalty programmes?

USA, 2022

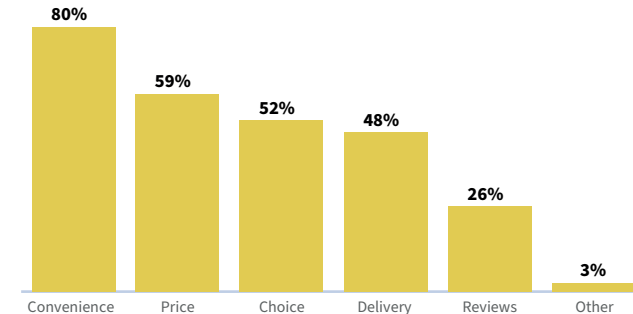


Based on 485 residents of the United States aged 18 and over, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "If you are a member of a retailer's loyalty programme or share your data with them, why do you continue to use it and share your information with the company? (What do you want in return?)"

Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

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Reasons for shopping online, 2022

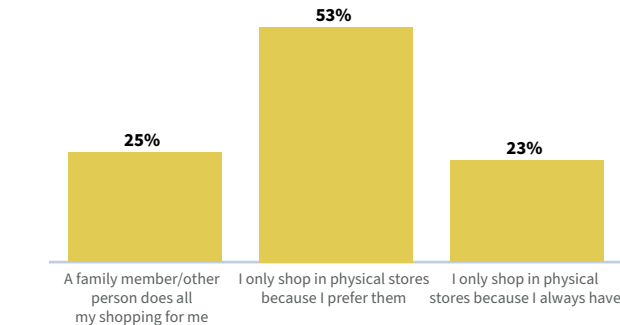


Based on 481 residents of the USA aged 18 and over, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "Why do you shop online?"

Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

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Reasons for not shopping online, 2022



Based on 14 residents of the United States aged 18-64, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "Why do you not shop online?"

Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

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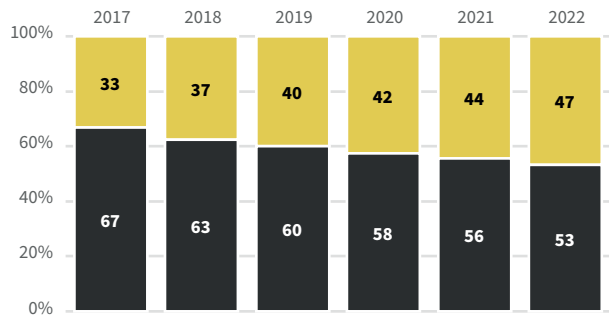
Our research also indicates that US shoppers are becoming more relaxed about sharing personal information with retailers, **as 55% answered “I’m usually OK with it”, while a further 15% classed themselves as particularly eager to share their details.** Only 30% take a negative view, with just 11% claiming they would never or almost never share personal information.

Regarding retailers’ usage of personal information, in the four categories here **only 8-13% answered that they would not allow it under any circumstances**, but 39% are enthusiastic about their personal information being used when it involves them receiving personalised discounts or offers.

Preferred device for online shopping (%)

2017-22

■ Mobile ■ Desktop

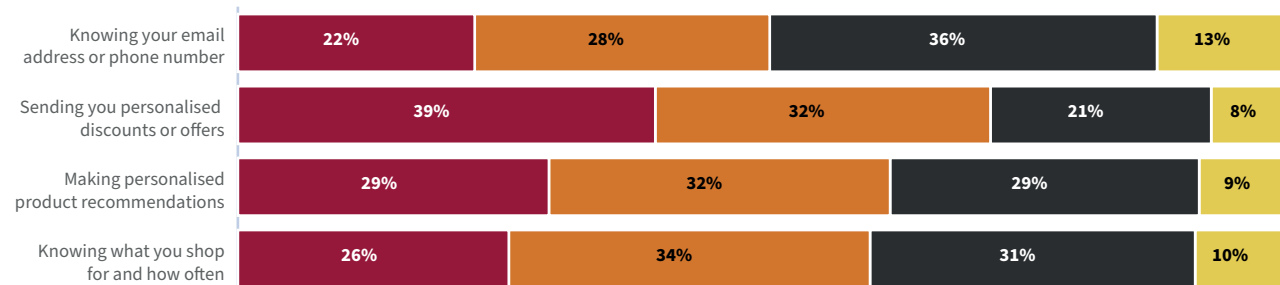


Source: Statista

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Usage of personal information, 2022

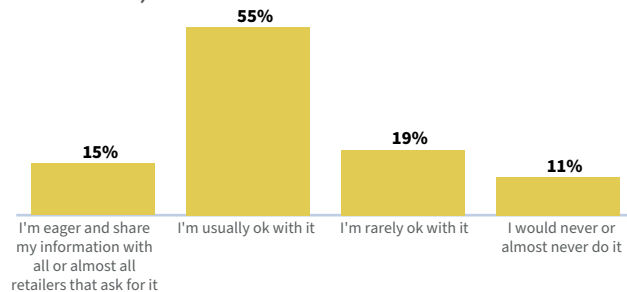
■ I don't mind at all ■ I don't mind if it's clearly advertised and I can see that it benefits me ■ I mind a little bit even if it's clearly advertised and I can see that it benefits me ■ I wouldn't allow it under any circumstances



Based on 485 residents of the United States aged 18 and over, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "How do you feel about a retailer you shop with knowing and using your personal information? How much would you mind the following activities?" Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

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Sharing personal information with retailers, 2022



Based on 485 residents of the United States aged 18 and over, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "Are you happy to get better products or discounts in exchange for sharing your personal information with a retailer?"

Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

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Holiday season

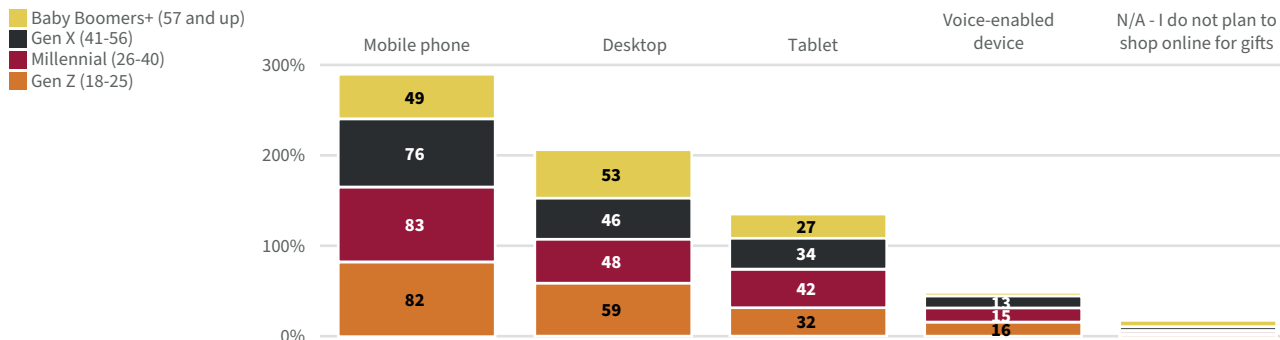
With total online retail sales reaching nearly \$240bn, the 2022 holiday season scaled new heights of success

The USA boasts numerous holidays throughout the year which have evolved into major retail events. In the bricks and mortar realm, this is played out in the stores of popular arts and crafts company Michaels which “transforms every month or two with festive decor for **spring, summer, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, July Fourth, Mardi Gras, and Pride Month**”^[1]

Other notable dates include Valentine’s Day, Saint Patrick’s Day, Superbowl Sunday, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, but the main event – Holiday Season itself – takes place in the fourth quarter. According to figures from the National Retail Federation, **57% of consumers planned to make holiday purchases online in 2022**.^[2]

More eye-opening was the figure that 42.1mn people expected to shop exclusively online on Super Saturday (the Saturday before Christmas, which fell on 17 December). By comparison, 44.1mn planned to shop exclusively in stores, while 72.2mn expected to shop both online and in stores. Early figures suggest that **sales for November’s Cyber**

Device usage intention for holiday shopping, by generation, 2021



Survey period August 3, 2021, Number of respondents 2,092, Age group 18 years and older. Question: "What devices will you use to shop for gifts this year?"
Source: Tinuiti, PureSpectrum via Statista

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Week reached \$35.3bn, topping even 2021’s record-breaking numbers.^[3] Taking the results in chronological order, Thanksgiving (Thursday) raked in \$5.3bn, with a massive jump to \$9.1bn on Black Friday. Saturday saw a respectable \$4.6bn, with a slightly higher \$5bn on Sunday.

Cyber Monday made the biggest haul of all, with \$11.3bn – although inflation and rising prices in the electronics industry must be taken into account. However, as Statista reported, Cyber Monday 2022 still amounted to “the biggest online shopping day in US history”, with total online retail sales for the entire holiday period reaching an impressive \$240bn.^[4]

A substantial amount of holiday season purchases are still made on desktop computers, with the highest number, 59%, actually from the youngest age group, Generation Z (aged 18-25). For Gen Z, Millennial and Gen X shoppers, the percentages are much higher for mobile (82%, 83% and 76% respectively) and even the more senior Baby Boomers are now just under 50% for mobile. Tablets retain a smaller, but by no means insignificant proportion of transactions – with the highest percentage being 42% for the Millennial age group.

[1] <https://www.marketscreener.com/quote/stock/HUBSPOT-INC-45166580/news/HubSpot-9-Product-Category-Marketing-Examples-to-Inspire-Your-Own-37435205/>
[2] <https://nrf.com/research-insights/holiday-data-and-trends/winter-holidays>
[3] <https://roirevolution.com/blog/2022-holiday-ecommerce-stats-trends-predictions>
[4] <https://www.statista.com/topics/1103/holiday-season-e-commerce/#topicOverview>

Inflation

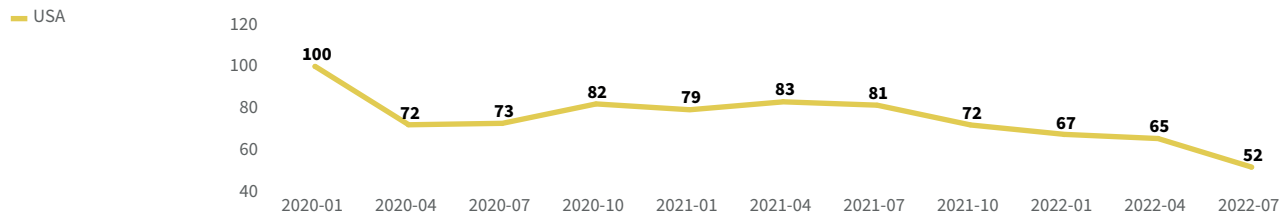
Uneven price rises lead to a distortion of consumers' spending patterns, along with the erosion of real income

Perhaps surprisingly, our research suggests that throughout 2022 US consumers have been **more concerned about inflation than about the possibility of a recession**. "Inflation weighs on consumers' purchasing power by slowing or even reversing gains in real wages and wealth," stated a Deloitte report in April 2022. "It often forces households – especially low- and medium-income ones – to pull back on discretionary spending."^[1]

According to the Indexed Consumer Price Index, prices held steady for the duration of 2020, the year of the COVID-19 Pandemic, rising by just one percent by the end of the year (and actually falling in April). **Prices subsequently rose by 8% between January 2021 and January 2022**, and by a further 6% by July 2022.

During the same period, consumer confidence has fallen significantly. According to figures from Michigan University, the sharpest drop coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, **with a 28% fall between January and April 2020**. The situation then steadied, with an 11%

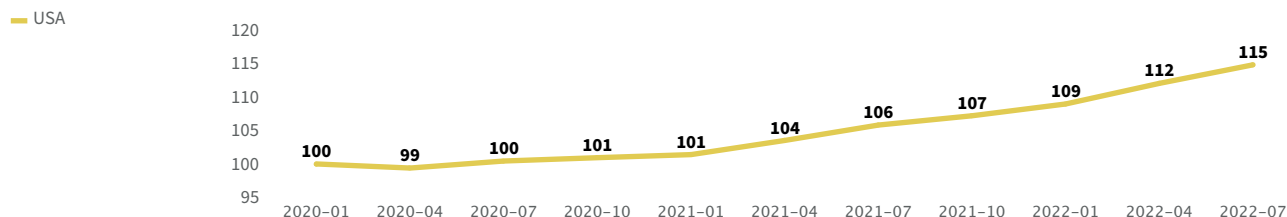
Consumer confidence survey, 2020–22



Source: Michigan University. Accessed via TheGlobalEconomy

© RetailX 2022

Indexed Consumer Price Index, 2020–22



Index January 2020=100. Source: Diverse National Institutes of Statistics

© RetailX 2022

increase over the next 12 months.^[2] However, by July 2021 consumer confidence was falling again, a process that continued into 2022 **when it reached a new low at just 52% of what it had been 30 months previously**.

"Overall sentiment remains low by historical standards and remains consistent with a recession to come," commented Michigan University economist Joanne Hsu in October 2022, while also describing the situation as "worrisome".

There was some relatively positive news towards the end of 2022, as economists noted that inflation in November was, at 7.1%, lower than the predicted 7.3%.^[3] However, **annual inflation looks set to remain at more than three times the 2% target** set by the Federal Reserve, despite it having raised interest rates to combat the problem.^[4]

[1] <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/insights/economy/spotlight/rising-inflation-poses-risks-for-consumer-spending>

[2] <https://news.umich.edu/sentiment-at-standstill-amid-economic-uncertainty/>

[3] <https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/inflation-cpi>

[4] <https://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/pressreleases/monetary20221102a1.htm>

The Largest 100

US shoppers still prefer homegrown companies, and multi-sector retail giants continue to dominate

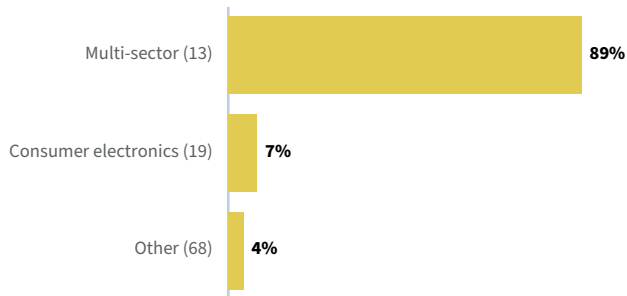
Looking at web traffic by sector for the Largest 100, we see that **89% of traffic is multi-sector (just 13 companies in total), while 7% is consumer electronics (19 companies)**. All other categories, comprising 68 companies, reach just 4% of the total. This marks a change from the figures we recorded last year, when multi-sector companies claimed 64.8% of web traffic, with consumer electronics reaching 10.8% and fashion 5.1%.

In total, 94% of web visits to USA-based companies in the Largest 100 come from the USA itself, with just 6% generated by the rest of the world. **Of the USA Largest 100, an overwhelming 75% are based in the USA itself.** Of the remaining 25%, 7% are based in China, 4% in Japan, 3% in the UK, and all other countries total 11%.

A different picture emerges when web traffic to the USA Largest 100 is split by consumer location – 43% of web traffic is generated by the USA itself, with 7% for both the UK and Germany, 6% for Japan, 4% for Canada and 3% for India. All other countries combined come to 31%.

Web traffic by sector in United States

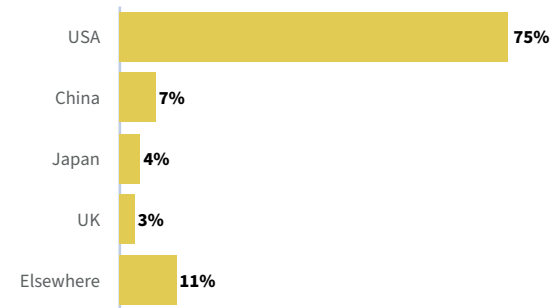
Web visits of local consumers to the United States Largest 100 retailers



The number of retailers in a sector is shown in parentheses
Source: RetailX, drawing on data from SimilarWeb



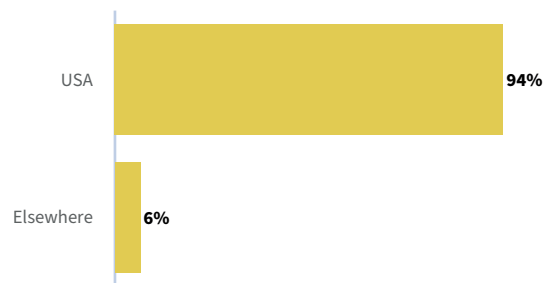
Where the United States of America Largest 100 are based



Source: RetailX, drawing on data from SimilarWeb



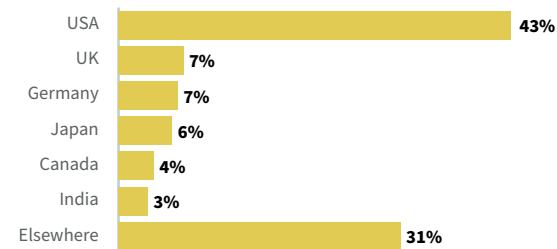
Countries where the United States of America Largest 100 retailers are based, along with the traffic they attract



Source: RetailX, drawing on data from SimilarWeb



Web traffic to the largest United States of America-based retailers split by consumer location



Data from 75 retailers are used. These are all the United States of America-based retailers that belong to the United States of America Largest 100.

Source: RetailX, drawing on data from SimilarWeb



Social media

Online retailers continue to engage customers using Facebook and Instagram, and also in the metaverse

A long-established but still-crucial element of the online ecommerce landscape, **social media continues to evolve, and is also taking on new forms in the metaverse.** While it has long been assumed that even hugely successful companies such as Facebook and Twitter have a built-in expiry date and will sooner or later wither and die like their ill-fated forerunner MySpace. In response, the social media companies have expended much creative and commercial energy looking for ways to extend their lifespans and expand into new areas of profitability.

According to Hootsuite, **26.5% of social media users currently go to social platforms in order to find products to buy.**^[1] Figures from mid-2022 showed Facebook as the USA's most popular social media platform, used by 74.2% of adults, followed by Facebook Messenger (61.1%) and Instagram (60.7%). **TikTok, Twitter and Pinterest remain strong** and influential with 42.4%, 41.8% and 39% respectively.^[2]

In terms of influence on buying a product, according to our research **49% of shoppers said that content creators**

such as social media influencers were 'very likely' (16%) or 'somewhat likely' (33%) to play a part in them buying a product. By contrast, only 26% declared themselves 'very unlikely' to be influenced in this way.

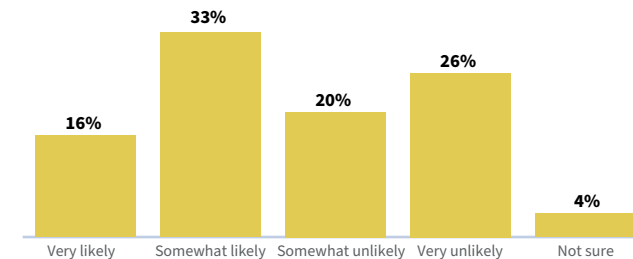
Advertising on social media continues to have massive reach. However, it is also one of the things that users complain most about, and so it's extremely worthwhile for merchants to go the extra mile in targeting the right audiences. **Customer Support also remains a must.** As social media is essentially a conversation in a public space, any interaction with customers can be seen and amplified (for good or bad) by other users.

As with so much in the US ecommerce realm, it was in the holiday season that the state of play with social media came most sharply into focus. According to Statista, **"About one-third of consumers expected to use social media for holiday shopping purposes,** making it a high-powered reach channel for marketers".^[3]

While exploring social media trends, it's also necessary to keep up with what's happening in social's final frontier: the metaverse. With the film sequel *Avatar: The Way of Water* reaping almost \$2bn at the global box-office, the idea of **using digital avatars to interact with others while using Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality technology to enhance our lives has never been stronger or more relevant.** As the metaverse continues to evolve, it's

How influential are content creators such as social media influencers?

Influence on buying a product, 2022



Based on 485 residents of the United States aged 18-64, August 2022. Results are stratified by age and gender. Question: "In your experience, how likely are content creators such as social media influencers to point you to buy products?"

Source: RetailX Consumer Observatory

© RetailX 2022

imperative that online retailers establish a foothold – and preferably a stronghold – to negate the possibility of getting left behind.

Major US brands establishing themselves in the metaverse include names like Nike, Hulu, Walmart and Verizon.^[4] The premise itself is remarkable enough, but the commercial opportunities now coming into view are almost as mind-blowing as the metaverse itself.

[1] <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-ecommerce/>

[2] <https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/most-popular-social-media-in-the-us>

[3] <https://www.statista.com/topics/1103/holiday-season-e-commerce/#topicOverview>

[4] <https://influencermarketinghub.com/metaverse-ecommerce/>

Sustainability

In a land where money talks, consumer concern for the planet is an ever-growing part of the US ecommerce experience

In the USA, consumer awareness of environmental issues is set to remain a prime issue in 2023 and beyond. According to a recent report from Forbes Technology Council, “82% of shoppers want brands to embrace sustainable and people-first practices, and Gen-Z is leading the charge.”^[1] The report claims that **75% of Zoomer shoppers now see sustainability as more important than brand names.**

While the USA under President Biden formally rejoined the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in February 2021 (having been withdrawn during the tenure of President Trump), tangible results have yet to materialise. The Paris Agreement **binds the world’s nations together in working to achieve net zero, to prevent environmental loss and damage, and to protect biodiversity.** Other aims include investing in renewable energy and helping global populations adapt to change.^[2]

Figures from the World Bank show that **Carbon Dioxide emissions from the USA greatly exceed those produced by its North American neighbours Canada and Mexico**

combined.^[3] While it’s true that the combined populations of Canada (38mn) and Mexico (130mn) only amount to about half of the US, the latter’s Carbon emissions remain a cause for concern. It should be noted, however, that Canada’s emissions are actually higher in terms of metric tons per capita – 15.4, compared to USA’s 14.7. Mexico’s are dramatically lower at 3.5.

According to a 2022 survey by BlueYonder, **64% of US consumers are willing to spend more for sustainable packaging**, while 81% of shoppers now recycle shopping bags and boxes at least half the time. Cleaning products appears to be the category that causes most environmental concern, with 64% saying they would be more likely to spend more if the product is manufactured sustainably. By comparison, **52% would spend more on apparel and 45% would spend more on beauty products that are manufactured sustainably.**^[4] The number of US shoppers who find environmental factors entirely insignificant is now in the minority. Moreover, as they are unlikely to boycott a product based on this issue, it can be argued that their stance carries less weight than more environmentally-conscious consumers who threaten to take their purchasing power elsewhere.

Sustainability-minded brands in the US range from Grove Collaborative, specialising in Green household cleaning supplies, to Patagonia, selling eco-friendly outerwear. In the fashion world, **popular and influential**



© NPS photo by Alex Stillson

Cyclist in Glacier National Park: 85% of Americans consider sustainability “a core imperative”

brands such as Shein have launched resale platforms, capitalising on the boom in second-hand sales while also supporting the sustainable practices increasingly demanded by their customers.

[1] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2022/12/05/what-recent-trends-say-about-sustainable-shopping-in-2023/>

[2] <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-officially-rejoins-the-paris-agreement/>

[3] <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=MX-US-CA>

[4] <https://blueyonder.com/knowledge-center/collateral/consumers-pave-the-way-for-sustainable-retail-and-commerce>

NIKE, Inc.

Comprising the Nike, Jordan and Converse brands, NIKE, Inc. is the USA's undisputed titan of sportswear, and an ecommerce innovator with stratospheric ambition

Size matters in the USA, and while the old-time entrepreneurial spirit has found a new lease of life in the age of the digital start-up, the biggest players of US online retail are companies that would not seem all that unfamiliar to a shopper of 100 years ago. With the notable exception of Amazon, the heavy hitters of US ecommerce – like **Walmart, Target, Home Depot and Best Buy** – still generate much of their revenue via thousands of bricks and mortar stores.

What makes NIKE, Inc. different and genuinely innovative is its commitment to the future of sport, an obsession with smashing records, and some seriously long-term strategic thinking in the digital realm – not to mention a neat line in inspirational slogans like ‘Just Do It’ and ‘No Finish Line’.

“With the Internet, we have an opportunity to recapture a level of intimacy with our consumer and simultaneously drive potential buyers to our retail partners”. This was legendary Nike co-founder Phil Knight, quoted in a February 1999 article titled *Nike Runs With E-Commerce... But Slowly*.^[1]

Nearly a quarter of a century later Nike has not only learned to run with ecommerce, but also to set the pace, occupying a **unique space where sports, fashion and lifestyle connect in one of the world's most powerful brands.**



Nike's NBA City Edition, 2022

In 2011 Nike launched its ambitious Direct to Consumer model, an iteration of which is still in play today. **After ten years its D2C revenues had more than doubled from 16% to 38%**, and the fact that Nike had already chosen this route meant that the company was well placed to withstand the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020. Even before the Pandemic changed everything, Nike had embarked upon perhaps its most ambitious step yet. In November 2019 it cut ties with Amazon, the world's largest online retailer, **after the failure of a pilot scheme**

intended to eliminate the sale of counterfeit Nike products on the site.^[2] For now it looks as though this risk has paid off, and the company named after the Greek goddess of Victory shows no sign of stepping down from the podium any time soon.

[1] <https://www.ecommercetimes.com/story/nike-runs-with-e-commerce-but-slowly-397.html>

[2] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2020/01/22/why-nike-cut-ties-with-amazon-and-what-it-means-for-other-retailers/?sh=ee9677864ff6>

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Conclusion

We hope that you have found our research and analysis to be of interest and commercial value. We would be very pleased to hear from you with questions, suggestions or comments, and in particular we would like to hear about any areas you think we should include in the 2023 report. Please get in touch via:

research@retailx.net

RESEARCH:

Research Analyst Ludovica Quaglieri

Research Manager Anna Segarra Fas

Research Director Martin Shaw

CEO Ian Jindal

EDITORIAL:

Managing Editor Jonathan Wright

Editor Pat Reid

Production Editor Gary Tipp

DESIGN:

Art Editor Daniel Tero

MARKETING:

Marketing and Circulation Addison Southam

marketing@retailx.net

SALES:



Commercial Director Andy James andy@retailx.net

Group Creative Solutions Director Marvin Roberts

marvin@retailx.net

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RetailX

123 Cannon Street,
London, EC4N 5AU
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Global Retail Research RV

Van Heuven Goedhartiaan 13D
1181LE Amstelveen
The Netherlands

