DELIVERY UX • 7 min read • ▶ Listen

The UX of delivering parcels

I shipped identical boxes, less than a mile, with 6 different delivery companies.

One was seized by the police—oh, to be a fly on the wall when they opened it.

Shipping and logistics companies aren't just moving goods, they play a key role in the general user experience of eCommerce.

84% of shoppers claim that they'd stop buying items from a retailer after just one poor delivery experience [1].

And in a separate study, 94% of consumers said that they would actually *blame* the retailer directly, for any problems [2].

That relationship, between retailer, courier and customer, is what makes this industry —where most providers sell essentially identical services—a great example to study.

What we'll cover:

💸   Why pricing transparency is key

⚡   5 ideas to make your forms easier to use

🌧️   Why we all seek reassurance post-purchase

💬   The role of communication in UX

🥞   Plus many more UX tips and ideas

Buckle up, the user experience of booking and shipping parcels is probably *worse than you realise*.

1. Obscure pricing

Let's set the scene with some context.

These are the 6 companies I selected, and how much it cost to ship each of my parcels:

Cost of shipping my 1kg parcel, 0.4 miles

EVRi	£4.28
PARCEL FORCE WORLDWIDE	£7.40
dpd	£7.67
FedEx	£9.66
UPS	£10.71
DHL	£15.56

Cost of 1-day delivery, with drop-off

It's not just the disparity in pricing that's surprising—even getting a quote is awkward.

For example, look at this from FedEx:

Expected delivery: not available for this shipment	
Shipping costs	UKL9.66 ⌃
Transportation costs	UKL43.73
+ Base rate	UKL41.01
+ FUEL SURCHARGE	UKL1.11
+ United Kingdom VAT	UKL1.61
Total discount	UKL34.07
- Volume discount	UKL34.07
Total	**UKL9.66**

I'm sending a single parcel. How have I been given a volume discount?

Similar to the competition for international payments, as the courier industry becomes more commodotised, **price** is a key differentiator between providers.

To reel you in, some of the couriers have a separate tool, allowing you to get a price *before* going through the hassle of completing all of the forms.

This kind of price transparency is similar in concept to what Wise does (very effectively).

Leading with your prices   WISE

Wise are so transparent with their prices, that they'll link directly to a fee calculator on their splash page (i.e., before you've made any commitment to use the app).
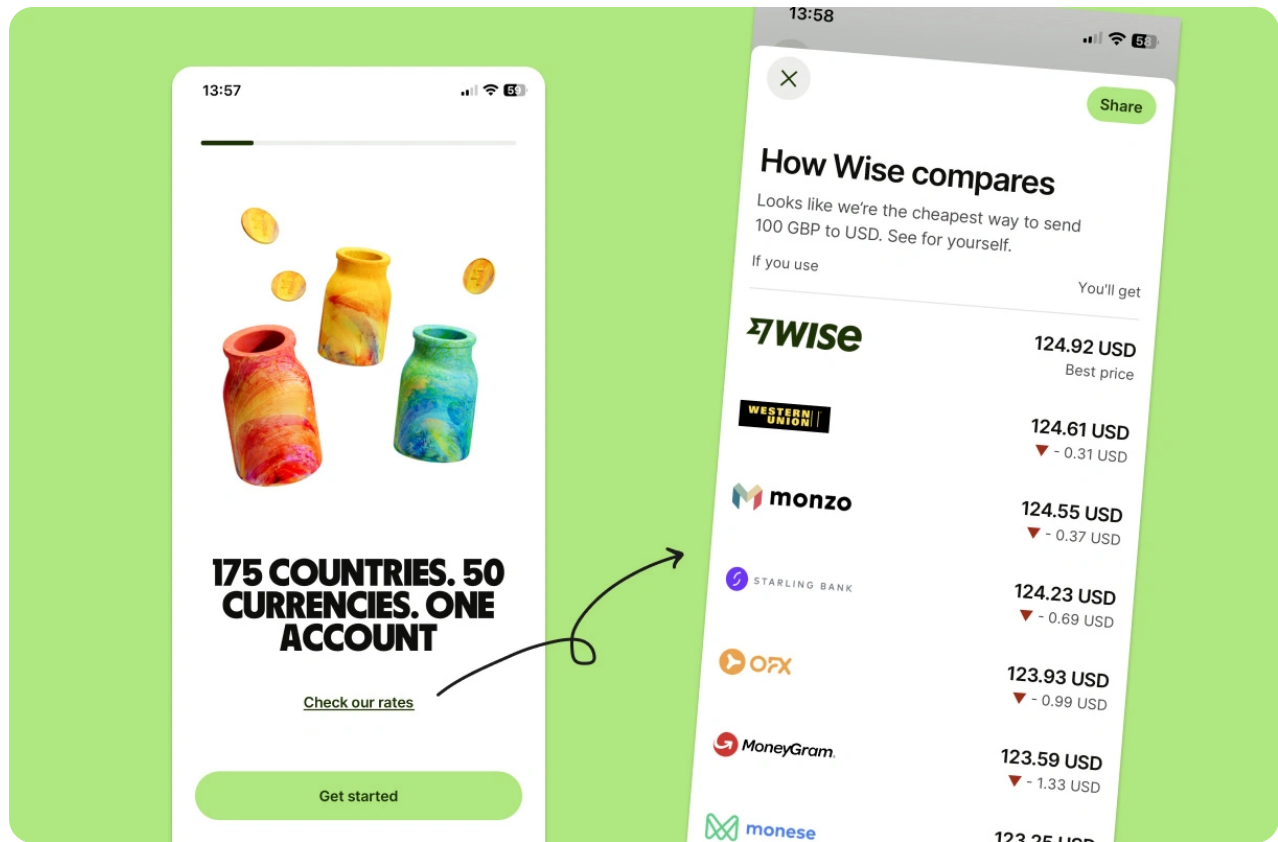
Browse all UX Bites →

But in most instances it's been executed without finesse.

Here are 3 UPS screenshots for identical deliveries, taken within 5 minutes of each other. All with different prices—one is even 10x more expensive.

The quote	Price #1	Price #2

If I can simply refresh a results page, and get shown a materially different price, how can I trust that I'm *ever* getting a good deal?

2. Inefficient booking flows

FedEx's set-up process was so convoluted, that after calling customer services 3 times, and more than 200 clicks, **I stopped counting and gave up**.

On the final call, the app was outright not working. I listened as the guy audibly gave up, let out a sigh, and suggested "*maybe just go on fedex.com*".

It'd amaze me if small retailers were happy, or even able to, use the interface that I had access to.

But across the board, there's **so much low-hanging fruit**.

These companies use almost none of the common techniques to reduce effort throughout a form.

5 techniques to improve your form design:

⚡ **Auto-focus on first field**
When the page loads, don't force the user to click into the first field.

Select the right field data types

⌨️ So that the operating system brings up the most suitable keyboard (e.g., numerical).

Auto-proceed on suitable fields

👉 If you're asking for a 6-digit code, auto-proceed once they've entered the 6th digit.

Suggest sensible default options

🇬🇧 For example, if the sender's address is in the UK, default to a UK phone number.

Utilise keyboard 'next' buttons

➡️ So it focuses on the next field, rather than just close the keyboard.

As a result, the amount of waste and inefficiency in these flows is truly mind-blowing.

Clicks to create account & send parcel

	Clicks
EVRi	50
PARCELFORCE WORLDWIDE	50
dpd	58
DHL	61
ups	87
FedEx	N/A

For comparison, this is in some cases, 4x more clicks than it takes to open a real bank account.

Even worse, most haven't built the functionality to actually let you book a delivery using the app.

DHL	✅	DPD	❌
Evri	✅	FedEx	❌
Parcelforce	❌	UPS	❌

Instead you get palmed off onto a non-responsive website, which is clearly designed for desktop use only.

It's why there are no slides for this study—I'd enjoy making the memes, but it'd be an incoherent mess.

FedEx   **UPS**   **DPD**

Optimising your form design (i.e., booking flows, purchases and sign-up), can be one of the most impactful ways to improve conversion rates.

And it's usually just a case of listening to and implementing the basic [design principles](#)—not an improvement through innovation or new features.

3. Reassurance seeking

Imagine if after booking an Airbnb, you couldn't **immediately** see that reservation in your account.

I've observed that moment of anxiety across many services and industries. It's an instinctive desire to seek reassurance.

Importantly, this can be true even if you've *already* seen an "action complete" status at the end of the booking form.

The distinction is that for a purchase without an immediate reward, your task remains incomplete. You still need to drop the parcel off, or wait for it to be collected.

Once the temporary status is off-screen, you **crave a place to store the details, and track the progression of that incomplete task**.

What I'm describing is a second-order benefit of the **tracking number**.

This is why it's damaging when the tracking number you've just been given errors, or shows confusing statuses.

Parcelforce   **DHL**

Saying "*estimated delivery: **not available***", entirely ignores this behaviour.

In most cases, the tracking number only started working once the parcel had been collected or dropped off.

I can understand this from a technical perspective, but that leaves hours, if not days, where the user has nowhere to see this booking, or **learn about the process**.

Take a look at this UX Bite from Revolut, who've tackled this problem excellently.

Ordering a new card   REVOLUT

After ordering a new card on Revolut, you'll see this, which serves both as a reassuring reminder, and a tracking link.

Let's summarise why this is so **effective at reducing both anxiety**, and the
🧠 **Cognitive Load** .

🚦 **1. It shows the current status**
i.e., the order is in progress.

🚗 **2. It explains the process**
i.e., the next step is for Revolut to post your card.

⏳ **3. Gives context about the timeline**
i.e., estimated to arrive on the 8th.

📦 **4. A status with permanence**
i.e., you're reassured that you can always come back here to check the
tracking status.

In fact, Revolut might have done this to counter-act the unreliable nature of **third party tracking numbers**.

4. Receiving a parcel

Using the data from a poll of tens of thousands of UK consumers, it seems like there's a slight correlation (or perhaps causation) between price and customer satisfaction. [3]

But given that there's such a broad *range* of prices (£4.28 → £15.56), and the process of getting a quote is difficult, how is a small retailer supposed to use this data to comfortably make a decision?

How do they not overpay?

Here's that customer satisfaction data, **ordered by price**.

Customer satisfaction

EVRi   19.6% (#6)

PARCEL FORCE   38.2% (#4)
WORLDWIDE

dpd   59.8% (#1)

FedEx   37.7% (#5)

ups   40.7% (#3)

DHL   44.3% (#2)

% who voted "Great" out of Great, Okay, Poor.

Why are some of these services disliked more than others?

At first I assumed that they were just worse at delivering parcels, but the most reliable data I could find suggests that DPD (the best rated by customers) actually has a similar number of failed deliveries as Evri (the worst rated). [4]

One major differentiating factor here is communication.

UPS didn't send the recipient anything on the day.

Parcelforce texted me, Evri emailed me, but **only DPD used time-sensitive notifications**.

It's executed brilliantly, and may help explain why DPD consistently perform better in customer satisfaction surveys.

5. Breakfast in a box

Out of the 5 scheduled deliveries, **only 4 arrived**.

DHL collected my parcel, took it 40 miles away, and through customs for a security check.

At this point they would have been confronted with a very strange sight. In each box, was a single Weetabix.

I contacted customer services 17 times in 49 days, after which they informed me that it'd been seized by the police.

And yet, until the 49th day, I was repeatedly promised that it would still arrive, and there was just a backlog.

It's clearly a common problem, at least in the UK.

34% of UK shoppers claim that they experienced a delivery problem with the *most recent* parcel they received (or tried to) [5].

Even more frustratingly, the interface was as confused as I imagine the customs officials were.

Day 1   **...**   **Day 49**

Lets consider the *messaging* of this for a moment:

Status of 'exception'

1 What does this mean? It's an exception to what? It was exceptionally tasty with milk?

Shipment closed

2 Why's it closed? Is it not arriving then?

Scheduled delivery date not available

3 This replaced "shipment closed", so is it open again?

Contact DHL

4 Why can't you contact me? It's been 49 days.

Those statements may be technically correct—likely referring to some functional status.

But no care has gone into **contextualising what the user is shown**.

In fact, 🐨 **Fuzzy Context** like this often confuses the user *even more*.

For example, trying to work out what "shipment closed" means, when customer services will tell you that the parcel is *still expected to arrive*.

Summary

Most people I've spoken to have visceral opinions on a number of courier services.

Clearly, delivering the parcel safely is the most important factor to consider, and a few bad experiences create an impression that's hard to shift.

But whilst we rightly hold that specific delivery company responsible, the data suggests we usually attribute blame **towards the retailer**.

Small businesses should view their choice of shipping provider as an extension of their own user experience.

And logistics companies should quickly start leaning into the value that they can provide *their* customers (retailers), by investing in UX.

Studies referenced:

[1] 84% of consumers will not come back to shop from you after just one poor delivery experience (Convery, 2022).

[2] 94% of customers will blame the online retailer for a poor delivery experience (Supply Chain Dive, 2016).

[3] MoneySavingExpert poll about customer satisfaction (link).

[4] Citizens Advice 'annual parcels league table', published November 2023.

[5] 34% of UK shoppers claim that they experienced a delivery problem with the most recent parcel they received (Citizens Advice, 2023).

STUDY COMPLETE

That was an easy way to consume 50 hours
of UX research, right?

What will you dive into next?

All of the UX analysis on Built for Mars is original, and was researched and written by me, Peter Ramsey.

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