STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Ecommerce Returns SOP

Document no.	SOP-ECM-003
Revision	1.0
Owner	Customer Experience Manager
Effective date	September 15, 2026
Review cycle	Every 12 months

1. Purpose

To handle customer return requests consistently and fairly, from initial request through refund or exchange, while keeping the customer informed at each step.

2. Scope

Applies to customer-initiated return requests, RMA issuance, and refund or exchange processing. Physical inspection and disposition of returned items at the warehouse are covered by a separate SOP.

Definitions

RMA	Return Merchandise Authorization, the reference number issued to a customer before they ship an item back.
Return window	The number of days after delivery during which a customer is eligible to request a return under the store's policy.
Store credit	A refund issued as credit toward a future purchase on the store instead of back to the original payment method.
Restocking fee	A fee deducted from a refund for certain return reasons or item conditions, per the store's stated policy.

3. Responsibilities

Customer Support Agent	Reviews return requests, issues RMAs, and communicates status to the customer.
Customer Experience Manager	Sets return policy application rules, approves exceptions, and monitors return trends.
Returns Clerk	Receives and inspects the returned item at the warehouse and confirms its condition.
Billing Coordinator	Processes the refund or store credit once the return is confirmed.

RACI matrix

Activity	Customer Support Agent	Customer Experience Manager	Returns Clerk	Billing Coordinator
Review return request	R/A	A	-	-
Issue RMA to customer	R/A	A	I	-

Activity	Customer Support Agent	Customer Experience Manager	Returns Clerk	Billing Coordinator
Confirm returned item condition	I	A	R	-
Approve a policy exception	R	R/A	-	I
Process refund or exchange	I	A	I	R

R = Responsible, A = Accountable, C = Consulted, I = Informed

4. Materials and PPE

Materials, tools and systems

- Ecommerce platform order and returns dashboard
- Return policy reference sheet
- RMA and prepaid label generation tool
- Customer notification email or SMS templates
- Refund and exchange request log
- Payment processor or gateway dashboard

5. Procedure

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.1	**Receive the return request** Log the return request from the customer's self-service portal, email or chat, capturing the order number, item, reason and any supporting photo provided.	Customer Support Agent	☐
5.2	**Check eligibility against policy** Verify the order falls within the return window and the item and reason are eligible under the store's return policy before proceeding. **Checkpoint:** The order date and item are confirmed against the published return window before an RMA is issued.	Customer Support Agent	☐
5.3	**Decide refund, exchange or store credit** Confirm with the customer whether they want a refund, an exchange for a different size or item, or store credit, and note their preference on the request.	Customer Support Agent	☐
5.4	**Issue the RMA and shipping label** Generate the RMA number and, if the policy provides one, a prepaid return shipping label, and send both to the customer with return instructions.	Customer Support Agent	☐
5.5	**Handle a request outside policy** For a request outside the standard return window or policy, such as a late request or a final-sale item, escalate to the customer experience manager for an exception decision instead of denying it outright.	Customer Support Agent	☐
5.6	**Approve or deny a policy exception** Review the escalated request and either approve an exception with clear reasoning or confirm the denial, and document the decision for consistency in future cases. **Warning:** Avoid making one-off exceptions without documenting the reason; inconsistent handling of similar requests creates customer complaints and disputes.	Customer Experience Manager	☐

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.7	**Track the return shipment** Monitor the return shipment's tracking status and follow up with the customer if it has not shipped within the timeframe stated in the return instructions.	Customer Support Agent	☐
5.8	**Confirm receipt and inspection** Once the warehouse receives and inspects the returned item, check the recorded condition and grade against the RMA before proceeding with refund or exchange. **Checkpoint:** The returned item's condition and grade are recorded against the RMA before a refund or exchange is triggered.	Returns Clerk	☐
5.9	**Apply a restocking fee if applicable** If the return reason or item condition qualifies for a restocking fee under policy, calculate and apply it before finalizing the refund amount.	Customer Support Agent	☐
5.10	**Process the refund or exchange** Process the refund to the original payment method or issue store credit, or trigger a new order for an exchange, once the return is confirmed received and inspected.	Billing Coordinator	☐
5.11	**Notify the customer of completion** Send the customer a confirmation once the refund, credit or exchange is processed, including the amount and expected timeframe for it to appear.	Customer Support Agent	☐
5.12	**Review return reason trends** Review return reasons and volume by product monthly to identify listing, sizing or quality issues that may be driving avoidable returns.	Customer Experience Manager	☐

6. Quality checks

- Every RMA issued is checked against the return window and policy first.
- Refunds are processed only after the returned item's condition is confirmed at the warehouse.
- Policy exceptions are documented with a reason for consistency.
- Customers receive a completion notification once their refund or exchange is processed.

7. Records

- Return request and RMA log
- Policy exception decisions
- Return shipment tracking records
- Monthly return reason trend report

8. KPIs

- Average time from return request to refund processed
- Return rate as a percentage of orders
- Percentage of returns resulting in exchange versus refund
- Top return reasons by product

9. Common mistakes

- Issuing a refund before the returned item is confirmed received and inspected.
- Applying the return policy inconsistently between similar customer requests.
- Not following up on a return shipment that never arrived.
- Skipping the return reason trend review, missing a product issue driving repeat returns.

10. Revision history

Revision	Date	Description	Reviewed by
1.0	September 15, 2026	Initial release	Alexa Uskova

Approval

Prepared by	Approved by	Date

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