

Exploring and Evaluating the Parcel Locker

A Swedish consumer perspective

A growing e-commerce in Sweden, with an increase of 16 % only in 2014, leads to limited capacity at postal agents and a service request both from consumers and e-retailers. A solution could be the parcel lockers to collect and return parcels, which can be administrated unmanned and used by the consumer at any time. Several countries are already using this logistic solution, but Sweden has not adopted the system yet. Furthermore, knowledge is missing on how the consumer likes this service.

Have you experienced the need to collect or return a parcel after you get off from work only to discover that the postal agent has closed for the day? Or have you avoided buying anything online, since it feels tedious to return it? Or is it always long queues at the postal agent when you get there? If so, you would surely appreciate using a parcel locker.

The parcel locker does not demand any interaction with service personnel and can be placed indoors as well as outdoors. The locker can be used at all times, or as long as the location (mall, supermarket etc.) is open. The parcel locker will serve as an accessible and flexible alternative to the postal agents.

One controls the locker from a touch screen, which provides guidance through the process. When collecting a parcel you enter pin codes that you received in a text or in an e-mail, and then one of the slots will open containing your parcel. When returning a parcel, a label with a bar code is scanned and a slot will open. Afterwards you can chose to get an e-mail containing the receipt.

In February 2015, PostNord started a pilot together with the e-retailer Zalando. Thereafter, an experiment was conducted with researcher letting participants use the parcel locker, while observing how the users interacted with the parcel locker. To capture the participant's thoughts about the parcel lockers interviews were done too. 60 participants were interviewed and observed in this experiment.

Most of the participants, 82 %, had been shopping online, which is of interest since only parcels ordered online are distributed to PostNord's parcel lockers in Sweden at the moment. The participants' online habits were quit similar and did not depend on age. In terms of gender, the men had been shopping more online but it was not that big of a difference.

Only 4 of the 60 participants interviewed had heard of the parcel locker and knew what it was used for. This unawareness is something PostNord has to consider and work upon to get the consumer aware of the parcel locker. For this matter, the e-retailer also has to highlight the opportunity for their customers to use the parcel locker instead of postal agents.

75 % of the participants in the experiment found it easy, simple, convenient to use or other equivalent positive attitude towards the parcel locker. No one found the parcel locker procedures hard to conduct. The problems encountered in the collect and return process were choosing the right slot size, opening and closing of the locker slots, and the pin- and bar codes.

Reasons for using the parcel locker were the fast process and the perception that it would lead to less queuing time. Some liked the fact that it was an unmanned service, while others were worried about losing the personal contact and the help you can get from the cashiers at the postal agents. Other barriers were the security aspects as well as the unawareness of the parcel locker. Regarding placement, most participants wished for a parcel locker nearby a shopping area, while others preferred it to be placed near home, job/school or transportation.

The participants had their own ideas when it comes to improvements of the parcel locker. Concerning functions they wished for sounds, a service phone, a plastic bag machine, a C2C-function, a drive-through alternative, and additional language to choose from besides Swedish and English. Regarding design, other colors, more capacity, and clearer signs were suggested.

The thesis shows that the participants in this experiment all found the parcel locker easy to use. If the participant feels a need for a parcel locker is harder to conclude though, since the parcel locker is a novelty on the Swedish market it is difficult for the participant to express ideas on why they would use it. The main strengths are that everyone found the parcel locker quick and convenient to use, in combination with the perception that it would have less queues than the current postal agents. The main threat for the parcel locker implementation in Sweden, is that the participants seem to be satisfied enough with the postal agents to not see the need for new solutions like the parcel lockers.

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