

Which Online Retailer Does Customer Service E-Mail Best?

Well in advance of the holiday shopping season, we decided to conduct an experiment to find out which online retailer does customer service e-mail best. We sent this e-mail query to seven retailers that sell a certain toy croquet set we were interested in buying.

Hello,

I want to buy the toy croquet set at [URL] and have it sent to my nephew who lives in Switzerland. Do you ship to Switzerland, and, if so, how much will shipping cost?

Here's the complete information about this product: [SKU, Manufacturer's No.]

Thanks -

Leslie

Within two days, we'd received responses from all seven retailers we'd e-mailed about shipping the croquet set to Switzerland:

- Buy.com
- Overstock.com
- Amazon.com
- Walmart.com
- Sears.com
- ToysRUs.com
- AlexToys.com

Read on for the retailers' e-mails and our comments on which companies provided excellent service and which ones disappointed a prospective customer.

Buy.com (1)

From: Buy.Com Support
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 1:53 PM
Subject: **Re: Other questions or comments (KMM4522726I15977L0KM)**

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for emailing Buy.com Customer Support.

This is an automated acknowledgement email, please do not reply.

In most cases, we will reply to your email within 24 hours of receiving it. Sometimes we will need to do a little research in order for us to address your concern (for example: shipments, cancellation, returns). If that is the case, it may take us two business days (excluding holidays and weekends) to reply.

Thank you for choosing Buy.com.

Sincerely,
Buy.com Support

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:14 AM

Comment [1]: Not a helpful subject line. The ones generated by forms usually don't help customers much.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:13 AM

Comment [2]: Oops. Forgot to include my name.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:13 AM

Comment [3]: Comma error.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:14 AM

Comment [4]: A friendly way of justifying response time.

Buy.com (2)

From: Buy.Com Support
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 3:49 PM
Subject: **Re: Other questions or comments (KMM4522726115977L0KM)**

Hello Leslie,

Thank you for contacting Buy.com.

At this time, Buy.com ships within the continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii only. Regrettably, we are currently unable to process International shipments orders going to Switzerland and orders going to Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. In addition, we are unable to bill to credit cards or accept any form of payment from any country besides the United States through this website.

We apologize for any inconvenience, and thank you for your understanding in the matter. Please feel free to contact us with any additional questions or concerns.

If you have any other questions or concerns please feel free to contact us using the following webform: <http://www.buy.com/support>

Please do not reply to this message. It was sent from a notification-only address that cannot accept incoming email.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Buy.com Customer Support
Buy.com

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:19 AM

Comment [5]: Good. Right at the beginning, an answer to my question: Buy.com doesn't ship to Switzerland. Unfortunately, these sentences also contain information about locations I didn't ask about and don't care about.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:18 AM

Comment [6]: I have absolutely no idea why this is here as I never asked about payment from other countries and won't be paying for anything as Buy.com doesn't ship to Switzerland.

Overstock.com (1)

From: info@overstock.com
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 2:23 PM
Subject: **Product Inquiry: Recreation & Sports [Incident: 110428-003066]**

Thank you for contacting Overstock.com Customer Care. You will be contacted with further information within 1-2 business days.

These Answers were automatically selected for your consideration. If your issue is addressed in our public Answers, the solution link should be listed below. If no solutions are listed or the solutions do not match your issue, there were no public Answers matching your issue.

Title: Bing Cashback Rebate Program
Link: https://help.overstock.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/1743

Title: Sheet Buying Guide
Link: https://help.overstock.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/1066

Title: Terms and Conditions
Link: https://help.overstock.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/63

Title: O.biz Terms and Conditions
Link: https://help.overstock.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/2889

Title: Buying Guides from Overstock.com
Link: https://help.overstock.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/97

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:20 AM

Comment [7]: I find this terminology confusing. What is an Overstock.com "public Answer"? Is it different from a "solution"?

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:21 AM

Comment [8]: Why send me solutions that do not match my issue? I'm confused.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:15 PM

Comment [9]: I truly have no idea why I am being offered a link to information about buying bed sheets.

Overstock.com (2)

From: surveys@overstock.com
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 2:46 PM
Subject: **Overstock.com Customer Satisfaction Survey**

Dear Valued Customer,

We would appreciate your feedback regarding your recent contact with our award winning Customer Care group at Overstock.com. This feedback will be used to help us refine our processes, policies, and interactions with you.

[Click here to take the survey.](#)

Thanks for helping to advance our World Class Customer Care.

Sincerely,

Overstock.com Customer Care

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:24 AM

Comment [10]: Sorry, it's just too soon for a survey. I received an automated e-mail from Overstock.com 23 minutes ago. I don't have anything to say yet!

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:23 AM

Comment [11]: This wording makes me grouchy. As a customer, I am not at all motivated to help Overstock.com advance world class care.

Overstock.com (3)

From: info@overstock.com
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 2:46 PM
Subject: **Email: Product information [Incident: 110428-003066]**

Thank you for contacting Overstock.com Customer Care. Please review our response to your inquiry in the "Discussion" section below.

We believe that we have resolved your inquiry. However, if it has not been answered to your satisfaction, you may reopen it within the next 7 days.

Hello LESLIE,

I have checked on our site to see if you are able to ship the Alex Toys Jungle Croquet to Switzerland. With shipping and taxes it would be around \$50 additional.

However, you will get to our international page by clicking on the flag in the upper right hand corner and choosing Switzerland as your location.

If you need any further assistance with shipping International, you will want to contact our International team by chat or phone (00-1-801-559-3816). Phone services are available from 6AM - 7PM Mountain Time Monday-Friday. Please note international toll charges apply. If there is anything else that I may assist you with, please let me know. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe
Customer Care
Overstock.com

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:25 AM

Comment [12]: This information belongs after the part of the e-mail that answers my question, not before it.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:38 AM

Comment [13]: Good! Here's a direct answer to my question. Yes, Overstock.com will ship the croquet toy to Switzerland, and it will cost me about \$50 to do so.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:38 AM

Comment [14]: Odd word choice.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:39 AM

Comment [15]: This is a complete answer. Overall, it's a success, though it's a shame two other e-mails preceded it.

Amazon.com (1)

From: Amazon.com Customer Service
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 2:36 PM
Subject: **Your Amazon.com Inquiry**

Hello,

I understand you'd like place order for this Alex Jungle Croquet. Before we can proceed, please write back with the address in the format given below so that we will be happy to add the address to your account.

Name:
Address Line 1:
Address Line 2:
City:
District/County:
State/Province/Region:
Zip/Postal Code:
Country:
Primary Phone Number:

Please visit the following link to provide the information we requested:
<http://www.amazon.com/rsvp-mi?c=bdudhxdc3424925384&q=o2r>

Once we receive this information we can take further action.

Our shipping options and policies, including costs and time of delivery, are available in our Help pages here: <http://www.amazon.com/help/ship/>

The total cost of your order, including shipping and any applicable taxes or giftwrap charges, appears on the final page of the order form, before you submit your order. This allows us to take into account the cost of the shipping method you chose, as well as any gift card balance or other discounts, before displaying the amount you will be charged.

You can still make changes to your order at any time until you click the "Place your order" button.

For future reference, the subtotal of the items in your shopping cart is displayed on the shopping cart page. Our shipping rates and options can be found in our Help pages here:

<http://www.amazon.com/help/shipping>

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:50 AM

Comment [16]: I can tell right away that this is not an automated e-mail. The agent is free-texting and writing directly to me. The wording of these sentences isn't particularly clear, but I do get the gist of what the agent is saying. It's not clear to me, however, why Amazon wants to add the Switzerland address to my account. Do they ship this toy to Switzerland? Yes or no?

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:42 AM

Comment [17]: Hmm... this sentence raises some confusion. If the answers to my questions about shipping to Switzerland are available at a Help page, why not just give me the answer in this e-mail?

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:44 AM

Comment [18]: Starting at this point in the e-mail and on through to the end, I am having trouble making use of the information I am being given. If Amazon won't ship the toy croquet set to Switzerland, I don't need or want all this info.

We look forward to seeing you again soon.

Thank you for your recent inquiry. Did I solve your problem?

If yes, please click here:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/survey?p=A3OQ5C6UWW2AW4&k=hy>

If no, please click here:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/survey?p=A3OQ5C6UWW2AW4&k=hn>

Best regards,

Jane Smith

Amazon.com

Your feedback is helping us build Earth's Most Customer-Centric Company.

<http://www.amazon.com/your-account>

Amazon.com (2)

My response to Amazon's request for the Switzerland shipping address

04/29/11 07:50:16 PDT

NAME: Leslie

COMMENTS: You asked for my nephew's address in Switzerland. Here it is:

Thomas Engle, Chemin des Palins 10, 1234 Le Muids, Switzerland
Tel [+41 11 123 4567](tel:+41111234567)

From: Amazon.com Customer Service
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Fri, Apr 29, 2011 at 11:02 AM
Subject: **Your Amazon.com Inquiry**

Hello,

I'd love to help you, but I wasn't able to find a customer account that matched the e-mail address you wrote from, leslieof@gmail.com. We can only provide account and order information to the e-mail address associated with the account.

Please give us a call so we can help you change your e-mail address. To call us, go to our Help pages at the URL below and click the "Contact Us" button; then click the "Phone" tab: www.amazon.com/help or here are our customer service phone numbers:

- U.S. and Canada: [1-866-216-1072](tel:1-866-216-1072)
- International: [1-206-266-2992](tel:1-206-266-2992)

We're available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your recent inquiry. Did I solve your problem?

If yes, please click here:
<http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/survey?p=A3K0HJTHZASJH9&k=hy>

If no, please click here:
<http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/survey?p=A3K0HJTHZASJH9&k=hn>

Best regards,

James Jones, Amazon.com
Your feedback is helping us build Earth's Most Customer-Centric Company.
<http://www.amazon.com/your-account>

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:54 AM

Comment [19]: I think the writing in this e-mail is adequately clear, but I am stuck in an internal process – add the Switzerland address to my Amazon account – and I am not getting the answer I need. Must I be signed into my Amazon account to ask a yes/no question about shipping?

Walmart.com (1)

From: Walmart.com Help
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 2:52 PM
Subject: **Re: International Shipping**

Dear Customer,

Thank you for contacting Walmart.com.

We are sending you this **automated** response to help you with your question.

We've made our shipping prices and policies as fair as possible, so you benefit from our Every Day Low Prices plus the convenience of delivery to your door.

Here is some information about how we ship our products.

We ship most items to APO/FPO addresses. Standard Shipping times apply to items being sent to the 48 contiguous states. Shipments to APO/FPO addresses, U.S. territories and protectorates can take up to 3-6 weeks from the order's ship date to arrive.

Site to Store is currently only available in the 48 states and is not available for all products.

Please note: Weather-related shipping delays are not within the control of Walmart.com.

For additional information on shipping options, costs and estimated arrival times please visit:

- <http://www.walmart.com/catalog/catalog.gsp?cat=538380>.

If we have not fully answered your question or you have additional questions, please reply to this email and let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,

Walmart.com Customer Care

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:55 AM

Comment [20]: Hmm ... not sure I need a sales pitch here.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:56 AM

Comment [21]: These paragraphs provide a kinda-sorta answer, which is the most dangerous kind. I can't tell if shipping to Switzerland is excluded or if it may be allowed.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:57 AM

Comment [22]: No, you have not fully answered my question.

Walmart.com (2)

My response to Walmart's question about whether they'd answered my question

Hello, Walmart -

Your automated response did not help me with my question. It didn't mention international shipping (to Switzerland) at all. Here's my question: I want to buy the Jungle Croquet set at <http://www.walmart.com/ip/ALEX-Toys-Jungle-Croquet/12970880> and have it sent to my nephew who lives in Switzerland. Do you ship to Switzerland, and, if so, how much will shipping cost?

Thanks - Leslie

From: Walmart.com Help
Sent: Friday, April 29, 2011 6:10 PM
To: LESLIE O'FLAHAVAN
Subject: Re: International Shipping

Dear Leslie,

Thank you for contacting Walmart.com regarding shipping to Switzerland.

I hope the following information will clarify any questions you may have regarding our accepted payment methods and shipping policies.

PAYMENT METHODS

Walmart.com only accepts the following methods of payment:

- Credit Cards: American Express, Discover, MasterCard, Visa, Walmart Credit Card and Walmart Discover
- Debit Cards, also called check cards, ATM cards or banking cards, and have a MasterCard or Visa logo
 - Note: You cannot use two credit or debit cards to pay for the same order.
- Walmart Gift Cards (with a 4-digit PIN number on the back of the card)
 - Note: You may only enter up to 4 gift cards per order.
- Walmart.com eGift Cards, also called Online Gift Cards (purchased at Walmart.com and sent via email)
- PayPal
- Bill Me Later (Bill Me Later is a registered trademark of Bill Me Later, Inc., and is subject to their terms and conditions.)

At this time Walmart.com does not accept the Walmart Community or Business Card.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 11:59 AM

Comment [23]: Excellent. An e-mail best practice. Restate the customer's question at the beginning of the e-mail. Doing so helps the agent who's writing the e-mail as well as the customer who's scanning it.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:01 PM

Comment [24]: Using headings is a great idea because headings make longer e-mails modular and scannable. However, presenting info about paying for my order is premature until I learn whether it can be shipped to Switzerland.

SHIPPING DESTINATIONS

Currently, Walmart.com can ship to locations in the U.S., APO / FPO addresses, American Samoa, Guam, North Mariana Island, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Additional restrictions may apply based on the size or type of item as well as local laws governing the selected destination. Any restrictions should be listed in the detailed description for each item on Walmart.com.

Promotional shipping offers, including 97-Cent Shipping, only apply to deliveries inside the 48 contiguous United States.

Our Site to Store service, which allows you to have eligible items shipped to your local store, is only available for Walmart stores in the 48 contiguous states.

Listed below are some of the carriers that Walmart uses:

1. Fedex
2. UPS
3. USPS
4. Site to Store
5. Freight carrier; Bekins, Seko, etc.
6. Carrier is chosen based on the shipping address
7. Some items such as eGift Cards will be sent electronically

If we have not fully answered your question or you have additional questions, please reply to this email.

Sincerely,
Walmart.com Customer Care

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:02 PM

Comment [25]: Oooh – here’s my answer ... kinda ... sorta. I guess Walmart cannot ship to Switzerland. I wish they had mentioned the country I asked about.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:03 PM

Comment [26]: Most of what follows is T.M.I. – too much information for a person who believes she’s just been told “we don’t ship to Switzerland.” What use will I have for all of this?

Sears.com (1)

From: Sears Webcenter
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 4:09 PM
Subject: **Re: Product Questions - Other (KMM16898606115977L0KM)**

Good Afternoon Leslie,

Thank you for contacting Sears.com. Thank you for shopping Sears.com International.

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide you with a shipping fee quote via email. Please select the country to which you wish to ship your items, add your items to cart, and proceed to checkout to view the shipping, duties, and taxes of your purchase. You will be able to review your order at checkout before paying. You will not be charged for the items until you click Buy Now to confirm your order. If you have any further inquires, please contact us again at international@customerserices.sears.com.

Look for Great Ideas throughout the store and find Sears exclusive innovations from great brands like Sony, Kenmore, NordicTrack, Craftsman and Reebok. Shop www.sears.com now to pick up great products for the season.

Carolyn M.
Sears Customer Care
webcenter@customerservice.sears.com
[1-800-366-3028](tel:1-800-366-3028)

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:04 PM

Comment [27]: I do not appreciate this ad in this customer service e-mail.

ToysRUs.com (1)

From: Customer Service at www.toysrus.com
To: leslieof@gmail.com
Date: Thu, Apr 28, 2011 at 4:46 PM
Subject: **Product/Item Question**

Dear Leslie,

Thank you for contacting RUs.com regarding our ability to ship internationally to Switzerland. At the present time, ToysRUs.com and BabiesRUs.com are unable to ship internationally and only have the ability to ship to the contiguous United States, Alaska, Hawaii, U.S. Territories (including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), and APO/FPO addresses.

I understand how this may be frustrating and apologize for any disappointment this may cause you.

Thank you again for contacting RUs.com. We appreciate your interest and hope to serve you in the future!

Sincerely,

Beverly Duncan
Guest Service Team
www.ToysRUs.com (800) ToysRUs / [\(800\) 869-7787](tel:800-869-7787)
www.BabiesRUs.com (888) BabyRUs / [\(888\) 222-9787](tel:888-222-9787)
Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week!!

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:08 PM

Comment [28]: Restated my question. Good work.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:09 PM

Comment [29]: A direct, clear answer. "No, we can't ship to Switzerland."

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:09 PM

Comment [30]: Using words carefully to manage the relationship and keep the tone friendly.

Alextoys.com (1)

From: Jane Doe
To: LESLIEOF@GMAIL.COM
Date: Fri, Apr 29, 2011 at 2:02 PM
Subject: Inquiry: Switzerland

Dear Leslie,

Thank you for your email and for your interest in ALEX! I am sorry to say that ALEX does not fulfill consumer orders internationally.

Where are you located? If you are inside the United States, you can use the store locator on the ALEX website to locate some stores in your area – perhaps the individual stores can further assist you with your request.
www.alextoys.com/store-locator

If you are located internationally, I would be happy to put you in touch with an international distributor who stocks this item, to see if they can assist. Please confirm your location and we'll decide upon the best next steps.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind Regards,

Jane Doe, International Marketing Manager
ALEX
251 Union Street
Northvale, NJ 07647
[201.750.8010](tel:201.750.8010) Ext. 3352
www.alextoys.com

**Concerned about the Quality of the E-Mails
Your Agents Write to Customers?**

Contact **E-WRITE's** Leslie O'Flahavan at 301-989-9583 or Leslie@ewriteonline.com to learn about our training materials and programs:

- *Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents*
- E-Mail Writing Skills Competency Exam
- Writing Customer-Focused E-Mail and Chat
- Measuring the Quality of Customer Service E-Mail
- Curriculum licenses and Train-the-Trainer programs

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:11 PM

Comment [31]: Friendly and direct, plus a simple answer to my question, though not the answer I was hoping for.

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:13 PM

Comment [32]: Excellent. The only retailer in this sample set who tried to solve my problem as well as answer my question. I would tweak the wording here, so that instead of saying "further assist you with your request," the sentence would say something like "...individual stores could help you ship to Switzerland..."

E-WRITE 6/8/11 12:14 PM

Comment [33]: Problem-solving once again! Jane Doe is thinking about how to help me get what I want. She's aware that "international" customers may want to ship to "international" locations. Her writing is friendly and collaborative.