



REVERSE LOGISTICS magazine®

Serving Manufacturers, Retailers, and Industry Partners



Properly Managing Returns is Imperative as Impact Nears the Trillion-Dollar Mark

- Page 8



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Message from the Editor

Welcome to this edition of Reverse Logistics Magazine! In this issue, we focus on the evolving role of returns as a valuable asset for businesses. From Creating Value from Returns to Effective Returns Management, we explore how smart strategies can transform returns from a cost center into a competitive advantage.



Our featured articles cover critical topics such as how logistics can drive sustainability, the role of the circular economy in industry transformation, and the growing trend of secondary market resales. We also tackle important issues like Returns Fraud and the secure handling of IT assets in the disposal process.

With the right solutions in place, returns management can not only boost efficiency but also contribute to sustainability goals. We hope this issue inspires you to rethink your returns strategy and uncover new opportunities for growth and innovation.

Felecia

Felecia Przybyla, Editor



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Our Mission

The Reverse Logistics Association is the authoritative body for best practices related to reverse logistics. RLA is a member driven, global trade association for the returns and reverse industry. The RLA offers information, research, solutions, and facilitates networking introductions for manufacturers, retail companies and Industry Partners. Our goal is to educate and inform reverse logistics professionals globally and be the voice of the reverse industry.



Industry Focus Committees

Industry Committees are set up to provide a standing forum for reverse logistics professionals to meet on a regional and global basis and discuss common reverse logistics issues.

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Board of Advisors



Pinar Martin – Amazon

Pinar leads Global Reverse Supply Chain Planning and Analytics at Amazon, overseeing returns and recovery of Amazon's consumer electronics products. She joined Amazon in 2015 to spearhead the EU transportation network, where she developed large-scale optimization models to facilitate the launch of next-day delivery in the UK. Later, Pinar transitioned to roles in AWS, focusing on the development and launch of software as a service and IoT products. Prior to her tenure at Amazon, Pinar held product management roles in the consumer goods industry, where she successfully launched new-to-world products to market. Throughout her career, Pinar has demonstrated a relentless drive to innovate and optimize, constantly seeking new ways to leverage data, automation, and cross-functional synergies to solve complex problems. Pinar holds a PhD in Business from Bocconi University in Italy and was a visiting scholar at Penn State, where she explored the development of efficient and sustainable closed-loop supply chains.



Glenn Richey – Auburn University

Glenn Richey is the Harbert Eminent Scholar in supply chain management and research director in the Center for Supply Chain Innovation. His role is to help advance supply chain management research and outreach in the Harbert College of Business at Auburn University. Richey engages in industry-based research and enjoys building research and student relationships between academia and practice.



Jason MacIver – Dell Technologies

Jason joined Dell in 1999. In previous supply chain roles within Dell, he helped reshape the enterprise logistics model that is used today, managed more than 110M in annual spend, as well as received an invitation to the White House to participate in a Sustainable

Supply Chain Symposium. Jason received his B.A. degree from Michigan State University (Supply Chain Management) and his MBA from the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University.



Chuck Johnston – ReturnPro

Chuck is CSO at ReturnPro, a global leader in the implementation and execution of omni-channel and supply chain solutions. He was formerly the Director of Reverse Logistics for The Home Depot, responsible for all return and repair operations. Prior to that he oversaw the Reverse Logistics operations for Wal-Mart Stores Inc. Chuck has been involved in the Reverse Logistics industry for over 20 years and is considered the foremost expert in the field. He is a sought after speaker and considered one of the most innovative thinkers in the industry. In addition to his experience in the reverse space, he has led numerous Specialty Distribution Operations in his 23 years with Wal-Mart. While at Wal-Mart, Chuck was responsible for the development of a profitable, “best in class” Reverse Logistics organization that is still the benchmark for all other retailers.



Troy Campbell – The Home Depot

Troy has worked in logistics for over 30 years 27 of those with Home Depot Supply Chain, the last 11 years focusing solely in reverse logistics. For the past 2 years Troy has been the Director of Reverse Logistics responsible for Home Depot's 4 return centers throughout the country that supports the returns of over 1.7 Billion in COGS, and over 170 million of liquidation sales. In the two years Troy has been in role he has helped navigate the reverse organization through the pandemic and increased volume that all retailers have seen. Responsible for the day to day operations within the 4 reverse centers helping grow the reverse culture within the Home Depot.



Julie Ryan – HP, Inc.

Julie Ryan joined HP (Compaq) in 1986 with over 22 years of experience in various reverse logistics capacities for US, Canada and Latin America. Julie currently leads the Americas Returns & Remarketing organization responsible for end to end reverse logistics which includes channel return approvals, physical claims and disputes, returns receiving, credit issuance, disposition management, remanufacturing, remarketing as well as planning, forecasting and reporting.



Daniel O'Neill – Liquidity Services

Daniel O'Neill leads Liquidity Services' Client Solutions team within the Retail Supply Chain Group. He is directly responsible for all current key client relationships, end to end inventory acquisition and disposition decisions, and program pricing and profitability. Dan brings more than 5 years of experience at Liquidity Services and over 17 years of professional experience within the corporate finance, strategic procurement consulting, and global supply chain industry. Previous employers include A.T. Kearney, a global management consulting firm, and A.P. Moller-Maersk, the world's largest shipping and logistics company. Dan holds an M.B.A. from Georgetown University and a B.S. in Finance from Rutgers University.



Sean Magann – Sims Lifecycle Services

Sean Magann, Global VP of Sales and Marketing, Sims Lifecycle Services is one of America's thought leaders on all aspects of IT asset disposition. With more than 15 years of experience in the electronics and reuse and recycling industry coupled with launching global sites and managing operations across the world, Mr. Magann has developed a complementary background for working in the ever-evolving world of managing global IT assets during their end-of-life.



Brad Harris – Walmart

As the Director of Circular Commerce for Walmart, Brad has extensive experience with the asset recovery aspects of the returns industry. Brad is responsible for helping Walmart sell returned and overstocked goods in a responsible fashion to help increase revenue as well as find ways to extend the lifecycle of returned goods destined for landfill. Brad started his career with Walmart in 2008 working in Innovation and Sustainability. He spent a few years with Sam's Club in Facility Management, but then transferred back to Walmart working in Reverse Logistics, Secondary Markets, and now Circular Commerce.



Tony Sciarrotta – Reverse Logistics Association

In 2016, Tony took over and became the Executive Director of the RLA after 12 years of active involvement on the Advisory Board and Committees. In over 35 years in the consumer products industry, Tony held various positions including 15 years in returns management at Philips where he developed new reverse logistics strategies. He worked with retail partners and industry groups to implement returns initiatives still in use. Tony has been an evangelist for improving the customer experience to reduce returns and their associated costs. Today, Tony is considered a subject matter expert in reverse logistics, and speaks for the industry at conferences all over the world.



Properly Managing Returns is Imperative as Impact Nears the Trillion-Dollar Mark

By Thomas Borders, Vice President Operations, Inmar Supply Chain Solutions
Powered by DHL Supply Chain (RLA Silver Member)

Having weathered National Returns Week earlier in the year – when consumers returned tens of millions of products from the 2024 holiday season – has many retailers and brands revisiting their return strategies and policies. According to the National Retail Federation (NRF), returns in 2024 reached a whopping \$890B, or 17 percent of total retail sales. This represents a 15 percent increase over 2023. Holiday returns were up even more – surpassing the 2023 holiday season by more than 20 percent. So, the message is clear. Now is the time to take control of this costly challenge. While return policies are easy to change, it’s time to shift the focus to strategic and sustainable, long-term solutions. In other words, merchants must move beyond their traditional reactive approach that delivers short-term solutions for managing returns.

Effective returns management must address all post-purchase activities, including people, processes and investments.

Knowing that the returns experience is paramount to successful, long-term digital commerce, many sellers will be revamping their approach to returns in 2025. The same is true for 3PL (third-party logistics) companies, as many are expanding their core services to include 3PRL (third-party reverse logistics). This is particularly important when it comes to operational efficiency.

Regardless if outbound supply chains are internal or leverage 3PLs/4PLs, the outward flow of goods has been optimized over the years. Newer inbound return processes, which are often rooted in ad hoc processes,

present new challenges and introduce greater complexities compared to outbound shipments.

Complexity of Return Shipments

Returned goods require more handling in the form of inspection, sorting, repackaging, and re-tagging before items can be returned to stock. This additional handling requires a combination of human intervention and specialized equipment and systems. This added workload puts extra stress on all resources, particularly labor. Storage of returned goods also creates new challenges for overcrowded warehouses and can create inefficiencies in inventory handling. And this process represents the tip of the returns iceberg, as it only applies to items once they are received in a warehouse. Obviously, quickly putting items returned in pristine condition back on the e-shelf, where they can be resold at full price, is the best possible outcome. This is particularly important as “bracket purchases” have become commonplace and trend windows continue to shrink – driven largely by the growth of fast fashion.

Maximizing Value Recovery and Sustainability

In the not-too-distant past, many retailers and brands would send items that could not be resold at full-price – or close to it – to landfills. This was a quick solution that mitigated handling costs while providing the requisite brand protection. While this approach quickly addressed some return-related challenges, it was certainly not sustainable.

Pressure to operate more sustainably, both environmentally and economically, continued to mount. This included pressure from the retailer’s customer base and direct pressure from formal sustainability and/or ESG initiatives. Other direct pressure surfaced in the form of legislation, such as California’s [Responsible Textile Recovery Act of 2024](#), which is an extended producer responsibility (EPR) program for apparel and textile articles. This act, which was amended in November 2024, emphasizes repair and reuse, and minimizes the

generation of hazardous waste, greenhouse gases, environmental impacts, and public health impacts. It is reasonable to expect influences from consumers, boards, and some governments to continue driving towards more sustainable solutions.

Beyond Direct Costs

Direct costs, or hard costs (e.g., shipping, handling, restocking fees) can be easily quantified. The less tangible costs, or soft costs, are much more difficult to measure. However, certain key metrics can be used in decision support systems, such as CLV (customer lifetime value), which can be connected to customer loyalty. This is where we find the returns dichotomy in which a retailer’s highest returners are often its best customers. This excludes serial returners – those customers that have returned more orders than they have kept.

This dichotomy is why, in my opinion, simply charging for returns is not a long-term strategy, it is merely a policy tactic. While our research shows consumers are becoming more accepting of return and/or restocking fees, our research also indicates that as much as 50 percent of consumers





will not shop with a merchant that charges for returns. Furthermore, if charging for returns was actually an effective strategy for reducing returns, we would expect to see return rates declining. Early on, Amazon molded consumer expectations for many things, including returns expectations and those expectations still remain. Plus, the tactic to increase CLV is convenience, which now rivals price when it comes to deciding where shoppers will spend their digital dollars.

Action Items for Online Merchants

There are three critical action items that will help merchants increase CLV.

The first is eliminating returns caused by the merchant. Up to 60 percent of returns can be traced back to one of the following reasons:

- Product image or description did not match the actual product
- Incorrect size
- Product arrived damaged

Adding 360° views of the product or using augmented/virtual reality applications can easily address the disconnects between the digitally-represented product and the physical item.

Accurate sizing charts, and other tools for getting properly sized items, combined with reviews from previous buyers, can aid consumers in determining the correct size.

Ensuring products arrive undamaged can be improved through a focused quality control program.

Data mining return reasons provide further direction as to what actions are required to address the root cause of the return. A SKU with a disproportionate number of returns may indicate disconnects in the description or a potential manufacturing flaw. Repeated delivery of damaged goods may identify a need to improve packaging or to ship goods using a different carrier.

The second action item is “leaning into returns.” This means leveraging returns as a competitive advantage. Complicated or restrictive return policies can harm a brand’s reputation, reduce customer trust and discourage repeat purchases. Furthermore, these negative experiences are easily shared via onsite reviews and through social media platforms. Complex or restrictive returns often negate a merchant’s potential for cross-selling and up-selling. In addition to damaging the brand’s persona, it dilutes customer acquisition initiatives and ultimately translates into lost sales.

Leaning into returns also means optimizing the returns experience by offering frictionless returns. This will likely include free in-store returns for omnichannel retailers and package-free returns at third-party locations, e.g., FedEx Office, Kohl’s, and Whole Foods Markets by pure-play online merchants.

Leaning into returns also means leveraging customer feedback, which comes at no cost to the retailer. This can include feedback in terms of fit, product design, packaging, delivery, the returns experience, and more. Feedback is a gift — one that when properly mined — can serve as the foundation for continuous improvement initiatives.

The third action item is sustainability, which goes hand-in-hand with optimizing value recovery. Many items that cannot be returned to stock can be sold in the burgeoning resale market, which is expected to reach \$30B by the end of 2026.

Several apparel and footwear companies have already jumped on the resale bandwagon. Carhartt, provider of durable workwear, outdoor apparel and gear, recently introduced [Carhartt Reworked](#). Timberland footwear also introduced [Timberloop](#), a circular design platform that considers product design, manufacturing, extending their products’ lifecycles and recycling. But the growth in resale isn’t limited to wearables. There’s a “resale market” for almost everything.

Other returns, overstocks and seasonal inventories are often sold to liquidators that sell into secondary markets such as bodegas, flea markets and out-of-market geographies. Liquidation is another viable method for keeping large quantities of goods in commerce, but liquidation buyers must be vetted and monitored to ensure they’re not competing with a brand’s primary sales channels. America’s largest liquidator, [InmarLiquidates](#), sells only in bulk, making it a highly sustainable option for managing returned goods while increasing value recovery.

Merchandise that is not sold through liquidation can be donated to select charities. This extends the product’s lifecycle and avoids landfills while serving worthy causes.

Items that can’t be sold, recycled, or donated can be sent to a “waste-to-energy facility,” where the items are combusted in a closed-loop process

that generates electricity for local utilities and commercial properties.

Extracting Greater Value from End-to-End Returns Management

In simplest terms, End-to-End Returns Management begins with returns initiation and ends with the return’s final disposition. This comprehensive approach builds loyalty, reduces hard and soft costs, and makes returns more sustainable.

Using an end-to-end returns management company also enables data collection at every touchpoint across the returns journey. Combining AI with each client’s protocols will ensure value recovery is maximized while limiting environmental impacts. Also, working with a returns management firm that provides a national network of return processing facilities will further reduce costs and improve sustainability. By reducing transportation requirements, retailers can increase cycle times, benefit from zone-skipping, reduce the consumption of fossil fuels and lessen greenhouse gas emissions.

The first step toward optimizing returns is understanding how to use returns as a competitive advantage and creating a strategy to capture that advantage. This often requires a paradigm shift — one in which policy and tactics transform returns from a “necessary evil” to a true strategic planning tool for the further development of capabilities. But retailers and brands must remember the importance of trust. Offering and executing a streamlined returns channel is among the best ways to earn consumer trust — and trust creates loyalty, which over time, increases customer lifetime value.



Thomas Borders

Vice President Operations, Inmar Supply Chain Solutions powered by DHL

Thomas Borders is a proven leader of diverse teams across a variety of industries and functional areas with experience in developing and growing teams in supply chain, revenue operations, financial technology, and retail media. Thomas is passionate about delivering the best end-to-end post-purchase solutions for clients by optimizing the customer experience and minimizing environmental impacts for forward and reverse supply chains. Thomas has been a leading spokesperson in returns and reverse logistics, and his expertise has been featured in The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Business Insider, USA Today, and Forbes Advisor, among other publications.

Surface Solutions Aren't Enough

Explore The Meaning of
Comprehensive Solutions



Brand Protection - Don't disrupt your sales channels; control where your product is sold

Velocity - We move inventory fast, preventing costly backlogs.

Net Recovery - We direct products to the best D2C outlets for maximum net recovery



Closing the Loop: How Logistics Can Drive Sustainability

By Katarzyna Mejer, DB Schenker ESG Coordinator at the NorthEast Europe Cluster;
(RLA Diamond Member)

The transition from a linear to a circular economy is essential to preserve natural resources, reduce waste, and combat climate change, while also aligning with environmental responsibilities and EU regulations. Logistics plays a pivotal role in facilitating returns, enabling repairs, and supporting recycling efforts. A recent DB Schenker study in Poland sheds light on the current state of circular economy adoption, uncovering both challenges and opportunities.

The European Union’s [circular economy action plan](#) aims to reduce pressure on natural resources and focuses on achieving a significant milestone - doubling its circular material use rate (CMUR) in the coming decade, with a [target of 22.4% by 2030](#).

The CMUR measures the circularity of materials in the economy and refers to the share of the total amount of material used in the economy that is accounted for by recycled waste.

This would mark an essential step forward in reducing waste and promoting sustainability in the European market. However, despite these ambitious goals, notable differences exist among EU member states, with some nations experiencing a decline in their CMUR, such as Poland. In response, we at DB Schenker conducted a study to understand the reasons behind this phenomenon. The study: “Closed loop – logistics for the circular economy from the perspective of Polish companies” explored how well Polish companies understand

the circular economy, their awareness of reverse logistics as an essential aspect of the model, and whether they plan investments in this sector. Our survey was completed by representatives of over a hundred medium and large companies in Poland, from various sectors such as industrial processing, automotive, construction, FMCG, healthcare, and others. The findings provide valuable insights into both local and global challenges in adopting circular economy principles.

The Necessity of the Circular Economy

The traditional linear economic model—“buy-use-dispose”—has led to unprecedented consumption of raw materials and severe environmental damage, including resource depletion, water and air pollution, and ecosystem degradation. Transitioning to a circular economy is essential to mitigate these issues. This model emphasizes extending the lifecycle of products through reuse, repair, and recycling, thereby reducing resource consumption, waste, and emissions.

Under circular principles, reuse is prioritized over recycling and recovery. Recycling, while valuable, is energy-intensive and cannot be conducted indefinitely. Recovery (e.g., energy recovery) typically addresses only a fraction of the original material. New regulations encourage “eco-design”—designing products with minimal environmental impact and maximum longevity. Products are increasingly expected to remain useful and sustainable for extended periods.

To achieve these goals, collaboration across industries and value chains is crucial. The circular economy cannot succeed without collective efforts from manufacturers, logistics providers, policymakers, and consumers. Regulatory changes are affecting all sectors including plastics, textiles, electronics and construction, among others, and companies must align their strategies with these changes, leveraging innovations and adapting supply chains to support the circular model. It would seem that companies understand this and are taking action in this direction, but are they really?

The Current State of Awareness and Adoption

Despite the growing emphasis on circular practices, many businesses remain in the early stages of adoption. DB Schenker’s study, conducted in May and June 2024, highlights several critical trends related to the circular economy in Poland:

- **Knowledge and Awareness:** While 70% of respondents are familiar with the concept of the circular economy, only 38% feel their knowledge is sufficient. Many lack clarity on which specific actions align with circular principles.
- **Unrecognized Circular Practices:** A surprising 64% of respondents are unaware that their companies are already implementing circular solutions, even though they are actively doing so. This points to a significant communication gap within organizations.
- **Investment Plans:** Encouragingly, 56% of companies plan to invest in circular economy initiatives within the next five years. However, knowledge gaps and cost concerns may slow the pace of these investments.
- **Barriers to Implementation:** High costs (30%) and the lack of market standards (29%) are identified as the biggest obstacles to adopting circular economy models on a larger scale.
- **Role of Logistics:** Only 44% of respondents understand how logistics providers can support circular initiatives, and 46% have not yet entrusted logistics companies with any circular-related tasks.

These findings underscore the need for greater education and clearer communication about the benefits and feasibility of circular solutions. Moreover, businesses should build stronger partnerships with logistics providers to fully realize the potential of circular practices.

Polish Companies and Circular Economy Practices

Despite the challenges, Polish companies increasingly recognize the benefits of adopting

circular economy practices. According to our study, 51% of respondents believe that circular solutions enhance market competitiveness. These solutions can lead to the production of longer-lasting goods and significant reductions in waste. Refurbishing and reselling products also create additional revenue streams by reaching customers who may not be able to afford new products, thereby expanding market access and fostering brand loyalty.

Nevertheless, barriers to broader adoption persist. Beyond high costs and the lack of market standards, companies cite insufficient technology as another challenge (29%). Planned investments over the next five years include waste segregation systems and reuse initiatives, but fewer companies are focusing on more advanced circular practices, such as resale infrastructure (16%) or digitization of return management (19%).

The respondents’ answers also confirm that companies operating in EU markets are more advanced in their adoption of circular economy principles due to stricter regulations and higher consumer awareness. This underscores the importance of implementing legal regulations and establishing unified market standards and increasing awareness to bridge the gaps between countries with varying levels of progress.

The Pivotal Role of Logistics in the Circular Economy

And what role does logistics play in the circular economy? Logistics providers are essential in enabling circular practices, particularly through reverse logistics. This includes managing product returns, repairs, and recycling, ensuring that materials and goods are reintroduced into the supply chain rather than discarded.



Successful projects have proven that, with the right expertise and resources, these activities deliver measurable benefits to business. For instance, results based on DB Schenker experience in operating contract logistics facilities dedicated to circular economy operations, where we provide services such as after-sales support, reverse logistics, repair, and component recovery, indicate that:

- 20% of returned items are repaired instead of being sent back to the manufacturer,
- international transport of returns can be reduced by 20%, thereby lowering carbon emissions and distribution costs,
- return and disposal operations are conducted in a single location, ensuring better control over the process.

As companies increasingly seek ways to align with circular economy principles, logistics providers will continue to play a key role in delivering the necessary infrastructure and expertise. Their ability to manage reverse logistics, in particular, can help businesses overcome operational challenges and implement more sustainable practices.

Logistics also facilitates the global exchange of knowledge and best practices, enabling less advanced markets to learn from early adopters. This collaboration can help standardize processes, making circular practices more accessible and cost-effective across borders.

Developing services that support the entire lifecycle of products appears to be crucial not only for logistics providers but also for businesses.

A Path Forward

The shift to a circular economy represents both a challenge and an opportunity for businesses worldwide. While awareness of circular principles is growing, significant gaps remain in knowledge, investment, and implementation. The findings from our study highlight the need for greater collaboration, education, and innovation to overcome barriers and accelerate progress.

Logistics providers have a vital role to play in this transformation. By offering expertise in reverse logistics and circular supply chain management, they can help businesses reduce costs, improve efficiency, and achieve sustainability goals. These partnerships are essential and beneficial to adopt a circular model.

We encourage you to explore our full report, which is based not only on quantitative research but also enriched by in-depth interviews with selected DB Schenker clients from the FMCG, IT, and automotive sectors. Additionally, experts from organizations such as the UN Global Compact Network Poland, the Warsaw School of Economics, and the Reverse Logistics Association contributed valuable insights to the study. The document is available here: [Closed loop economy | DB Schenker](#)



Katarzyna Mejer

DB Schenker ESG Coordinator at the NorthEast Europe Cluster; Quality Management Leader in Poland, ISO 14001 Representative.

A graduate with a Master's degree in management, specializing in "organization and leadership." Post-graduate studies in logistics and ESG and climate transformation (currently ongoing). Over 25 years of experience in building Integrated Management Systems, internal auditor for ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 27001, ISO 45001. Mentor in development programs. Assessor leading EFQM self-assessment groups. For the past 2 years, deeply involved in areas related to sustainable development.



ITAD Logistics Made Easy

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>> We're excited to welcome Darrell Hogan, an ITAD industry veteran with over 35 years of experience, to our leadership team. His deep expertise in ITAD, logistics, and operations will help us continue to offer innovative solutions that ensure your assets are handled securely and efficiently, from start to finish.



>> Darrell Hogan ✓



Circular Economy: A Competitive Advantage for Industry Transformation

By Xavier Hubert. Head of Circular Economy at Flex (RLA Platinum Member)

In today's industrial landscape, the adoption of circular economy principles has become essential for businesses seeking long-term resilience, efficiency, and regulatory compliance. No longer just a sustainability initiative, circularity is a transformative business model that extends product lifespans, recovers valuable materials, and minimizes waste.

By incorporating services such as reverse logistics, carbon footprint analytics, and parts harvesting, companies can optimize operations while lowering costs and complying with evolving regulations. Beyond environmental benefits, circular strategies

provide financial advantages by reducing dependency on raw materials, enhancing supply chain resilience, and unlocking new revenue streams¹.

Circularity as a Strategic Advantage

For many years, circular economy initiatives were considered an added cost, but businesses are now realizing that sustainable practices lead to long-term economic benefits. By integrating sustainable design, manufacturing, and supply chain processes, companies can extend the life of

their products, reduce environmental impact, and establish new business models based on reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling².

Data-driven tools, such as carbon footprint calculators and lifecycle assessment software, play a key role in helping businesses quantify the environmental impact of their products. These tools also guide decision-making by identifying opportunities to optimize resource efficiency and reduce waste. Many industries are now leveraging such insights to improve operational efficiency and enhance brand reputation, particularly as consumers, investors, and regulators place increasing emphasis on sustainability³.

Reverse Logistics: The Backbone of Circular Business Models

Reverse logistics is a fundamental component of circular economy practices. It involves managing the return, refurbishment, and recycling of products, enabling businesses to reintegrate materials into the supply chain rather than discarding them as waste. By investing in reverse logistics, companies reduce landfill contributions, recover valuable components, and cut costs associated with waste disposal.

The reverse logistics market is expanding rapidly, with analysts projecting it will reach over \$1 trillion by 2033⁴. This growth is driven by increasing product returns, the expansion of e-commerce, and stricter environmental regulations that require businesses to take responsibility for end-of-life product management.

Many industries are refining their reverse logistics strategies to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Some logistics providers have introduced specialized services to help companies refurbish returned products, manage spare parts inventory, and implement closed-loop supply chains. Such initiatives not only minimize waste but also create new revenue opportunities through resale and remanufacturing.

In the electronics industry, reverse logistics is especially critical. With the rapid advancement of

technology, businesses are facing shorter product lifecycles and a growing need to manage electronic waste responsibly. Companies implementing reverse logistics systems can recover valuable materials such as rare earth elements and metals, reducing reliance on newly mined resources and lowering production costs.



Navigating the Evolving Regulatory Landscape

The global regulatory environment is evolving to encourage circular economy adoption, prompting businesses to adjust their strategies accordingly.

The European Union has introduced stringent sustainability legislation, including mandatory recycling targets, right-to-repair laws, and eco-design regulations that will require products to be more durable, repairable, and recyclable. These policies push manufacturers to rethink product design and lifecycle management⁵.

Right-to-repair legislation in the U.S. is expanding, granting consumers and independent repair shops access to tools, parts, and repair information. This

movement aims to make products more repairable, reducing electronic waste and promoting sustainability⁶.

Massachusetts led the way with an automotive repair law, later adding telematics. Colorado extended rights to wheelchairs and agricultural equipment, while New York passed the Digital Fair Repair Act for electronics. Minnesota included home appliances, and California mandated repair access for electronics and appliances, set to take effect in July 2024. Oregon signed the strongest right-to-repair law in 2024, covering consumer electronics and appliances⁷.

Governments in the Middle East and Asia are promoting sustainability through waste reduction incentives, recycling mandates, and investments in circular economy initiatives. Countries in the Middle East, in particular, are aligning their economic diversification strategies with sustainable practices, creating opportunities for businesses that integrate circular models into their operations.

Companies that proactively align with these regulatory trends not only ensure compliance but also gain a competitive advantage by reducing costs, improving operational efficiency, and enhancing their reputation in sustainability-conscious markets.

The Role of Data Centers in the Circular Economy

One of the fastest-growing industrial sectors embracing circular economy principles is data centers. With the global shift toward digitalization, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence, data centers are expanding at an unprecedented rate⁸. The Middle East, in particular, has become a hub for data center investments, with reports indicating that the market is “expected to double by 2030” due to increasing demand for digital infrastructure⁹.

However, data centers have a significant environmental footprint. They consume vast amounts of energy and generate electronic waste, making sustainability a key concern for operators. By integrating circular economy practices, companies

in this sector can reduce their environmental impact while optimizing resource efficiency.

Sustainable Strategies for Data Centers

Energy efficiency is a major focus for data center operators. Investments in renewable energy sources, AI-driven energy management systems, and advanced cooling technologies are reducing power consumption. These initiatives lower operating costs while minimizing the carbon footprint of data processing activities¹⁰.

Electronic waste from decommissioned servers, storage units, and networking equipment presents a significant challenge. Businesses are adopting reverse logistics solutions to refurbish and reuse components, extending hardware lifecycles and reducing demand for new materials.

Sustainable construction practices are gaining traction in the industry. The use of recycled building materials and modular data center designs supports circularity by allowing for future upgrades without excessive resource consumption. Some companies are even repurposing old industrial sites for data center development, reducing the need for new construction.

By embedding these principles into their operations, data centers can enhance sustainability while meeting the growing demand for digital infrastructure.

Addressing Supply Chain Challenges with Circularity

Supply chain disruptions have become a persistent issue due to geopolitical tensions, resource shortages, and shifting market dynamics. Circular economy principles offer a solution by promoting resource efficiency, materials recovery, and localized production.

By investing in closed-loop supply chains, companies can secure alternative sources of materials through remanufacturing and recovery, reducing dependency on virgin raw materials and



mitigating risks associated with price fluctuations. This approach also improves production stability by maintaining an in-house supply of refurbished components.

Industries facing supply chain vulnerabilities, such as electronics and automotive manufacturing, are increasingly turning to circular strategies to enhance resilience. By designing products for disassembly and reuse, companies ensure that materials remain in circulation, reducing reliance on volatile global markets¹¹.

The Role of Data and Collaboration in Circular Economy Success

Transitioning to a circular business model requires integrating advanced data analytics and fostering collaboration across industries. By leveraging data-driven insights, companies can track product lifecycles, optimize reverse logistics, and identify opportunities for resource recovery.

Lifecycle analytics help businesses monitor product performance, predict maintenance needs,

and determine optimal refurbishment strategies. Industry partnerships with logistics providers, recycling firms, and technology companies accelerate circular initiatives. Some major logistics companies have even acquired reverse logistics specialists to expand their sustainability offerings.

Consumer engagement also plays a crucial role. Companies are introducing incentive programs that encourage responsible product disposal and returns, fostering a circular mindset among customers.

By integrating these elements, businesses can accelerate their transition to a circular economy while unlocking cost savings and environmental benefits.

Conclusion

The transition to a circular economy is no longer optional. Organizations that embrace circularity gain a competitive edge by optimizing resource efficiency, reducing costs, and enhancing supply chain resilience.



The increasing importance of reverse logistics, evolving regulatory frameworks, and the expansion of industries such as data centers highlight the need for sustainable strategies across sectors. By embedding circular principles into product design, manufacturing, and supply chain management, businesses can drive long-term success while minimizing environmental impact.

For companies seeking to lead in sustainability, the path forward is clear. Circular economy adoption is not just about compliance—it is about building a smarter, more resilient, and more profitable future.

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Xavier Hubert

Head of Circular Economy at Flex

Flex is a global company that delivers technology innovation, supply chain, and manufacturing solutions to diverse industries. Xavier has 25 years' experience in the electronics industry's supply chain, from logistics and distribution to aftermarket services. For the past 10 years, Xavier has driven several Circular Economy initiatives supporting large tech companies' efforts to become more sustainable. Xavier holds an MBA from Trinity College Dublin, and has held various senior roles spanning business development, product and services development, clients' solutions, sales operations, Marketing and ESG leadership, as well as Supply Chain and Sustainability consulting.

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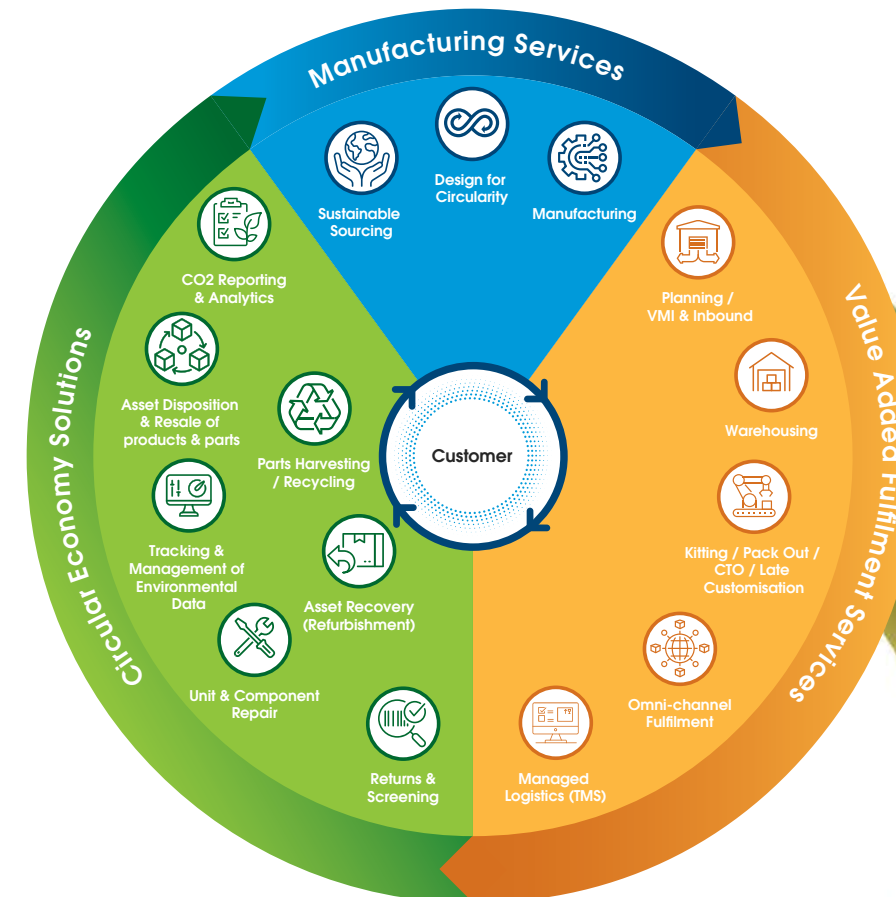


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What Happens To Your Gifts After You Return Them?

By Charlie Sorrel, iFixit (RLA Bronze Member)

One of the best parts of online shopping is the returns. No more justifying yourself to a prickly in-store clerk who insists on asking questions despite the store's no-questions-asked returns policy. Just drop the parcel at the pick-up point and you're done.

But not so fast. Those returned items aren't just restocked on warehouse shelves, ready to be resold. In fact, in many cases, they can end up useless. We tend to use generous returns policies as extended trial periods, and we never think of what happens to products after we send them back. So what really happens to the stuff you return?

It Depends

Perhaps unexpectedly, tech products are actually the least likely to end up in a landfill, especially the more expensive ones. But first, let's take a quick look at what happens to returned goods in general.

To handle returns, a whole shadow industry exists. It's called "reverse logistics," and while many large companies handle their own returns, much of the work is contracted out. When a package is returned, it is "triaged," where people quickly look through everything to see what can be done with it. This means checking that the packaging includes all cables, instruction manuals, power supplies, etc, that clothing is not dirty (according to the Atlantic's Amanda Mull, these poor folks even sniff the clothing to check for odors), and so on.

Around 70% of returns have nothing wrong with them. That is, they are perfectly functional, and were not sent back because of malfunction. And 20-30% of online purchases are returned, so you can start to imagine the huge amount of processing needed.



We like to think that if we coil the USB cable correctly and fit everything back into the box just so, then our returns will be resold. And that can happen. Electronics retailers often sell returns as "open-box" or "b-stock," with a full warranty, just like buying new, only with a sometimes hefty discount. But that's the best-case scenario. Low-price items can end up in the trash, because they are not worth the cost or bother to prep for resale. Clothing might be sold in large consignments to wholesalers and discounters, from where it could end up in dime stores or discount online sellers.

Other items may be donated or recycled, although that also requires a logistics chain to handle, and recycling ends up destroying a lot of raw materials and embodied energy. The worst case is what the industry calls "destroyed," which usually just means landfill.

In short, you should probably think twice about returning stuff and treating online retailers as sources for extended trials. As an iFixit reader,

it's likely that you are quite conscious of the need for repair and reuse instead of replacement, but if you're anything like me, you might not really ever have thought about the huge problem of returns, which was estimated to be a \$2 trillion industry in 2022.

But there's good news too...

Return, Repair, Resell

I asked Chuck Johnston, CSO of ReturnPro and staunch Right to Repair advocate, to help me understand how it all works. ReturnPro provides return processing services to other companies, and they are experts on what happens to tech products—from home appliances through computers to phones and tablets—after they are returned. I was pretty surprised by the process.

First, the resaleability of a device is in a large part determined by its price. High-price items like iPhones and laptops are worth reselling because even at the lower price of a reconditioned unit, they're profitable. That, and the high original cost

means that there is a consumer demand for a lower-priced alternative.

Chuck says that industry-wide, 70% of returns work just fine. For ReturnPro, the "yield rate" is around 90%. That extra 20% comes from repairing returned items so that they can be resold, instead of junking them or sending them for recycling. This means that there is much less e-waste, and of course far fewer resources required to manufacture, package, and ship brand new replacements halfway across the world. Without those repairs, running a company like ReturnPro would not be viable. Essentially, the entire return ecosystem is funded by a functional repair system.

ReturnPro takes broken devices and harvests them for parts. But, unlike your local repair shop, they handle so many units that they have a lot more parts to work with. They also have to deal with the same hindrances to repair that we all do, like annoying glue and software locks. Parts pairing is annoying for you and I, but can lead to massive waste if perfectly good parts cannot be reused between units.



ReturnPro also partners with manufacturers to buy or obtain original spare parts. With TVs, for example, the most common problem is a broken screen. The company ships in replacement panels to repair the returned units before repacking them for sale. When does it make sense to repair a TV? “Unless you’re dealing with a \$700-800+ TV, it doesn’t pay to rescreen,” says Chuck. TVs are now a cheap commodity item, and often the cost of repair is higher than the resale value.

Any time an item that stores data is returned, for regulatory reasons, it must go through the proper data wiping channels before it can be resold,” says ReturnPro director of brand management Fara Alexander. “Retailers are legally not allowed to restock or reshelve electronics that could contain a customer’s personal information.”

Repackaging products for resale is another interesting challenge. While it makes the most sense to use plain brown cardboard boxes that can be used with any model or brand, buyers prefer to have things in the original box, even though they know they are buying reconditioned items. The problem is that the original box is often either damaged or simply missing.

Chuck told me that in some cases their partner actually provides original boxes for them to use, so all the parts and accessories can be packaged up as new, which makes for a much nicer buying experience and can help the retailer sell that item for a higher value leading to better recoveries.

As you dig deeper into the entire supply chain of the devices we buy, from the original manufacturer, through shipping (which is quite carbon-intensive), purchase, use, and returns, it gets more and more obvious that designing for easy repair is utterly essential.

For large companies, the opportunity to reduce costs by making returns less wasteful is a big one. Repairability also saves them money in other ways. Apple’s improvements in this area include making iPhone screen repairs and battery replacements easier, which means that they can be done in-store while the owner waits, instead of shipping them off for days at a time.



Repairability might initially seem like something that makes it easier for handy nerds to keep their computers going for a few more years (itself an essential goal), but it really is important to every part of the modern world.

Taking It Home

Here at iFixit, our in-house team painstakingly refurbishes every returned tool kit. We inspect every part, replace anything that’s missing, and thoughtfully repackage the kits without retail frills, ready to be resold. Properly handling returned goods is an important part of what we do, and makes a real difference, just like repairing your own stuff is essential to sustainability, and to just plain saving money.

It’s tempting to buy and return goods as if online retailers were just facilitators of free trials, but as we see, that’s far from the case. Even if you repackage everything perfectly, carefully coiling cables and taping adapters back into their little plastic baggies, that box is still going to have to be opened and inspected and likely shipped to yet another location to do that. No, Amazon and the other retail behemoths don’t need your help, but e-waste is e-waste, and in that case, we’re all the losers.



Returns Done Right: The Story of a Smarter System

By Larry Velman, EVP of Technology, ReturnPro (RLA Platinum Member)

Returns have long been the supply chain’s dirty little secret. Customers hate the hassle. Retailers hate the hit. It’s been a slow, pricey mess for years, but that’s changing fast. Tech is flipping the game and listening to customers venting on social platforms and shareholders grumbling in boardrooms.

We have spent years untangling reverse logistics knots, and the future isn’t just about managing returns. It’s about mastering them so everyone wins. Customers want simple and quick returns. Retailers want lean and smart returns. It turns out that those align, and the story of how it’s happening is worth telling.

Precision From the First Click

Picture Sarah, a busy mom, buying a laptop online. She clicks confidently, knowing the product matches her exact needs, thanks to AI-driven recommendations that track her past choices, not just clicks. A recent survey of 500 consumers conducted by ReturnPro shows that 73% of shoppers trust brands more when sizing/compatibility/recommendation tools get it right from the start.

Tech also ensures listings are crystal clear. Accurate specs, authentic reviews, and high-quality images

ReturnPro

Solving returns for retailers, brands, and 3P sellers

Returns solutions that address every part of the post-purchase experience from returns initiation all the way to the second shelf.

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items processed

100M+
pounds spared from landfills

16M+
units brought back to life

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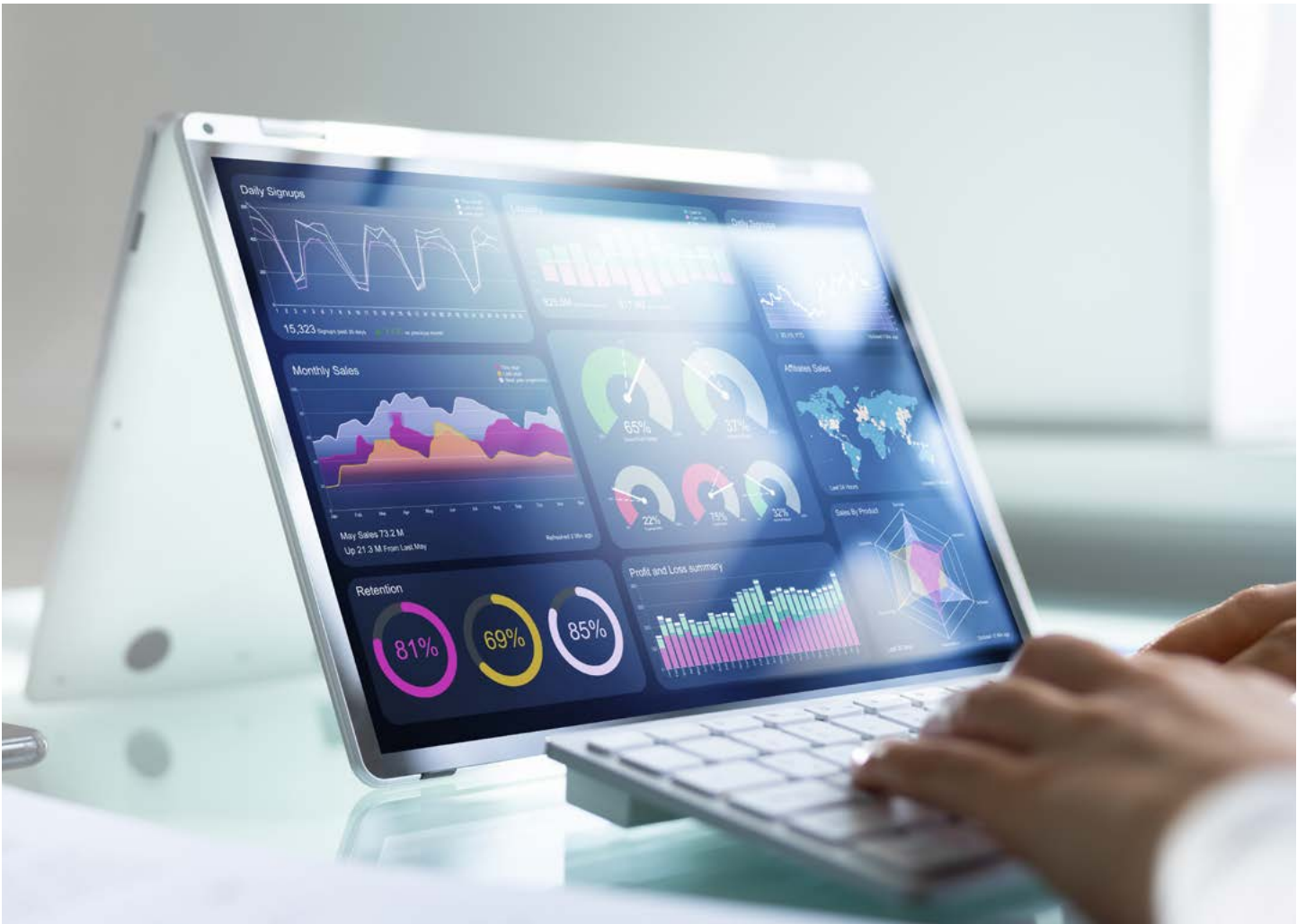
eliminate uncertainty, significantly reducing returns caused by misleading product information. When Sarah uses virtual try-ons or augmented reality previews to visualize products in her home or workspace, she ensures perfect alignment with her expectations. ReturnPro's data consistently points to inaccurate/inadequate listings as a top reason for returns; technology is flipping this narrative.

Today, better pre-shipment quality controls mean the days of receiving defective or unexpected items are becoming less common. Industry statistics reveal that roughly 20% of returns are due to quality issues, something AI-driven monitoring nearly eliminates by catching inaccuracies and defects before shipping. Shoppers like Sarah get exactly what they expect and retailers see substantial cost savings and higher customer satisfaction.

Effortless Returns, When Needed

Occasionally, Sarah might still need to return that laptop, maybe she upgraded sooner than planned or has buyer's remorse. Instead of navigating a maze of emails and forms, she simply opens a QR code or clicks her order history. One tap and it's handled. Research underscores that 70% of customers abandon brands with cumbersome return processes, while 80% stay loyal to effortless ones.

Behind the scenes, tech swiftly distinguishes genuine returns from potential fraud, ensuring Sarah's legitimate return moves smoothly without unnecessary checks. Flexible logistics powered by technology allow Sarah to choose a nearby drop-off center, store location, or home pickup, quickly, conveniently, and free from frustration.



Fast, Smart, and Precise Dispositioning and Processing

Now, Sarah’s laptop is back in the warehouse. The moment it arrives, intelligent disposition technology assesses its condition instantly, sorting it without delay into resale, refurbishing, or recycling categories. No dead stock, and no guessing games. AI-powered condition assessments determine precisely what steps are required next, whether refurbishing electronics, repairing tools, or restoring furniture.

The efficiency here is remarkable. Studies have shown that intelligent sorting alone cuts labor costs by 30%, dramatically accelerating inventory turnover and refund speeds. Customers get swift refunds, retailers maintain healthy cash flow, and the entire process moves smoothly, exactly as it should.



Sustainability at the Core

When products can’t be resold immediately, they’re automatically channeled into sustainable solutions. Sarah, like 66% of consumers today, values green returns handling. Technology ensures unsellable electronics, furniture, and tools aren’t trashed but responsibly refurbished, dismantled for valuable parts, or recycled. This not only reduces waste but also maximizes value recovery.

return, the retailer cashing in on a quick resale. The process is seamless, fast, value-driven, and green. When a product or returns experience goes bad, customers blast it online, often turning the interaction into a viral sensation, but customers cheer wins too. The customer’s online voices are being heard with 60% of retailers planning on tech upgrades by 2026.

The Edge Is Here

Returns used to be a nightmare for everyone. Not anymore. Picture Sarah smiling at an easy

This story is not a “someday” tale. It’s live, built on years of reverse logistics expertise, and growing more efficient every day. The winners are companies leading this shift, the rest get left behind. Returns are no longer a problem, now they are the competitive edge. Are you in?



Larry Velman
EVP of Technology at ReturnPro (formerly goTRG)

Larry is a visionary leader with over two decades of experience driving innovation in the technology and SaaS sectors. Passionate about creating customer-centric solutions, Larry embodies a philosophy of simplicity and clarity, believing deeply in Leonardo da Vinci's wisdom that "simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." His strategic insights and hands-on approach have been pivotal in developing ground-breaking SaaS tools that redefine the reverse logistics landscape. Known for his collaborative spirit, effective communication, and empowering leadership style, Larry continuously inspires his team to challenge conventional boundaries. His lifelong curiosity in science and technology fuels his dedication to transforming complex problems into elegant, impactful solutions.

What's up RLA?

Welcome RLA's Newest Members!





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The 21st Annual RLA Conference - A Great Networking and Learning Experience

By Cathy Roberson, Research Manager, Reverse Logistics Association

The 21st annual RLA Conference is now in the books and plans are already underway for next year's event. The conference was hosted at a new venue and was well received by attendees and vendors.

"RLA is a melting pot where we have organizations that can help us achieve our goals and organizations, we can work with to push that change. And I think without RLA that would not have been possible."
- Mohsin Dar, Head of Product Development & Management, DB Schenker.

Indeed, the Tuesday before Wednesday's full slate of sessions has traditionally been a 'pre-conference' day, but this year, Tuesday was a full day of events.

The conference kicked off Tuesday morning with a three-hour RL Masterclass led by Rich Bulger, Peter Evans, and Deborah Dull. This session focused on transforming reverse logistics into business innovation, helping attendees understand how to maximize product lifecycles profitably while minimizing environmental impact, and case studies on how industry leaders in apparel, retail, automotive, and electronics are successfully embracing circular logistics.

The Masterclass was followed by the RL Women's luncheon with Claudia Freed, CEO of EALgreen, as keynote speaker. An important message that Claudia shared, "Your roadmap to happiness is uniquely yours. Start with one intentional step today, and you'll see how these building blocks

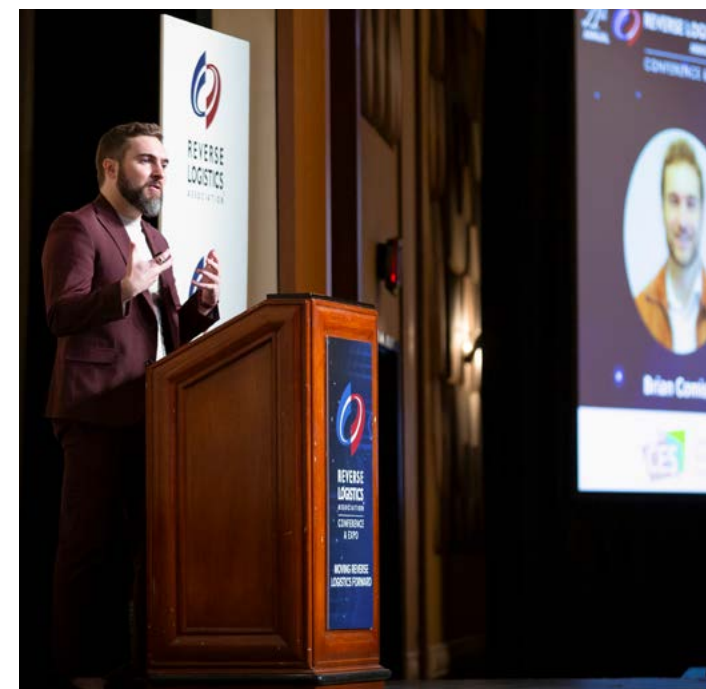


create a fulfilling, balanced life," resonated with the attendees.

After the luncheon, RLA's Industry Partner and Retailers and Manufacturers forums were held allowing participants to share insights and concerns. The Industry Partner Forum began with presentations from Sims Lifecycle, Gay Gordon-Byrne from The Repair Association, and a B-Stock presentation on survey results on B2B resale channels for returned and excess inventory before Q&A.

Rob Link of the Tech Care Association noted in a LinkedIn post that Gay Gordon-Byrne from Repair.org delivered encouraging news about the right-to-repair movement. "We're hearing less and less in opposition from manufacturers," she noted, highlighting that five states have now passed consumer electronics repair bills. While cell phone repair has become "low-hanging fruit" due to increasing OEM support, challenges remain in data center equipment repair – an area where The Repair Association is actively seeking industry collaboration.¹

The first of four keynote speakers throughout the conference was Brian Comiskey of the Consumer Technology Association followed by the third annual RL startup pitch competition. Five great startups – In the Loop, Pattarn, SendBack, Sotira, and Vereva, competed for RLA membership, an interview with IDX, an RLA Magazine article, and free ad and other benefits. A special thanks to the judges – Marcus Shen, CEO of B-Stock, Tom Maher, Director, Supply Chain Executive Consortium at Arizona State University, and Tammy Lesch, Chief Strategy Officer at PlanITROI.



The 'pre-conference' day ended with the 5th annual TopGolf Charity Event benefiting Cell Phones for Soldiers. The event raised \$15,000 this year. Thank you to the more than 100 folks that attended.

Wednesday kicked off with the second keynote from Nordstrom's Senior Vice President of Operations, Corinne Copello, and Senior Vice President of Supply Chain Operations discussing how Nordstrom's returns solutions helped deliver on Nordstrom's customer promise.

After a session on apparel returns, a number of breakout sessions were throughout the afternoon to provide more content and learning experiences for attendees.

Our third keynote speaker, Michelle James, Vice President of Strategic Industry Programs at CTIA presented on the importance of wireless devices aftercare and stressed the importance of standards among the wireless repair community.

Wednesday ended with the RLA awards and recognition.

Congratulations to the following:

Circular Economy Award: Logitech & Goodwill Keystone Area

Green RL Award: Sunnking

Innovation Solution Award: Certus Software

Operational: DHL & Triage Partners

Education: Rich Bulger of Bulger Consulting

Lifetime Achievement: Tom Maher, former Dell Technologies VP & RLA Board Advisor. Current Assistant Director of Supply Chain Executive Consortium (SCEC) at Arizona State University

The final day of the conference started by announcing the startup pitch contest winners. Congratulations to the Judge's Award winner, Sotira, and Audience Award winner, SendBack.

Following the startup winners' announcement, the final keynote speaker – RLA board member and head of reverse logistics planning and data

analytics for Amazon, Dr. Pinar Martin presented on navigating reverse supply chains in consumer electronics.

The consumer electronics theme continued with a presentation on consumer electronics returns and solutions and finally, the interactive roundtables with each RLA board company leading discussions on various topics around a table of participants.

We've received incredible feedback on LinkedIn since the conference such as:

I want to thank the Reverse Logistics Association for the amazing setup and the great job they did for this conference, it was a successful event! It was a pleasure catching up with partners, customers, and vendors, and we also had the chance to connect with many new faces we're excited to start partnering with! One key takeaway from this conference is our shared commitment to making the earth a better place. Let's keep pushing for sustainability and protecting the environment.

- Mahmoud Yehia, Close the Loop¹



A huge thank you to the Reverse Logistics Association for an incredible event filled with insightful discussions, industry expertise, and meaningful connections! Events like these remind us why circular economy and responsible recycling are more important than ever. To everyone who stopped by booth 217, connected with us, and engaged in great conversations, thank you! We look forward to continuing the discussions and driving sustainability forward together.

- First America²



Incredible three days at the Reverse Logistics Association (RLA) Conference & Expo in Las Vegas. Just wrapped up an amazing three days at the RLA Conference & Expo in Las Vegas! It was a privilege to connect with both familiar faces and new contacts and to engage with insightful presentations and panel discussions from leaders in retail, e-commerce, and B2B sectors. Gaining deeper insights into the growing and increasingly vital reverse logistics industry reinforced the importance of advancing circularity goals. Extending product life cycles and expanding reach to demanding markets—while maintaining brand integrity, customer affordability, and environmental responsibility—remains a key focus. Excited to apply these learnings to drive more sustainable and efficient solutions!

- Dr. Antonio Cachazo,
VP & GM of EcoFlow at Frontera
Textile Distributors³

A big thank you to everyone who attended and shared their knowledge at this year's conference. Planning for next year's conference is already in progress, so be sure to join us next year!





Discount Retail Chains’ Struggles Highlight Need for Diversified Secondary Market Resale Strategies

By the B-Stock Editorial Team (RLA Gold Member)

Over the past year Big Lots, Channel Control Merchants, and American Freight have each announced bankruptcy. The immediate future looks different for each of these organizations, and while these developments were somewhat expected to those in the know, they’re alarming nonetheless for businesses in the consumer goods resale, bargain, and discount outlet space. The same is true for any retailer or brand that depends on off-price retailers to purchase bulk quantities of their returned and excess merchandise.

Last September, Big Lots—a nationwide chain of over 1,000 discount stores across the US—publicly

[announced its bankruptcy and sale to a private equity firm](#). While many locations that profitably resell closeouts and overstock will remain open, a financial restructuring will result in the closure of over 300 stores nationwide with additional closures possible in the future. Channel Control Merchants, the parent company of stores Dirt Cheap and Treasure Hunt, is a secondary market retailer that sells overstock, customer returns, liquidation goods, and out-of-season items across eight southern states. Following a period of unprofitability, company leadership [announced bankruptcy last October](#) and will close all stores immediately to satisfy debts to creditors including

many well-known nationwide retail giants. Finally, American Freight—a chain of 370 stores selling discounted furniture, mattresses, and appliances across 40 US states — [announced in early November that it would also cease operations](#) following the bankruptcy of its parent organization Franchise Group (aka FRG). While operations will continue for now, the future is uncertain for American Freight and its sibling companies, Pet Supplies Plus, The Vitamin Shoppe, Buddy’s Home Furnishings.

What’s behind these off-price struggles?

Though inflation is cooling, it’s still been a tough few years for American consumers, with continued economic uncertainty affecting many. And there’s plenty of evidence that it’s discretionary low-cost goods that they’re opting to cut out of their budgets.

Analysts note that in the case of Big Lots, a “jumbled and muddled product mix” hurts the shopping experience, and doesn’t always provide significant savings over more closely managed stores like Walmart. Further, the company itself has noted that its core customers have been developing new habits and spending less on home and seasonal products—a major source of sales for the chain.

Similarly, FRG explained in a press release on American Freight’s troubles that it has “struggled due to sustained inflation and macroeconomic challenges facing the large durable goods sector.” Moving forward, FRG plans to lean on its chains that offer more focused selections such as vitamins and pet supplies, possibly indicating that the traditional appeal of discount stores—a wide and unpredictable variety of mixed inventory—may no longer be a benefit.

Retailers and brands should look to diversify their B2B resale strategy

While it’s tough to pinpoint exact causes or determine whether there’s a broader, longer-term trend at play here, retail leaders would be wise to monitor headlines like these and think seriously

about whether their traditional inventory disposition channels will be sufficient in the event of ongoing economic downturn, business interruptions, or a liquidation partner closing its doors.

News stories and business concerns like these highlight the importance of developing resilient, diversified, and carefully managed B2B resale strategies for moving out returned, unsold, and slow-moving merchandise.

This is where an online B2B resale platform – one that is backed by technology and data, and offers multiple channels to sell inventory – can help solve the returns, excess, and overstock pile up. Some of today’s biggest retailers and brands are leveraging a B2B resale platform to act as a centralized hub for all their secondary market resale needs. By moving everything onto a single online platform, these companies have a single system of record and are able to tackle what’s historically been a fragmented and extremely manual process (ex: selling to an off-price retailer or liquidator). They are also able to provide:

Confidence in pricing

Whether selling to a single buyer or to thousands, it’s critical to know the fair market value of the merchandise and the factors that affect it, including condition, inventory type, and sales channel. A B2B resale platform that holds years of pricing data against these many variables presents a more accurate view of pricing. The best platforms provide a variety of ways to move merchandise into the secondary market (resale via an open marketplace, time-bound contracts, or private one-to-one transactions) and can compare resale performance across these channels.

Access to motivated buyers

There is a thriving and ever-growing secondary market of buyers for returned merchandise of all categories, quantities, and conditions. The ideal B2B resale platform will have a network of thousands of such buyers (including, online resellers, bin store owners, off-price stores,



online sales only, etc.—helps to avoid conflict with your primary sales channels and to guard your company’s carefully built image.

Automated sales and performance tracking

An established, technology-based B2B resale solution can manage the resale process from start to finish. This includes setting up an online resale storefront, providing listing recommendations, pre-setting auction launch times, handling in-platform payment, and sending invoices automatically. Further, it will keep granular records critical for accurate bookkeeping, tax reporting, compliance, and ensuring buyers have met resale requirements.

Proven, Data-backed Strategic Advice

Whether your goal is recovery, velocity, brand control, etc, a company with years’ worth of B2B resale data at its fingertips can be a game changer. You can achieve significantly better results by carefully analyzing data and adjusting strategy accordingly. For example, grouping your inventory by category or SKU to make it more appealing, targeting marketing at specific buyer profiles, or improving manifest accuracy.

As the world’s largest B2B recommerce platform with over a decade of secondary market and resale data, B-Stock has delivered these exact benefits to our customers – which include today’s largest retailers and brands – for years.

To learn more about why leading global brands and retailers trust us to help them move out billions in returned and overstock inventory, [visit our site](#). Or if you’re ready to get started today, you can [contact us for a live platform demo](#) today.

Velocity & scalability in excess inventory reduction

A B2B resale platform that provides multiple channels to sell surplus goods will enable you to scale up resale operations easily. With different sales channels and efficiency-oriented features at your service, you can sell as much inventory as you have, whenever you have it.

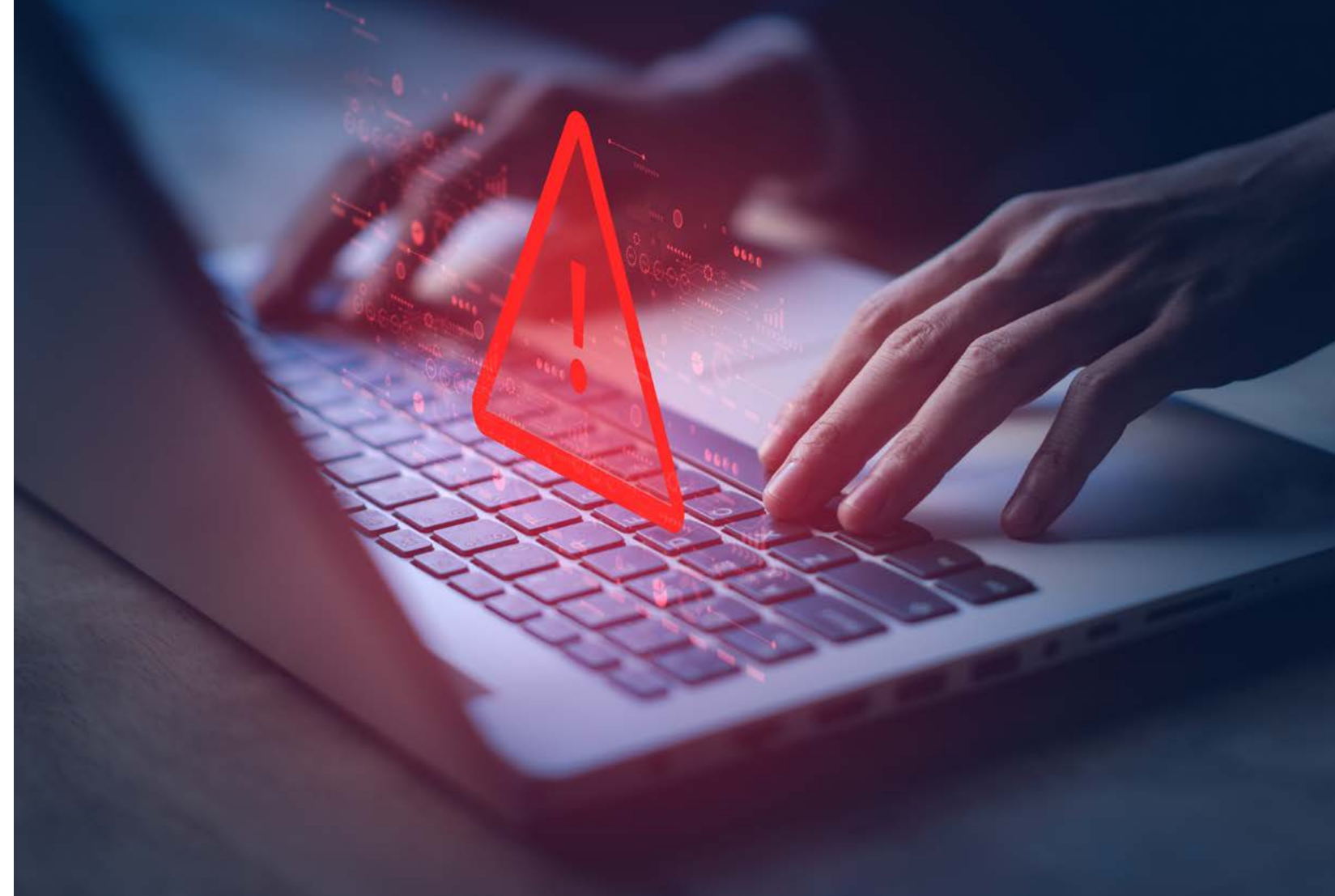
Brand control

Control over where and how inventory is resold is key for brand-conscious companies. Through an online B2B resale platform, it’s up to you to determine how your inventory is remarketed and who can view and purchase it. Setting these kinds of restrictions—including geographic limitations, delabeling requirements, marking for in-store or



B-Stock

B-Stock is the world's largest B2B recommerce platform and system of record for all resale. We connect sellers and buyers of returned, trade-in, and excess inventory through a suite of online resale channels. Our customers range from the world’s largest brands and retailers that want best-in-class inventory resale management to buyers of all sizes looking to source valuable merchandise for their resale businesses.



The Impact of Technology in Empowering Retailers to Tackle Returns Fraud

By Chuck Fuerst, Chief Commercial Officer, ReverseLogix (RLA Silver Member)

As e-commerce eats into physical retail’s share of the total retail market, there has been a coincidental increase in incidences of returns fraud. This development, while shocking, is not entirely unexpected. While returns have always been a part of doing business in retail, returns fraud did not cast a long shadow as it does today.

This is thanks to e-commerce, which creates the perfect environment for bad actors to mushroom

in this space. Unlike product returns to physical storefronts, returns arising from e-commerce tend to make their way to a distribution center, where there is a higher chance of it being checked by an employee who cannot identify product nuances like their peers in a retail store.

The National Retail Federation (NRF) estimated that more than \$100 billion in merchandise was returned fraudulently in the US in 2023¹, amounting

to about 13.6% of the overall returned goods that year. On a microscopic level, these numbers are starker — companies lose an average of \$13.70 to return fraud for every \$100 of returned merchandise accepted.

Uncovering the Tactics Used in Return Fraud

While businesses continue to strengthen their defenses against fraud, return fraudsters have kept up with the times as well. They employ a litany of tactics, weaponizing evolving customer behavior and generous return policies to exploit loopholes in retailers’ systems.

Wardrobing is a common strategy in the fashion and apparel sector, where fraudsters ‘buy’ a product to return it after using it for a specific event — like a wedding, party, or photoshoot. With the ‘no questions asked’ return policies prevalent in the market today, returning the purchases saying they

have changed their minds or that it is unwanted is frequent.

While box switching or swapping products for their likeliness is one of the oldest fraud strategies, bad actors are going a step above today by replacing parts with a cheaper or defective version, especially in electronic products. This can go unnoticed by retail staff and can get added back to the inventory. If resold, the business might face the ire of genuine customers who end up with these defective products, impacting brand value.

The rise of omnichannel has complicated product returns for businesses, as customers can now buy a product via one channel and return it in another. Fraudsters may buy products online, use them for a while, and then return them to a physical store, or vice versa. Fake or altered receipts from fraudulent websites or stolen payment card information can be used to return goods in-store when never purchased.

Good returns management is good fraud management.
Stop criminals trying to take advantage of you, including:



Switching or upgrading scams



Bricking
(removing valuable electronic components and returning the shell)



Suspicious lost receipts or fake receipts



Wardrobing



Returning shoplifted items



Using system delays for twice the refund
(e.g. initiate an online chargeback while returning the item in-store)

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\$139.99 | Qty: 1
Free Return Shipping

Return Reason: Battery Life

Leave a comment about this purchase

Select Return Reason

Leave a comment about this purchase

SUBMIT

Leveraging Technology to Resist Fraud at the Point of Entry

In a scenario where bad actors are increasingly adept at committing fraud, technology can come to the rescue. To begin with, employing a returns management system (RMS)² is crucial to plugging gaps in the returns process while providing clear visibility into the cost of returns operations and the capital lost to returns fraud. A quality RMS can mitigate fraud by managing and orchestrating each aspect of returns management, ensuring workflows and policies are repeatable and standardized.

Data is crucial here. The end-to-end product and logistics data an RMS collects and measures provide businesses with visibility into every item's purchase history, detailed product information, and customer profiles. This data can enable AI-based solutions to spot returns fraud in real-time.

For instance, AI can flag suspicious accounts based on return rates and the type of products being sent back. High-value items are especially prone to return fraud, and AI can detect red flags when returns do not align with a typical buyer's behavior or if there is a short purchase history. Technology can also detect return timing anomalies, alerting the business when the returned product falls outside typical return windows or within suspicious time frames.

AI can also analyze customer sentiment through chats, feedback, social media, or reviews. For instance, inconsistent or contradictory statements on different communication threads can signal that the return request might be fraudulent.

Tech-Based Product Inspections to Identify Fraudulent Returns

While AI-based detection systems help flag returns, businesses are unlikely to outright refuse these return requests as not all flagged returns tend to be fraudulent. However, these alerts help ensure the flagged items are inspected more closely than other returns.

Technology like computer vision plays a huge role in expediting the inspection process and increasing the accuracy of detecting fraud. Computer vision



can be trained to assess the condition of returned items based on images or videos taken at the time of the return. Analyzing visual features like wear, scratches, dents, missing parts, or altered packaging can quickly determine whether an item has been used or tampered with.

A common fraud tactic is product swapping, in which the fraudster returns a different or inferior product instead of the one they originally purchased. Computer vision can match returned items with original products through advanced image recognition algorithms. It can also verify the authenticity of returned goods — especially high-end or luxury items — by analyzing patterns, logos, colors, stitching, and materials that are typically difficult to distinguish manually.

Computer vision can automate the sorting and routing of returns by assessing their condition and categorizing them as 'eligible for refund' or 'requires further inspection.' This reduces human workload, allowing them to be more selective about the products they inspect. All the visual data collected by these systems can be fed into a broader fraud detection system, enabling AI to learn and evolve by recognizing patterns of consumer behavior and the state of product returns.

Personalizing Return Policies for Mitigating Fraudulent Behavior

While technology can help improve how returns are handled and processed, the resulting operational data can be used to tweak return policies, matching them to individual customer behavior. AI can analyze a customer's purchase and return history to create tailor-made return windows. For instance, if a customer with a high return-to-purchase ratio is found to consistently return items within a week of purchase, the system can shorten their

return window for future purchases while offering more generous return periods to loyal, low-return customers.

Further, AI can help offer dynamic return policies based on product category and customer history. High-end electronics may have a stricter return window than clothing, or items with high rates of fraudulent returns could have tighter return rules. This allows flexibility while enabling the retailer to monitor items at a higher risk for abuse.

The idea is to restrict bad actors who abuse the system. Once a profile is flagged, returns from that account must go for a more thorough review each time, besides increasing restrictions — like needing to return items with receipts or items in original packaging. In cases of genuine confusion and mistaken flagging, the AI system can help agents provide an efficient resolution, minimizing friction for the customer.

Ultimately, as a retailer looking to reduce returns fraud, using technology in returns management operations can bring about comprehensive results, purpose-built returns management systems³ can reduce the impact of returns fraud on your bottom line, along with radically improving the process of collecting, inspecting, and adding returned items back to the inventory.

1. <https://nrf.com/media-center/press-releases/nrf-and-appriss-retail-report-743-billion-merchandise-returned-2023>

2. <https://www.reverselogix.com/returns-management/>

3. <https://www.reverselogix.com/news-event/purolator-launching-innovative-open-verify-returns-solution-to-help-combat-fraud/>



Chuck Fuerst
Chief Commercial Officer, ReverseLogix

As Chief Commercial Officer at ReverseLogix, Chuck plays a pivotal role in driving the company's growth strategy. He is responsible for the company's marketing, sales, and go-to-market strategy.

Chuck has spent over 20 years in supply chain technology, helping to build market-leading businesses. He leverages a long track record of scaling companies to help ReverseLogix achieve peak growth through integrated marketing, customer-centric sales, and go-to-market strategy. Before joining ReverseLogix, he served as the director of product marketing at Plex Systems, a SaaS-based ERP platform.

Prior to Plex Systems, he was vice president of marketing for 3G, a hypergrowth transportation management system (TMS) start-up, led global product strategy for HighJump (now Körber), and held marketing leadership positions at Lawson Software (now Infor) and RSM.



How AI-Powered Data Recovery Affects IT Asset Disposal and Security

By John Shegerian, Co-founder, Chairman and CEO of ERI (RLA Silver Member)

Artificial intelligence has the ability to do things faster and with a level of precision that most people cannot possibly hope to match. When used responsibly, it can be a helpful tool for a multitude of tasks, including recovering data and identifying breaches and threats before they happen.

While AI is extremely helpful at data recovery, you cannot ignore security or how to dispose of the computers and other electronic devices that are used. You can't just give that unneeded equipment away. It must be disposed of properly and all data must be completely erased. AI is also a powerful tool for addressing missing data, but it's also at risk of breaches, so it's not a technology to take lightly.

How Is AI Used for Data Recovery?

So, how does AI-powered data recovery work? It starts with a command from an IT professional or business owner. Advanced automated systems begin collecting and analyzing information looking for patterns and concerning anomalies. As missing information is found, AI looks for the path to find where it is in order to recover it. While this could take a person days or weeks, AI can do it in minutes and continually check around the clock for problems that could create data loss.

AI can be set up to continually back up files and computers to make it easier to restore systems if there's a disruption like a hack or data breach. This

also eliminates the length of time that a breach can go undetected. It can detect an intrusion and follow protocol to minimize the threat right now instead of months or years later as has happened in many large breaches.

This advanced technology becomes more advantageous because of the speed and continual processing. A person needs to take a lunch break or a day off. AI works 24/7 and never needs a break. As it's also processing massive amounts of information, it's important to have security measures in place to protect the information it gathers.

The Value of Complete Data Erasure

Another area where AI-powered data recovery becomes useful is with data erasure. As software or other tools are used to erase data, you can use AI to double-check that all data is completely wiped from a device. If AI cannot find a path back to it, you know no one is going to be able to retrieve that data.

NAID AAA is one of the nation's leading data security certifications. The certificate declares that the certificate holder complies with the highest standards for data destruction with its workers and destruction practices. When you're choosing a provider, this is a certificate to look for. The reason why you need this is because not every company disposes of electronics responsibly.

If you're recycling all of your servers and choose a company that shortcuts and sells your devices before wiping the data, you could end up learning that sensitive or proprietary information was stolen downstream. You think you did everything right, but you missed that NAID AAA certification recommendation and went with the cheapest company. Make sure you're looking at certificates.

AI, Your Business, and Data Breaches

Last year, the medical industry experienced two huge breaches caused by improper disposal of films. More than 9,000 patients in Arkansas

and Ohio were affected. While these were not computers or tablets, films also contain private information. Every business should have systems in place to track where things are and whether they've been destroyed yet.

The fines for improper disposal are high, so check these records often and take action if needed.

AI can detect the loss of data, but it can also be used by your IT department to ensure data leaks are not happening. On average, it takes companies just over 190 days to recognize that a data breach has happened and 64 days to contain it. With AI constantly checking, you avoid having that amount of time pass before workers uncover data leaks.

There's another issue to consider if you do choose to use AI. Companies are embracing AI, but about one out of five companies have considered the security of the AI systems they select. This could open the door to breaches through AI. You're gaining nothing.





Tips for Implementing AI-Driven Data Recovery and Disposal of Assets Responsibly

When you store information like credit cards, birthdays, addresses, SSNs, customer information, etc., it's on you to ensure data privacy and legal compliance for keeping this information secure. The right AI-powered solution can constantly check and stop possible breaches.

That's only part of it. You also need to do your part in complying with the laws. Don't trust your electronic devices to anyone. You need to carefully research ITAD providers and make sure the company you choose meets any federal or state privacy rules your company is legally required to follow. If you're not certain of the rules, you need to work with a company that knows and is easily able to meet them.

Keep a list of all the electronics you have to recycle. You need this inventory to track what has been processed and what's tucked away somewhere. As items are recycled, make sure you receive a certificate of destruction to protect your company if a problem arises months or years from now.

Don't put your old computers, tablets, and other components in storage until you've collected so many that you can't ignore them. Make sure you have data destroyed and devices recycled promptly. Even the busiest company has time to place items in a box and send them to a secure data destruction and electronic recycling facility.

What you need is an expert in ITAD and electronic recycling. A certified ITAD company like ERI can destroy data and recycle over a billion pounds of electronics each year.



John Shegerian

Co-Founder, Chairman and CEO of ERI

ERI is the largest ITAD service provider and recycler of e-waste in the United States. ERI is certified at the highest level by all leading environmental and data security oversight organizations to de-manufacture, recycle, and refurbish every type of electronic device in an environmentally responsible manner. ERI has the capacity to process more than a billion pounds of electronic waste annually at its eight certified locations, serving every zip code in the United States. ERI's mission is to protect organizations, people and the environment. Learn more at eridirect.com



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RLA's Educational Impact on Students at APU and AMU

By Oliver Hedgepeth, PhD, Professor of Reverse Logistics at American Public University

The expertise and publications of the Reverse Logistics Association (RLA) serve as a cornerstone that significantly enhances and encourages students' learning in reverse logistics and supply chain management courses at American Public University (APU) and American Military University (AMU). Discussions with RLA members, research conducted through RLA partnerships, and a recent publication by an APUS student who is also an RLA member have contributed to the updating of supply chain management and reverse logistics management courses.

Currently, two courses have been updated using this RLA material, and two more courses are under

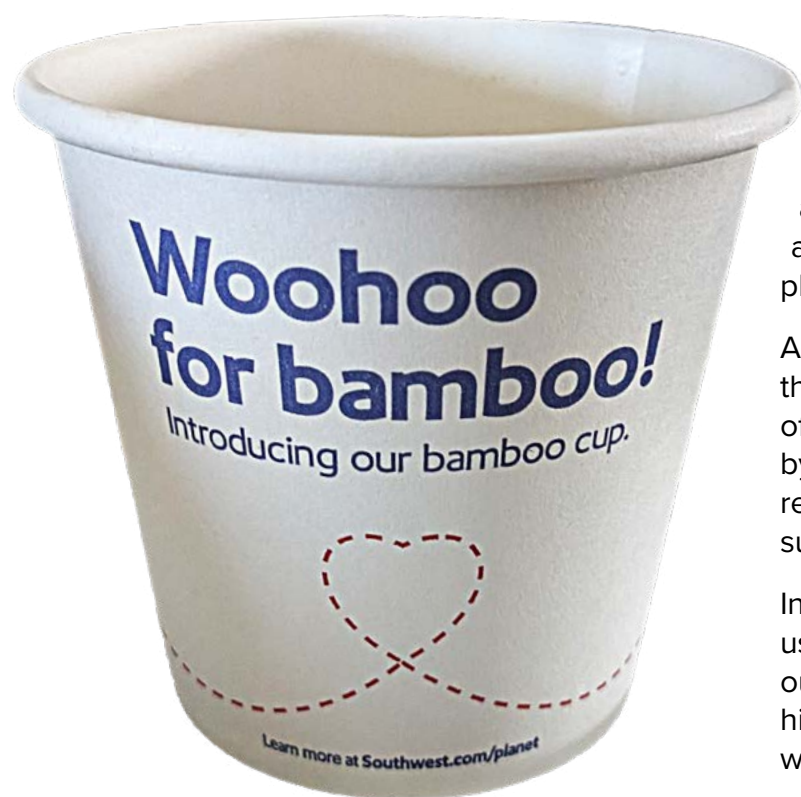
development. The recently completed courses are RLMT: Introduction to Reverse Logistics Management and TLMT313: Supply Chain Management. Two courses currently being developed this spring are RLMT302: Environmental Issues in Reverse Logistics and RLMT400: Recalls Best Practices and Issues.

One of the great sources of current information we insert into classroom weekly discussions is from contributors like Felecia Przybyla, who showed a photo of "Woohoo for Bamboo." It seems that Southwest Airlines Co. has started using bamboo cups for customers who want a cup of water or a soft drink. This type of information is provided to our students to show how a natural product like bamboo can be used to replace plastic cups.

They even include a wooden stick for stirring, made of 100% forestry-certified birchwood. When we post such fun items as this, students not only see what the RLA is doing, but they are also asked to comment on this bamboo cup and provide examples of other items that replace plastic.

Another key source of reverse logistics impact on these four courses is "Going Circular: The Evolution of Reverse Logistics into a Competitive Weapon" by Richard Bulger. This book is now the key text for reverse logistics courses and a support book for supply chain management courses.

In fact, Rich Bulger has developed a video that is used as part of the readings and video material for our students. He often provides our faculty with his current research and ideas on how rapidly the world of product returns is changing. He helps



our students better understand product recycling, waste management, environmental impacts, and general profitability for potential careers after graduation.

Part of our involvement with our students is to ask them questions in an open classroom forum. One such question is "imagine you are in charge of introducing a new eco-friendly product in your supply chain management course. What product would you choose, and how would you present its benefits? (Bonus points if you come up with a quirky slogan for your eco-friendly product!)"

Also, we ask them to search for companies who belong to RLA and find what those companies are doing now to be eco-friendly. And of course, we ask a funny follow up question that has a bit

of Ernst Hemingway tone such as asking them to discuss a scenario where a bamboo cup leads a revolt against plastic cups in a dramatic classroom debate. How would you moderate this eco-friendly revolution?

RLA members and online searches for articles from RLA Magazine and of course the book "Going Circular" help students become more creative and have fun with their answers among students, and of course their professor!

RLA is a gravitational force for education for APU and AMU reverse logistics and supply chain management courses and a partner with APUS to help build a future career path for many of our students.

Supply Chain, Inventory & Logistics Certification

This industry-recognized credential meets the growing need for these skilled employees by exploring:

- The importance of supply chains, the flow of goods and the operations of supply chain facilities
- Reverse logistics and its goals for cost recovery and sustainability
- Safety measures and techniques
- Problem-solving roles in supply chain facility management
- Supply chain jobs, career paths and the skills needed to succeed

Course delivery options are flexible – from online to classroom to a combination of both. Self-paced lessons allow students to engage with curriculum videos, activities and knowledge checks. Mix and match your own lessons to provide a course that’s completely tailored for your students, preparing them for jobs that are in high demand right now.



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Gerald Dagle
Business Educator
Northside High School
Lafayette, LA



NRF Foundation’s RISE Up is a winner of the U.S. Department of Commerce Presidential Award for Excellence in Workforce Education and Training.

Curriculum Summary



The retail industry is America’s largest private-sector employer, supporting 55 million first jobs, next chances and lifelong careers to people in every community. Our industry-recognized curriculum and exams build workplace readiness through training resources loaded with real-world examples and engaging, media-rich activities.

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CLASSROOM DELIVERY	• textbook & exam \$115
BLENDED DELIVERY	• textbook, online & exam \$155
PRICING OPTIONS	• online curriculum \$65 • textbook \$65 • instructor guide \$265 • exam only \$55 • exam retest \$25
ESTIMATED COURSE DURATION	• 10 hours online • 25 hours classroom
EXAM DETAILS*	• 75 multiple-choice questions delivered online – 90 minutes • proctored exam
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We are committed to our community of retailers and industry partners.

We convene retail's leaders and innovators.

As the world's largest retail trade association, NRF brings retailers together to learn from each other and create a stronger, more vibrant and diverse industry.

We produce always-on education.

In-person conferences. Virtual events. Council meetings. Digital media and podcasts. NRF provides top industry content and experiences you and your team need.

We provide exclusive retail research and insights.

Access the reports, insights and research you need to grow your business and brand. From seasonal and holiday consumer trends to industry benchmarking, we have it all.

We advocate for retail — every day.

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