



Technical Report

ISO/TR 32123

Transaction assurance in E-commerce — After-sales services

*Assurance des transactions de commerce électronique — Services
après-vente*

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 321, *Transaction assurance in E-commerce*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

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Introduction

The rapid development of E-commerce has significantly impacted buyers' shopping behaviours, and intensified competition in the E-commerce market. Consequently, the quality of after-sales services provided by E-commerce operators to buyers has become a critical factor in E-commerce transaction assurance. Improving the quality of after-sales services is therefore crucial for buyers as it enhances their satisfaction and trust in E-commerce transactions. It is also essential for E-commerce operators to maintain a competitive edge.

In contrast to traditional after-sales services, E-commerce after-sales services are provided not only to tangible goods but also to virtual goods. They can also compass a broader spectrum of activities, for example, continuous customer support, automated refund processes, logistics tracking, etc. They can therefore involve some new participants, such as E-commerce platform operators, logistic service providers, couriers and technical support teams.

These new elements pose challenges to E-commerce after-sales services. The diversity of E-commerce after-sales service activities can lead to inadequate policy development, causing buyers to be confused about specific terms. The involvement of numerous participants can lead to inconsistencies in service quality, including differences in delivery time, eligibility criteria for return and refund. The diversity of product types can lead to disparate policies, resulting in issues such as difficulties with virtual goods refunds. Providing sustained online support can lead to a deficit of customer service personnel, resulting in issues such as delays in handling complaints.

This document analyses the core aspects of various E-commerce after-sales service activities, the factors affecting service quality and the existing issues in after-sales services. This document also specifies International Standards and use cases to help enhance service quality for after-sales services for E-commerce operators.

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Transaction assurance in E-commerce — After-sales services

1 Scope

This document provides information on the nature of after-sales services unique to E-commerce transactions. It is a review of current practices across different platforms, an analysis of factors that impact quality of after-sales services in E-commerce transactions and a description of possible means to enhance after-sales services.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definition

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <https://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

tangible goods

physical products or items that can be touched and seen

EXAMPLE Books, clothes, furniture, tools, equipment, appliances, cars, jewellery and more.

3.2

virtual goods

intangible assets that are not physically available but virtually present

EXAMPLE E-books, downloadable music, films, games and apps.

3.3

service

activity, or set of activities, provided for the benefit, or to meet the needs, of a buyer

EXAMPLE Service can include offline services and online services. Offline services include those delivered in real life, such as travel services, hotel and event bookings. Online services include those delivered online, such as cloud services, social media, communication, email and Skype.

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC Guide 76:2020, 3.11, modified — “consumer” has been replaced by “buyer”. Notes 1, 2, 3 and 4 to entry has been deleted, EXAMPLE has been added.]

3.4

E-commerce platform

e-marketplace

network information system that provides one or more services to interested parties to facilitate E-commerce transactions

Note 1 to entry: Service can consist of information releasing, information delivery, data processing and transaction information matching.

Note 2 to entry: Platform means application interface to provide E-commerce transactions in forms of websites and mobile applications.

[SOURCE: ISO 32110:2023, 3.1.7]

3.5

E-commerce operator

individual or organization engaged in E-commerce

Note 1 to entry: E-commerce operator can be an E-commerce platform operator or a seller.

[SOURCE: ISO 32110:2023, 3.2.6]

3.6

E-commerce platform operator

organization that operates an E-commerce platform

[SOURCE: ISO 32110:2023, 3.2.7]

3.7

seller

individual or organization that sells products over open networks

Note 1 to entry: A seller can be a manufacturer or a retailer. When trading large volumes of goods for profit or business, a seller can be a merchant.

Note 2 to entry: The definition of seller includes both for-profit and non-profit.

[SOURCE: ISO 32110:2023, 3.2.13]

4 After-sales services in the E-commerce context

4.1 Overview

After-sales services in E-commerce refer to the services and support provided by E-commerce operators and related parties to meet the needs of buyers after purchase. Besides E-commerce operators, the involved parties can include manufacturers, logistic service providers, third-party payment service providers, etc.

Based on current global E-commerce practices, after-sales services in E-commerce can include various activities. For instance, when considered starting after product receipt, the main components of after-sales services include maintenance and technical support, return of products, refund of payment, resolving disputes and compensation for transaction loss. If they are considered to start after order placement, additional activities in after-sales services can also encompass logistics.

After-sales service activities also differ across various products. For example, after-sales services for tangible goods can encompass installation, maintenance, returns and exchanges, etc. This is in contrast to virtual goods and services, which can include consultation, upgrades, training, etc.

To enhance the quality of E-commerce after-sales services, it is crucial to analyse and understand the relevant factors that can have impacts on E-commerce activities and the quality of after-sales services.

4.2 Logistics

4.2.1 Overview

In E-commerce, timely delivery is critical for ensuring that orders are processed and fulfilled promptly and accurately. Consequently, in some practices, logistics is viewed as a key after-sales activity that is essential for buyer satisfaction. Key aspects related to logistics service quality can be found in the processes of dispatch, customs clearance, transportation and last-mile delivery, and reverse logistics.

4.2.2 Dispatch

Dispatch refers to the process whereby purchased goods are picked from inventory and packaged for shipment. The following aspects are important to the service quality:

- a. Options for logistic service providers: Whether options for specifying logistic service providers are available to buyers to select on the shopping order page or review page.
- b. Packaging: Whether E-commerce operators or logistic service providers package goods with suitable materials and label the package according to applicable rules. This can involve indicating precautions such as fragile, hazardous items and instructions for buyers to check the condition of goods prior to acceptance.
- c. Dispatch time: Whether products are dispatched within a predefined time frame set by E-commerce platform operators, sellers, or as agreed with the buyer.
- d. Cost: Whether there is a provision for free shipping, or an estimated shipping fee is applied.
- e. Notice of dispatch: Whether notification is provided by E-commerce platform operators, sellers or logistic service providers, enabling buyers to track the status of their orders, including dispatch time, the tracking number of the package, etc.

4.2.3 Customs clearance

Customs clearance refers to the process of complying with the requirements set by customs authorities for importing and exporting goods across international borders. The following aspects are important to the service quality:

- a. Information availability: Whether E-commerce operators provide clear instructions on what information is to be submitted for customs clearance (e.g. common customs clearance types, buyers ID) and how they can be submitted (e.g. "Single Window" for international trade).
- b. Customs brokerage services: Whether E-commerce operators offer the option of utilizing customs brokers who are experts in the customs clearance process to expedite the delivery of goods to buyers. Customs brokers assist in preparing the necessary documentation (commercial invoices, certificates of origin, waybills, packing lists, import contracts, any necessary certifications or permits, etc.), coordinating inspections, and facilitating communication between sellers, buyers, and customs authorities. Additionally, whether E-commerce platform operators or related entities offer customs brokerage services to buyers on their E-commerce platforms or similar platforms.
- c. Customs clearance tracking: Whether E-commerce platform operators integrate tracking capabilities that enable sellers and buyers to track the progress of shipments through the customs clearance process. Furthermore, whether E-commerce platform operators provide effective communication channels to address any customs-related inquiries or issues.

4.2.4 Transportation and last-mile delivery

Transportation and last-mile delivery involve the transportation of goods from the warehouse to the buyer. The following aspects are important to the service quality:

- a. Transportation mode selection: Whether the logistic service providers have the flexibility to select the appropriate mode (such as ground, air, or sea) and equipment (such as cold-chain transportation) of transportation based on factors like buyer location, package size and delivery requests.
- b. Shipping options: Whether a range of shipping options is offered to buyers to suit their preferences and needs. Options can include standard shipping, expedited shipping, same-day delivery or in-store pickup options.
- c. Logistics tracking: Whether logistic service providers offer real-time tracking updates to enable buyers to track the status of their shipments and predict delivery times.

- d. Communication channel: Whether E-commerce platform operators provide effective communication channels for buyers to address issues such as damaged goods, loss shipping, or discrepancies in quantities through communication with E-commerce operators.

4.2.5 Reverse logistics

Reverse logistics refers to the coordination of returned goods from buyers back to the seller, as well as the proper handling of those goods. The aspects that affect the service quality of reverse logistics include customs clearance (see 4.2.3), transportation (see 4.2.4), and additional elements as follows:

- a. Cost: Whether buyers are offered free reverse logistics service or clearly informed of any additional costs, such as freight or storage fees, and whether this information is provided before purchase transaction or at another suitable time.
- b. Reverse logistics tracking: Whether E-commerce platform operators or logistic service providers offer services that allow buyers to track the movement and status of their returned items.
- c. Packaging: Whether logistic service providers package goods with suitable materials to protect the goods from damage during transportation.

4.2.6 Delivery of virtual goods

Delivery of virtual goods differs from tangible goods, as it involves electronic transfer of digital products or services to buyers. The following aspect are important to the service quality:

- a. Delivery method: Depending on the nature of the virtual goods, virtual goods can be delivered through various methods. This can involve accessing an online platform, downloading directly through applications, or receiving license keys, activation codes, or login details.
- b. Validity: Whether the validity period of the virtual goods is clearly communicated to buyers on the product detail page, including the start and end dates. Whether buyers are given instructions on how to utilize the virtual goods, prompting them to download or use them accordingly.

4.3 Maintenance and technical support

4.3.1 Overview

Maintenance and technical support involve ongoing efforts to keep the product functioning properly. Maintenance refers to preserving or restoring a product's ability to perform its intended functions, which can involve repairing or replacing components. Technical support refers to helping buyers correctly utilize the product, including providing guidance in installation. E-commerce operators usually offer maintenance and technical support for products via warranty services.

In E-commerce, warranties can be offered by various participants involved in the online retail process. Manufacturers and sellers serve as the primary warranty providers, ensuring the quality and functionality of products. E-commerce platform operators can also extend warranty services for products sold on their platform. This can augment the warranty services provided by the manufacturer or seller, prolong the warranty period, or include additional services. The key aspects in the warranty include its terms and conditions, as well as the processes involved.

4.3.2 Terms and conditions

The terms and conditions of a warranty in E-commerce vary across the product and the warranty providers. Typically, these terms are accessible on the product detail page of the E-commerce platform, enabling buyers to review them before making a purchase. The following aspects are important to the service quality:

- a. Warranty coverage: Whether manufacturers or sellers explicitly state what is included under the warranty. This includes detailing which components or parts are covered, as well as any restrictions or exclusions.