



Press release

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## **Sustainability potential revealed in Swiss online retail**

**Around half of products offered by Swiss online shops are produced sustainably. That's according to a survey of online retailers commissioned by Swiss Post for a research project run by the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and the University of Applied Sciences in Business Administration Zurich (HWZ). There's room for improvement when shipping items, according to the research team. Sustainable shipping options are continuing to become more and more important with consumers.**

In the 2020 online retailer survey carried out on behalf of Swiss Post, the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts investigated sustainability in Swiss e-commerce from retailers' perspective for the first time. To do so, the study's authors surveyed 227 companies on environmental and social aspects of the value chain for their online shops.

### **Products: online shops see majority of their range as sustainable**

The online shops surveyed say that the majority of their products are produced sustainably. According to the survey, on average 52 percent of all products sold by Swiss online shops are produced in an eco-friendly way. Retailers are paying even closer attention to social aspects. 77 percent of all items on online shops are produced under fair working conditions. "Our study shows that sustainability aspects are an important factor in Swiss online retail", says Thomas Wozniak, the study leader and a lecturer at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. Surprisingly, however, retailers rarely point out sustainable products to shoppers: sustainable items are labelled as such by just 14 percent of the online shops examined by the study. And just 11 percent of retailers provide a search filter to locate products that are produced sustainably. According to Wozniak, companies already seem to be aware of the shortcoming. Around half of all the organizations surveyed would like to keep their customers better informed about the sustainability of their products.

### **Packaging: only one third managing without plastic**

Along with the product itself, packaging also contributes to the overall sustainability record of online shops. Swiss online retailers say that 56 percent of their packaging for shipping is made up of recycled materials. 48 percent of retailers use recycled materials for filler. Just one third manage to avoid plastic in their packaging. "A crucial aspect is also the size of packaging", says Thomas Wozniak. A majority of 72 percent of all online retailers use shipping packaging that is tailored to the size of products. "This can help to use transport capacities efficiently and to cut down on packaging material", the study leader says. Alternatively, online retailers could send items directly in the original packaging. 49 percent of online shops already do this. The role of packaging is becoming more and more important. Eight out of ten online shops surveyed believe that the demand from consumers for sustainable packaging will increase in the next two years.

### **Shipping: can products be sent sustainably?**

When looking at sustainability, the shipping of products is a special challenge for online retailers. "We need innovative ideas to find solutions for getting products sustainably from the warehouse to customers", says Wozniak. There is certainly room for Swiss online shops to improve in this area, he adds. Just 15 percent of the companies examined offer locally adapted, environmentally-friendly logistics solutions. For example, these could be bicycle delivery services in combination

with trains, or transport by e-cargo bikes. Only 15 percent of all online shops offer customers have the option to choose a carbon-neutral form of shipping without paying extra. “It’s therefore not surprising that very few online shops actively inform their customers about sustainable shipping options”, says Wozniak. By contrast, there is a high level of willingness from retailers to improve their logistics. 75 percent of them are open to sustainable transport solutions – particularly on what’s known as the ‘last mile’, the final section of the supply chain in which the mail carrier delivers the parcel to the customer.

### **Customer perspective: sustainable shipping solutions becoming more significant**

Swiss Post and the University of Applied Sciences in Business Administration Zurich (HWZ) have also created the Swiss e-commerce trend indicator. Compared to the previous year, the proportion of Swiss customers who shop online on at least a weekly basis has risen by over 13 percent. Especially the over-55 age group shopped significantly more often on online shops than they did in 2019 (+ 25 percent). The proportion of those using TWINT as a payment option has increased from 17 to 29 percent. Sustainability aspects were also examined in the study. For customers, it was particularly important for packaging sizes to be specifically adapted when shipping goods (75 percent) and for reusable packaging to be used (73 percent). Swiss consumers would prefer to be informed about the origin of products (79 percent) than about manufacturing conditions (65 percent).

#### **More about Swiss online retail in 2020**

More information about the online retailer survey and the e-commerce trend indicator can be found at <http://www.swisspost.ch/digital-commerce-studies>. The two studies are also available for download there.

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