

REPORT 'E-COMMERCE IN BELGIUM'

The key to success for foreign web shops with Belgian consumers



**THE BENELUX
COURIERS**
FOR YOUR E-COMMERCE



Contents

-
- > **CHAPTER 1**
A closer look at Belgian online shopping behaviour.... 04

 - > **CHAPTER 2**
The preferences of Belgian online consumers..... 09

 - > **CHAPTER 3**
Ten tips to be successful with your web shop in Belgium.. 15
-

The Benelux Couriers

bpost and DHL team up for Benelux deliveries

Consumers expect their parcels to be delivered according to their wishes. Even if the parcel comes from abroad. As delivery preferences differ from one country to the next, bpost and DHL have decided to join forces. bpost knows the wishes of Belgian consumers inside out, and DHL is just as knowledgeable about the Dutch. This means that together we are ideally placed to cater to the wishes of Benelux consumers.

Want to know more about our partnership and how you will benefit? Go to www.thebeneluxcouriers.com



Small country, big opportunities

E-commerce is really taking off worldwide and that includes Belgium. Although the Belgian online market is not yet as developed as in our neighbouring countries, Belgian consumers are increasingly finding their way to web shops.

Because the number of Belgian web shops is still rather limited, Belgians have become accustomed to buying abroad. As a result, Belgium is an interesting market for foreign web shops. For instance, **87% of Flemish consumers prefer to purchase products from Dutch web shops.**

However, there is a but: Belgians have specific expectations with regard to the delivery of their parcels. Fortunately that doesn't necessarily mean you need multiple logistics partners. Together, **bpost and DHL will be happy to assist you on the Belgian market.** We do this under a common name: The Benelux Couriers.

We frequently poll consumers in order to better gear our logistical services to consumer needs. This report details the results of our first survey. And to point you in the right direction, we have also included ten tips that will help you score with Belgian online shoppers.



Good luck!

Thierry Moubax

VP Marketing, Product and Pricing Benelux

About this study

On behalf of bpost, research company Ipsos selected 1504 Belgians aged 16 to 70 who made at least one online purchase in the last twelve months. In April 2018, they completed a questionnaire asking for their conclusions and preferences with regard to e-commerce.



1504 respondents

Belgians aged **16 to 70**

At least **1 online purchase** in the last twelve months

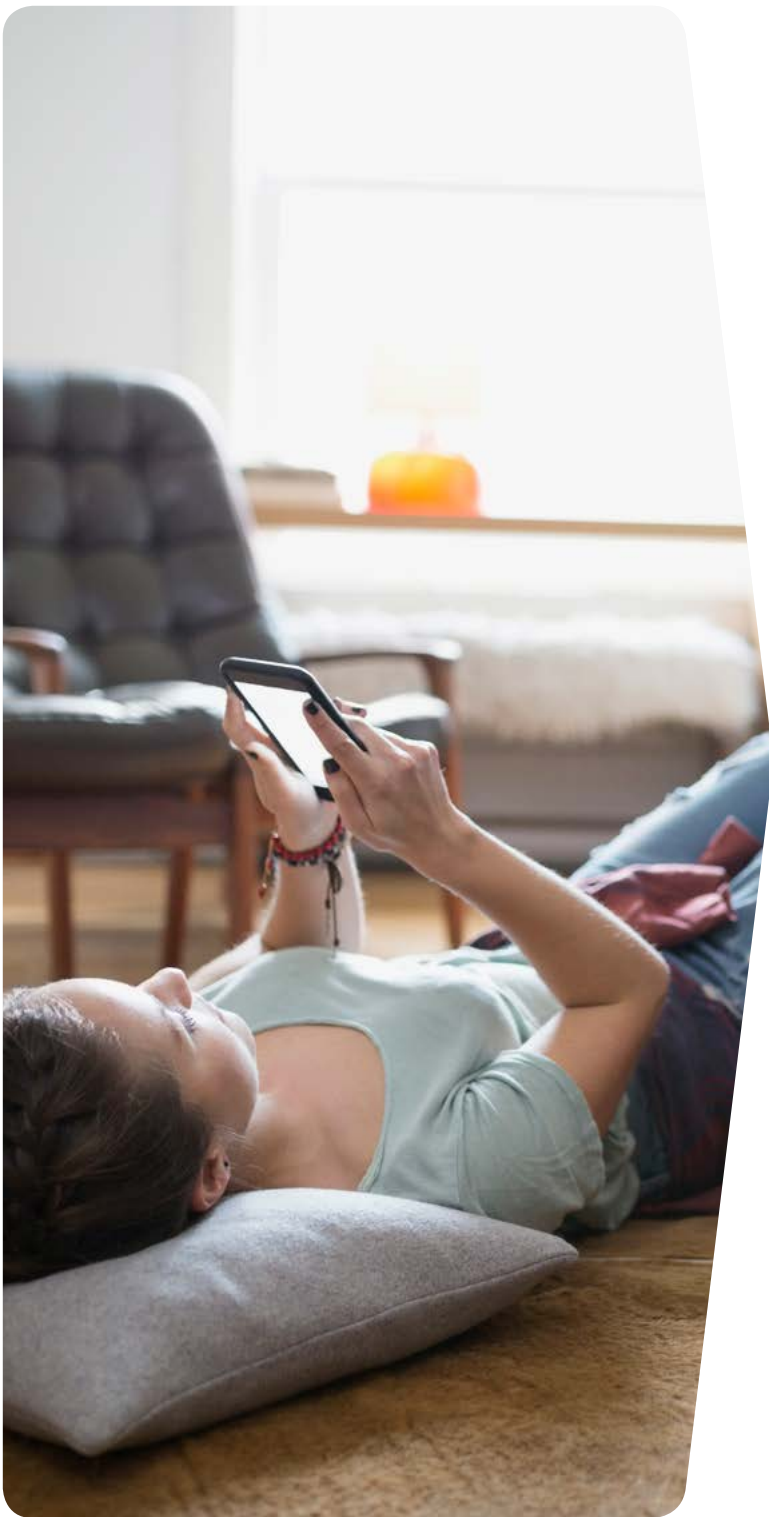
Men **47%**  **53%** Women

Dutch-speaking **52%**  **48%** French-speaking



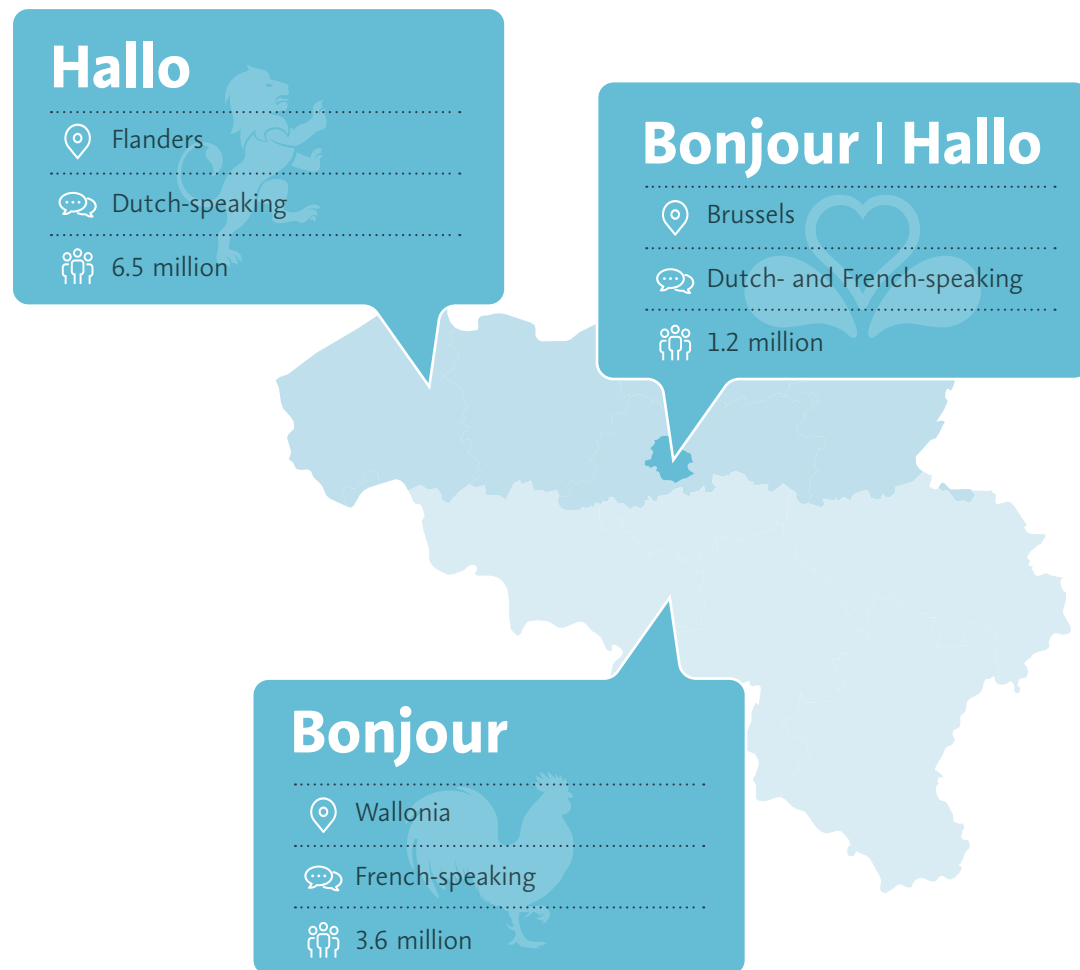
A closer look at Belgian online shopping behaviour

How many Belgians buy online? How often and what do they buy? Do they do this throughout the year or mainly during specific periods? To win the hearts of Belgian consumers, you'd better know what makes them tick and how they like to shop. We have mapped out the online shopping behaviour of Belgian consumers.



11.3 million Belgians

Belgium has 11.3 million inhabitants spread across Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia.



86%

of the Belgian online population also shops online



Roughly 9 in 10 Belgian surfers make purchases requiring delivery. The largest group (40%) does so at least once a month.



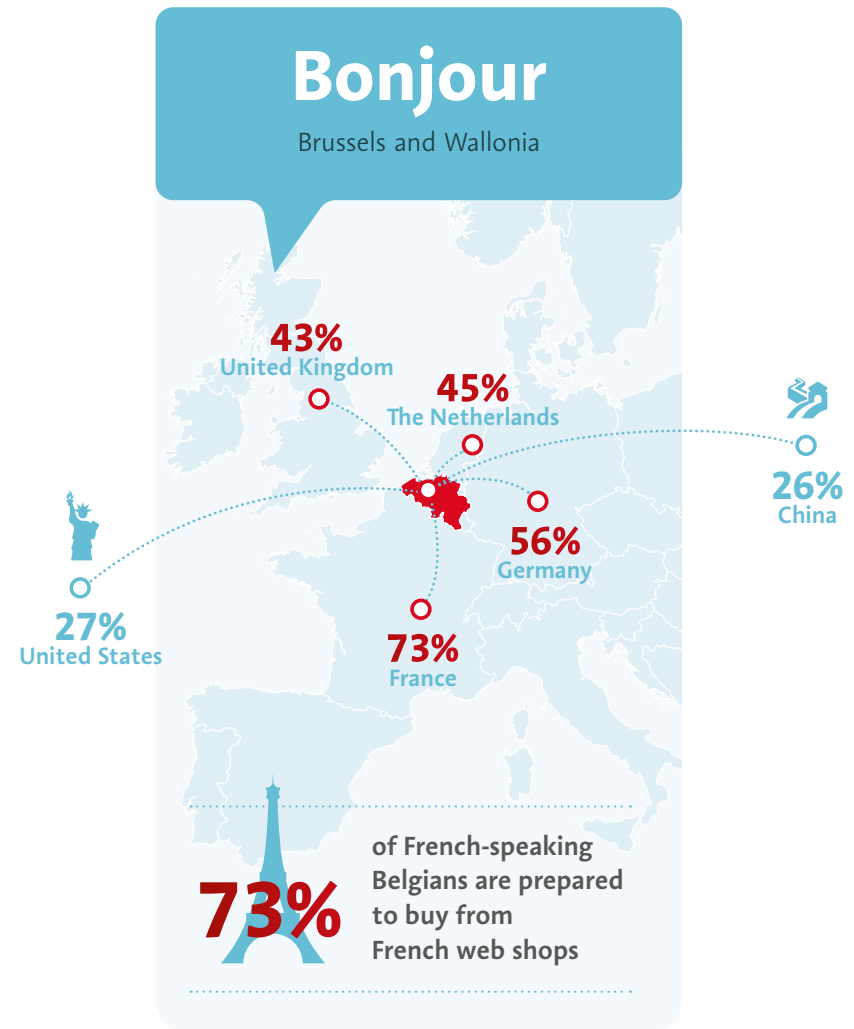
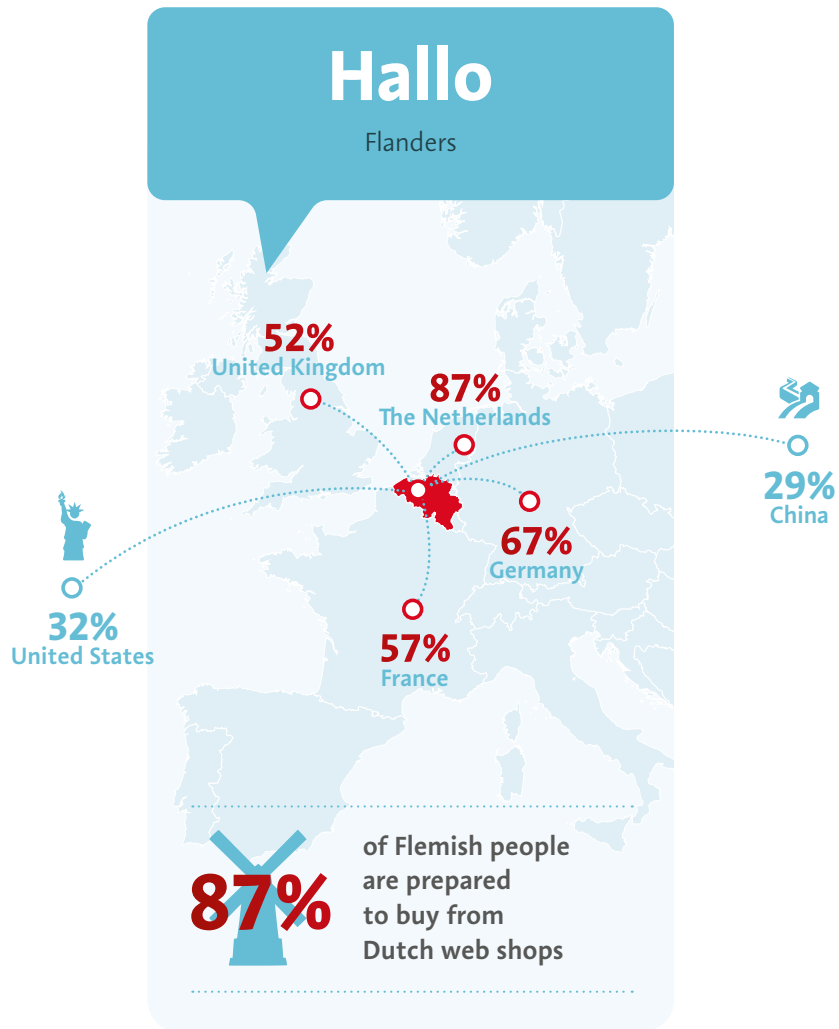
12% At least one purchase a **week**

40% At least one purchase a **month**

34% At least one purchase a **year**

Belgians mainly opt for web shops close to home

The country of the web shop matters. Although there are clear differences between Flanders on the one hand and Brussels and Wallonia on the other, there is one constant: Belgians prefer web shops from neighbouring countries. **Which neighbouring country is preferred depends on the language.**

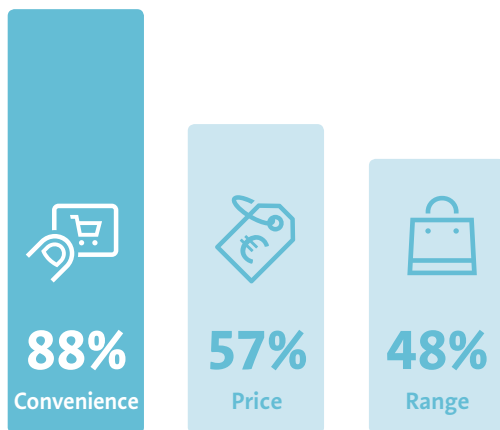




Belgians buy online because it is convenient

Belgians buy online because it is cheaper, because there is a more extensive range or because it is easier than going to a physical shop. A combination of reasons may be involved but the main motivation for an online purchase is convenience. This means the possibility of ordering 24/7, having the purchase delivered at home and not having to leave the comfort of your own home.

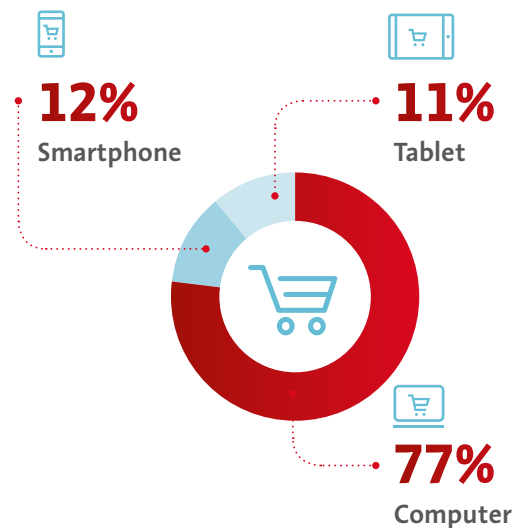
These are the main reasons Belgians made online purchases in the last twelve months:



Purchases are primarily made via the PC

77% of Belgians indicate they prefer to make their online purchases on their computer: 48% prefer a laptop, 29% go with a desktop. The remaining 23% are divided evenly between mobile devices: 12% use their smartphone whereas 11% prefer a tablet.

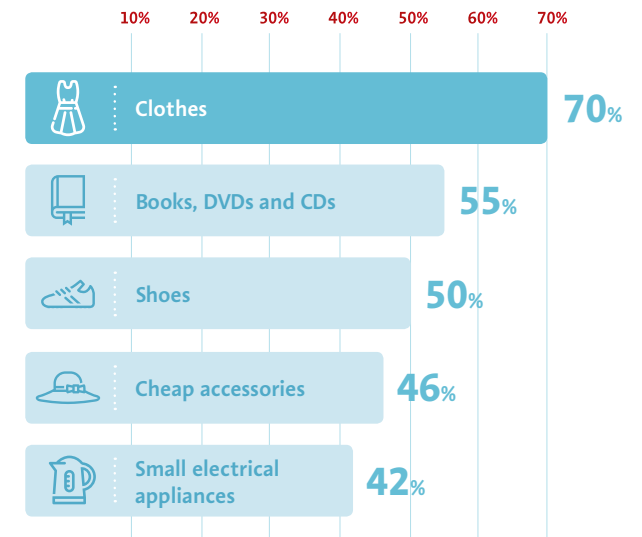
These are the Belgians' devices of choice for an online purchase:



Belgians mainly buy clothes online

Clothes are the most popular purchase amongst Belgian internet users. No fewer than 7 in 10 bought at least one piece of clothing online this past year. The opposite is true of luxury items and food articles: they are hardly ever bought online. Belgians like to see or touch these products before they buy them.

These are the products Belgians purchased most often online in the last twelve months:





Belgians mainly shop online during sale periods and the Christmas holidays

More than in other countries, online purchases are very much calendar-related. No fewer than 40% of Belgians indicate they shop online more frequently in January and July, the traditional sale periods in Belgium. Online purchases also peak during the Christmas holidays.

In the last twelve months, this is when Belgians made most of their online purchases:



40%

Sale periods (January/July)



35%

Christmas holidays

16%
Black Friday

12%
During holidays

11%
St Nicholas

4%
Mother's day

4%
Valentine's day



Making publicity for a web shop is also possible through the letterbox

Banners, newsletters, a Facebook ad... there are several online triggers that incite Belgians to shop online. More striking, however, is the fact that print ads in their letterbox also convince one in five Belgians to make an online purchase. In the Netherlands, for instance, this is just 13%.

Triggers that made Belgians buy online over the past year:





The preferences of Belgian online consumers

Belgians have specific expectations with regard to e-commerce. What information do they expect during the ordering process? Which payment methods do they prefer? How do they wish to receive their parcel? We have listed all preferences of the Belgian online shopper.



Belgians mainly trust web shops in their own language

For Belgians language is a decisive factor when choosing a web shop. To an average **31% of shoppers, a web shop in their own language is a prerequisite to making a purchase.** This percentage is mostly due to online shoppers in Wallonia (36%) and Brussels (34%); language is slightly less important in Flanders (27%).

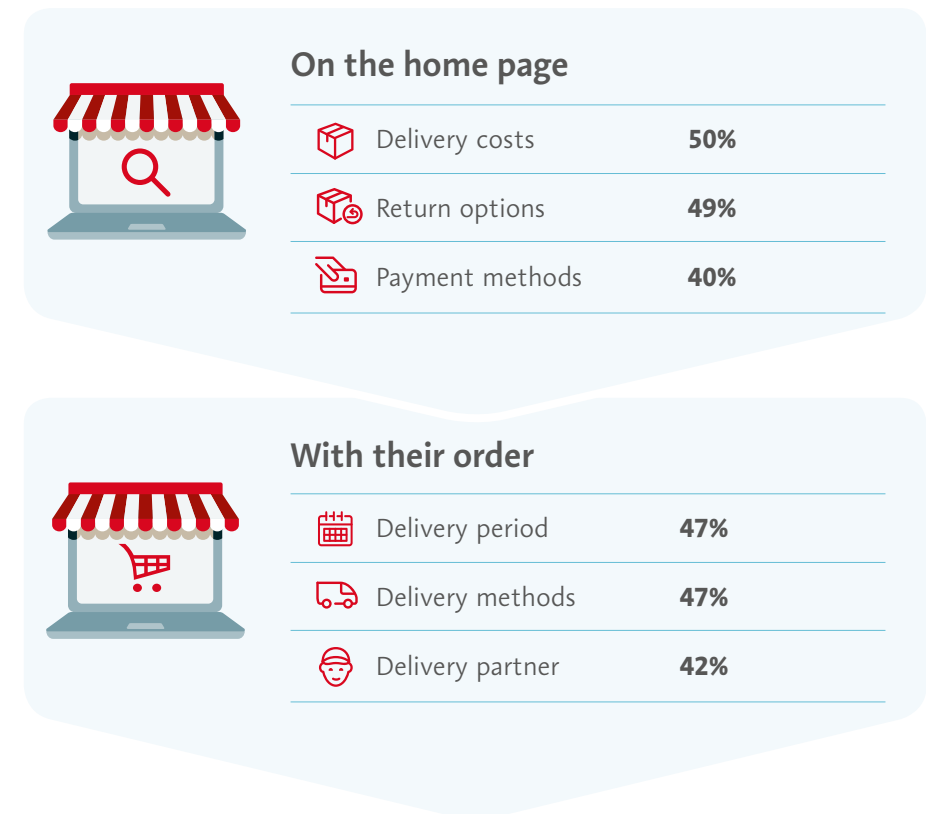
The lion's share of Belgians prefer to shop in their own language:



Belgians like to know where they stand right away

Belgians attach maximum importance to payment, delivery and return options. They expect this information to be readily available, even before the start of the ordering process. So it is a good idea for web shops to clearly advertise this information on their home page.

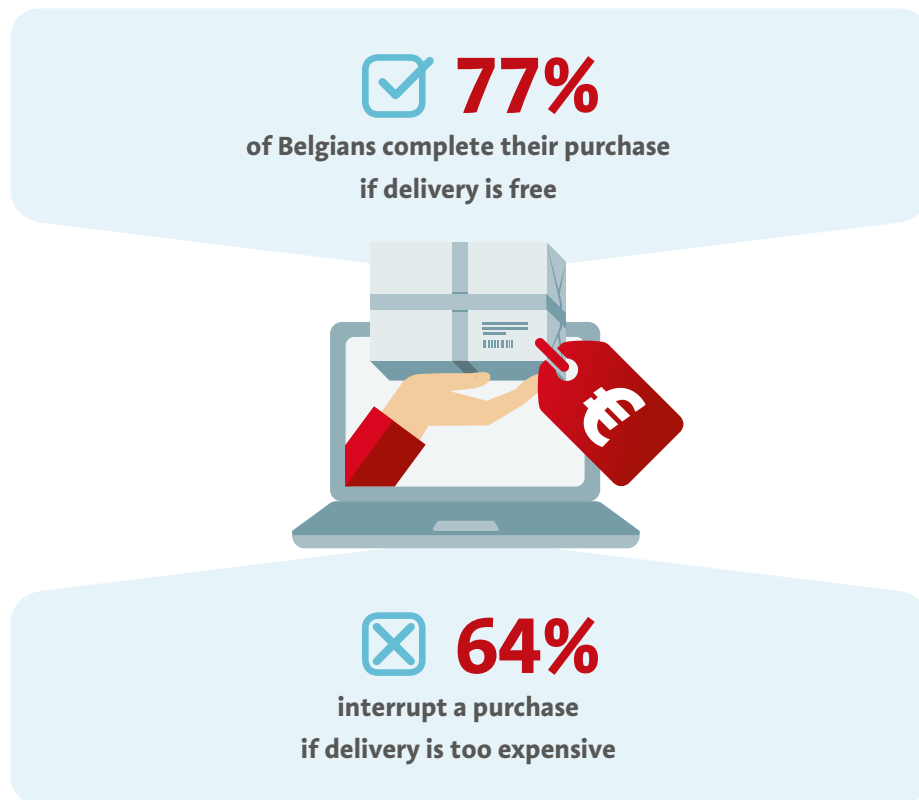
This is the information Belgians want during an online purchase:



Low delivery costs are crucial for conversion

Delivery information is not the only crucial factor; delivery costs co-determine whether the Belgian will continue the ordering process. For example, free delivery convinces 77% of Belgians to place an order. Conversely, 64% interrupt their purchase if delivery costs are too high.

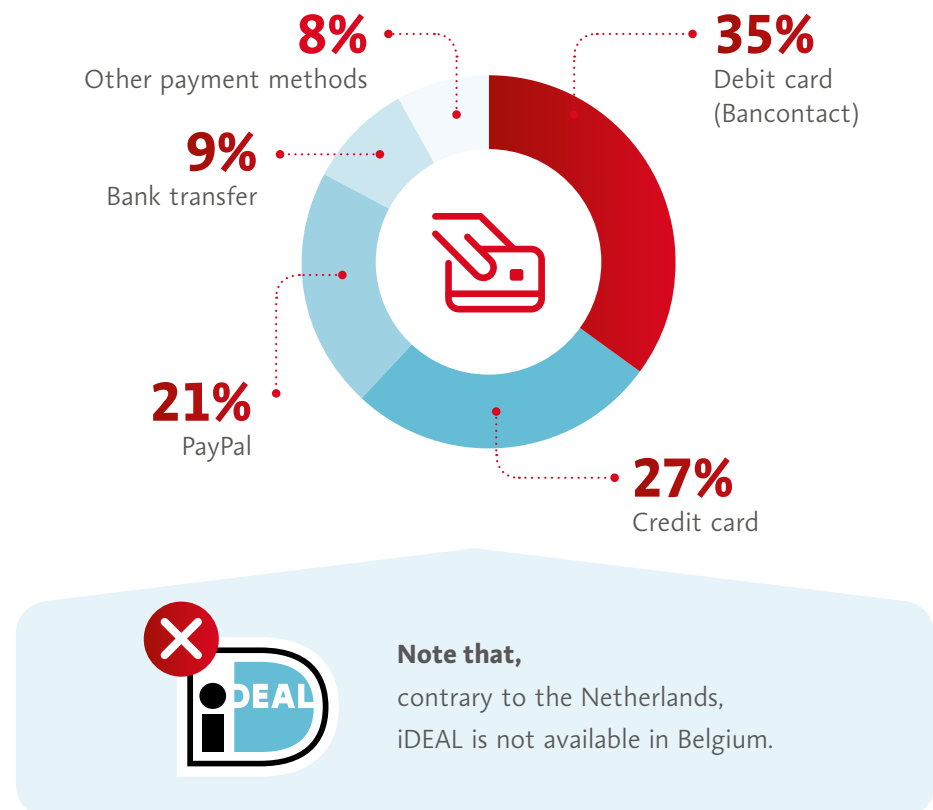
For Belgians the cost of delivery is a determining factor:



Belgians prefer to pay with their debit card (Bancontact)

Belgians prefer to pay for their online purchases with their debit card (Bancontact). Credit cards and PayPal rank second and third respectively. Other payment methods such as bank transfers or cash on delivery (COD) are much less popular.

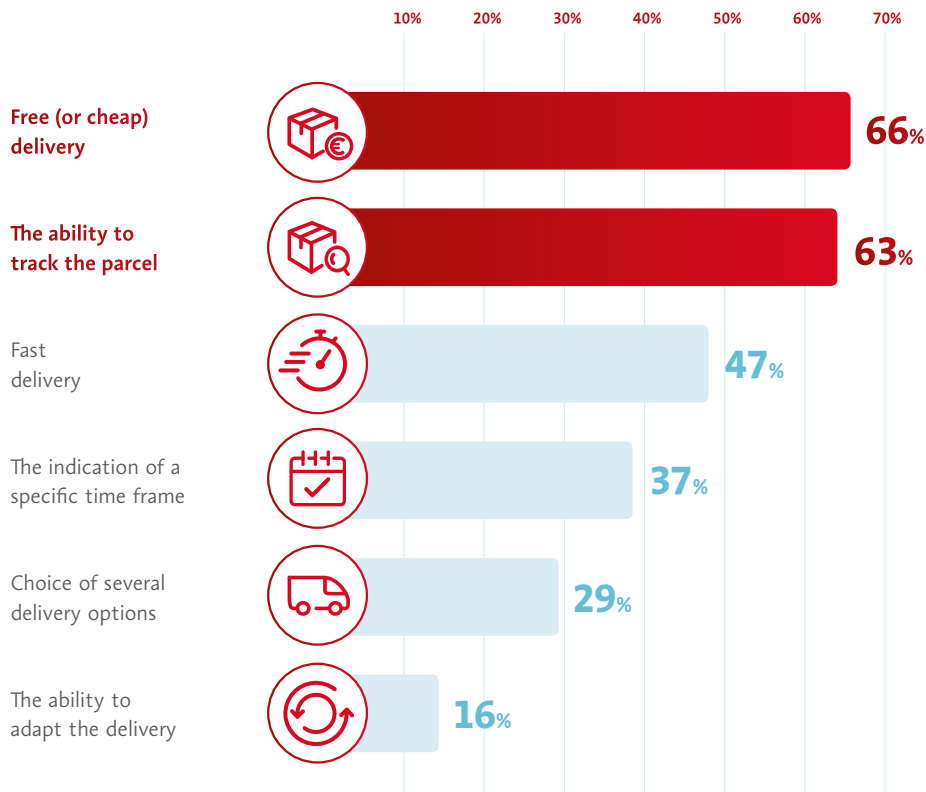
These are the Belgians' favourite methods of payment:



Free delivery? Yes, please!

The delivery of an online purchase involves a number of factors. The key factor for the Belgian online shopper: cost of delivery. This is the most important factor for almost seven in ten Belgians. The ability to track the parcel and delivery speed are also taken into account.

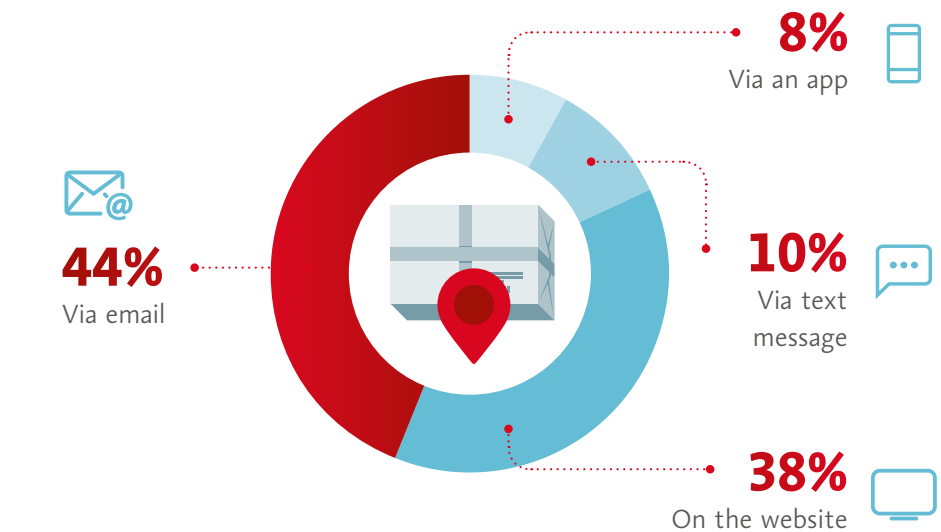
This is what Belgian consumers find important in terms of delivery:



Belgians track their parcel, preferably via email

Belgians want to be kept up to speed, also when they have placed an online order. They prefer to receive notifications via email. Checking a website themselves is also a popular option. 74% of Belgians indicated that they track their parcel.

This is how Belgians prefer to track their parcel:



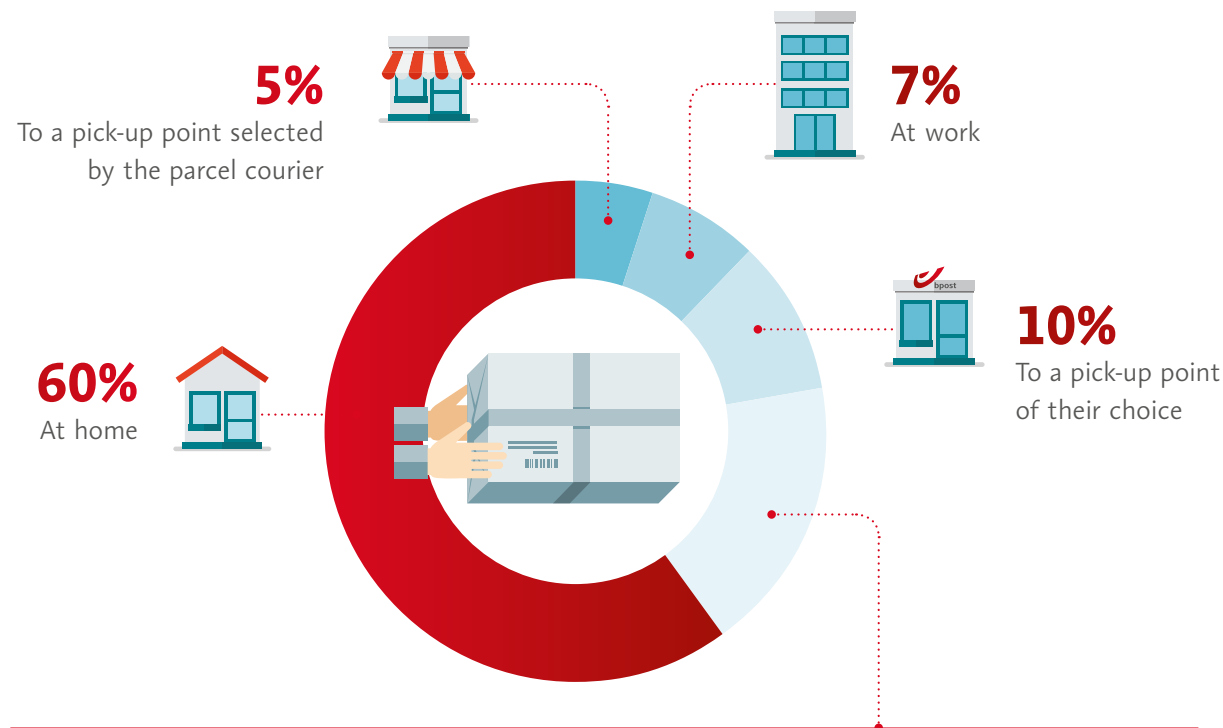
Information that Belgians insist on receiving:

- 66% Order confirmation
- 52% Time frame for delivery
- 52% Delivery confirmation

Home delivery is the most popular delivery method in Belgium

In spite of the availability of different delivery methods in Belgium, home delivery remains the method of choice for 60% of Belgians. Still, it is not as popular as in the Netherlands, where no fewer than 77% opt for home delivery.

Preferred delivery methods in Belgium:



Other delivery methods

- To a different address of their choice: **4%**
- To a safe location around the house: **4%**
- To a post office: **4%**
- To a parcel locker: **2%**
- To a physical shop owned by the web shop: **2%**
- To a neighbour's home of the parcel courier's choice: **2%**

If they are not at home, Belgians want to be able to decide

If Belgians are out at the moment of delivery, 1 in 2 do not want their parcel to be left with a randomly selected neighbour. One in four are OK with this if they can select the neighbour themselves.

51%
 are **not OK** with their parcel being delivered to a randomly selected neighbour

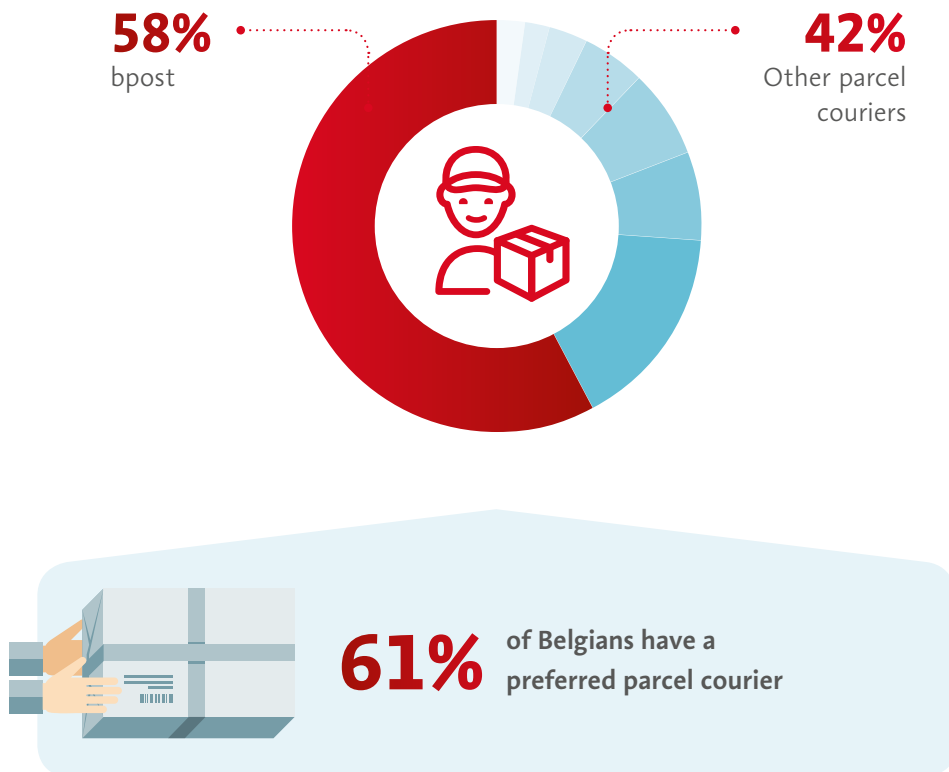
25%
 are **OK** with this as long as it's a neighbour of their choice

93%
 indicate it is practical or even a requirement to be able to list **their own preferences**

bpost is the most popular parcel courier in Belgium

Fully 61% of all Belgians have a favourite parcel courier. 58% of them name bpost as their parcel courier of choice, making bpost significantly more popular than the other parcel couriers on the Belgian market.

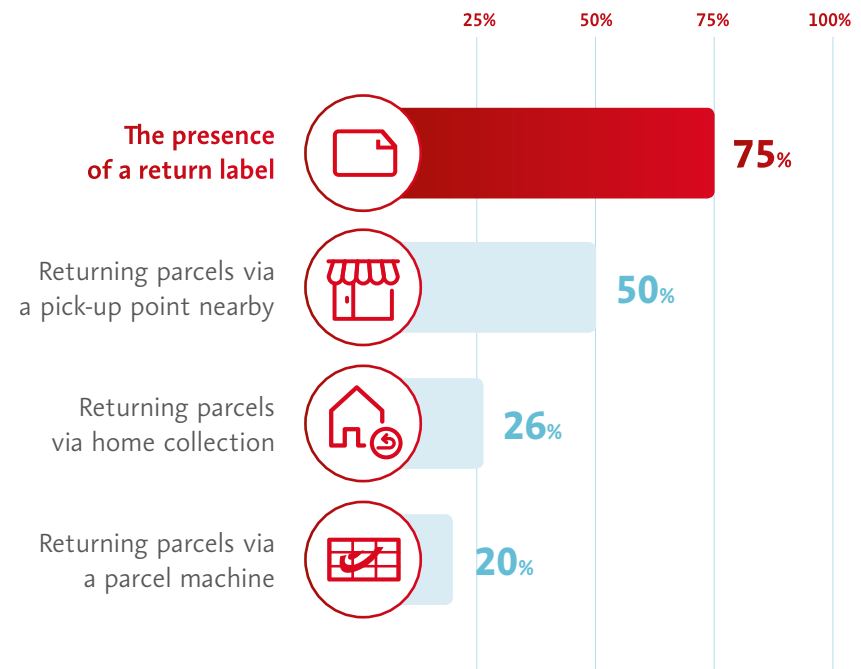
These are the Belgians' favourite parcel couriers:



Belgians want an easy return option

An easy and transparent return policy helps convince Belgians to make an online purchase. They not only want a choice of return options; three in four indicate it is essential that their parcel includes a return label. Just as striking: one in five want to be able to return their parcel via a parcel machine, among others because this is possible 24/7.

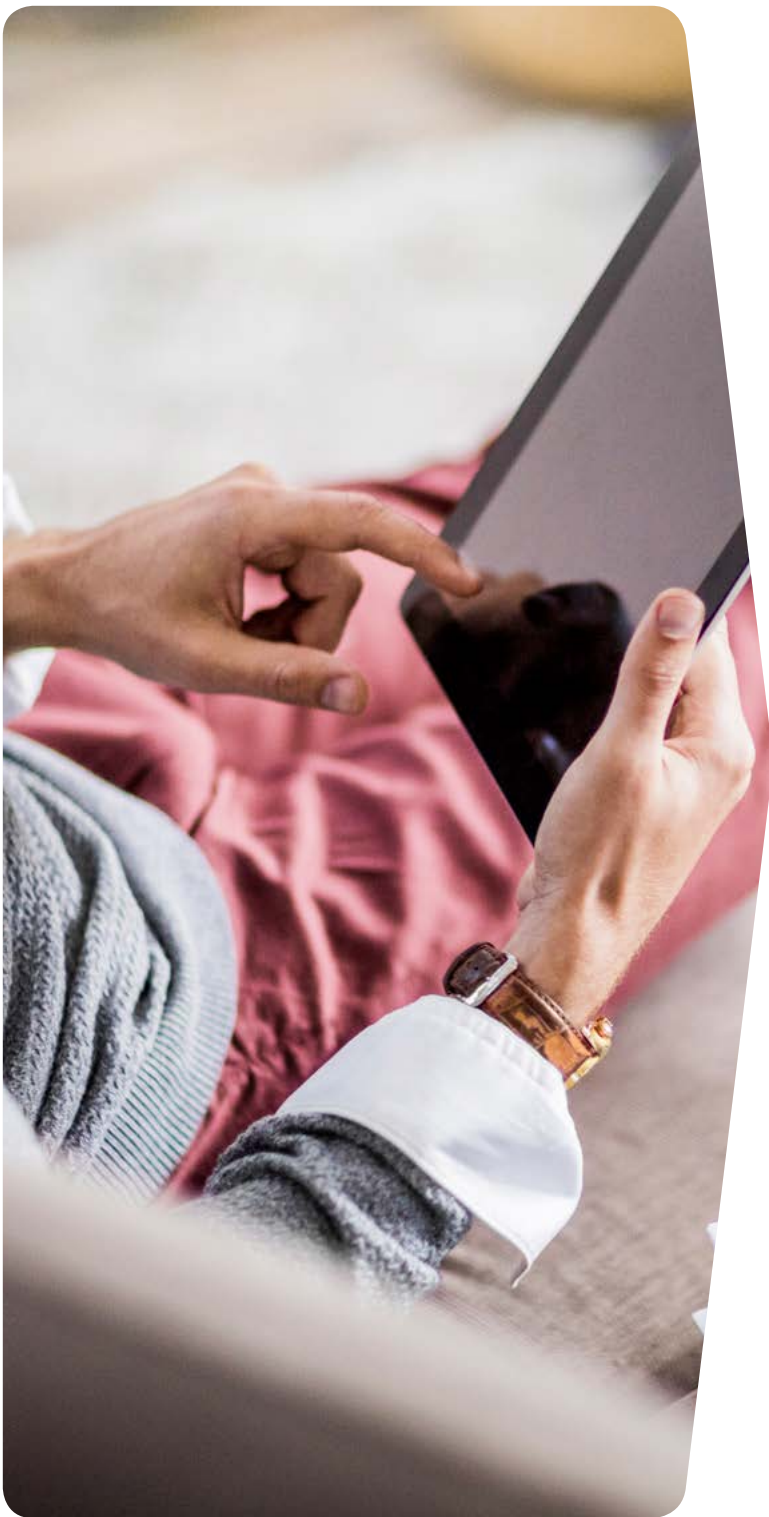
These return options are important to Belgians:





Ten tips on how to be successful with Belgian online consumers

How to increase conversion in your web shop. And how to turn logistics into an actual marketing tool. We have translated the results of this report into ten practical tips. Apply them and give your chances of success a major boost.





1 | Adapt your web shop to Belgian consumers

Belgians mainly trust web shops in their own language. Therefore, a Dutch and French version of your website can be interesting. Incidentally, one in four Belgians shop on their smartphone and tablet so ensure an optimum user experience on every device.



2 | Offer the right payment methods

Contrary to the Netherlands, iDEAL is not available in Belgium. The most popular payment methods among Belgian consumers are debit cards (Bancontact), credit cards and PayPal. We would advise foreign web shops to offer at least two of these three payment options.



3 | Make delivery free or affordable

A fair share of Belgians cancel their purchase if delivery is not free. If free delivery is not an option for you then try to keep things affordable: offer free delivery as of a certain purchase amount or make the cost of delivery inversely proportional to the purchase amount.



4 | Offer a choice of delivery methods

Although home delivery is the most popular method by far, four in ten Belgians still prefer a different method. So be sure to give them the option of collecting their parcel, for instance from a pick-up point or post office.



5 | Easy and preferably free returns

Outline your return policy on your home page and indicate how much you charge for returns. Keep the cost as low as possible and preferably let customers return their parcels free of charge. Be sure to include the return label.



6 | **Communicate transparently on your delivery policy**

Give Belgian consumers clear information on your delivery methods and any costs involved, preferably on your home page. Avoid having them fill their shopping cart just to find out the cost and time of delivery.



7 | **Give consumers every reason to trust your web shop**

Clearly indicate which partners you work with. If consumers see the logos of VISA, MasterCard, Maestro, bpost or DHL in your web shop, this tells them that not only is payment risk-free but their order will also be delivered swiftly and safely.



8 | **Keep customers informed during shipment**

Customers want to know when their order is being shipped and when they can expect delivery. Confirm not just the order but also send notifications with delivery information. Send them a tracking code so they can monitor their shipment.



9 | **Make home deliveries more successful**

If they are not at home, Belgians do not want their parcel to be delivered to a random neighbour. So give them the opportunity to choose a neighbour or a safe location around the house (car port, garden shed, ...) where you can leave the parcel.



10 | **Also use the letterbox for publicity**

Belgians shop online most often during the Belgian sale periods in January and July. The Christmas holidays are also popular. These are ideal moments to put your web shop in the spotlight. Don't just advertise online but use the letterbox as well.

Cater to the desires of Belgian consumers and choose The Benelux Couriers as your logistics partner



Putting our ten tips into practice may be easier than you think. By working with The Benelux Couriers you can tick every logistics box that matters. Our solutions are easy to integrate into your web shop and you need just one contact for all your Benelux shipments.



The Belgians' favourite parcel courier



Delivery when and where your customers want

At home or a different address, to a pick-up point, to a parcel machine or to one of your shops



Alternatives for home delivery

Select a neighbour of your choice, list a safe location around the house, or choose a pick-up point



Clear delivery information



Online shipment tracking



Easy return options



Recognisability of the mailman

Find out more about The Benelux Couriers? Go to www.thebeneluxcouriers.com



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