

GoodsExpress.com: A trusted online partner

By Vision Reporter

A few years ago, online shopping was presumed to be a preserve for the rich who had relatives abroad and could send for items when their relatives were travelling back. People sought to find quality and authentic items, but would pay a high price.

However, nowadays, anyone can shop online and get their items shipped to Uganda affordably in less than a week.

This has been made possible with the advancement in technological developments, growth of financial technologies, faster logistics, wider penetration, affordability and access to the Internet and Internet-enabled devices, among others.

Internet penetration

About 20 years ago, not even 1% of the world population could afford an Internet connection. Today, according to Internet World Statistics of 2017, about 40% of the world population is connected to the Internet. The 2017 Africa Population Internet Users' statistics indicate that about 31% of Uganda's population has access to the Internet.

Figures from the telecommunication sector regulator indicate that the number of mobile Internet users increased by more than one million to 19.5 million in 2015, from 18.5 million in 2014.

This, according to the Uganda Communications Commission, has facilitated the quick growth of e-commerce in the country, and also deepened financial and digital inclusion.

GoodsExpress taps opportunity

GoodsExpress is an online retail marketplace launched in the country about three years ago. The company enables Ugandan customers shop online from around the world and ship to Uganda.

According to Moses Ihoza, the company's regional business head for East Africa, the website provides an Amazon-like experience, removing geographical and other barriers, so that people can have the benefits of shopping around the world and getting their items to Uganda affordably and on time.

It provides total solution by pooling products from over 4,000 websites around the world into one platform, saving clients from browsing multiple stores to find what they want.

How it works

Just like Google, GoodsExpress instantly brings you products from over 4,000 stores around the world, upon searching for a product.

"If you already know what you want, you can use the 'Add Product' button to add your item to cart. From your cart, you can choose options, such as quantity, colour, size, specifications and shipping speeds or even add custom notes," Ihoza explains.

He adds that it is at this point that one will be able to see a final price for your item in Uganda shillings, including customs and shipping.

The company offers flexible and

convenient payment methods, such as cash and mobile money.

GoodsExpress' uniqueness

We believe that there should be no boundaries to trade as anyone in Uganda should be able to shop online and find whatever they want or need wherever it may be.

"We bring major sites, such as Amazon, eBay, Macy's, Zappos and Walmart, among other global stores, into one place. That effectively gives our customers the widest selection of items from their favourite stores around the world," Ihoza says.

As such, Ihoza explains that clients are able to have wider selection and get the best quality product of their choice at the lowest price from different sellers.

"You do not have to worry about a shipping address, how you will pay, how you will ship the item or how fast it will come. We take care of all that for you. All you have to do is shop, pay, we ship the items and you collect them to our office or we deliver to you," Ihoza explains.

In addition, the company also offers one of the fastest shipping periods of three to five days on most items with functional shipping, returns and refunds policy, which offers clients a peace of mind while shopping.

"Our platform is simple, safe and secure to use, allowing customers to register, shop, place an order and get it shipped without leaving the GoodsExpress website," Ihoza adds.

Free shipping promotion

"Yes! We want people in Uganda to experience and enjoy global online shopping and its benefits. As a result, we have come up with a one-month promotion of offering free shipping on thousands of items on GoodsExpress. All they have to do is shop and pay for their items and we shall ship them to Uganda free of charge. So, if I were you reading this right now, I would jump on that smartphone, tablet or laptop and get shopping," Ihoza explains.

Ugandans embrace trend

We have been in Uganda for about three years and have witnessed a lot of growth as a business. Uganda is an interesting market with challenges and a lot of potential for growth.

While online shopping was only looked at as something for the rich, things have changed.

"You would be surprised at how fast Ugandans have embraced online shopping. When people realise that they can have the same quality of a product in the US and around the world for the same cost or even less, with no hustle, they never look back," Ihoza explains.

Without delving into numbers, Ihoza says they are happy with the growth they have so far registered in the online shopping, over the last three years. He says they have achieved the growth



Ihoza believes there should be no boundaries to trade as anyone can shop online



A couple shopping online using a credit card on their laptop

through customers widely regarding shopping patterns and trends, from one dollar earrings, the latest Kim Kardashian collection and multiple fashion items to gadget and electronics, household appliances, car parts, books and food items, Ihoza explains.

"Our customers have a wide range of tastes and preferences. It is hard to pinpoint and say they shop this or that the most. We even had to revise our infrastructure to accommodate bigger volumes and faster shipping since customers were demanding it.

"So far, we are happy with the level of adoption of online shopping, but we still have a long way to go, to catch up with our African counterparts in Nigeria and Kenya. It is our hope that online shopping continues to grow, so that the wider population can enjoy its benefits," he adds.

Challenges faced

The fact the GoodsExpress is an Internet business means that Internet access and penetration impacts on it directly. "There cannot be mass adoption of online shopping in Uganda with few people accessing the Internet or

Internet devices. In comparison to Kenya, Nigeria and Egypt, we have more work to do as a country to enable more people access the internet and its benefits," Ihoza says.

Online shopping can be tough, for instance, many Ugandans do not have a shipping address, customers cannot actually touch and feel the items they are purchasing till they arrive, or you may find low quality items or have difficulty paying for your items.

However, GoodsExpress has solved all of that by providing all its customers with a standard shipping address. "When you receive an item that is different from what you expected, we re-order it for you so you are never afraid of getting the wrong items. And as for payments we have the most simplified payment systems with instant wallet reconciliation for those who use MTN Mobile Money. What that means is that when you send money to your GoodsExpress wallet, it reflects immediately," Ihoza says.

Fortunately, there are efforts by the Government, Google, Facebook and other private players to establish infrastructure to enable easier access and wider Internet penetration. "We look forward to

CLIENTS ARE ABLE TO HAVE A WIDER SELECTION AND GET THE BEST QUALITY PRODUCTS

such efforts coming to fruition. We are making strategic partnerships with multiple players in the internet space to make contributions to the efforts in liberating the Internet," he says.

The future is bright

When you look at the statistics, Africa has 1.2 billion people, out of which, 216 million are connected to the Internet. This represents a penetration rate of about 18%.

There are 960 million mobile subscriptions, representing 80% mobile penetration. Nigeria leads with 93.5 million Internet users. Kenya has 37 million, while Uganda is between 13-16 million.

"This shows there is a lot of potential for growth. We have barely scratched the surface when it comes to the benefits that Internet and e-commerce can have on the African continent, let alone Uganda as a country," Ihoza says.

From creating multiple opportunities and employment to bridging the trade gap between sellers and buyers worldwide, he describes e-commerce as the future for Africa.

GoodsExpress is strategically positioning itself by building capacity in payment systems, logistics, and customer experience necessary to handle the growing demand for shopping from around the world to Uganda and Africa.

Dealing with online challenges

Ihoza says many people were conned of their money by fraudsters promising to help them get items from abroad cheaply until GoodsExpress came. "When you are dealing with us, we take on all the risk of dealing with sellers, clearing customs and any other risk. Our customers do not deal with all that stress. It is like a having a Google account. You aren't the one who fights off hackers, Google does and all you enjoy is security and convenience," he says.

GoodsExpress provides a secure e-commerce experience connecting clients to authentic merchandise from trusted stores. "There are no unwelcome surprises when you do business with GoodsExpress. That is why we also do card verifications as is the standard procedure to confirm card ownership before anyone can use their card," he says.

In addition, GoodsExpress only works with trusted sellers and verified retailers. "So you never have to worry about where your money is going and who may have your personal information. Your GoodsExpress transaction is always secure," he adds.