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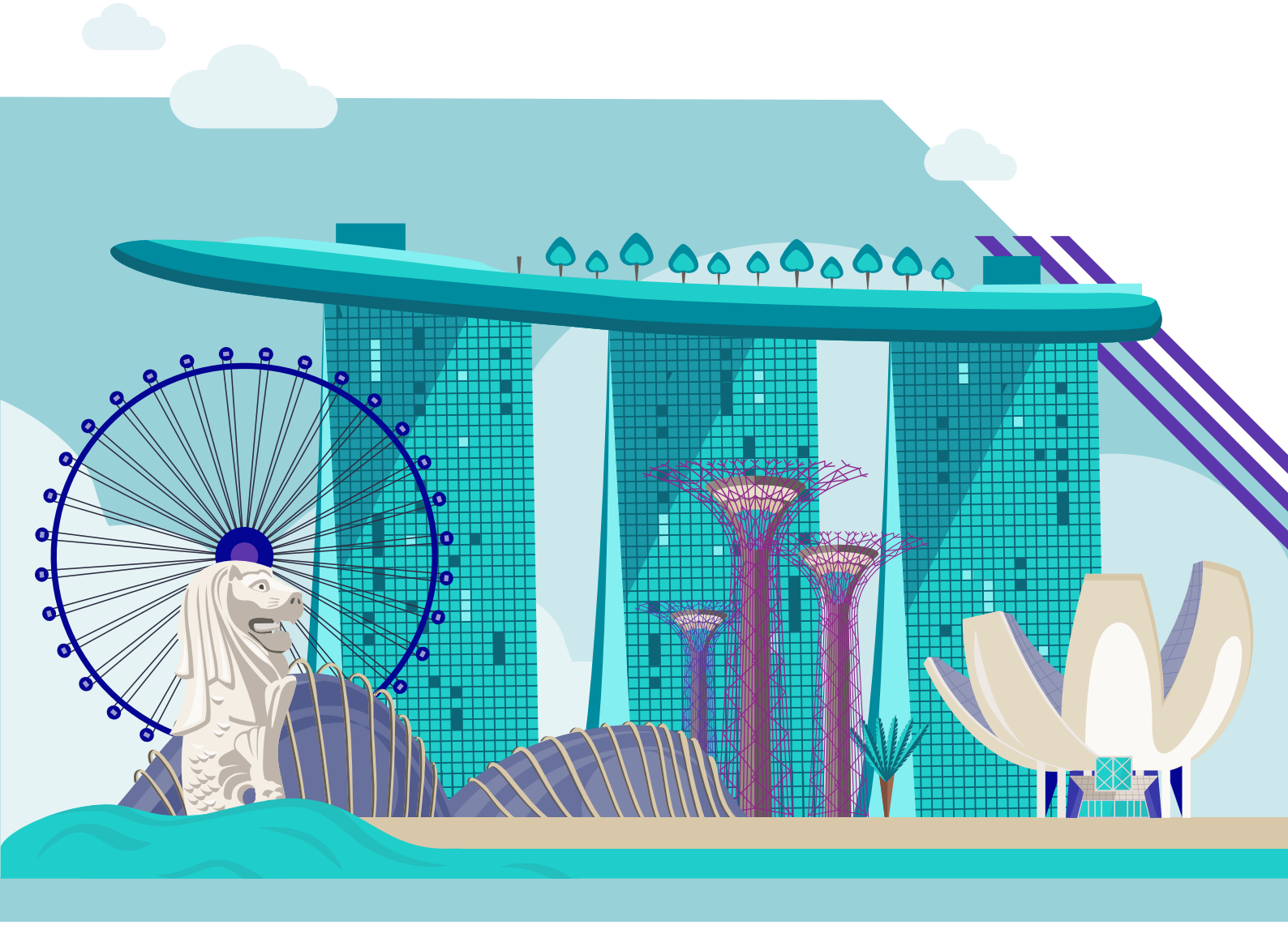
Asia's Logistics Simplified

The Ultimate eCommerce Guide to Shipping to SINGAPORE



Authored by **Janio Team**

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ABOUT THE SINGAPOREAN MARKET

Why Singapore?
Key Stats on Singapore's eCommerce Market

US$2.7 billion

Singapore's projected eCommerce market value in 2020: **US$ 2.7 billion**

2024

US$3.9 billion

Expected Singapore eCommerce market value 2024: **US$ 3.9 billion**

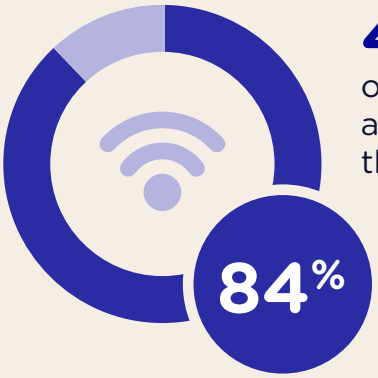
US$ 675.71

Singapore's average revenue per user in 2020: **US$ 675.71**

**reflective of Statista's revised estimates for 2020*

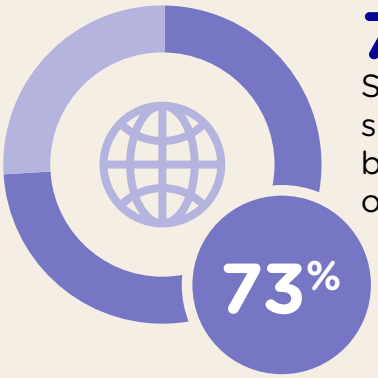
SOURCE: Statista

Internet and eCommerce penetration rates in Singapore



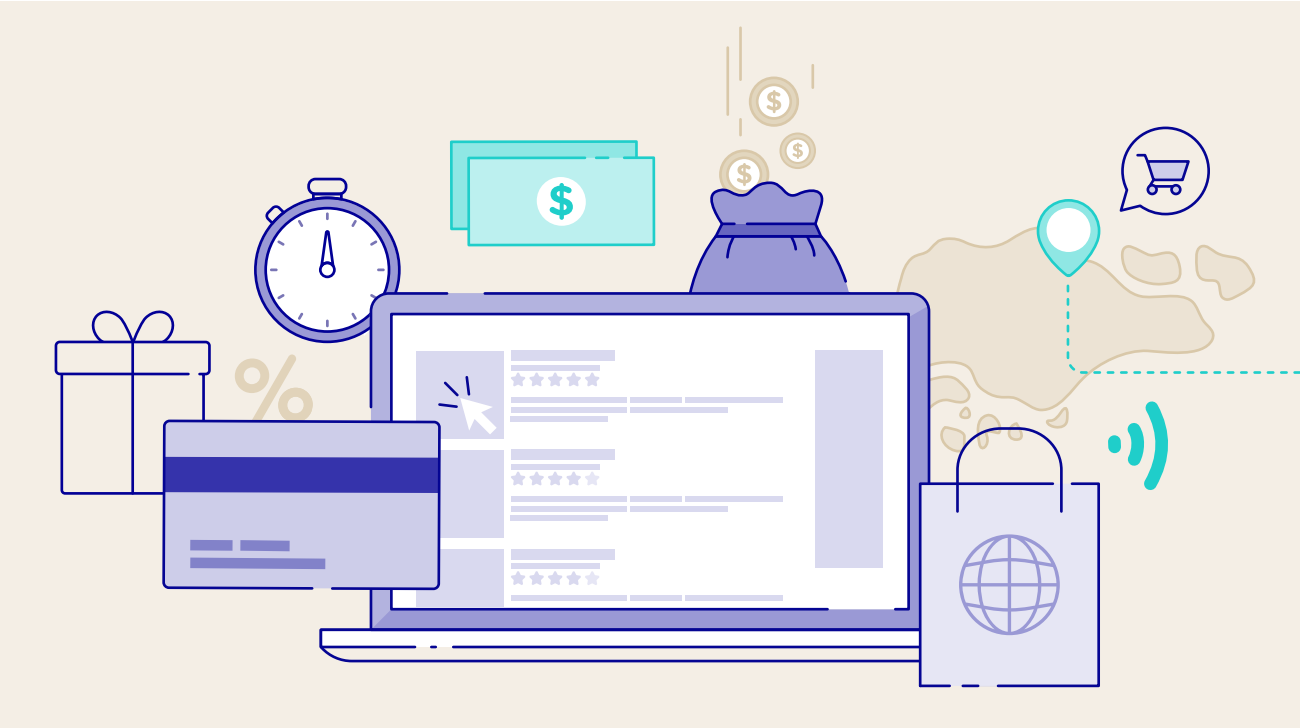
4.9 million of Singaporeans are connected to the internet

3.5 million of Singaporeans have bought items online



73% of Singapore's online shoppers have bought from overseas

SOURCE: Hootsuite/We Are Social, Ipsos/PayPal



With many players eyeing the Southeast Asian market for eCommerce expansion, Singapore has always stood out as an attractive market. Singapore has the highest internet speeds[1] and one of the highest smartphone penetration rates[2] in the world, making it a ripe market to enter for eCommerce.

But what are the considerations that you should have in mind if you want to expand into Singapore's eCommerce industry?

WHY SHOULD YOU ENTER SINGAPORE'S eCOMMERCE MARKET?

Singapore's eCommerce market is expected to grow steadily in the upcoming years. Statista[3] is expecting Singapore's eCommerce market value to hit US$ 3.9 billion in 2024. This is a 9.1% CAGR from 2020's expected value of US$ 2.7 billion.

The majority of Singaporeans are already connected to the internet. The number of internet users in Singapore has reached 4.9 million in 2019[4], out of a 5.8 million population. That's an internet penetration rate of 84%. Of the 4.9 million users, 3.5 million of them - that's 73% - have bought items online, which means a sizeable number of them are digitally savvy enough to navigate the realms of eCommerce.

> **Retail shops that have dotted Orchard Road are seeing fierce competition by eCommerce shops.**

Singaporeans also tend to spend more when shopping online, compared to its other Southeast Asian neighbours. The average revenue per online shopper in Singapore stands at US$675.71[5], which is higher than Malaysia and Indonesia's combined.

Additionally, retail shops that have dotted Orchard Road are seeing fierce competition by not only new malls appearing in suburban Singapore[6], but also online stores. This signals changing times for traditional brick-and-mortar retail models. To top it off, Singapore is home to popular eCommerce platforms that are dominating the Southeast Asian region, such as Carousell and Shopee.

These factors definitely signal the rise of eCommerce in Singapore. So what has been driving the adoption of eCommerce in this Southeast Asian country?

CHAPTER 2

What's Driving Singapore's Shift Towards eCommerce?

Some major factors driving Singapore's surge in eCommerce activity include:

Better bargains and convenience for consumers

Popularity of cashless payment methods

Low barriers to entry

1. Better bargains and convenience for consumers

Having many products listed online means that the savvy Singaporean shopper can find better deals for similar products before making their purchase. To top it off, many eCommerce merchants are vying for a slice of Singapore's eCommerce pie, either by carving their own niche or by capturing the mass market.

In a study by iPrice[1], one of the reasons why Singaporeans like to shop online is because they are able to access promotions and discounts easily. Similarly in a study by PwC in 2016[2], 60% of Singaporeans access social media to tap into promotional offerings and reviews before making the purchase.

Singaporeans also enjoy the ability to find products that cannot be bought locally. In Paypal's 2018 study, 73% of online shoppers[3] in Singapore have bought items from overseas online stores. Thus the convenience in accessing these items and getting them delivered straight to the shopper's doorstep cannot be overstated.

In the same iPrice study in 2017, they have also found that 18% of Singaporean shoppers do so because they need to fix something urgently.

For instance, an office assistant has to address the need for more monitors quickly as new hires are coming in to work. In the morning, she makes an order for 25 new monitors and asks for same day delivery and the parcels arrive at the office before it closes. She and her colleagues are able to set up their new workstations pretty quickly to welcome the new hires that way.

Because Singapore is a small island, same day domestic shipping is a feature that Singaporeans can afford. In the case of cross-border deliveries, which are difficult to fulfil within the same day, you can always give a realistic timeframe for an international shipment to arrive to set your customers' expectations right. Singaporeans are generally aware that cross-border shipping tends to take longer than domestic shipping.

2. Popularity of cashless payment methods

When it comes to paying for goods online, Singaporeans are spoiled for choice. The availability of payment methods like credit cards, e-payments, and bank transfers make it easier for customers to pay for things online.

Additionally, the presence of global e-payment platforms and the availability of cashless payments make it easy for Singaporeans to shop globally on sites like AliExpress, Amazon, Taobao, and even sites like Etsy and Kickstarter.

We cover more details on the various payment methods in Chapter 6.

3. Low barriers to entry

Many factors contribute to having a low barrier to entry for overseas eCommerce businesses to enter Singapore's market.

For starters, English and Mandarin being two of the four national languages of Singapore makes communicating with consumers accessible to global eCommerce players. These businesses can then build trade relations with other businesses in the country and the government as well. Singaporeans are 97% literate[4] according to the latest statistics from Singstat in 2015. Their high literacy rate makes it easier for Singaporean consumers to search for and buy items from international eCommerce stores that use these languages.

Additionally, Singapore's liberal customs regulations make it easier for international eCommerce merchants to enter the island-nation, like the high de minimis threshold of SGD 400 for the value of a single shipment via air freight.[5] The aforementioned high internet speed and high internet penetration also makes accessing to Singaporean eCommerce shoppers relatively easy.

Furthermore, Singapore consistently ranks well as a transportation hub[6]. Not only are Singapore's ports one of the busiest in the world[7], Singapore's Changi Airport has been voted the best in the world consistently, cinching the award in 2019 as well[8], and their air cargo division ranks within the top 20 in the world[9] in 2014.

WHAT COULD HINDER SINGAPOREANS FROM BUYING ONLINE?

Even with eCommerce booming on the island, Singaporeans don't always choose to buy online.

Some reasons include:

- Accessibility to nearby malls and grocery shops
- Scepticism

1. Accessibility to nearby malls and grocery shops

Even though Orchard Road's decline[10] was driven by two major factors: the rise of eCommerce and competing suburban shopfronts, traditional brick and mortar stores still have a fighting chance. Because of the rise of suburban malls and their accessibility due to Singapore's well-

developed infrastructure, it makes walking to a mall or grocery shop near their homes a breeze for Singaporeans as well.

Even though Singaporeans may miss out on discounts when shopping online, which in some cases can go up to 90%, the accessibility and convenience of a physical store[11] make them a competitor to eCommerce stores.

However, some Singaporean shoppers would prefer online shopping over offline shopping. These reasons range from their busy schedules to the lack of product availability in local stores. More of these reasons will be covered in Chapter 3.

With that in mind, some physical stores have taken to the online space to integrate the shopping experience into both online and offline channels. This strategy then enables customers to have a feel for the product before buying.

2. Scepticism

Singaporeans tend to be meticulous about what an online product has to offer before they make a purchase.

It didn't help that Singapore's Health Sciences Authority (HSA) has stepped in before to issue advisories on some cosmetic products[12] that were bought from overseas. While some of these products indeed had harmful chemicals, the average online shopper tends to be quite sceptical about product listings in general to begin with.

Being critical of product listings apply to all verticals selling in the online space. As much as 48% of Singapore's online shoppers would compare[13] the prices and features of the products before making a purchase, so it's best to make a good first impression with good copywriting and professional product photos on your listing's landing page.

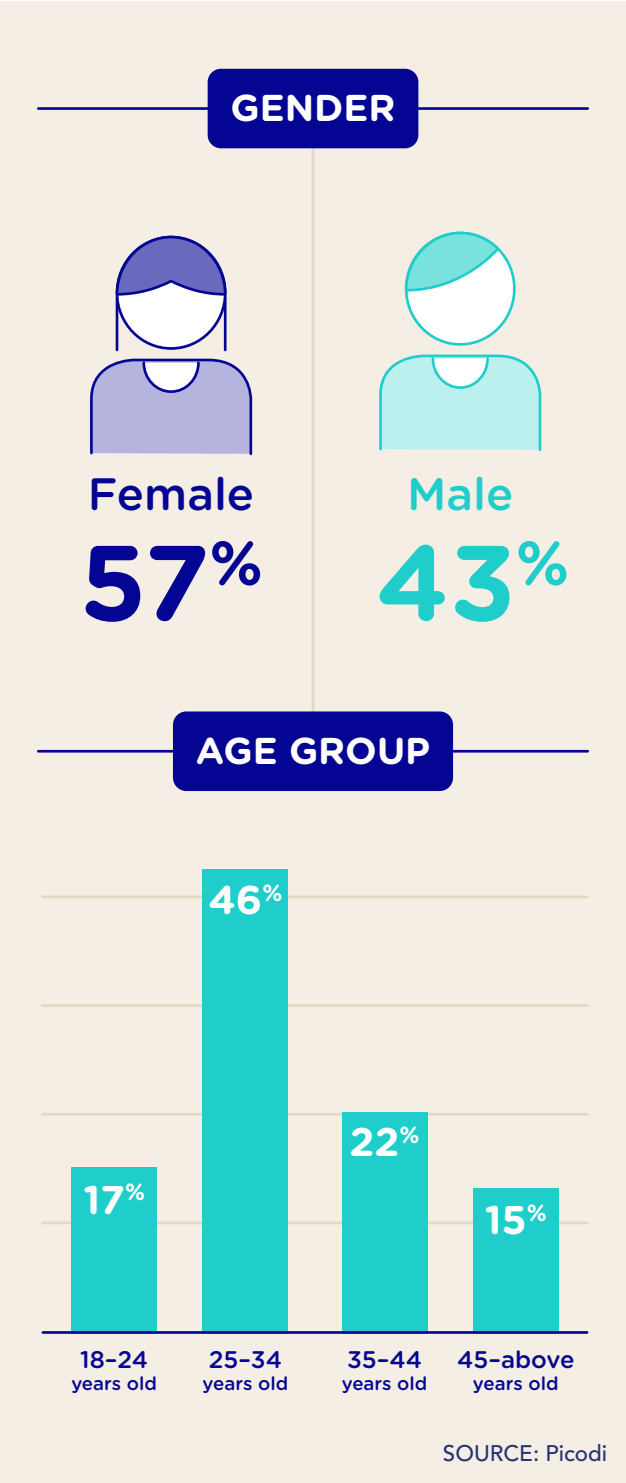
Because of this lack of trust, Singaporeans also tend to rely on product reviews[14] before making their purchase like most Southeast Asian shoppers.

While we're on that, let's get to know the online shoppers of Singapore, and learn their motivations behind shopping online.

CHAPTER 3

Meet Singapore's Online Shoppers

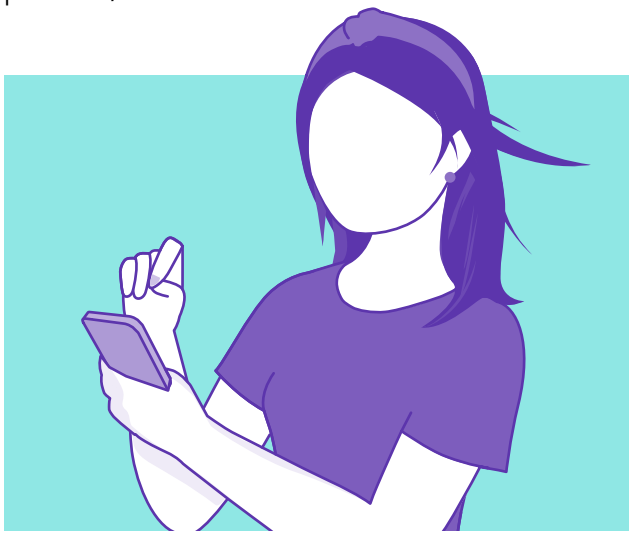
Singaporeans are avid online shoppers, with nearly 3 in 4 of them having shopped online according to research by Hootsuite/We Are social. Among them, 73% have bought from overseas online stores.[1]



Within this group, Singaporean women (57%) shop more than men (43%) according to Picodi's 2018 study.[2] Similarly, the study revealed that most online shoppers are young. Almost half of Singapore's online shoppers are within the age group of 25-34 years old (46%). This is followed by the 35-44 year old age group (22%) and then the 18-24 year old age group (17%). Only 15% of Singaporean shoppers are aged 45 and above.

From this, you could derive that the typical online shopper in Singapore belongs to a young, digitally savvy generation. They are fond of using social media to communicate with each other and would tend to interact with their favourite brands on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. These platforms can help you boost your brand if you are thinking of expanding and localising your online store into a Singaporean audience.

With the profile of a typical Singaporean shopper in mind, it begs the question, why do these young Singaporeans shop online? To answer this, let's look into our Singaporean shopper's persona, Meilian.



WHY DO SINGAPOREANS SHOP ONLINE?

For Singaporeans like Meilian, a working adult in her late 20's, there are some days where she is too busy at work to step into a mall for her dose of retail therapy, even if the Great Singapore Sale[3] is going on.

Loves discounts

While Meilian does enjoy getting a good discount for her purchases, she prefers shopping online to look for the best discounts, like 25% of her Singaporean cohorts according to iPrice's study[4].

Additionally, she has found that online discounts tend to be more attractive[5] than those in physical retail stores. For stores like Lazada, their flash sales can go up to 90%, as opposed to some stores that rely on gimmicks like offering discounts only on the second item bought[6]. On top of that, Singapore's high internet speeds mean that the ability to access multiple eCommerce storefronts to compare prices between them is easier than ever.

During the Singles Day Sale from 2016 to 2017, online sales rose by 60%[7]. This means that online shoppers like Meilian would have anticipated and participated in the campaign period by grabbing as many discounted goods as she could.

With global eCommerce platforms like Amazon and eBay being widely available on Singaporean shores, sales periods known for their impressive discounts and promotions like Black Friday have also become commonplace for Singapore's shoppers, where 82% of respondents knew about Black Friday[8] and 49% intended to participate in the sale in 2018. This has also affected brick and mortar stores[9] such that shops which conduct Black Friday sales have done better than the month-long Great Singapore Sale.

Item availability

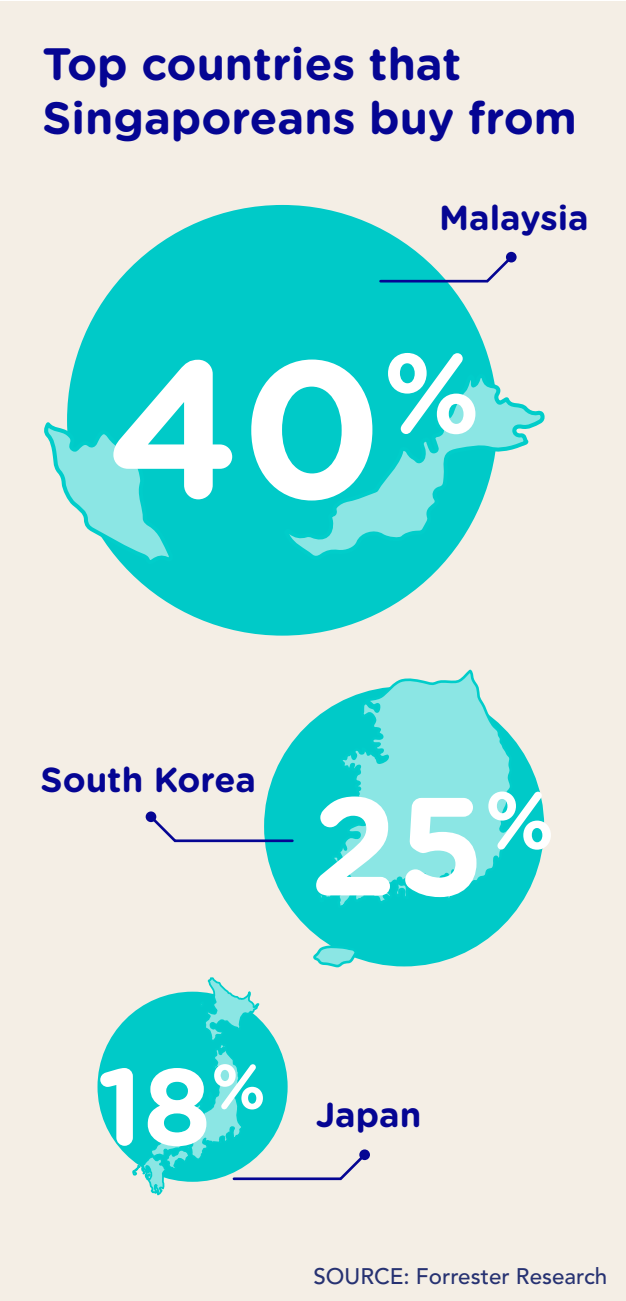
Meilian also likes to shop online to gain access to overseas goods. By buying from other countries, she is able to gain access to goods that are normally not found in local brick and mortar stores, similar to why almost half of the global populace[10] shop online. In some cases, products could be cheaper in other countries or released earlier there than they would in Singapore.

According to PayPal's 2017 study, 73% of Singapore's online buys[11] are from cross-border eCommerce, with 14% of shoppers buying exclusively from foreign websites. Forrester Research[12] places this number at 60%. Their study also reveals that Singaporeans like to buy products from Malaysia (40%), South Korea (25%), and Japan (18%).

Treating themselves

It's been a gruelling month at work for Meilian, and finally, the day has come - Pay Day. Knowing that hard work shouldn't go unrewarded, she treats herself by going online to do some well-deserved shopping. This habit coincides with iPrice's findings that some Singaporeans like to treat themselves (19%)[13], and tend to do so at the end of the month where there is an increase in online shopping activity.

To cater to Singaporean online shoppers like Meilian, it therefore helps to have a variety of desirable goods that are price competitive or hard to find in Singapore. Now that you know why Singaporeans shop online, you'll need to know how they shop online.



INFLUENCES AND EXPECTATIONS IN SINGAPOREANS' ONLINE BUYING DECISIONS

Meilian follows her friends' social media profiles religiously, and this affects how she spends her money on online purchases. She's usually the first to stay on top of reviews and knowing which online shops to support and avoid based on her friends' status updates.

Influences

iPrice Group reveals that 60% of Singaporean online shoppers would look for products via search engines like Google in their 2017 study[14]. Usually already having a type of product or brand in mind, Singaporean shoppers would search for various reviews, features, and price comparisons to make sure that they are getting the best product at the best deal possible.

On days where Meilian isn't looking for a specific blazer to compliment her black shirt, she would consume content from her friends' posts in the form of Instagram content and their #ootd's, which is the hashtag used for a person's stylish outfit of the day.

In Hootsuite/We Are Social's report in 2019, 79% of Singaporeans are active social media users.[15] To add to that, Singaporean shoppers are the most vocal users amongst Southeast Asians[16] when it comes to eCommerce shopping.They are most likely to complain if an eCommerce order goes wrong (34.7%) but they are also two times more likely than Indonesians to share their joy of eCommerce shopping if the delivery meets or exceeds their expectations on social media.

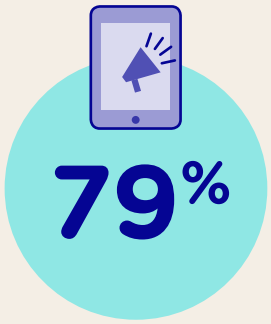
This corroborates with iPrice and Parcel Perform's findings in 2019[17] that Singaporeans are generally happy with the eCommerce delivery experience with 75% giving a 5/5 star rating, but this has to be backed up by timely deliveries within 0-3 days.

Because of this, Meilian tends to stay away from eCommerce stores that have bad reviews from frustrated customers, while going for those that her friends recommend highly. This forms part of their tendency to be meticulous about online listings, where 48% of Singaporeans would compare product listings[18] before making their online purchase, and 57% of respondents in PwC's survey rely on reviews[19] via social media in order to determine the authenticity of the product.

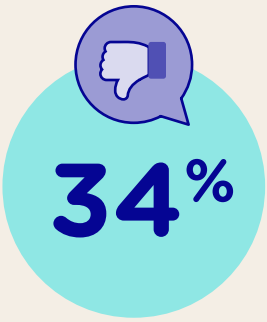
Expectations

With developed infrastructures in place like high internet speeds and the prevalence of cashless payment methods, Singaporeans tend to take their comforts for granted. Because of that, they would have high expectations when it comes to the online shopping experience.

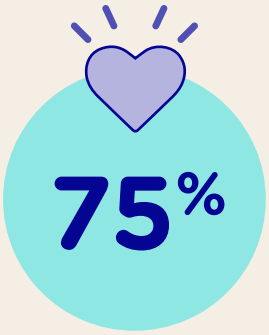
Singaporean shoppers like Meilian would want to have more flexibility[20] and convenience in their online shopping experience according to Marketing Interactive. For instance, Meilian wants eCommerce platforms to give her options



- Percentage of active social media users
- Most vocal users amongst Southeast Asians



- Percentage of complaints if an eCommerce order goes wrong



- Percentage of users who will rate 5/5 if deliveries are within 0-3 days

SOURCE: Hootsuite/We Are Social; iPrice

when it comes to delivery addresses because she might not be around to collect her parcel at home and would like it sent to the office instead. She would want her office receptionist around to collect a delivery on her behalf if she's away on a business trip.

That same research states that 52% of Singapore's online shoppers want the ability to select a delivery location that is convenient for them. Among other things, around 63% of Singaporeans will also review a merchant's return policy before checking out their carts online. This corroborates with our previous statement that shoppers like Meilian are meticulous about which online storefront they are shopping from.

To win over your Singaporean customers, it helps to address negative feedback in a prompt and personable way, while providing various payment options. On top of that, you should have an online storefront that can save multiple delivery addresses and have a robust return policy to optimise the online shopping experience for them.

WHAT DEVICES DO SINGAPOREANS USE TO SHOP ONLINE?

Most Singaporeans do their shopping after work hours[21], although Meilian sometimes unwinds by window shopping online during her 3pm coffee break. In order to not get caught shopping online during working hours, she would browse on her mobile phone to do her online shopping. However, she would prefer the larger screen of her personal laptop if she's shopping at home.

There are conflicting sources on whether Singaporeans prefer to shop online via desktop or on mobile. In a 2018 survey by Picodi, they have found that Singaporeans preferred online shopping on desktops (62%) compared to their smartphones (35%).[22] But the 2017 study by iPrice revealed that 60% preferred shopping on smartphones whereas 34% preferred shopping on desktops.[23]

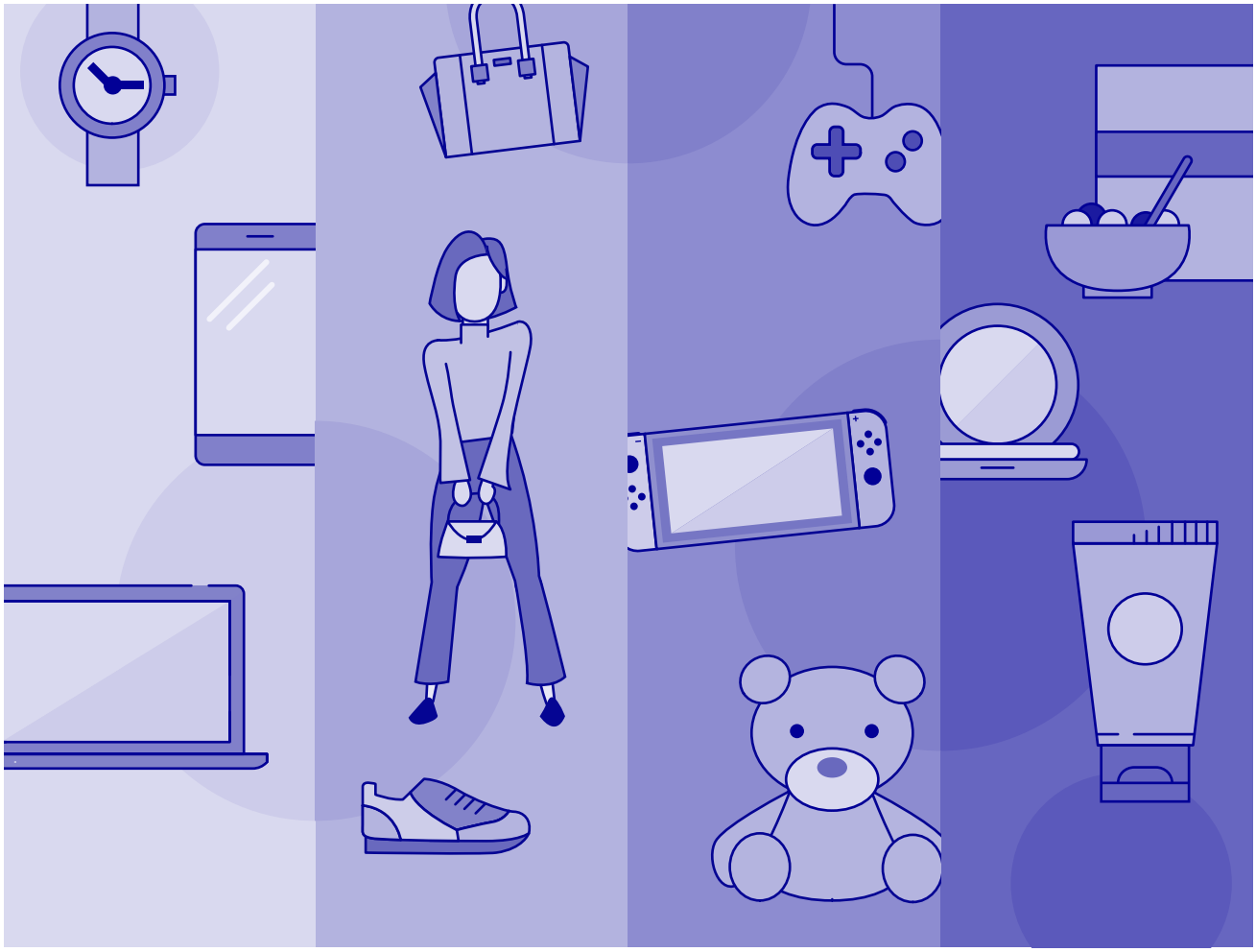
Thus, it helps to have your website optimised for both desktop and mobile screens, and it helps to take a leaf from Singapore's popular online shopping platforms. The top 3 platforms, Qoo10, Lazada, and Shopee[24], are good examples to follow with user-friendly interfaces on both desktop and mobile screens.

If you exceed your customer's expectations in your eCommerce store experience, you stand the chance of getting a bigger return on investment with great reviews and advocates for your online brand. Thus, with the right types of products and excellent service, your eCommerce store can capture your share of Singaporean shoppers like Meilian. But what products would do well in Singapore's eCommerce market?

Janio's wide network of logistics partners and real-time tracking can provide you and your customers peace of mind when shipping products into Singapore. Contact us to find out how!

CHAPTER 4

Top eCommerce Product Categories in Singapore



When it comes down to figuring out what Singaporean shoppers like to buy online, it helps to look at the bigger picture and find out what product categories perform well in the island-nation's eCommerce space. Although different market research reports offer different findings on the market sizes of these verticals, our research tells us that the top eCommerce product categories are:

- **Consumer electronics**
- **Fashion and beauty**
- **Toys, DIY, and hobbies**
- **Personal care**

While this overarching view can help identify the top product categories, no two shoppers, let alone country markets, have the same tastes. Let's find out what you can do about this information by taking a deep dive into specific products that do well in each category.

CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

Singapore's goal of becoming a Smart Nation isn't just a government initiative, it's a lifestyle embraced by Singaporeans, right down to their shopping habits. This is a country that's crazy about technology, as seen in the consumer electronics and media sector's valuation of US$1.9 billion in 2020, with a compound annual growth rate of 9.9 per cent year on year growth (CAGR 2020-2024).[1]

Hootsuite/We Are Social findings are a bit more conservative, estimating electronics and physical media to account for US$1.08 billion in annual spending, edging out the fashion and beauty sector by a narrow margin.[2]

Singapore's eCommerce spend by category

SOURCE: Hootsuite/We Are Social

Lazada's best selling products in Singapore on 11.11 shopping festival

SOURCE: Lazada.sg

Among the most popular consumer electronics products sold online in 2018 were wireless/ Bluetooth speakers, smart wearables, activity watches (analogue), and OLED TVs.[3] Meanwhile, Lazada's best selling products in Singapore during its 11.11 Shopping Festival[4] were the Logitech M220 wireless mouse, the Nintendo Switch, and the Xiaomi MI Roborock 2.

If consumer electronics happen to be one of your product verticals, it helps to pay attention to what Singaporean brands are doing on the eCommerce front in order to learn how you can take your slice of Singapore's eCommerce pie. Local brands like Razer and Creative, along with resellers like Courts and Qisahn, are opting for an omnichannel retail strategy in order to capture a bigger market share.

Singaporean shoppers may either window shop offline before buying online, or click and collect with the option to try the product first before buying. This provides consumers in Singapore more ways to shop, meeting various needs like verifying the products' quality or having various convenient ways to have their products sent to them.

The key takeaway from the omnichannel strategy is that these stores take into account the customer's ability to try an item before committing to the purchase. So if you are running a purely online store, it helps to have a return policy for defective items. On top of this, established brands can also afford to provide deep discounts on platforms like Lazada, so this discount campaign may be something you can look into once your brand is established.

With that said, you may be hard-pressed to win over Singaporean customers. News about fraudulent sales of electronics via eCommerce[5] are widely covered, which means Singaporean shoppers will be sceptical when an unknown brand or seller is introduced to the market. Because of this, you may need some time to establish your brand and earn your shopper's trust.

Additionally, consumer electronics tend to be quite fragile. Nothing is worse than having your items damaged during transit before it arrives at your customer's doorstep. Having the right packaging and the right shipping partner could help minimise the chances of these things happening, and ensures a good purchase experience for your Singaporean customer.

FASHION AND BEAUTY

Singaporeans have a healthy appetite for fashion and beauty products, with revenue for this sector amounting to US$326 million in 2020, growing by 9.9 per cent from the previous year.[6]

Aside from eCommerce platforms like Qoo10 and Zalora dominating this product category, Singapore is also a hotbed for Brand.coms and omnichannel retail stores. Some prominent names of these types of fashion stores include Love, Bonito, The Editor's Market, and Dressabelle.

Looking at their product offerings, you would think that this product vertical only caters to Singaporean women. However, there are still notable brands that cater to men like Benjamin Barker, In Good Company, and Duxton. This corroborates with our previous findings that women only have a slight majority (57 per cent) compared to men (43 per cent).[7]

While some of these stores started off as online blogshops, they have since expanded into the physical retail space, and newer brands are tackling the omnichannel retail strategy on the get-go. Thus, it would be wise to take note of the omnichannel retailing trend as an international eCommerce retailer.

Additionally, a report by PwC in 2016 found that the most popular out-of-country online purchases among Singaporeans were clothing and footwear (58 per cent).[8] Compared to other Southeast Asian shoppers, Singaporeans are also the least price sensitive.[9] This bodes well if you are selling mid-range or luxury goods, as Singaporeans can respect quality work and even share their satisfaction of your product with their peers if it exceeds their expectations.

TOYS, DIY, AND HOBBIES

Products in the toys, DIY, and hobbies segment are also massive in Singapore's eCommerce economy, amounting to US$219 million this year, growing by 7.8 per cent year-over-year.[10] However, Hootsuite/We are social's numbers are more optimistic, pegging the toys, DIY, and hobbies segment to US$658 million with a 40 per cent growth.[11]

While Toys 'R' Us has shuttered stores around the world, it has done the opposite in Singapore, opening three locations in 2017 alone.[12] But the company has also learned from the bitter lessons of its counterparts in the U.S. (the brand is operated as a separate legal entity in Asia) and launched an online store in 2015, which by extension beefs up its omnichannel retail strategy. According to Andre Javes, CEO of the toy retailer's Asia arm, sales from its eCommerce platform outpaced brick-and-mortar stores on a year-on-year basis.[13]

There are a lot of different niches within the toys, DIY and hobbies category, each with their communities surrounding them. If your products tend to attract a community of niche buyers, it helps to have brilliant content and an active online community to act as your products' advocates. To attract these communities, it helps to list on eCommerce marketplaces like Etsy, and buff up your inbound marketing strategy by having brilliant content that your niche community can relate to and engage with.

PERSONAL CARE AND FOOD

Despite Singapore's online food and personal care sector being still the smallest vertical in terms of revenue of the four listed here, it is also the fastest growing eCommerce segment in Singapore. This sector has been growing by 47 per cent in annual spending from the previous year.

In 2016, the U.S. International Trade Administration (ITA) also highlighted the potential of Singapore's cosmetics and skincare retail sector[14] for international brands, citing the presence of an affluent local population and a large concentration of expats who possess knowledge of international personal care products.

For instance, brands like Shiseido, SK-II, Timeless, and Colourpop are quite popular. Some of these are available in Singapore. For those that don't have local sellers, consumers in Singapore are willing to have them shipped internationally into Singapore.

This is good news for your personal care brands even if you don't have a physical store in Singapore. If you're able to build a following for your brand, you'll be able to serve the Singaporean personal care market through cross-border shipping. By extension, if your brand becomes successful in Singapore, this can act as a launching pad to enter other markets in Southeast Asia.

Surprisingly, men are one of the key drivers of this growth, which should be another sign for your business to look into catering to male customers in the country.

According to a Shopee study[15] that surveyed more than 3,000 male Shopee users in Singapore, an increasing number of men are turning to online shopping to purchase beauty and personal care products, including pomades, toothbrushes, and acne patches. Of those surveyed, 70 per cent said they shopped online more than they did the previous year due to convenience, better prices, and product variety.

This means that if you're not currently selling to this customer segment, you could consider having a section in your online and/or offline store that caters to them.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL MERCHANTS AND BRANDS

As covered in our Singaporean shopper's article, the opportunities for international eCommerce merchants to do well in Singapore lies in how well they cater to Singaporeans' online shopping motivations to shop online. PwC's 2016 report[16] explains that 55 per cent of Singaporean shoppers are motivated to purchase from overseas online retailers because of the lack of product availability within local stores.

Because of this, it helps to know who you are targeting within the Singapore market, and how you can differentiate your products and online shopping experiences from your competitors in Singapore's market. If you haven't already done so, building a buyer's persona to better understand them might be a good start.

Singapore's eCommerce growth by category

Electronics and physical media

+31%

Fashion and beauty

+30%

Toys, DIY and hobbies

+40%

Food and personal care

+47%

SOURCE: Hootsuite/We Are Social

Once you understand who you can target, you can find out how to better serve their needs. If you're targeting a niche segment, you can cater to their unmet needs in unique ways through your products or selling experience. If you're going for mass market appeal, you'll need to find ways to make your products cheaper and/or better than your competitors.

In addition, each of these product categories will present its own barriers to entry, ranging from differentiating your product listing from fraudulent sellers, to finding methods for consumers to try samples before buying. So it helps to do further research into the challenges of selling a product category before diving straight in.

With this developed digital infrastructure in place, this must mean that there are online shopping platforms that Singaporeans consider their stomping grounds. Where would that be, and what can you do about it?

CHAPTER 5

Popular Online Shopping Platforms in Singapore

Locally, Singapore is a hot bed for eCommerce stores and platforms, and the largest ones have found themselves at the top spots by the number of monthly visits they get on average.[1] There are several types of online platforms that sell not just Singapore's top performing product categories but also a huge variety of goods. These platforms include business-to-consumer sites (B2C) and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) shopping sites as well.

BRAND.COM WEBSITES

This B2C platform involves businesses selling directly to consumers from their own websites or stores. This is especially useful for brands that aim to maintain exclusivity and control. Some businesses choose to sell only through their website.

Others choose to use omnichannel retail, where their website is an additional sales channel to existing methods like brick-and-mortar. For example, one can either shop at Love, Bonito's website or go into one of its brick-and-mortar stores like the one in 313@Somerset.

MARKETPLACES

People may also buy from marketplaces, where different e-tailers sell products. This is the space occupied by the likes of Zilingo, Lazada, Bukalapak, and Zalora among others. Depending on the platform, sellers may include both SMEs and individuals, and even the eCommerce company that hosts the marketplace.

Additionally, marketplaces can include C2C sites like Carousell, where consumers can sell pre-loved goods or act as a reseller to sell hard to find products or top performing product verticals. More notably, Facebook has recently entered this space for C2C shopping.

TOP eCOMMERCE WEBSITES IN SINGAPORE

Prior to Q1 2019 Qoo10 has consistently topped the charts in Singapore eCommerce, with 7.9 million monthly web visits at its peak in Q1 2019. Qoo10 has since been dethroned by Lazada, who enjoyed an average of 7.8 million monthly visits in Q3 2019 compared to Qoo10's 6.9 million, and Shopee held its third place at 4.1 million average monthly visits in Q3 2019.

Based on Q3 2019 results
(monthly web visits)

Lazada	7.8 million
Qoo10	6.9 million
Shopee	4.1 million
eBay	823K
Love, Bonito	473K
Hipvan	274K
SkyWatches	192K

SOURCE: iPrice Group 2019

On top of this, Brand.coms also do well with Singaporeans, with notable ones including Love, Bonito, a Brand.com fashion store with 473 thousand views per month on Q3 2019, HipVan, a Brand.com furniture store with 274 thousand views per month on Q3 2019, and Skywatches, a timepiece Brand.com store with 192 thousand views per month on Q3 2019.

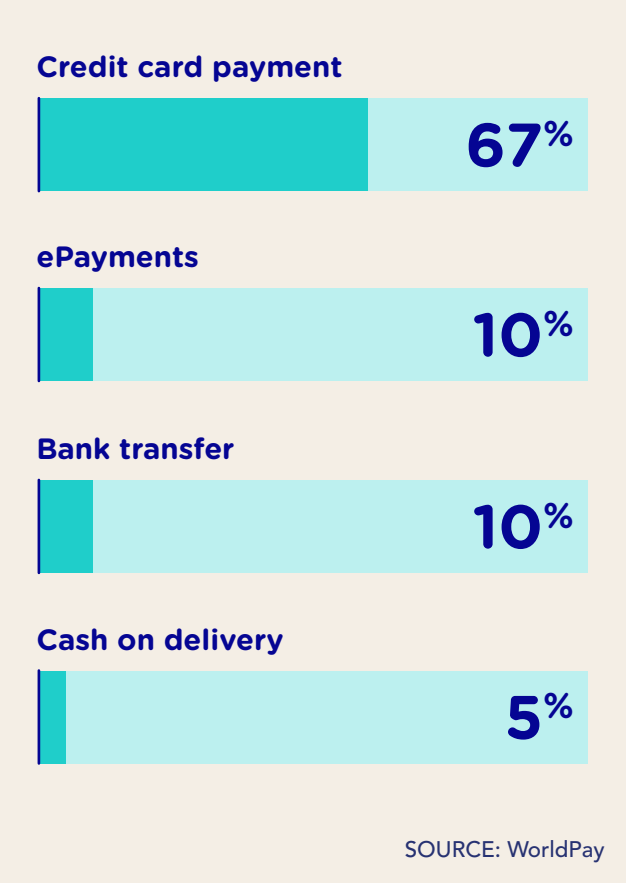
Additionally, international shops like Ebay and Alibaba's various storefronts like AliExpress and Taobao are also popular amongst Singaporean shoppers. Ebay enjoyed 823 thousand monthly visits on average in Q3 2019, while Taobao's 11.11 sales raked in SGD 30 billion in 2017,[2] showing evidence that the Alibaba-owned site is popular amongst Singaporeans too.

If you want to enter Singapore's eCommerce market, you might want to consider which types of online platforms you would want to use to attract Singaporean consumers. Listing on online marketplaces like Qoo10 and Shopee means that you increase the chances of Singaporean shoppers finding your product online. You can also participate in the platform's discount campaigns and win customers over in the short term. However, if you're in a more specific product vertical, for example fashion, then selling on platforms like Zalora and Zilingo can help attract the right type of audience.

However, to have full control of the brand experience, it helps to have a brand.com website of your own in order to not dilute your product's branding and purchase experience for your customers. Brand.com's work best when it comes to cultivating brand loyalty amongst online shoppers. Tools like Shopify and Magento can help to customise your storefront to give it a brand identity which can help you to stand out from your competitors. You will also have to optimise your website's keywords and have topical relevance in your content in order for your online store to be found via search engine results.

Now that your customers can find you, it's good to check if you're offering their preferred payment methods.

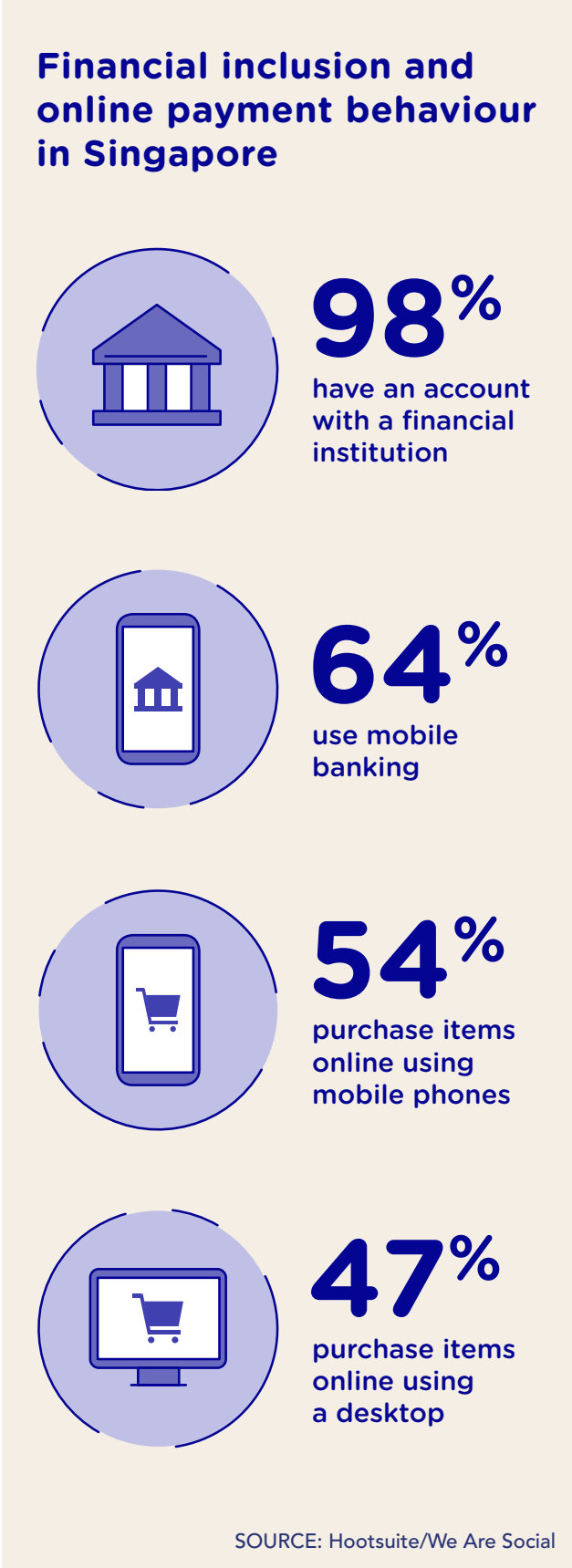
Popular Payment Methods in Singapore



While the majority of Singaporeans prefer to pay using credit cards (67%) in a 2018 study by Worldpay, other methods that are accessible to them include e-payments (10%), cash on delivery (5%), and bank transfer (10%). Singaporeans tend to favour using credit cards as it allows them to maximise the rewards programme offered by their credit card provider.

On top of credit card penetration, bigger players like Singapore's authorities and banks[1] have also taken on the task to convert Singapore into a cashless society. Initiatives such as PayNow[2] among others are underway, such as a common QR code to make it easy for individuals and businesses to use the service.

With that said, it doesn't hurt to offer cash on delivery as a payment option if you are thinking of expanding your eCommerce shop into Singapore.



CHAPTER 7

Major Online Sales Events in Singapore

Culturally, shopping is often considered a national pastime[1] in Singapore. This propensity for consumerism has led to a relatively mature online shopping market, which now includes niche eCommerce platforms.

That means eCommerce merchants from outside the country would do well to be present in both major marketplaces, such as Lazada, Shopee and Qoo10, and in relevant specialty platforms.

SINGAPORE'S MAJOR ONLINE SHOPPING DAYS

Singles' Day (11.11)

11.11

Lazada's Singles' Day sale, held on November 11 every year, has undoubtedly taken Southeast Asia by Southeast Asia by storm with Singapore being no exception. Interest in the sale has been soaring in the past couple of years. From 2016 to 2017, online sales in Singapore during 11.11 rose by 60 per cent.[2] Comparing Singles' Day 2017 to the same day in subsequent years, iPrice Group observed an uptick in shopping activity in 2018[3] and an increase in basket size in 2019.[4]

Lazada isn't the only platform that holds this sale, although it did garner 59 per cent of search queries[5] related to "11.11 promo" in 2018. Platforms such as Qoo10, Shopee, Zalora, and Klook also received significant shopping interest during the sale. Local platform Ezbuy notes that its sales tend to increase by 50 to 100 times[6] during Singles' Day compared to the rest of the year.

Black Friday & Cyber Monday

The weekend after Thanksgiving - 26th November in 2020 - is a major shopping period, with Singaporeans looking to both overseas and local eCommerce platforms to find good deals. While these sales events originated in the USA, they have become increasingly known globally. A survey of Singaporeans showed that 82 per cent of respondents[7] knew about the Black Friday sale, and 49 per cent intended to participate in the sale in 2018.

In 2017, Qoo10 reported a total sales value of $10.1 million[8] during the Black Friday and Cyber Monday weekend—a 50 per cent increase compared to the previous year. ShopBack, a cashback site, saw higher average spending during the same weekend compared to Singles' Day. This is partly due to the fact that more international merchants participate in Black Friday and Cyber Monday compared to Singles' Day. Picodi's 2019 survey data[9] revealed that amongst shoppers that participated in one of the November shopping holidays, 47 per cent participated in both 11.11 and Black Friday sales, and 37 per cent participated in Black Friday sales only. Consumers' shopping basket sizes also tend to be higher for these international merchants.

Shopback's 2018 survey[10] showed that the average Singaporean spends between S$190 to S$214 on Black Friday, with a preference for clothes, electronics, and shoes. Picodi[11] places a more conservative value, between S$161 to S$172, in their 2019 survey. Nevertheless, these values are still higher than Singapore's average basket size of S$91[12] outside of these promotional periods. Prices were marked down by an average of 55 per cent globally, and 53 per cent in Singapore.

Amazon is a popular option for buying discounted items from the USA, especially during Black Friday and Cyber Monday. (In 2017, the eCommerce giant acknowledged its local popularity by offering Prime membership for Singapore.) Local retailers also hold sales, both within their offline stores and on their websites, and the ones that do ended up having higher sales volumes than the traditionally well-known Great Singapore Sale.

Great Singapore Sale

While online eCommerce sales events have since eclipsed the month-long Great Singapore Sale (GSS), it comes as no surprise that eCommerce platforms and online merchants could still jump on the bandwagon and take a slice of the sales event's pie.

This sales event has been held annually since 1994.[13] From mom-and-pop stores to major chains and international brands, retailers across Singapore participate in the sale, offering discounts that can come up to 70 per cent of the original prices. While shoppers have bemoaned the gimmicky and lacklustre nature of traditional brick-and-mortar store's discount campaigns, your eCommerce store can always step in with more attractive offers as GSS is no longer the exclusive domain of offline retailers.

In fact, in 2018, Lazada went the extra mile by holding GSS pre-sale and a GSS Last Chance sale, aside from the main event.

JUN 5-7 **GSS Pre-Sale**	JUN 8-15 (9AM) **GSS Mega Sale**	JUN 15-20 **Taobao Collection 6.18**
JUN 20-26 **Home & Grocery Fair**	JUN 27-JUL 3 **Beauty Fair**	JUL 4-10 **Baby Fair**
JUL 11-71 **Electronics Fair**	JUN 18-24 **Fashion Fair**	JUN 25-31 **GSS Last Chance**

Discounted electronics goods are among the most coveted items during GSS

While GSS typically runs from June to July, last year saw an extended sale period in celebration of the event's 25th anniversary. GSS 2018 ran from June 8 to August 12. However, while eCommerce platforms performed well during GSS last year, reports of lacklustre sales in brick-and-mortar stores have prompted GSS organisers to consider revamping the format.

This revamp[14] sees the event adopting an omni-channel strategy, launching an app that allows shoppers to find deals and download coupons. This is a sign of recognition that Singaporeans are increasingly using online channels for shopping, which is good news for eCommerce store owners serving Singapore.

GSS returned to a one-month format in 2019.

CULTURE-DRIVEN SALES

Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year (CNY) takes place at the beginning of the Chinese calendar year. It is a major holiday in Singapore, where Chinese citizens count for 74.3 per cent of the population[15], respectively. The holiday is celebrated with street parades and family gatherings, as well as the giving of fruits and delicacies.

In Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam, CNY shopping tends to peak in the two weeks before the holiday itself.[16] This allows people to buy gifts in advance, as well as purchase clothing and home decor for the festivities and for the new year ahead. With locals busy enjoying the festivities and participating in family rituals during the two days of the CNY public holiday, they spend less time shopping online on those two days. In fact, online sales began to dip five days before CNY.

To boost online sales during the season and introduce eCommerce to older demographics, online platforms have made themselves visible during public CNY festivities[17] in Singapore. This year, Shopee and Native, a tour-booking platform, set up booths at Chinatown as part of the CNY bazaar.

Meanwhile, platforms such as Amazon, Shopee, and Lazada, made it a point to sell unique CNY-related items from heritage brands. Fashion retailers also take the opportunity to sell modernised cheongsams, which are traditional dresses for Chinese women. Shoppers also like to purchase heavy home appliances during the CNY shopping period.

Smaller merchants can take a cue from these eCommerce giants' steps and sell CNY-themed items. For example, those selling fashion can find clothing manufacturers who can make modern apparel inspired by the traditional Chinese aesthetic.

Hari Raya Puasa

Hari Raya Puasa marks the end of Ramadan, a month of fasting for Muslims, who make up 14.3 per cent of Singapore's population by religion.[18] Muslims dress their best on Hari Raya Puasa, providing an opportunity for fashion ateliers and retailers to sell clothing in the weeks and days before the celebration.

Elegant, modest fashion for women is popular for Hari Raya Puasa celebrations. Zalora, FashionValet, and several other fashion eCommerce platforms and merchants run dedicated sales for Hari Raya Puasa.

Homeware is also another popular category for Hari Raya sales.

There is no fixed annual date for observing Ramadan, as it depends on the Islamic calendar, which in turn is based on lunar cycles. Hari Raya Puasa 2020 will be celebrated on May 24–25.

OTHER NOTEWORTHY eCOMMERCE EVENTS

12.12

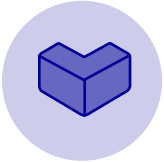
For some sellers, 12.12 is deemed as the culmination of a month-long sales period that began in 11.11. For buyers, it's a chance to find bargains that they may have missed during November's sales events, and an opportunity to shop for Christmas and year-end presents.

In 2018, Shopee saw a record 12 million orders within 24 hours during the 12.12 sale. The company observed that the top-selling categories in Singapore[19] were Beauty & Personal Care, Home & Living, and Mobile & Gadgets. Under each category, the most popular brands were Laneige, P&G, and JBL, respectively.

9.9

9.9, held on September 9, is Shopee's Mobile Shopping Day. The platform recorded a peak order volume of 187 thousand orders per minute in 2019.[20]In Singapore, over 90 per cent of orders were placed using mobile phones. Shopee took advantage of this high mobile usage by running in-app games, such as Shopee Shake, which allows users to win Shopee coins. The platform also ran daily Spin-the-Wheel games with prizes such as promo codes and bonus coins.

Mobile & Gadgets, Health & Beauty and Games & Hobbies were top-selling product categories for the event.



Lazada Singapore's birthday sale

Lazada Singapore offers discounts of up to 90 per cent during its Birthday Sale, officially held on March 27 in 2019 but usually running for at least three days. In 2019, over 100 brands held a total of 1,500 flash sales during the Birthday Sale. Popular deals included discounts for beauty products and shoes.

Christmas

Even after 11.11 and 12.12, Singaporeans continue shopping near Christmas Day on December 25—and even afterwards.[21] One reason is that merchants also offer post-Christmas markdowns as well as back-to-school sales during the festive season.

Singaporeans buy Christmas gifts for themselves, their loved ones, and for their office parties. Every year, numerous articles are written with ideas for gifts under $20 and under $35, especially for office gift-giving. Christmas baskets and customised items are also popular items, especially for business-to-business gift-giving. Online merchants may also want to sell festive decor before the Christmas holiday or even offer discount vouchers that are usable during the Christmas period.

With all this information about Singapore's hottest sales periods, you ought to know how to promote your products and win over your customers in Singapore as well.

How Can You Reach Singapore's eCommerce Shoppers?

With Singapore's retail space being a competitive one, it helps to have promotional strategies that help you stand out from the other players and to prepare your store's operations to make a good first impression. This will even help you make the most of the seasonal shopping event promotions and discounts you can plan throughout the year.

Having big discount campaigns can help to establish your foothold in the short run if you can afford it. That isn't the only way though, here are more ideas to get your sales campaigns started.

PROMOTIONAL IDEAS FOR SHORT-TERM CAMPAIGNS

Pre-sales

Hold minor sales days prior to a major shopping event. Not only does this help you build up anticipation; it also allows you to bring in sales with fewer competitors around.

Flash sales

On the day of a major shopping event, you can hold flash sales that last for an hour or two, complete with a counter indicating the number of products sold and the remaining available items.

Competitive arousal[1] has been shown to positively affect online purchase intention, especially when paired with time scarcity. That means buyers don't like it when they miss out on an opportunity to get a good deal, especially when they see that other consumers have already bought the same and when they know they're running out of time to make a purchase.

Surprise boxes

Surprise boxes are like product bundles, except that people don't know what's inside of them. This is your chance to delight and surprise buyers, as well as introduce less popular items by including them in a box with more in-demand products.

To decide what to place inside your surprise boxes, analyse the items that your buyers typically purchase together or search for in the same browsing period. Take a look at Google Trends to discover trending searches, too.

Themed days

One of Shopee's 9.9 sales tactics is to hold themed days—24-hour periods focusing on major discounts for a specific product category. Aside from enticing consumers, this helps you simplify your supply preparation, as you'll know which items will be in high demand on certain days.

Partner with cashback platforms

Cashback platforms like ShopBack are widely popular in Singapore. After all, with their 'kiasu' approach, locals can be quite ingenious when finding ways to not miss out on great bargains. ('Kiasu' is a local term that means the fear of losing out to other people.)

By partnering with cashback platforms, you can expose your online store or brand to a wider audience and encourage them to make a purchase.

Partner with physical resellers

If you're confident of your product's demand, you could partner up with existing offline stores to get the items out there. As an example, Urban Story sells through their partners' physical stores based at centrally located areas and hip shopping neighbourhoods like Raffles Place and Bugis. That way, you can kill two birds with one stone by offering an offline shopping experience, and a cross border online shopping storefront too.

If you're in it for the long run, it helps to know how to do inbound marketing and building your brand to solidify your presence in Singapore. It always helps to play the long game by building a genuine relationship between your business and your customers. With internet penetration at a high 84% in Singapore, it makes sense that engagement and conversation building has taken on a new form online via social media and messaging platforms.

Build conversations and earn trust

According to Neil Patel[2], customers spend 20%-40% more with companies that they have social media engagement with. The idea here is to create conversations with the target audience. When doing this in a market like Singapore, it'll be a good idea to have a team who can understand the local lingo — like the aforementioned 'kiasu' — and connect with what the locals like and dislike.

This local Singaporean team will also be able to use these insights to create content Singaporeans find engaging and meaningful. Finding out what they love and how your products and store can fit in their lives is half the battle. Publishing great content and taking time to answer people's queries or, at times, asking the audience for feedback will also help to grow your follower base. For example, companies like YesStyle and Sorabel frequently make blog posts and social media posts to engage their target markets' love for fashion.

Once your eCommerce transaction is complete, it helps to ask your customer to leave a review in order to increase trust in your product's listing. Since Singaporeans are pretty vocal, it helps if you could tap into your most loyal customers to share their thoughts on your product and service. If you have some stock to clear, why not send a surprise gift box for these loyal customers as your way of saying thank you?

> **Increase your share of the Singapore eCommerce market by taking advantage of sales periods and tailoring your products and promotions...**

HIGH OPPORTUNITY, HIGH COMPETITION

Being Southeast Asia's economic powerhouse, Singapore is an attractive market for many online merchants. Shopping has been ingrained into the locals' lifestyle. While that's a good thing, that also means that established local retailers and online sellers are quite adept at competing for consumers' wallets, and continued technological and infrastructural development means that Singapore's shoppers are getting harder to win over.

Increase your share of the Singapore eCommerce market by taking advantage of sales periods and tailoring your products and promotions to locals. Understand what makes Singaporeans click on the 'purchase' button and provide them with a pleasant and convenient user experience. On top of that, ensure that your eCommerce website and listings are able to capture your customer's trust, and top it off with reliable shipping partners to fulfil cross-border deliveries for you.

To test out the Singaporean market for the first time, it helps to use the cross border shipping model as you don't need to have an upfront investment to fulfil orders. Set the expectations right by indicating how soon packages will be able to depart your country and arrive in Singapore by mentioning this upfront onyour online store.

Now that you've learnt more about Singapore's eCommerce market and its shopper's habits, it begs the question: how do you ship your products there?

02

SHIPPING TO SINGAPORE

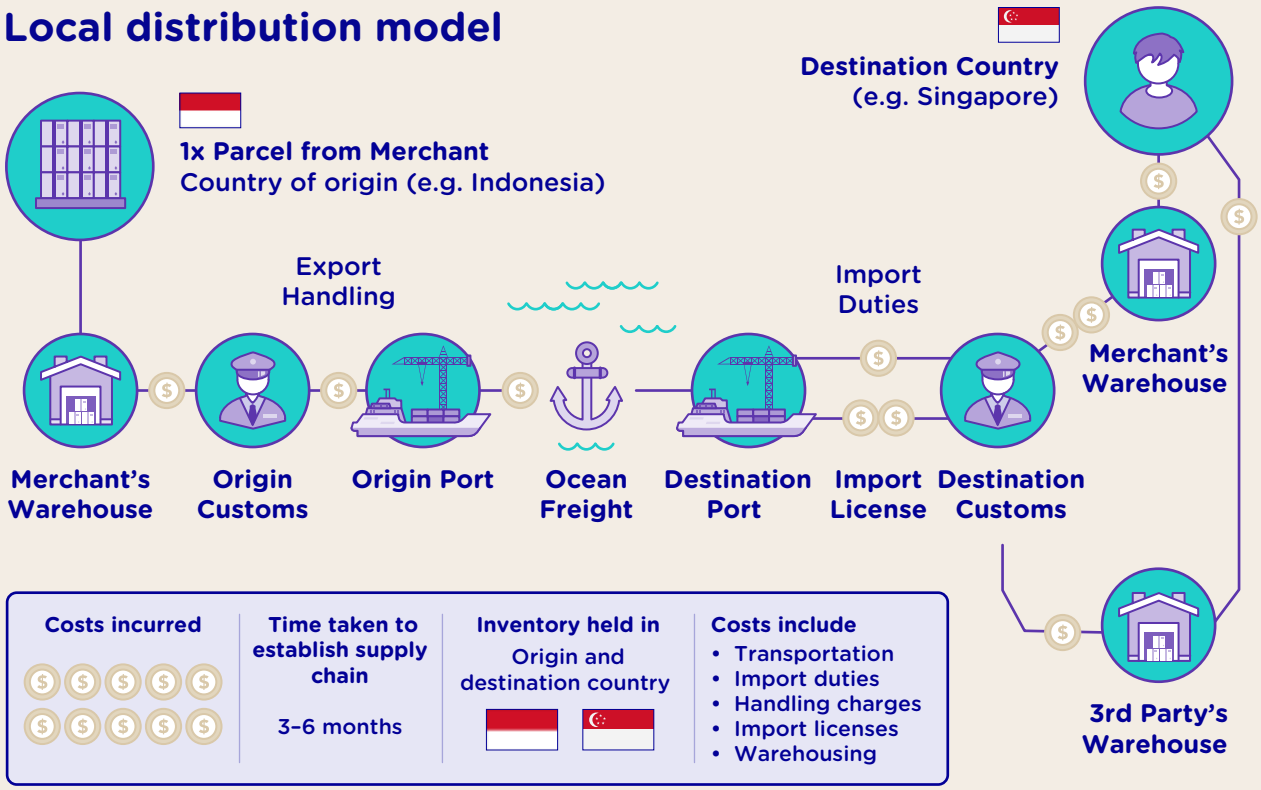
Getting into Singapore – Cross-border Shipping or Local Distribution Models?

Cross-border shipping model

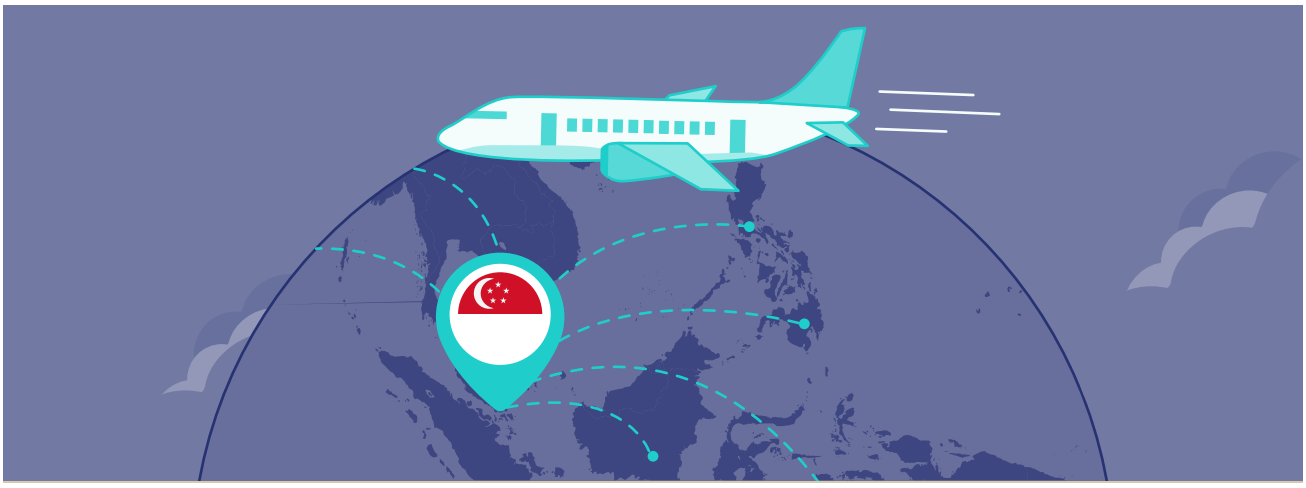
LEGEND $ - costs incurred by merchant

Costs incurred	Time taken to establish supply chain	Inventory held in	Costs include
$ $ $ $ $ $	1–2 days	Origin country	• Transportation • Import duties • Handling charges

Local distribution model



Costs incurred	Time taken to establish supply chain	Inventory held in	Costs include
$ $ $ $ $ $ $ $ $ $	3–6 months	Origin and destination country	• Transportation • Import duties • Handling charges • Import licenses • Warehousing



When thinking of the logistics for entering a market like Singapore, you need to factor in elements such as delivery speed, logistics costs like warehousing and freight, and more. All of these factors might get overwhelming when deciding which shipping model you should use. To help you out here's a quick comparison between local distribution models and cross-border shipping models.

Cross-border shipping is the process where goods are transported from one country to the next, with no inventory being stored in the destination country. The goods will go through customs and import duties may have to be paid depending on existing trade agreements and customs policies. In the case of cross-border eCommerce, cross-border shipping only needs to occur when a sale has been made.

As an alternative to cross-border shipping, creating a local distribution model involves setting up warehouses and managing fleets for deliveries in the destination country. Often, this is done to reduce time between receiving orders to fulfilment as the inventory is kept closer to the country. It is vital to estimate demand carefully to prevent stock-outs or oversupply.

For instance, an eCommerce merchant could rent a warehouse near Changi Airport to shorten the time taken between customs clearance and moving goods into a distribution centre.

INVENTORY EXPOSURE AND INITIAL INVESTMENTS

While it is tempting to keep inventory closer to your customers, creating your own local distribution model requires a lot of initial investment. Setting up and maintaining offices, import licenses, and warehousing to handle your inventory could get quite expensive, so you'll need to be very sure of your decision before choosing to set up these operations. In addition to this, all these components mentioned could lead to higher sunk costs compared to cross-border shipping. This could be risky if demand for your item turns out lower than anticipated.

> **"Singapore is a land scarce country, so holding inventory here could turn out to be an expensive investment..."**

In addition to the high initial investment and sunk costs, each component mentioned could lead to higher storage costs and operating expenditure in the target country compared to cross-border shipping. Holding on to inventory at any given moment also involves certain risks. This risk is known as inventory exposure, which comes from inventory storage costs, spoilage costs, and obsolescence. That means holding inventory in Singapore could be risky if demand for your item turns out lower than anticipated. On top of this, Singapore is a land scarce country, so holding inventory here could turn out to be an expensive investment since rent is not cheap.

With the cross-border shipping model, your inventory exposure will not be as high as a local distribution model if you run a centralised logistics model. This is because storage costs are incurred only in the origin or hub country with a centralised logistics model.

On top of that, with the cross-border shipping model you only incur shipping costs on confirmed sales. Therefore, you will have guaranteed revenue on each parcel that you ship to the target country. This makes cross-border shipping a cheaper and more flexible logistics option when initially entering new markets, which would be a good first step when testing Singapore's eCommerce market.

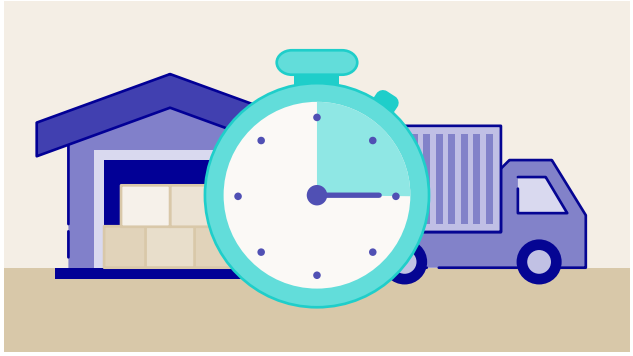
Your inventory will run the risk of becoming obsolete with either model, so it is vital that you have strong data to estimate demand in your target country. It could be a good idea to test demand via cross-border shipping first before making any heavy investment commitments when you are expanding to new markets.

SPEED OF DEPLOYMENT

Using a local distribution model can involve high amounts of set up time, especially when you need to establish teams, warehouses, and fleets in the new country. Singapore also has a tiered warehousing[1] license system with different regulatory controls and permit requirements that depend on what you're importing. To set these up, you'll need to have a registered business within Singapore and a customs account with Singapore Customs. This slower time-to-market could cost you potential sales.

Existing cross-border shipping partners have logistical infrastructure, licenses, and expertise already in place that you can make use of. This can reduce logistics set-up time to that of researching the right partners and registering with them, improving the time-to-market for your products which is key in a fast-paced environment.

> **...stating an estimated time frame for delivery will set the expectations right for the Singaporean consumer.**



While cross-border shipping models mean that it's hard to achieve same-day fulfilment, stating an estimated time frame for delivery will set the expectations right for the Singaporean consumer, as they are aware that deliveries from overseas tend to take longer than domestic deliveries.

A GOOD WAY TO TEST DEMAND IN NEW MARKETS

With its lower initial investment, faster time-to-market, and potential geographical reach, cross-border shipping offers a flexible and effective way of serving the region. As a result, cross-border shipping is more suitable for initially testing demand in the market compared to using a traditional local distribution model. A local distribution model should only be considered once you are sure that demand for your product can sustain the costs involved.

In summary, cross-border shipping is a flexible and low initial investment way of fulfilling Singaporean eCommerce sales. Rapid deployment and close to zero fixed costs make this fulfilment model potentially more lucrative than the traditional local distribution model. This can be helped by finding the right cross-border fulfilment partners who can save you a lot of time and effort which can be spent growing your business and brand instead. Having payment option flexibility and real-time tracking also helps keep customers at ease. Reliable deliveries can build trust which is paramount in eCommerce.

After deciding on which shipping model is best for you, it's now time to find out how you can begin shipping to Singapore.

Janio specialises in cross-border fulfilment of B2C products to Singapore. If you're ready to deliver to Singapore, reach out to us at contact@janio.asia

How to Ship to Singapore

While shipping experiences may vary between shipping partners, the general steps you'll need to do to get your products into Singapore look like this:

- ☑ **Find the right shipping partner**
- ☑ **Package your goods**
- ☑ **Choose the right service level**
- ☑ **Provide shipment details**
- ☑ **Print shipping labels & documents for your package(s)**
- ☑ **Pass the shipments to the carriers**

1. FINDING THE RIGHT SHIPPING PARTNER

It could be daunting to figure out how to ship internationally to a country like Singapore for the first time. You will need to find a logistics provider who can reach your Singaporean customers, know what you can and cannot ship into the country, and how to collect payment for your products. Here, we'll find out what you need to bear in mind when choosing a shipping partner.

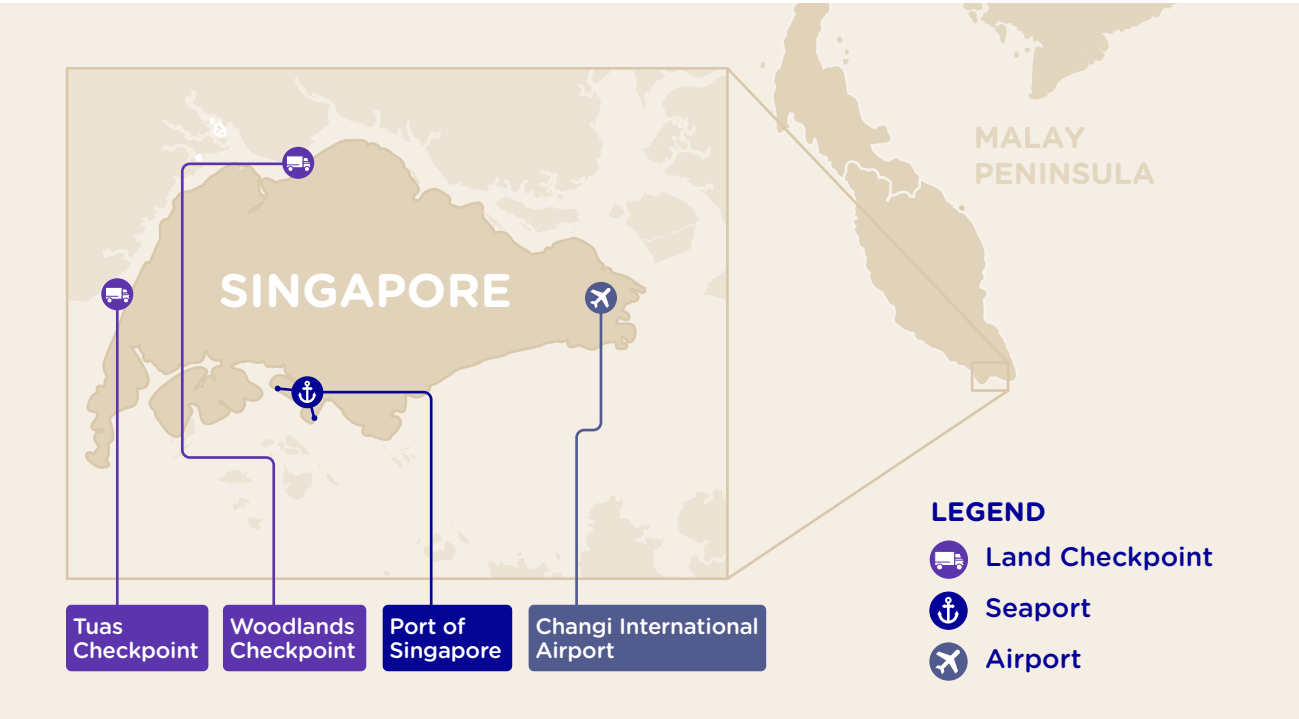
Cross-border shipping has different stages in a delivery and each shipping partner has differing strengths and weaknesses at each stage.

Some companies specialise in only one stage of delivery but offer competitive rates. Larger international logistics partners can provide end-to-end fulfillment services that cover all stages, but be wary of the costs. Bear in mind what your logistics needs at different stages of the delivery process are before selecting a logistics service provider.

Generally, cross-border fulfilment follows these stages:

First Mile Delivery	The shipment moves from the merchant's warehouse to the airport or port.
Origin Customs Clearance	Clearing goods to export from origin country.
Freight	The shipment is transported, usually by air or sea, from the origin country's airport or port to the destination airport or port.
Destination Customs Clearance	Clearing goods for import in the destination country.
Distribution	The shipment is sent from the airport or port to the domestic distribution centre to be sorted and assigned to vans and motorcycles for the last mile delivery stage.
Last Mile Delivery	The shipment moves from the distribution centre to the customer's doorstep.

As an example, an Indonesian merchant could have their goods shipped via truck from their premises in Jakarta to Soekarno-Hatta International Airport (CGK) where it is cleared for export. Then, it is transported via air freight to reach Changi International Airport (SIN) and goes through customs clearance. After that, it gets transported to a local distribution facility to be picked up by the last mile delivery van or motorcycle. These vehicles then deliver the



shipment from the distribution facility to your customer's address in Singapore.

Should there be a failed attempt at delivery, the last mile carrier may try again on a different day. Some last mile logistics service providers may also place the goods in a parcel locker or a pickup point near your customer's address.

One way to save money on shipping is to use multiple smaller, localised shipping partners at different stages of the delivery, but this may prove hard to manage, especially when there are so many choices. Fortunately, there are end-to-end 4PL couriers, which act as integrators for various third party logistics service providers, with wide networks of logistics service providers which provide great coverage in Singapore who can manage these logistics partners for you at a similarly competitive rate.

With regard to international freight, you generally have two options to ship goods to Singapore:

- **Air freight**

For many eCommerce merchants, air freight is the transportation of choice for fast and reliable deliveries. International shipments usually enter Singapore via Changi International Airport (SIN).

- **Sea freight**

In bulk, sea freight is cheaper, but this is not the case for smaller shipments. Nevertheless, sea freight is much slower than air freight and is primarily not used for B2C eCommerce deliveries. Consider your delivery deadlines and shipping model before picking this option. Singapore's primary port is the Port of Singapore (SGSIN).

- **Land freight**

Singapore has road connections with peninsular Malaysia via Woodlands and Tuas, so line-haul trucking is a viable option to consider. This transportation method tends to be cheaper than air freight and if your warehouses are based in peninsular Malaysia.

- **Last mile consideration**

As roads can become congested and operators are pressed for time to deliver to other addresses, it is possible that your customer may miss their delivery if they are not at home. While carriers might carry out multiple attempts at delivery, engaging with one that provides options like dropping the item off at a parcel locker, or leaving the shipment at the guardhouse of condominiums, can ensure that your customers are able to receive the shipment in time and at their own convenience.

Logistics service providers do not work on Sundays and public holidays but will resume delivery on the next working day. In light of all this, you should check with your shipping partner to see how deliveries might be affected by this and be ready to ease your customers' expectations when delays happen.

Now that we understand the different parts of a cross-border delivery and that logistics service providers could specialise in all stages or some stages, it's good to know what kind of features and services you should look out for in a shipping partner:

Navigating Singapore's customs regulations

When shipping to Singapore, staying up-to-date on all of the changes to customs regulations could be difficult and time-consuming.

There are logistics companies which specialise in or offer help in navigating these regulations. Some of them also have automated processes to ensure that your paperwork is up-to-date and complete. This helps your shipments move smoothly through customs, ensuring on-time delivery and satisfaction.

Real-time tracking

Manually tracking the shipment through calls and emails and ensuring that each partner fulfils the delivery would distract from further building your business. Real-time tracking of the delivery progress of a parcel can help keep your customers less anxious about their delivery and reduce the chances of them contacting you to check on delivery statuses.

Finding a logistics partner with this capability can save you a lot of time and also provides customers with much needed assurance and transparency.

Can help you manage multiple shipping partners

It's possible to save on shipping costs by managing multiple lower-cost logistics partners in your Singaporean supply chain. However, manually managing multiple logistics partners at once could be a time-consuming and complicated exercise.

Some logistics partners have software that allows you to manage your entire supply chain network on one platform, making it easy to manage your shipping partners. This is in addition to an online dashboard that simplifies delivery order submission in a hassle-free way, taking out much of the complexity in managing your logistics.

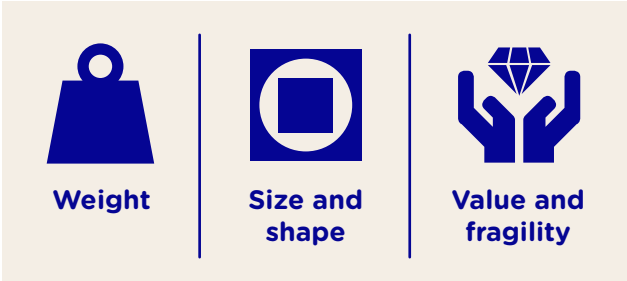
Facilitates preferred local payment methods

Singaporeans have access to a wide variety of payment methods from credit cards to online transfers. However, even though cashless payment methods are a norm in Singapore, providing cash on delivery (COD) is still highly recommended. Having a logistics partner that can facilitate various payment options will signal to your Singaporean customers that you are willing to accommodate to their demands for flexible shopping experiences.

2. PACKAGING YOUR GOODS

Appropriately packaging your products with the right packing materials is important in cross-border shipping. You can pack your products following this 5 step process:

1. Assessing your item's requirements and choosing the right packing materials.



To assess which method is best suited for your product, you should take into account the item's weight, size and shape, and its value and fragility. If you are shipping an item that has no fixed shape and is also non-fragile, like a t-shirt, you can pack it into a polyurethane bag with some packing tissue.

If you are packaging larger items that may need more cushioning and needs to be boxed, like cosmetics in fragile containers you may need to include additional packing materials like bubble wrap or packing peanuts to help prevent your products from bouncing around within the package during shipment.

If the item requires even more protection, or if you want to protect your branded packaging during transit, you could consider the box-in-box method. The box-in-box method involves placing your original parcel into a larger box filled with sufficient stuffing.

2. Wrap all items separately

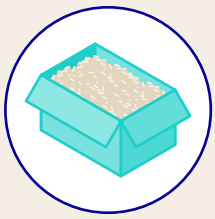
If your box contains multiple separate items, bear in mind that they could move around and bump into each other during transit. Wrapping and cushioning your items separately helps you ensure the items won't move around so much and if they do, won't result in damage.

Items that could be affected by dirt, water, or wet conditions should be placed in a plastic bag within your package.

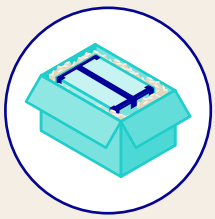
Basic Packing Methods

Polyurethane bag

Single box with wrapped item



Single box with filling materials



Box-in-box method

3. Cushioning and filling: leave no empty space, but don't overstuff

As much as possible, there should be enough filler and cushioning material so the product doesn't move in the box during transit and has enough cushioning to absorb any bumps the package may get during the delivery.

When adding cushioning and filler material to your package, ensure the box has enough room for sufficient cushioning around the delivered item. Use at least 2 inches/ 5-6 cm of cushioning.

Examples of cushioning include:

- Foam or cardboard inserts
- Bubble wrap
- Airbags

The rest of the box can be filled with filler like packing peanuts, crumpled paper, or styrofoam.

4. Using the right sealing material

If your package needs a box for delivery, be sure to use appropriate tape with the right width (around 2 inches/ 5 cm). Any of the following three types of tape should be suitable.

- Brown plastic tape (Polypropylene tape)
- Electrical tape (Vinyl adhesive tape)
- Duct Tape (Fiber-reinforced paper tape)

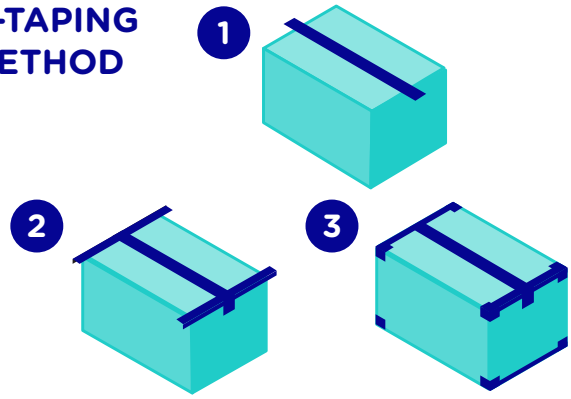
If you're packaging light products like T-shirts, you might be using a polyurethane bag with its own adhesive strip. Ensure that you've sealed the bag correctly to ensure it doesn't open up mid-delivery or allow liquid to enter the package.

5. Sealing your boxes with the H-taping method

H-taping helps keep your boxes' flaps secure during delivery, and prevents them from opening accidentally. This can be done by applying sufficient tape to the centre and edge seams.

Packages may be subject to rough handling during its cross-border shipment to Singapore as it transfers from one shipping partner to another. With this in mind proper packing helps to prevent damage to your goods and can save you money on replacing damaged goods.

H-TAPING METHOD



3. CHOOSING THE RIGHT LEVELS OF SERVICE

Carriers usually offer multiple tiers of service in shipping. These delivery options mainly differ in their offered features, such as:

- **Delivery time**
- **Weight limit**
- **Real-time track & trace**
- **Free pick-up at origin address**
- **Compensation in the event of shipment loss**
- **Packaging service**
- **On-call customer service**
- **Cash on delivery collection**

Typically, the more features offered, the higher the shipping fee is. Choose one that best suits your budget and shipping needs.

Some consumers in Singapore are willing to pay more for express shipping so it might be worthwhile to have a faster shipping partner on hand as well.

When planning your shipment, you can consult your shipping partner for recommended steps in packaging your goods for transport.

4. PROVIDING SHIPPING DETAILS

Carriers will need merchants to provide shipping details to generate the documentation required by Singapore's customs. The type of information most carriers required are:

- Sender's details and address
- Recipient's details and address
- Country of manufacture
- Shipment's value in SGD or any national currency
- Harmonised System (HS) Code of Item
- Item description
- Item weight and dimensions
- Item quantity

If you decide to declare the value with another currency that is not SGD, the exchange rate will be based on the government's exchange rate. This may not be favourable as the market's exchange rate may beat the exchange rate set by the government, so it's preferable to declare the value in SGD. You may check the government's exchange rates on the Monetary Authority of Singapore's page.[1]

This information will be entered into a Customs Declaration form and shipping label by either you or the shipping partner if they offer this service. Always check that this information has been entered accurately. Incomplete documentation may trap your goods in customs.

It's good to be as accurate as possible when preparing these customs documents. Additional shipping charges could arise if the shipping company returns the packages to you. Under-

declaring the value of the items of your shipments on the commercial invoice would require you to pay additional Goods and Services Tax (GST) to Singapore Customs if they correctly suspect it[2]. The amount to pay in GST can be found in the next chapter.

The courier may also charge you additional fees for undervaluing your goods.

5. PRINTING THE SHIPPING LABELS AND DOCUMENTS AND ATTACHING THEM TO YOUR PACKAGE

Print and paste the shipping label, which contains the information you've entered in the previous step, securely onto the parcel. The addresses and bar-codes on the shipping label must be in clear view for identification and customs inspection. If the label isn't properly attached, it could get torn off or damaged during transit. Without all the information on the label, there won't be a clue about what is in the package and where it needs to go.

You'll also need to ensure that the shipping documents can be found on the package. One way to do this is to place all supporting documents inside a clear plastic pocket and tape it onto the package. Another common method is printing the labels on adhesive paper and pasting them on the parcels or packages. These will include the commercial invoices and customs declaration, so that the item is able to clear customs. Do note that some of these documents will require the sender's signature.

Sample of Shipping Label and Commercial Invoice

6. PASSING THE SHIPMENTS TO CARRIERS

Depending on the delivery option you've selected and service level the carrier offers, the carrier will collect the packages from you either at your specified sender address or at one of their drop-off points in your origin country.

If your selected service level includes track and trace, you'll receive a tracking code for your package after your carrier receives the package. Your customer can use this tracking code to find out where the package currently is.

It's also good to note that Sunday is a non-working day in Singapore. Sundays and Public Holidays may delay shipments, so you may want to plan around when Singapore has its holidays. You can find out when Singapore has its public holidays on the Ministry of Manpower's website[3].

While the actions required from the merchant usually end once the package is in your logistics service provider's hands, the shipping journey involves more processes that the logistics service providers carry out on your behalf, such as customs clearance.

CHAPTER 3

Customs Clearance

Customs clearance requires you or your shipping partner to have the right documentation at hand to avoid delays. Depending on the value of your shipment, you may have to pay customs taxes and duties.

DOCUMENTATION

Singaporean Customs require extensive documentation prior to clearing goods for import. If your logistics service provider is helping you clear your product through customs, they will normally engage with experienced customs brokers who are familiar with the procedures and required format of documentation.

Minimally, the carrier must present the following to the relevant agencies:

- Commercial and pro-forma invoice
- Packing list
- If you are planning on shipping without a logistics partner who can clear customs on your behalf, you'll need the following:
- Airway bill or bill of lading
- Insurance policy (if applicable)
- Receipt of payment of import duty and import-related taxes
- Other relevant permits, licenses, and certificates

CUSTOMS DUTIES AND TAXES

If your shipment value is lower than Singapore's de minimis value of SGD400, you won't be charged duties and taxes for your shipment. A de minimis value is a threshold where any shipment whose value is above it will be charged duties and taxes at customs.

If your shipment is valued above SGD400, you will have to cover the following duties and taxes:

SHIPMENT VALUE ABOVE SGD400

Goods & Services Tax (GST)	7%
Import Duties	0%*
Total Tax Applicable	Up to 7%

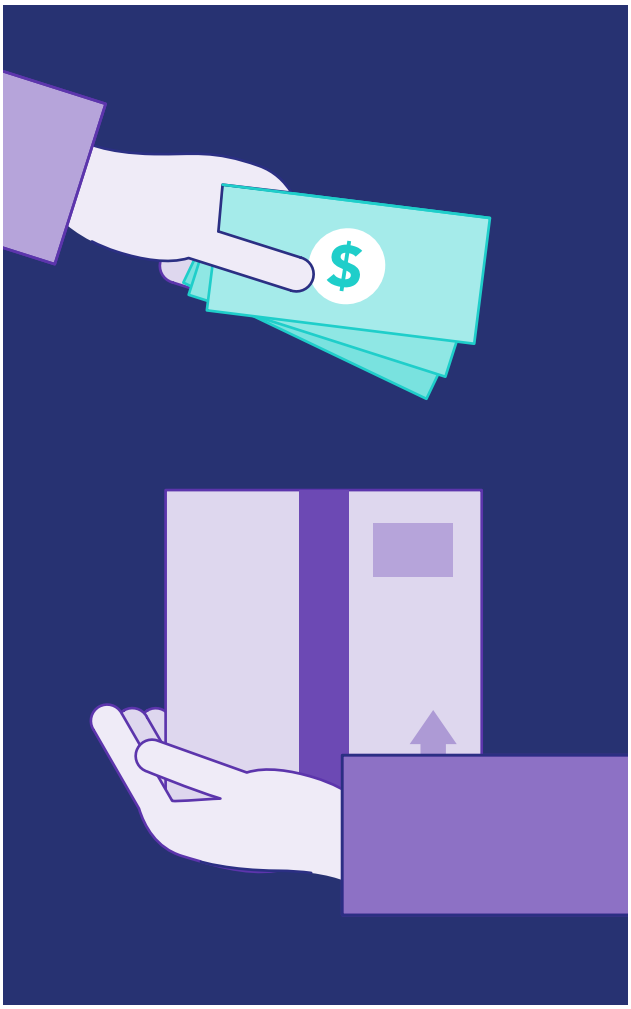
**The 0% import duty does not apply to restricted items. To check if your goods are dutiable, you may refer to Singapore's customs.*[1]

Singapore's high de minimis value and low GST tax on imported goods are to encourage foreign trade.

However, the de minimis value is only applied to shipments entering Singapore via air freight[2]. Shipments transported from sea freight and land freight would have to pay for the 7% GST.

Once again, to ensure that your package doesn't get stuck in customs, it is important to work with a logistics provider who is well-versed with the latest developments in Singaporean customs regulations to better navigate the ever-changing landscape of customs processes.

Our custom's clearance expertise can help your products get through Singaporean customs without a hitch. To find out how, you can reach out to us at contact@janio.asia



COLLECTION OF PAYMENT FOR DELIVERIES IN SINGAPORE

79% of Singaporeans are willing to pay via credit card for online shopping[3]. This is because Singaporean shoppers are trying to maximise their credit card's savings and rewards.

Additionally, 10% of Singaporeans prefer to pay with e-Payments and another 10% prefer bank transfer, and 5% of shoppers tend to prefer cash on delivery (COD)[4], so you may want to provide as many payment options as possible to capture the Singaporean market.

How is cash on delivery collected?

When your customers choose to pay for their purchase via cash on delivery, the last mile fulfilment stage of your supply chain becomes more complicated.

What happens during cash on delivery:

1. Online merchants will specify the amount to be collected in cash upon delivery when they pass the parcel to the logistics provider. This leads to the shipping value displayed on shipping labels to be in Singapore's local currency, SGD.
2. The logistics provider generates an invoice-cum-delivery challan, which indicates delivery details as well as the value of goods delivered, and attaches it to the parcel for easy retrieval.
3. The delivery man is authorized to collect the cash payment from the recipient immediately upon the successful delivery of the parcel. While it may be called 'cash on delivery', some logistics providers accept card payments and hence, the delivery man may also carry a card swiping machine.
4. The delivery man deposits the collected cash in his office. The logistics provider will hand over the cash to the online merchant, usually in the original currency paid i.e. rupiah, after deducting applicable handling charges. Some logistics providers offer additional currency conversion services which convert the SGD collected into the currency of the merchant's country before transferring the money.

Bear in mind though that not every logistics provider supports cash on delivery because of the additional payments infrastructure and processes required to offer this payment option. Should you decide to offer cash on delivery on your eCommerce site after weighing the pros and cons, find a logistics service provider that is able to facilitate it.

All the steps involved in cross-border shipping to Singapore may sound complicated but having the right shipping partners can greatly simplify things. By engaging with reliable and proficient shipping partners at every step, or even a single partner who can handle every step, you'll be on your way to seamless cross-border shipping to Singapore.

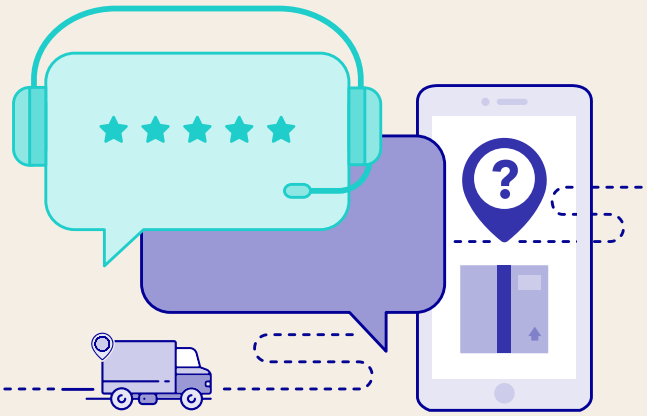
conclusion

FINAL TIPS ON DOING ECOMMERCE IN SINGAPORE

For eCommerce players around Southeast Asia, Singapore's big basket size and openness to foreign goods makes the eCommerce industry an enticing one to enter. However, just because the conditions are ripe for the taking doesn't mean you should immediately dive straight in. There are some things you need to consider before entering the Singaporean market.

Singaporeans are world class customers

Having world class infrastructures like a high internet speed and developed logistics industry means that the typical Singaporean customer may take their world-class convenience for granted. Consider having a dedicated customer service team, and be ready to answer queries relating to the product's features and shipment status.



Provide a great user experience

User experience plays a big role in winning and keeping customers. You not only have to beat the competition—you also have to make your online store visually appealing on smartphones' small screens, and make sure you allay Singaporean's fear of fraud by providing multiple payment gateways and cash on delivery to win them over.

You don't have to go it alone

It's also good to have help when entering new markets. Make sure you have a trustworthy logistics service provider and a good local seller-partner with in-depth knowledge and understanding of the country's eCommerce and logistics trends, challenges, and opportunities to make the most of entering Singapore's eCommerce market.

Lastly, given Southeast Asia's diversity, **it's wise to observe and learn.**

Analyse what makes some succeed and what makes others fail.

Understand their culture, work with local partners, and steadily win your slice of ASEAN's eCommerce pie.

contact us

Should you require more detailed information or assistance on this or even tips on setting up your online store in Singapore through our partners, you may contact us or schedule a complimentary consultation.

www.janio.asia

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INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND BEYOND

Contact our experts to learn more about shipping within Southeast Asia and contact our experts to learn more about shipping within Southeast Asia as well as our international shipping services.

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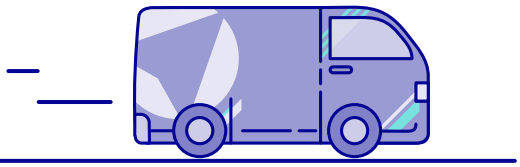
Asia's Logistics Simplified

Janio is a logistics service provider which can help you fulfil your international eCommerce shipments across Southeast Asia.

For a reliable and comprehensive shipping solution throughout Southeast Asia, contact us today.



we love your feedback!

Was this guide helpful?
Is there something else about Singapore eCommerce that you are interested in?

Drop us a line at
contact@janio.asia
and share your ideas!

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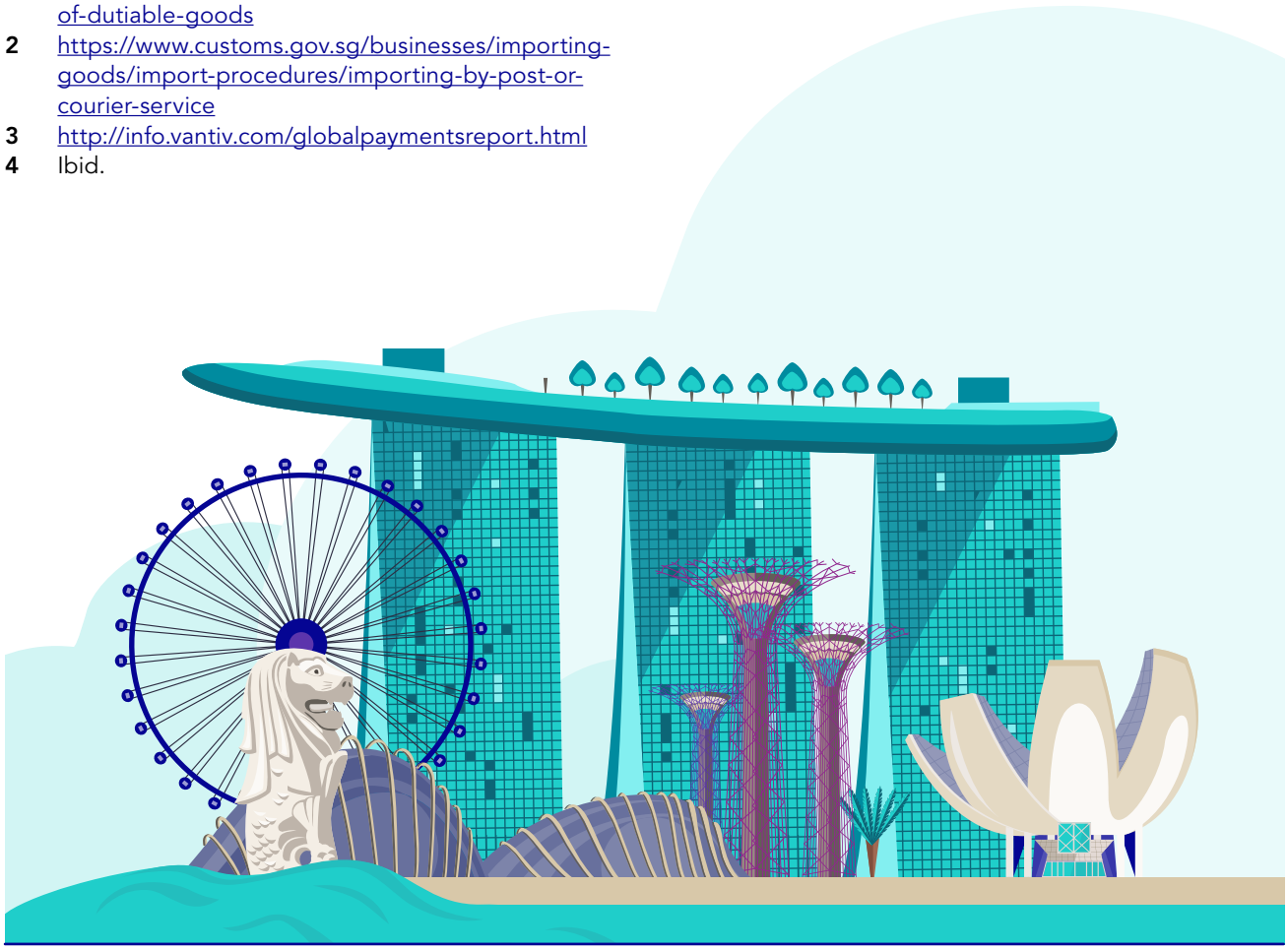

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