



Beyond Bentonville

WALMART TO GO DELIVERS

By W.H. Bender

As residents of San Jose, Calif., my wife Pamela and I have our choice of some of the nation's leading grocers: Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Safeway. These companies set a high standard when it comes to quality and service, so it was with some reluctance, but a sense of adventure, that we gave Walmart To Go a try.

This new home delivery service pleasantly surprised us at virtually every point along the shopper experience continuum, from the point when we first registered at Grocery.walmart.com, to the placement of orders, scheduling and promptness of deliveries, professionalism of the delivery driver, quality of food and, of course, the prices, which tended to be lower than what we were paying elsewhere.

From the start, it was apparent that Walmart had thought through the user experience. The uncluttered home page made the process of opening an account easy, and I quickly received a confirmation email. Pamela and I experimented with different tabs to navigate the site with products organized by categories and subcategories, shelves, types and brands. After clicking on a category tab a new page would open with "special offers," and we could go down this page or click a link above to reveal sub-categories. After we became acclimated to the site design, the navigation process became faster.

Product selection was simple because items were merchandised with a brand picture that showed the package label, and the images loaded fast, even with our normal DSL Internet speed via AT&T. The only thing that slowed our process somewhat was we had difficulty locating the rather small back button on the Web pages, as we typically make use of our browser's back button. The package pictures, while clear, were small and sometimes hard to read depending on the label size. The first group of products that was viewable on the screen was always Walmart's special offers featured at rollback prices.

As for prices, San Jose is a relatively affluent area, where many residents can afford to shop at such places as Whole Foods. Even so, that doesn't mean saving money isn't a consideration, and Pamela — who is very knowledgeable when it comes to grocery, drug store and retail pricing — quickly recognized that Walmart's prices were better than Safeway's on the assortment of fresh food, dry grocery and household products we purchased.

The site functionality worked fairly well, and we could view items in our "cart" with the sidebar and easily change quantities or delete items. Pamela liked the option to "allow substitutions" if the box was checked when you viewed the order list. And since we were first-time customers and our order of 17 items cost \$59.28, the normal \$7 delivery fee was waived.

The checkout process was easy and we were able to verify and submit the order. Within a minute, we received an email thanking us for our order and confirming our delivery choice.

Because the "technology" portion of our experience had went so smoothly and we were being engaged at
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Walmart uses a special fleet of refrigerated delivery vehicles with distinctive branding elements to provide the Walmart To Go service.

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each point of service, our confidence in the Walmart To Go brand was building even before the merchandise arrived.

The delivery experience didn't let us down either. Our order was scheduled to arrive on July 7 between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. Our phone rang at 6:30 p.m., and Manuel let me know he would be at our house in approximately 30 minutes. At 7:05 p.m., I answered a knock on the door and was met by Manuel. He was smiling, well-groomed and looked professional in a blue Walmart shirt and dark blue slacks wheeling a hand truck with our first order. Manuel made a great first impression, and the experience got even better when he handed me a loaf of fresh French bread as a thank you for being a new customer.

I showed him to the kitchen where he proceeded to unload the blue plastic containers from his hand truck that was filled with Walmart bags. Our order was separated by dry goods, fresh, frozen and refrigerated items. The food quality was good, and all products received were at the correct temperatures. The ice cream was hard, and dairy and meat products were very cold.

Buoyed by our initial experience, we gave Walmart To Go another try, but this time the stakes were higher. We had guests coming for a birthday party the evening of Saturday, July 9, so when I placed our order the prior day, it was imperative we hit the delivery window with an order of 35 items that totaled \$156.17.

The order process went quickly, as we had familiarized ourselves with the fairly intuitive site navigation, and I selected 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. as the delivery window. As with the first order, we received a prompt thank you and order confirmation via email.

When Saturday came, Pamela answered the phone about 4 p.m., and a driver named Mohammed said he would be arriving in 20 to 30 minutes. He arrived at 4:22 p.m. and, just like Manuel, was professionally dressed, courteous and asked where we would like him to put our sizable order.

With the particulars of the delivery out of the way, Mohammed satisfied my curiosity and showed me the Walmart To Go delivery vehicle. It was apparent this prideful young man thoroughly enjoyed his job as he showed me the compartments of his truck and described how he had previously worked for Schwann's making home deliveries.

As with the first order, the product quality was excellent, and all products were at the correct temperature. Because I had overlooked disallowing substitutions during the order process, we did receive five items that were different than we intended. However, Mohammed explained the substitutions, and we accepted as delivered.

Considering the convenience of ordering, service, pricing, quality of products and our overall favorable reaction to the experience, Walmart To Go is a service we can envision using again in the future and even recommending to friends. ■



Walmart To Go delivery personnel were professional, courteous and enthusiastic.