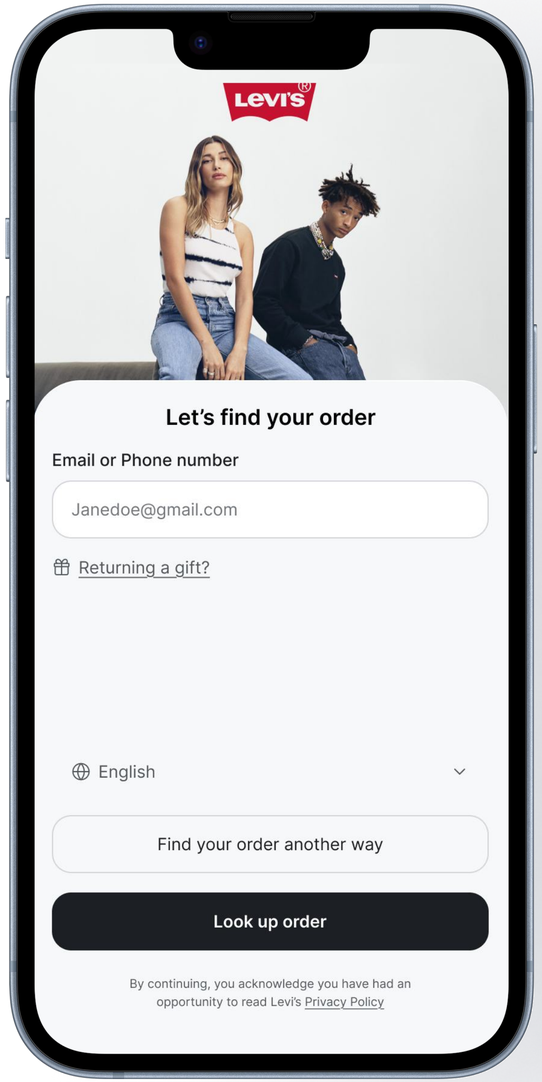
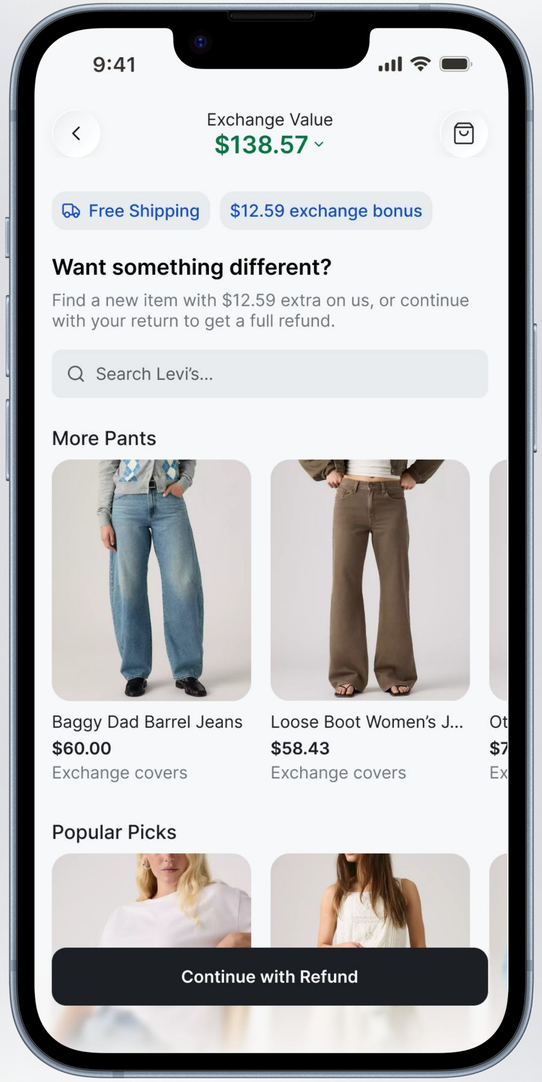
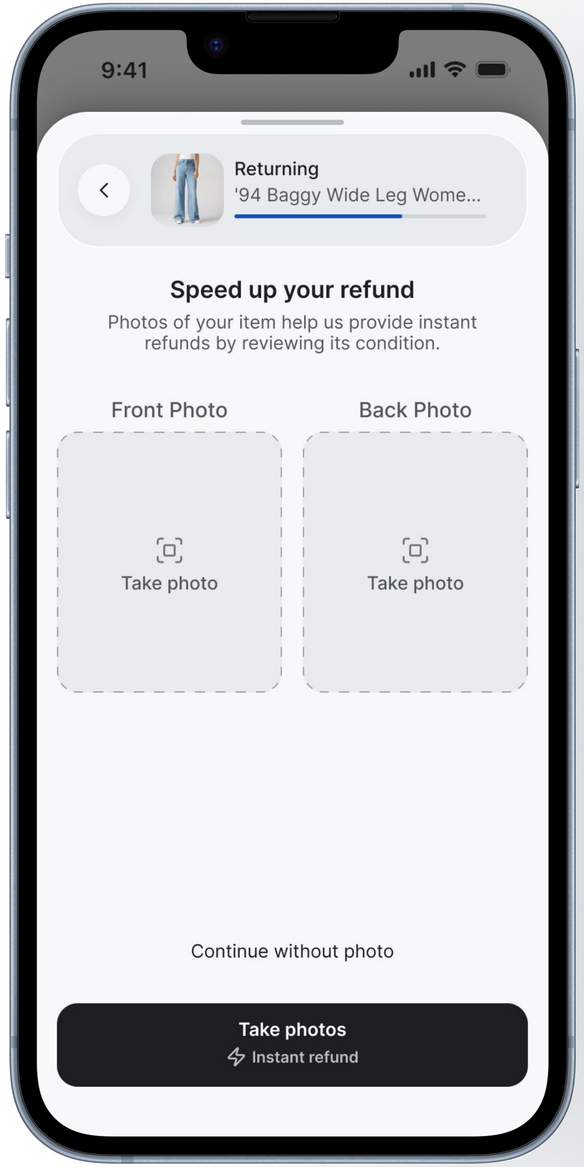
Resolve

Better Returns

Case study by Ethan Hawkes







30 Second Brief

Resolve is a return portal concept that uses return reasons and photos to inform routing before shipment, balancing minimal customer friction and maximizing business revenue.

My role

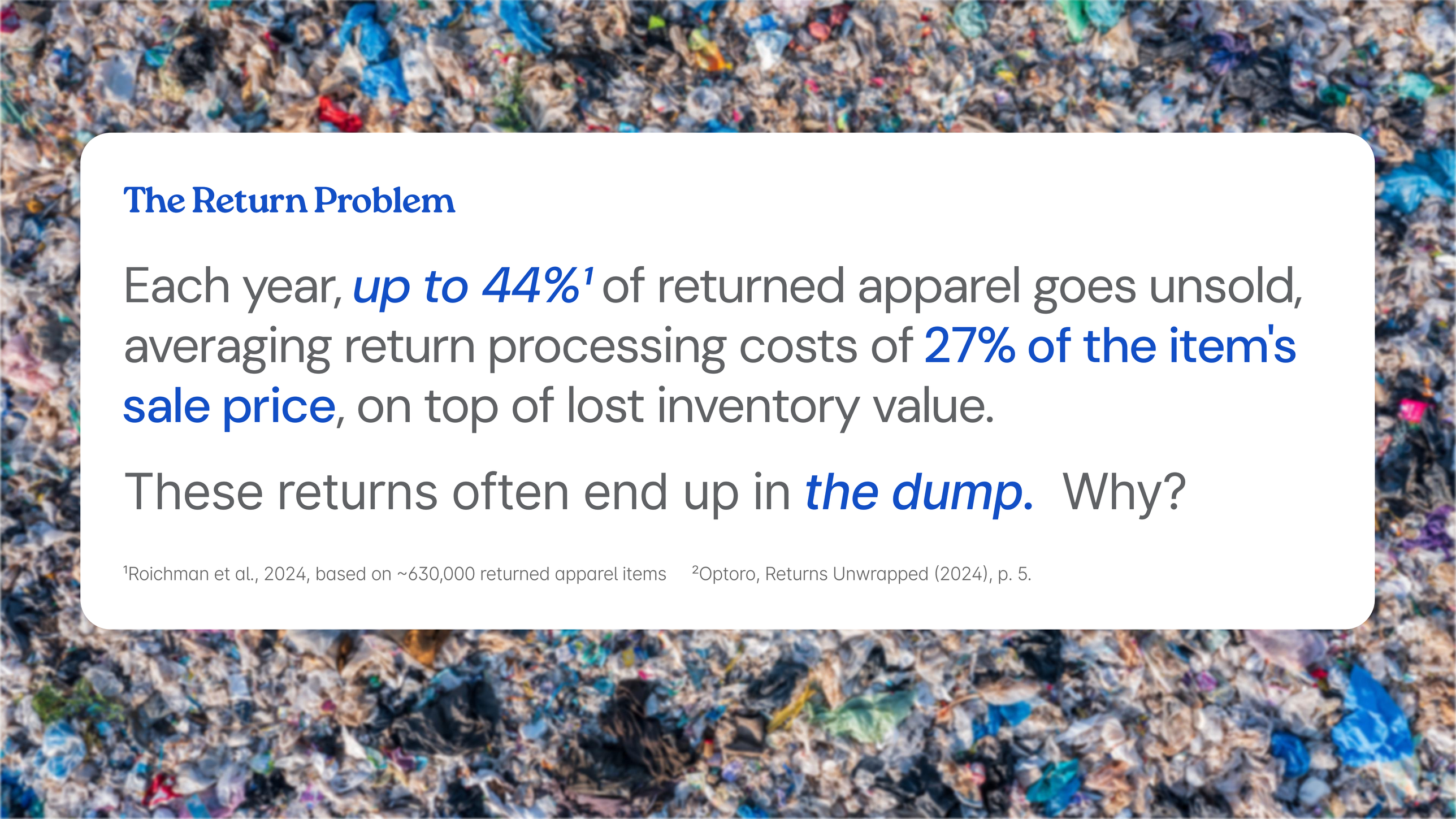
Built initial flow with a small team, then redesigned the project solo with feedback.

Scope

Full return portal flow, from item lookup to package drop-off and refund.

Intended Impact

Reduce reverse logistics costs without increasing user friction, maintaining both return revenue and returning customers.



The Return Problem

Each year, *up to 44%*[1] of returned apparel goes unsold, averaging return processing costs of **27% of the item's sale price**, on top of lost inventory value.

These returns often end up in ***the dump.*** Why?

[1]Roichman et al., 2024, based on ~630,000 returned apparel items [2]Optoro, Returns Unwrapped (2024), p. 5.

Returns ship before value is known

Some returns cost more to ship, process, and route **than they are worth**, and that's often discovered only after businesses ship and process it.

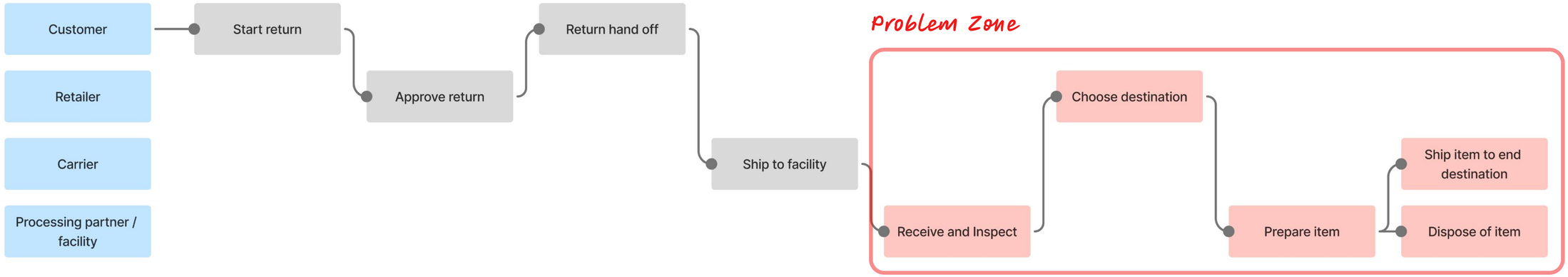
Disposal can be the easiest and cheapest solution.

How are businesses responding?

First, increasing return flow friction. Return fees, delayed refunds, and several money retention nudges help businesses reduce costs.

Second, proactive handling. Returns can trigger returnless refunds, or exchanges to ignore return costs.

Current Return Logistics



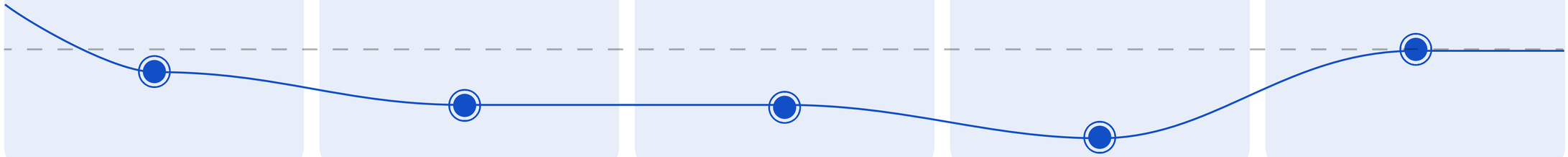


Friction creates a loyalty problem

The frustrated returner

Returns happen when a product disappoints, friction during the return process can compound and cause customers to not shop with a brand again.

About	Wants to return	Starts return	Return reason	Chooses resolution	Returns item
	The purchase didn't work out. Now the customer has to fix it.	Frustration starts when retailers charge for return shipping. 62% of customers have stopped buying places due to shipping fees, yet 66% of retailers charge for at least one return method.	Customer inputs why they want to return.	Customer is frustrated when return flows slow desired return options, pushing alternate return methods. 79% of customers abandon carts when preferred return options aren't offered.	The customer has their money back but the poor experience might make them not shop there again. 71% of customers say a poor return experience causes them to stop shopping somewhere.



*DHL E-Commerce Trends 2025, NRF 2025 Retail Returns Landscape, Optoro Returns Research, Eightx E-commerce Refunds Benchmarks 2026



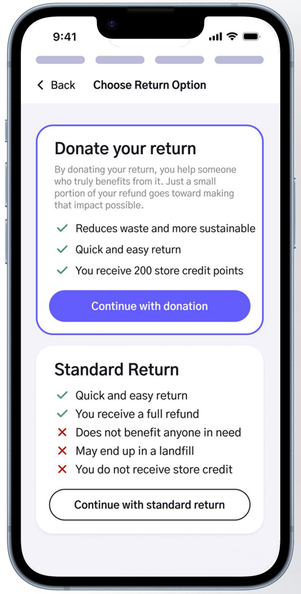
How Might I

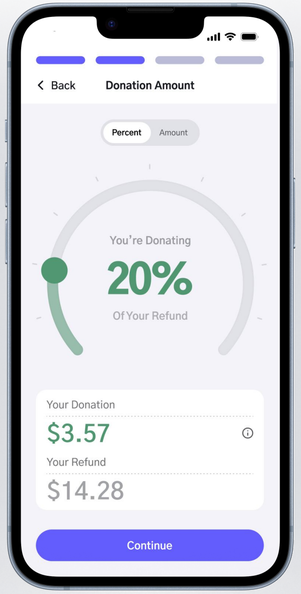
...help businesses recover more value from returns without increasing customer friction?

Customers who paid for return shipping reduced subsequent spending by 75–100%.

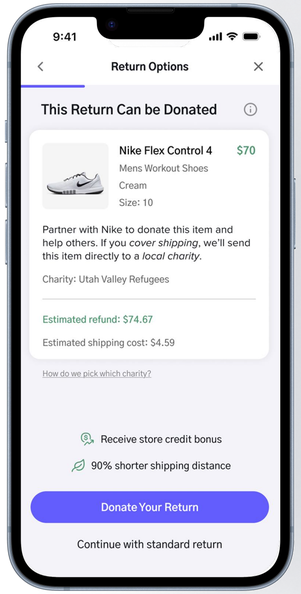
Bower, A. B., & Maxham, J. G., III (2012)

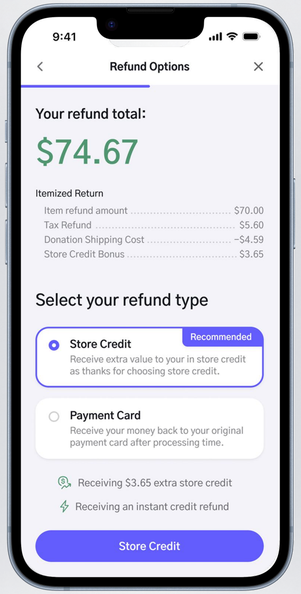
V1





V2





Exploring donations led the project toward proactive return routing.

Assessing an item's condition before donation revealed a broader opportunity: reducing unnecessary shipping and handling by routing returns before shipment.

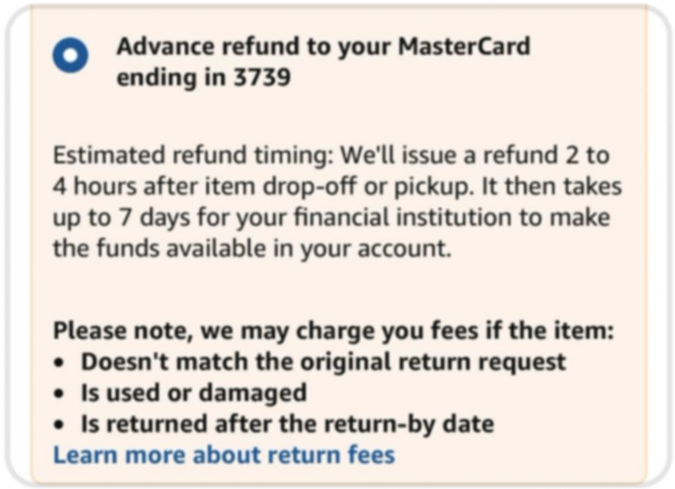
Testing early iterations with **11 recent returners** also revealed:

1. **Customers need clarity on money they will receive.**
2. **Store credit offers were a top frustration.**
3. **Donations appealed, but complicated the return**

Competitive review revealed more opportunities

View full heuristic evaluation of return portals

Amazon Returns



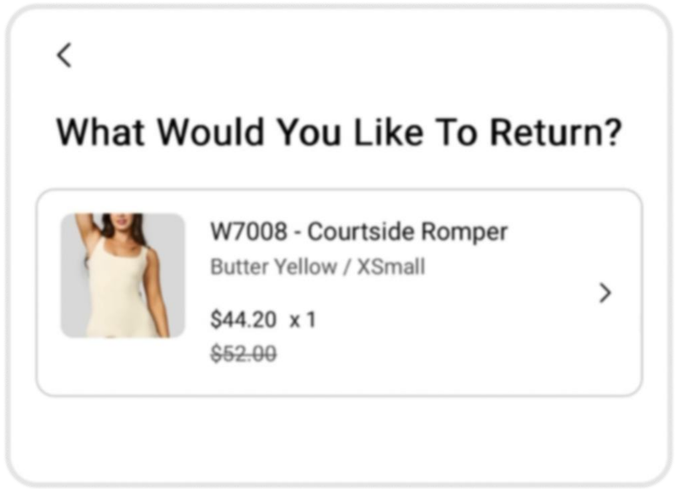
Problem

Crowded UI that is hard to parse, reducing flow clarity.

Solution

Use minimal information per screen to make progression fast and clear.

Loop & Happy Returns



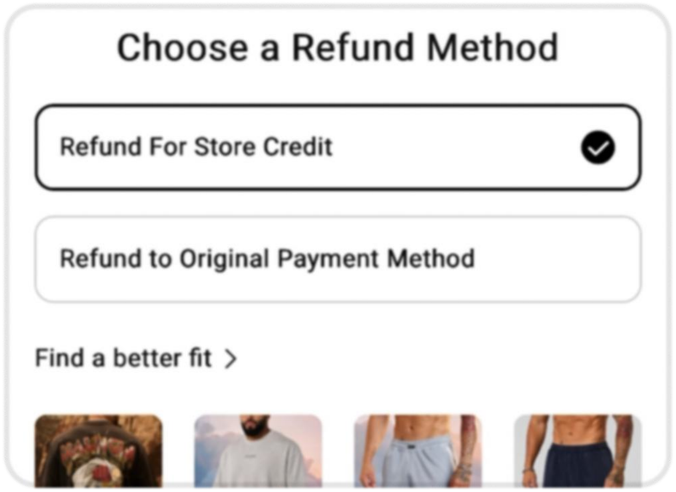
Problem

Unclear relationship between the original price, discount, and refund.

Solution

Don’t cross out item prices. If it was discounted explain that explicitly.

AfterShip



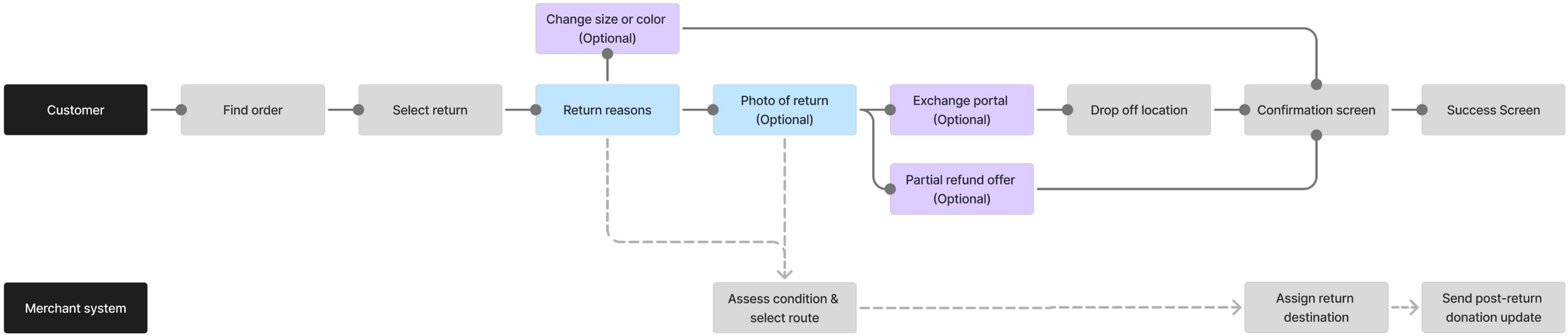
Problem

Three nudges are used in one flow, present on nearly every screen.

Solution

Use a single highest value nudge based on return context.

Updated Return Flow



Assess returns before shipment

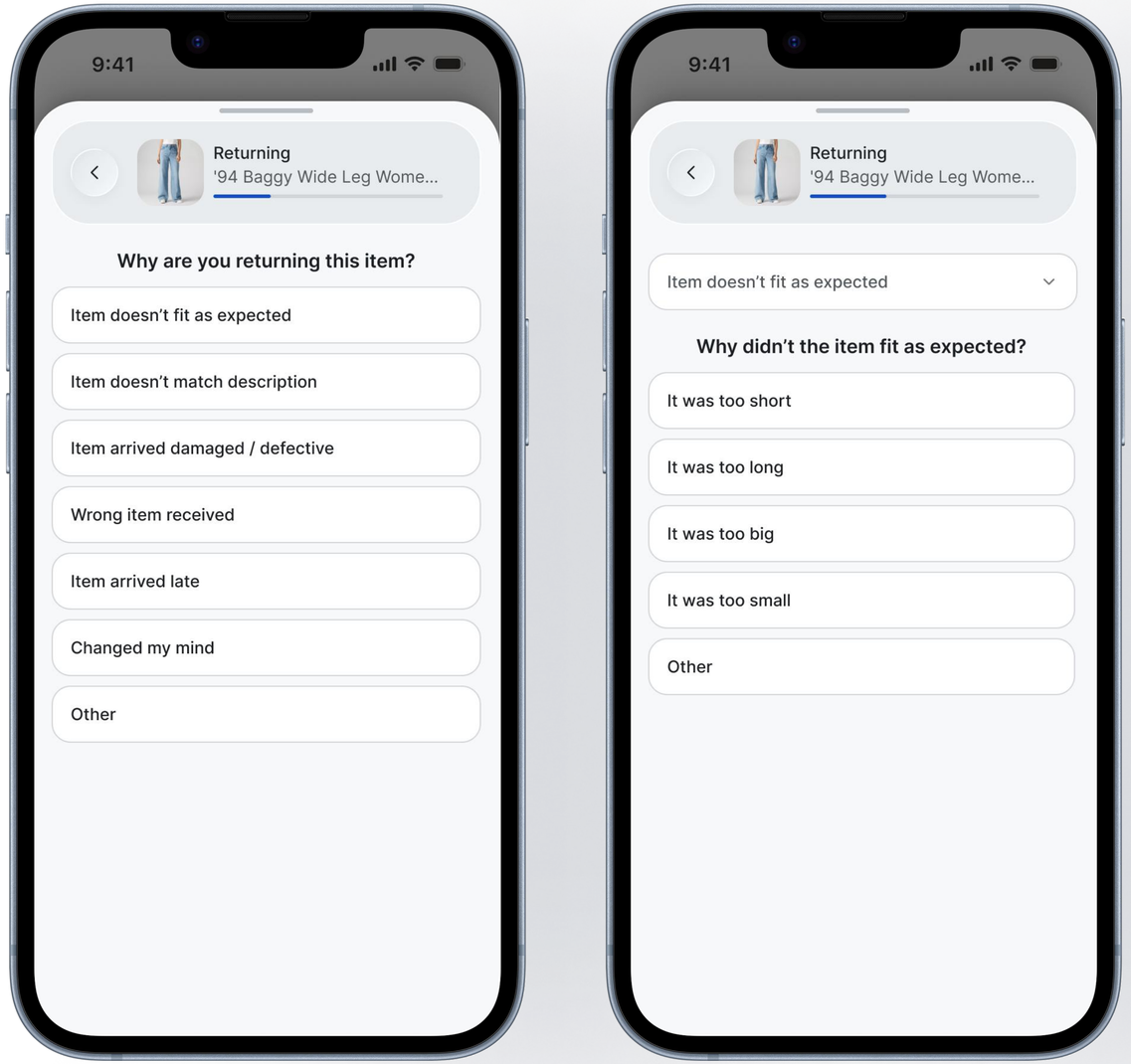
Earlier routing decisions (Blue): Return reasons and photos allow assessment of a return's current condition before it ships, reducing reverse logistics costs.

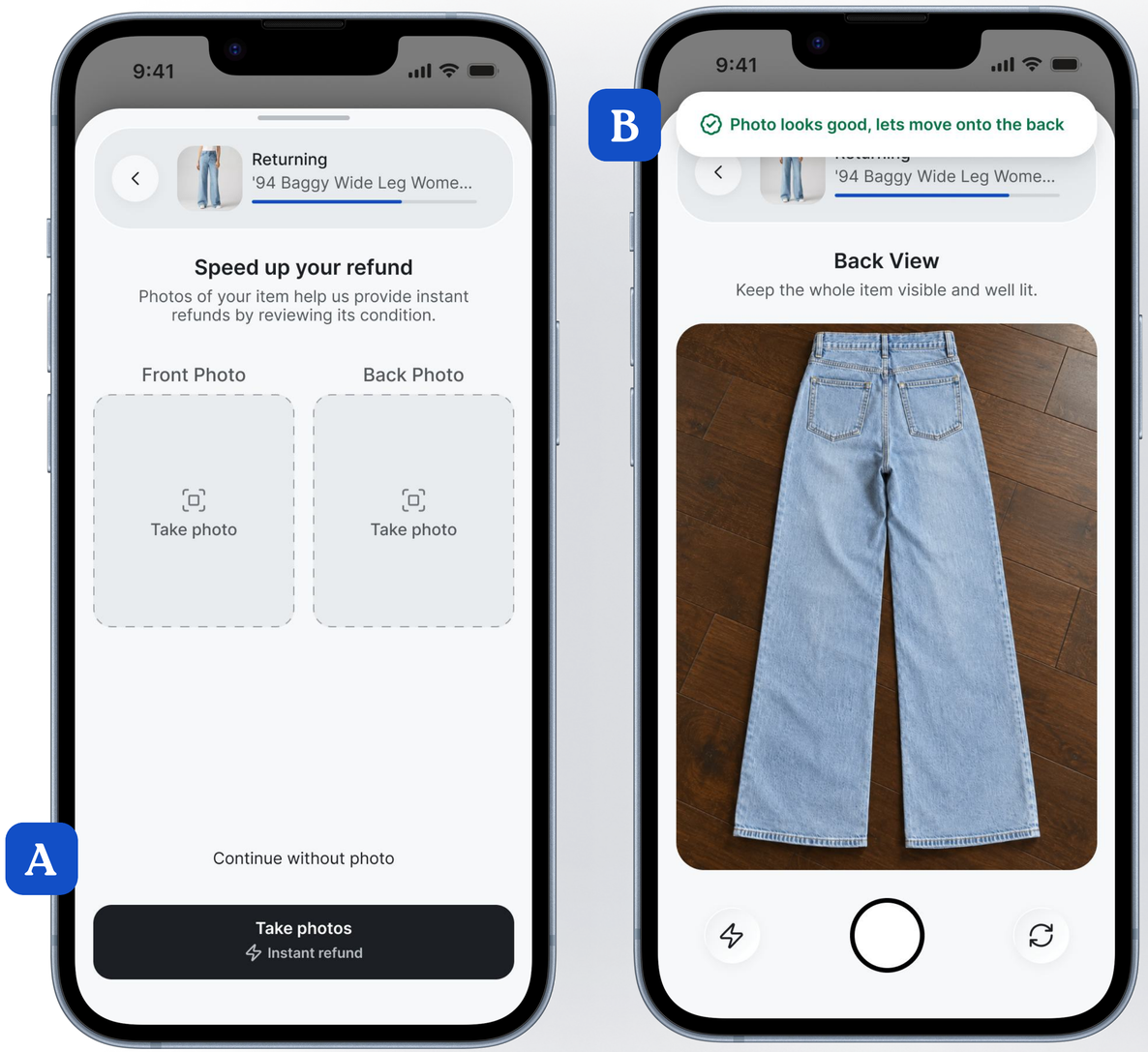
Keep the customer flow focused

One relevant offer (Purple): Customers see a contextual exchange or partial refund offer, with a clear path to continue their return. This aims to minimize friction while maximizing revenue retention.

Questions to assess condition

Follow up questions adapt to the selected return reason, gathering more specific return information to inform routing and relevant exchange offers.





Photos to assess condition

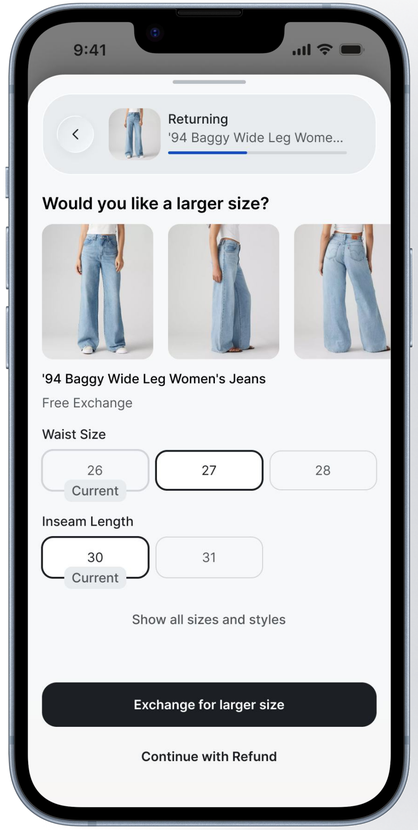
Photos reveal item conditions. Instant refunds encourage participation, while customers without camera or item access can continue without photos (A).

Guided photo capture automatically advances from front to back, confirming progress (B).

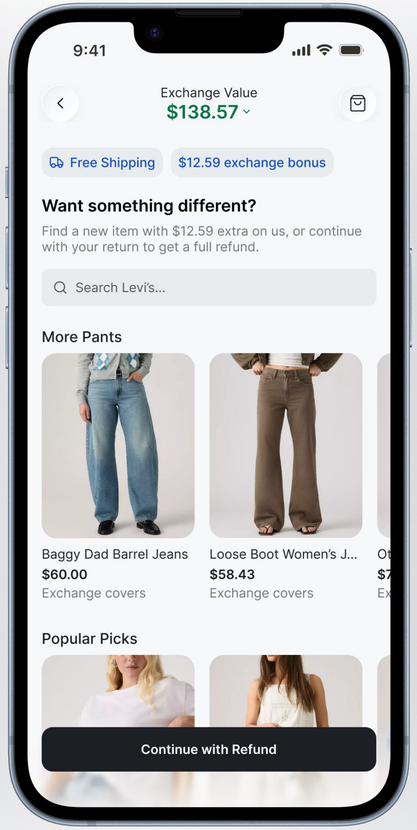
One relevant offer

Using return context, a single offer would be given to the user. Never store credit.

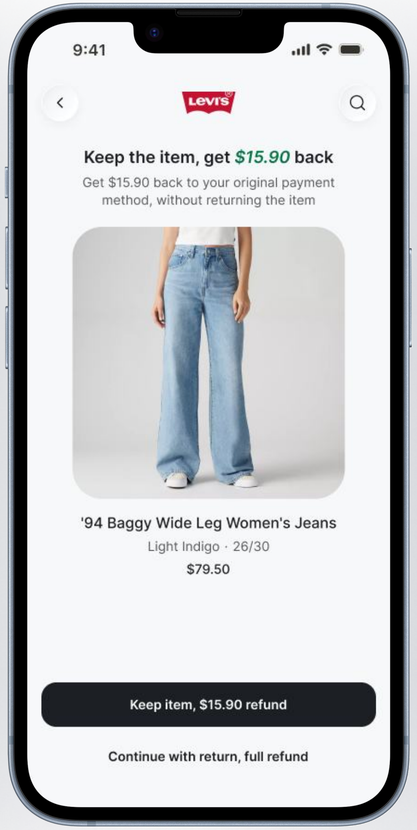
Exchanges retain 3× more revenue than store credit.*



Fit issue → Size exchange



Standard returns → Product exchange



Exceeds recovery value → Keep item offer

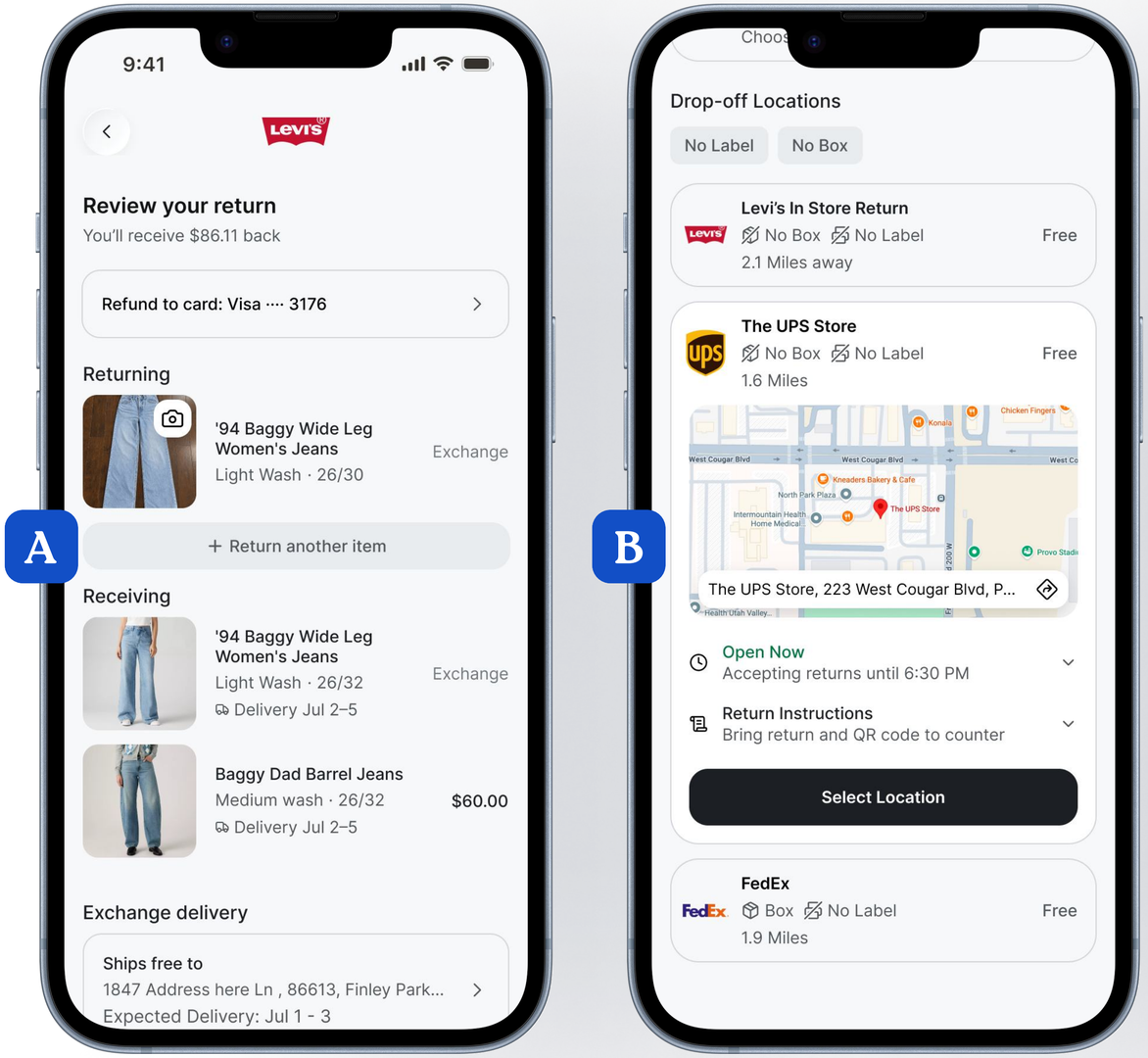
* Loop, Ecommerce Returns Benchmark Report

Simplifying the flow (A)

Customers can return another item from the review screen, avoiding the need to ask an extra question for everyone.

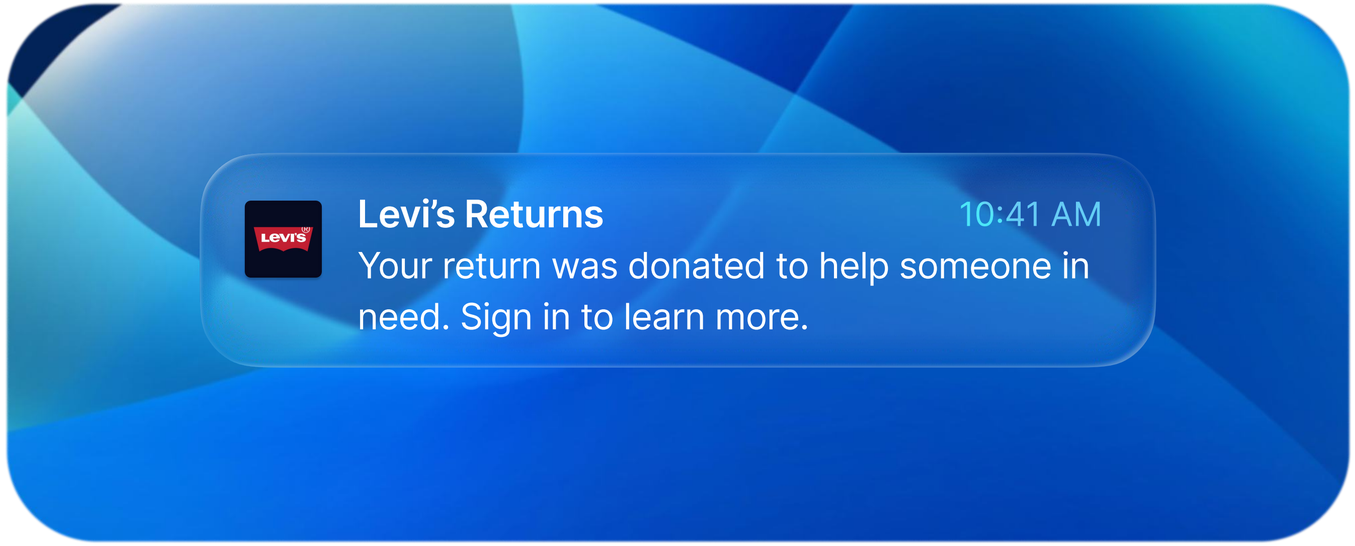
Information, as needed (B)

Return locations expand with a map of the location, store hours, and return instructions.



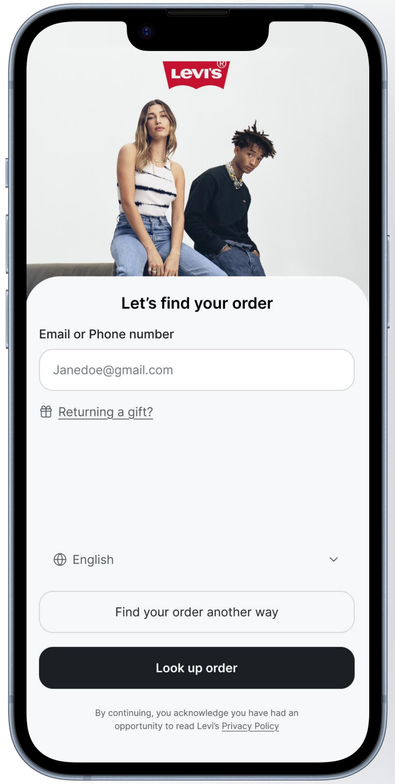
Donation as a positive touchpoint

10 of 11 participants liked donating to someone in need, but it complicated the return.

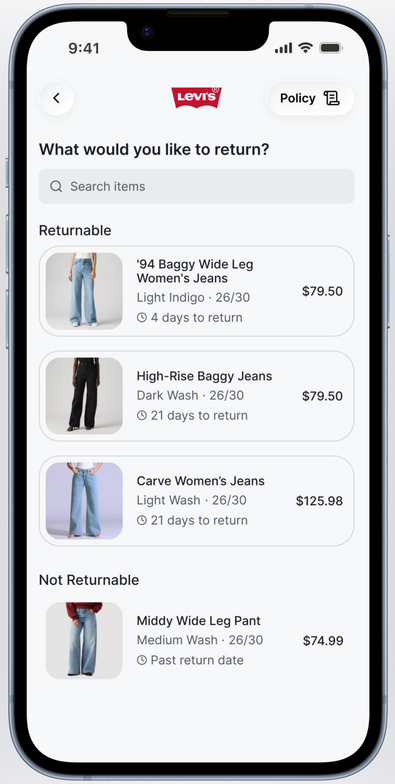


I moved donation updates to after the return, preserving it as a positive touchpoint without adding another customer decision.

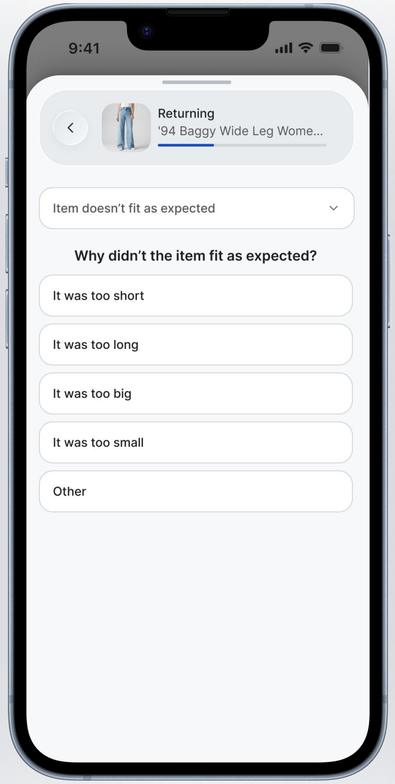
Return portal flow • 1 of 2



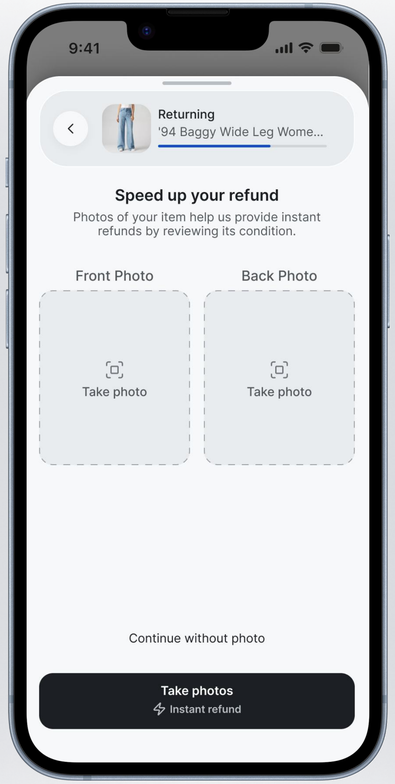
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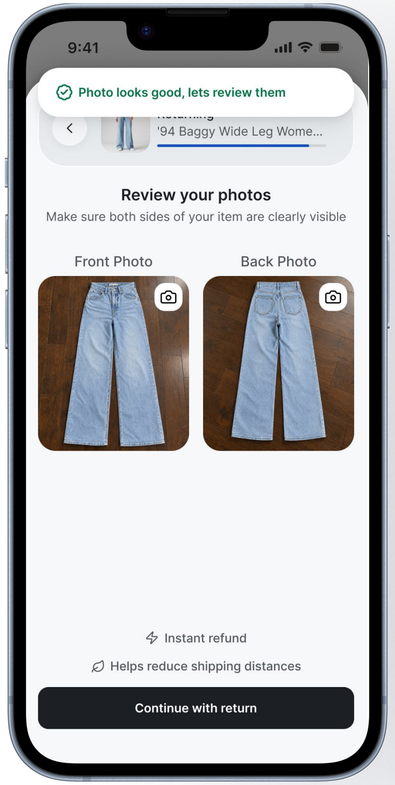


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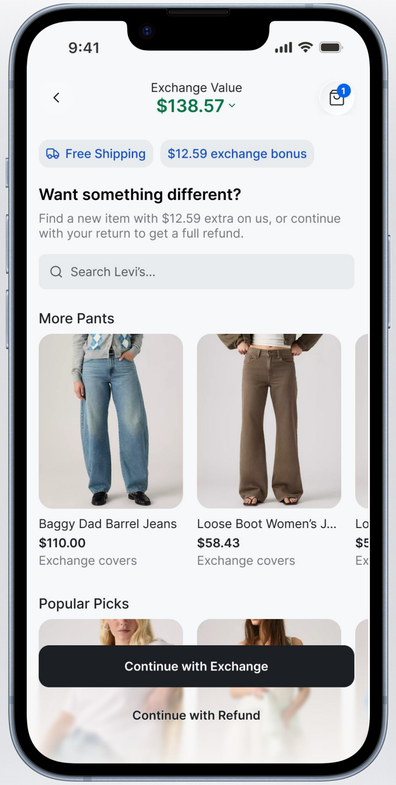


5

Return portal flow • 2 of 2



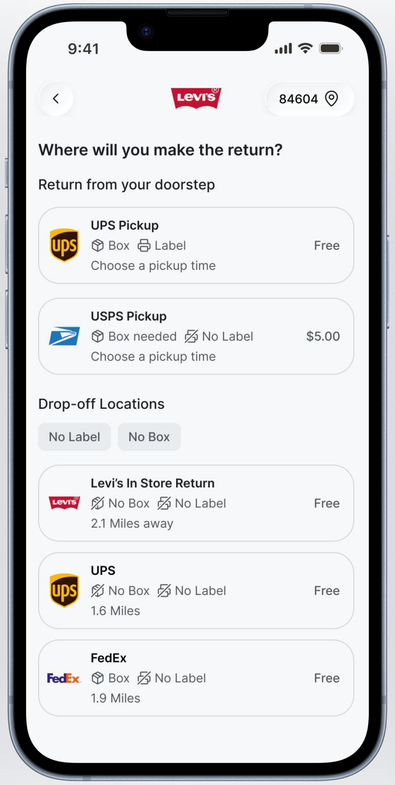
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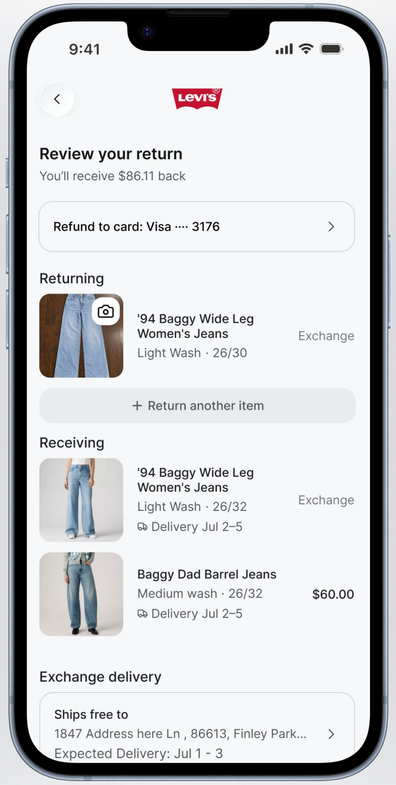
7



8



9



10

Built with tokens

56 primitives and 22 semantic tokens.
Includes color, radius, and spacing.

primitives and semantics

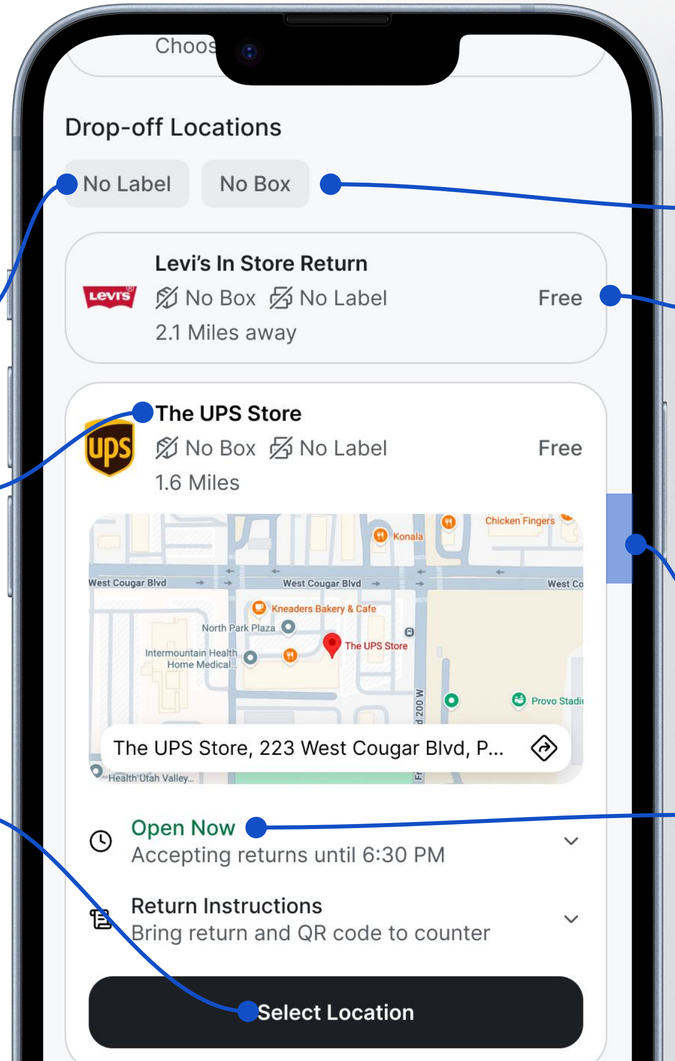
gray-50 — surface-background

gray-200 — surface-sunken

gray-900 — text-primary

gray-700 — text-secondary

gray-0 — text-inverse



radius-12

radius-24

Spacing & radius left primitive

spacing-8

spacing-16

label-strong

label-regular

10 text styles



Thank You

Case study by Ethan Hawkes