European Commission

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Digital Single Market

Making the most of the digital opportunities in Europe

ENDING UNJUSTIFIED GEOBLOCKING: A Short guide for online traders

As part of a big package of measures under the Digital Single Market Strategy to boost cross-border e-commerce in the European Union, on 3 December 2018 new rules on geoblocking will enter into force.

The new rules will:

Ensure better access to goods and services offered online

Create greater certainty for business and build trust amongst consumers

Reduce transaction costs and the administrative burden for businesses

WHAT WILL THE NEW RULES MEAN FOR ONLINE SELLERS?

Accepting foreign credit cards:

A german trader who accepts a certain brand of credit cards for payments via his website should also accept the same brand of credit card when issued in Austria.

Access to websites regardless of the consumer's place of residence

Irish customers accessing an Italian online shop selling clothes should not be automatically redirected to a site for Ireland, they should be asked first whether they wish to be redirected. Even if they give their consent to be redirected, the Italian version should remain accessible.

Prices and conditions should not depend on nationality

An Estonian person accessing a Belgian website to buy tickets for a concert should be offered the same conditions as a Belgian national, for instance discounts for advance buying.

Online sellers will still be able to freely design their prices, websites across the EU, as well as their marketing activities, including designing offers targeting specific groups of customers, so long as they do not discriminate against nationality, residence or establishment (such as offers for young people or for consumers as opposed to specific professionals).

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HOW CAN ONLINE SELLERS ENSURE THEIR SERVICES ARE COMPATIBLE WITH THE NEW RULES?

Always offer the possibility to the customer to buy goods and services on their website irrespective of the customer's nationality or residence.

Allow the customer to provide a contact address regardless of his residence or nationality. This does not mean however that the online seller has to deliver to a foreign customer, but simply that this customer can buy the product as if he was a local customer.

If traders allow payment via credit transfer, this possibility should also be offered to consumers with a bank account in a different Member State

Allow access to their website irrespective of where the customer connects from.

Ask for the customer's consent before redirecting them to another version of their website, and always offer the possibility for the consumer to return to the website they initially sought.

Not decline credit or debit cards just because they are issued in other Member States.

Online sellers do not need to offer delivery in the customer's Member State. However the seller must offer the same delivery conditions as the local customers in the Member State to which they offer delivery, including the same picking-up options. The picking-up of goods from the seller can be done by the consumers themselves or by a delivery company of their choice.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

✔ If consumers are re-directed to a local version of a seller's website after giving their consent, there should be an easily accessible button to take the consumers back to the website they accessed initially.

✔ If reduced prices are offered for online advance bookings for concerts or other events (as opposed to offline sales), they should be offered to all customers, irrespective of their nationality or residence.

✔ A trader who only provides delivery services to pick-up points in one Member State, should allow the consumers to fill in their contact details even if they do not reside in this Member State, so that they may have the possibility to pick up the goods themselves or via a delivery company.

DID YOU KNOW

Almost 40% of EU consumers feel confident purchasing goods or services via the internet from sellers located in a different EU country (Eurobarometer 397, 2015), though only 19% of consumers actually buy online from another country (2015 data). The new EU rules on e-commerce are aimed at exploiting this significant potential cross-border demand and create new opportunities for business.