

E-commerce pushing boundaries with marketers and customers

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Teaser: Check out these exciting innovations for obtaining customers that are literally hard to reach.

We take it for granted that when we purchase a package online, it'll eventually arrive on our front door.

But what if you don't have a physical address? There's a large swathe of the world out there -- in fact billions of people especially those in developing countries -- where this is a real concern.

Fortunately, a number of companies -- many of them startups -- have stepped up to the plate to mitigate these issues.

And for those of us who do have a physical address, e-commerce technology innovations are rapidly improving across many fronts to further drive sales and make the online buying experience seamless.

So let's address the first issue.

A Kenyan startup, [OkHi](http://www.okhi.com/), <http://www.okhi.com/> created a phone app that enables people to log in from where they live. The Nairobi company has raised more than \$1 million to date from investors. OkHi combines a GPS data-point with a photo of the front entrance of a customer's front door. The company's co-founder, Timbo Drayson, claims that delivery times have been reduced by up to 50 percent.

Dubai-based Mena 360 DWC LLC launched [Fetchr](http://fetchr.us/). <http://fetchr.us/> The app pinpoints a delivery location and time using a customer's phone as a GPS location. To make it easier for customers, all fetchr couriers wear bright orange shoes and orange backpacks so they're seen on city streets.

And last summer, Bangalore, India-based [Flipkart Internet Pvt.](http://www.flipkart.com/), <http://www.flipkart.com/> the country's largest online marketplace, rolled out a pilot delivery program via Ekart, the company's logistics arm. Ekart set up pick-up centers, called "Experience Zones" at 20 locations nationwide. Neeraj Agarwal, the company's senior director of delivery operations, said restricted entry of delivery personnel into IT parks, gated communities and educational institutions often results in customers having to wait an entire day to receive the shipment.

"We're moving from the orthodox doorstep delivery model to an alternate delivery model to make life convenient for frequent buyers busy in meetings or not present at home during delivery," noted Agarwal.

Commenting on OkHi, Dave Mount of Silicon Valley investment firm Kleiner Perkins Caulfield & Byers told Wall Street Journal <http://www.wsj.com/articles/startups-try-to-put-remote-e-commerce-customers-on-the-map-1468603499> "This is an example of a leapfrogging technology. These regions of the world could go from having really imprecise address systems to the most precise in the world, with the help of technology."

And some e-commerce tech inroads will further drive sales and help many companies with branding and positioning.

In recent months, drones have generated a welter of editorial coverage across a wide array of business and tech publications -- companies like Amazon, Google, and Wal-Mart continue to test and improve drones, but advances in droids are also starting to be noticed.

Estonia-based [Starship Technologies](https://www.starship.xyz/), <https://www.starship.xyz/> was launched by Ahti Heinla, one of Skype's original developers. The venture's also backed by Janus Friis, Skype's co-founder. As reported in TechCrunch, the idea is that a customer will place an order online, then the Starship drone (they can carry about 40 pounds) will be automatically loaded up with the goods inside a "portable warehouse" constructed from a converted cargo container.

"This can be placed anywhere which is convenient, like a parking lot or by a shopping mall, for instance. The Starship then heads out on the sidewalks at a top speed of four miles an hour, with a range of up to two miles. The aim is to deliver a package in under 30 minutes," noted TechCrunch.

Experimental deliveries are now being conducted with a full service rollout expected sometime in 2017.