

## M&S customers hit by delays to online orders

**Distribution centre unable to cope with high demand**

**Retailer draws complaints over internet purchases**

**Sarah Butler**

Marks & Spencer has had to delay deliveries of online orders by up to two weeks and withdraw next-day delivery services to stores after being beset by problems at the busiest shopping time of the year.

Disappointed customers have been complaining on social media about delays to their orders which have been caused by problems at the retailer's distribution centre in Castle Donington, Leicestershire, which opened in May last year.

While some orders have been delayed by up to two weeks, next-day deliveries to customers' homes have been taking up to two or three days and M&S has withdrawn its next-day deliveries to stores.

The company admitted it had been forced to extend delivery times after its Black Friday promotions as its distribution centre could not keep up with demand.

Other retailers have also struggled. Last week Tesco customers were complaining of long delays for click-and-collect orders placed around the time of Black Friday, a relatively new promotional event imported from the US.

M&S's Facebook page has a number of complaints from customers. One wrote that an item ordered a fortnight earlier had been delayed for another week. "Every other shop can deliver quickly - has Christ-

mas crept up on M&S before they noticed," the shopper wrote. Another shopper was annoyed after their order was delayed by a week: "Not good enough M&S as some of the items required for this week. Please get your act together."

Today is predicted to be the biggest shopping of the day of the year so far by data firm Experian and online retailing trade association IMRG. Consumers are predicted to spend £676m.

While other retailers are experiencing strong increases in online sales, M&S's website has been losing customers since the retailer took control of its running from Amazon in February.

The company has previously denied that there were problems at its distribution centre, but online sales slumped 6% at marksandspencer.com in the six months to the end of September. Close to 5 million customers had registered on the site by the start of November, 1 million fewer than on the previous one.

Sources said the problems at the distribution centre meant that online sales at M&S were set to fall again in this quarter.

M&S said it had reinstated next-day delivery to homes but that deliveries to stores would take at least two days while standard deliveries, which normally take three to five days, could take up to 10 days. It said some products, such as wine and flowers which are not handled at Castle Donington, had not been affected.

An M&S spokesperson said: "Our customer is always our top priority and that is why we've extended some of our delivery options. The vast majority of orders are delivered on time. If we do miss a delivery date, we will do all we can to rectify it."



Gugu Mbatha-Raw accepts her best actress award, with *Pride* actor George Mackay Photograph: Dave J Hogan/Getty Images

## Pride, '71 and Belle head independent film prizes

**Hannah Ellis-Petersen**

*Pride*, the heartwarming story of an unlikely alliance between LGBT activists and a Welsh mining community in the 1980s, was the big winner at the British Independent Film awards, with prizes in three categories.

The comedy-drama, based on true events, was named best British independent film, beating competition from Mike Leigh's *Mr Turner* and *The Imitation Game*, and picked up two other awards, with Imelda Staunton named best sup-

porting actress and Andrew Scott awarded best supporting actor.

Yann Demange was named best director for his Belfast-set thriller, *'71*, while the best actress award went to Gugu Mbatha-Raw for her first major role, the title part in *Belle*, based on the true story of a mixed-race aristocrat in 1780s England. She praised the quality of storytelling and attention to detail in British independent film. "I'm really, really proud to be a part of something that ensures little girls can grow up knowing that Dido Belle was also part of our history," said Mbatha-Raw.

The ceremony held in London also saw Brendan Gleeson beat Timothy Spall's depiction of JMW Turner and Benedict Cumberbatch's Alan Turing to the best actor prize for his portrayal of a priest whose life is threatened in *Calvary*. "I genuinely am knocked for six" said Gleeson, as he accepted the award.

*Boyhood* won best international film with director Richard Linklater dedicating the award to If... director Lindsay Anderson. The Richard Harris award for outstanding contribution to British film was given to Emma Thompson.

