

What we set out to test

A regional retailer asked a simple question: does same-day delivery pay, or does it only move demand forward. We instrumented four depots for sixteen weeks and measured cost to serve, not order volume.

Method

Depots	4, two urban and two mixed
Duration	16 weeks, March to June 2026
Orders in scope	214,800
Control	Two depots kept next-day only for 8
Primary measure	Fully loaded cost per delivered order

What we did not measure

Brand perception, customer lifetime value and returns handling sit outside this study. Where a result depends on one of them we say so rather than estimate it.

Headline

Same-day raised cost per order by 2.14 and raised basket value by 1.80. It paid only where drop density passed 14 orders per square kilometre per day.

Same-Day Retail Logistics

A field study across four depots. Page 2 of 4

Cost to serve

Next-day, urban depot	4.62 per order
Same-day, urban depot	6.31 per order
Next-day, mixed depot	5.18 per order
Same-day, mixed depot	8.44 per order

Where the difference came from

Vehicle utilisation	62 percent against 81
Drops per route	11.4 against 19.2
Failed first attempts	4.1 percent against 6.8
Pick to despatch time	38 min against 4.2 hours
Same-day routes fail less often, because the customer has just ordered and is at home.	
That saving is real but it does not cover the utilisation gap on its own.	

The density threshold

Below 14 drops per square kilometre per day, same-day never reached cost parity in any week at any depot. Above 18, it reached parity within three weeks at both urban depots and stayed there.

What changed in the store

Picking

Same-day pushed picking into the trading day. Store colleagues picked 71 percent of same-day orders during opening hours, against 12 percent of next-day orders. Two depots moved to a dedicated picking bay in week six and recovered 22 minutes per hundred units.

Stock accuracy

Substitution rate rose from 3.2 to 5.9 percent. The cause was not stock loss but latency: the shelf was picked before the count refreshed. Cutting the count interval from four hours to thirty minutes brought it back to 3.7 percent.

Labour

Overtime rose 9 percent in the first four weeks and returned to baseline by week ten once shift patterns moved to a mid-day peak.

What we would do next

Recommendations

Set a density floor before switching a postcode on. Fourteen drops per square kilometre per day is the number this data supports.

Cut the stock count interval before launch, not after the substitution rate moves.

Give same-day its own picking bay from day one. Retrofitting cost six weeks.

Price the promise. Every depot that offered same-day free ran below parity all sixteen weeks.

Limits of this study

Four depots is a small sample and all four sit in one region with one weather pattern.

The sixteen weeks include no peak trading period. Numbers here should be treated as a starting hypothesis for a peak-season test, not a forecast.

Data

Route-level data is available to participating depots on request. Aggregated tables are published alongside this document.