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AUGUST 2020

HOW CASELY BOOSTS CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT WITH CHARITABLE GIVING

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The COVID-19 pandemic prompts UK online supermarket Flava to offer BNPL for groceries

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Building brand awareness by aligning charitable giving with BNPL payment plans

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WHAT'S INSIDE

Finding charitable causes that resonate with customers' deepest social and environmental concerns is a powerful way to develop long-lasting relationships that can lead to many repeat purchases. A recent [study](#) found that 47 percent of consumers around the globe would be likelier to trust a business that supports environmental or social causes they also embrace, for example, while 53 percent said they would be more inclined to endorse businesses that were involved in charities.

Some buy now, pay later (BNPL) solution providers are finding ways to encourage customers to contribute to pandemic-related relief efforts as the COVID-19 health crisis continues to pose severe challenges for many communities and organizations. BNPL service provider Afterpay is [teaming](#) with fashion industry-focused fund A Common Thread as well as Baby2Baby, which collects contributions for babies in need worldwide, for example. The latter nonprofit has donated more than 15 million baby essentials such as diapers, formula and baby food to families facing pandemic-related struggles.

Retailers are likewise tapping into a range of charitable causes to engage their customers in meaningful ways. This is allowing consumers to use their BNPL accounts to contribute directly to nonprofits of their choice, enabling them to help those in need while developing loyalty and brand awareness.

AROUND THE BUY NOW, PAY LATER WORLD

Generation Z consumers are proving to be an appealing demographic for retailers, especially as they begin [flexing](#) more spending power. Recent findings suggest that members of this generation [represent](#) 40 percent of all United States consumers and possess \$143 billion in purchasing potential, for example. Earning Gen Z consumers' business is no small feat, however, and research suggests that companies can better appeal to them by offering flexible payment options and contributing to the causes and initiatives they hold dear.

BNPL offerings are also enabling some brands to more easily pursue their own causes and initiatives. Atlanta-based BlackCool, a lifestyle company focused on

apparel and accessories, was recently able to [boost](#) its sales 600 percent by offering its customers installment payment plans, said Rocky D. Williford, the company's founder and CEO. He said the flexibility BNPL options offer has also allowed customers to stretch their dollars during the pandemic. This includes encouraging them to purchase items such as a commemorative T-shirt, from which some proceeds will go toward a nonprofit initiative spotlighting Black cultural positivity.

Installment payment plans are moving into sectors outside of retail as well, including live entertainment ticketing. Ticketing platform Ticketek New Zealand is reportedly preparing to [provide](#) BNPL payment plans through a partnership with Afterpay, for example. The service will enable fans to purchase tickets in four installments paid every two weeks, allowing them to reserve their seats after making the first payment.

For more on these and other headlines from the BNPL space, read the Tracker's News and Trends section (p. 11).



HOW CHARITABLE EFFORTS CAN HELP BUSINESSES BOOST THEIR BRANDS

Companies' charitable giving and customer loyalty initiatives can often dramatically affect their bottom lines. Those that engage their customers by offering flexible spending options as well as focusing on social justice causes and nonprofit outreach efforts are seeing positive results. Jeremy Smith, head of product at mobile accessories retailer Casely, recently told PYMNTS. In this month's Feature Story (p. 8), Smith discussed how offering BNPL tools and partnering with various nonprofits can help retailers expand their customer reach.

DEEP DIVE: HOW BRANDS ARE BANKING ON BNPL OPTIONS TO PROMOTE CHARITABLE EFFORTS

Merchants that pair charitable endeavors with flexible payment methods can boost sales and build brand awareness, especially as many nonprofits are experiencing severe financial hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic. Offering these options and supporting social and environmental causes can also foster greater customer loyalty among brands. This month's Deep Dive (p. 15) examines how retailers are participating in community-oriented causes, including pandemic-related relief efforts, that can benefit from predictable cash flows achieved through BNPL payments.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Pulse, a new Afterpay loyalty program, will reward customers who pay for purchases on time and spend responsibly. What need is this fulfilling and what impact will this have on the loyalty of millennials and members of Generation Z, who prefer using debit cards rather than credit cards to pay their bills?

"During the COVID-19 period, millennial and Gen Z [consumers] are demonstrating a clear aversion to financial risk – especially for lifestyle purchases. There is an obvious acceleration in online spending, but there is also the tangible shift away from credit cards. Young shoppers across all the markets we serve are making a conscious choice to use their own money via debit cards, avoiding expensive credit, interest and excessive fees. In fact, nearly 90 percent of Afterpay customers are electing to use their debit cards to pay over time.

But if you think about it, historically there has been no way for debit card users to earn rewards or benefits for the way they pay. Loyalty programs across our industry have encouraged excessive spending, leaving no options for those shoppers who want to spend responsibly and avoid expensive fees and extended debt. Pulse, Afterpay's loyalty program, was built to fulfill a need and offer a program in which consumers benefit from spending responsibly and paying on time. My favorite reward is the ability to use Afterpay to buy gift cards with 50 top retailers, like Sephora, Macy's and West Elm.

Pulse is fundamental to our mission and values as a company to encourage financial responsibility and wellness for our customers."

NICK MOLNAR,

U.S. CEO and co-founder of [AFTERPAY](#)

5 FIVE FAST FACTS

600%

Retail brand BlackCool's rise in sales after adding BNPL options



\$143B

Total estimated purchasing potential of Gen Z consumers in the U.S.



330%

Year-over-year increase in BNPL provider Afterpay's U.S. sales in its 2020 fiscal year



89%

Share of Gen Z consumers who believe brands should aid in pandemic-related relief efforts



38%

Portion of consumers globally who said they would be likelier to support brands that helped consumers during the pandemic



Customer Journey



HOW CHARITABLE GIVING
**BOOSTS ONLINE
BNPL SALES,
CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT**



DON'T CHILL BELOW 55°

READY
TO
USE

Christo
Ran

FRESH

FEATURE STORY

Consumers take notice when companies lead with socially responsible approaches, often viewing such businesses in higher regard and perceiving their products as greater in value. Ninety-four percent of consumers [believe](#) companies need to do more than just earn profits – they expect them to give back to social causes in their communities and in the world at large.

Charitable donations have also proven to boost sales. They are so effective, in fact, that eCommerce giants like Amazon and eBay employ checkout contribution options as a strategy to keep customers from abandoning their carts. eBay reduced its rate of customer attrition by 67 percent simply by supporting nonprofits.

Retailers are not just looking to donate a percentage of profits to a charity or cause, either, but are also seeing it as a way to foster customer engagement. Brooklyn, New York-based technology accessories eCommerce company [Casely](#) established charitable giving as part of its core mission when it was founded in 2017 with the launch of its Every Case Counts initiative, which donates 5 percent of proceeds to a designated charity organization each month.

“This has helped grow the business and connect with other businesses,” said Jeremy Smith, who runs charitable outreach at Casely and operates as its head of product.

The addition of installment payment company Afterpay’s BNPL offerings to Casely’s website in January also brought higher customer spend, with average order values rising 24 percent and conversion rates jumping to about 4 percent in the first few months. This figure has remained steady, according to Casely CEO Mark Stallings.

“Tying into social justice and allowing people to get behind the movement while also offering payment options that will allow them to plan their finances over the next four months, all combined, helped to grow our business long-term,” Stallings said.

THE NONPROFIT EFFECT

Partnering with a nonprofit can reap benefits, as consumers seek out companies that support socially responsible causes and are more willing to buy their products over those of peer companies.

Casely teamed up with Westerly, Rhode Island-based Ivory Ella, an online for-profit retail company that donates a percentage of profits to organizations including Save the Elephants, when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March. Together the companies designed and covered the costs of producing a phone case and a T-shirt for sale on Casely’s site, for which 100 percent of the proceeds will be donated to Project Sunshine, an organization supporting pediatric patients during COVID-19.

“When we reached out to them, they jumped into action quickly,” Smith said about working on the campaign with Ivory Ella, which they called #SpreadHope. “The partnership helped elevate the campaign and allowed us to connect with each other’s core group of customers – something we’d like to repeat with more companies for certain causes.”

Donating to a variety of charitable causes can expand customer reach for retailer engagement. Casely also recently partnered with HeadCount, a New York-based nonpartisan organization that promotes voter registration through music. The pair collaborated on the creation of a “VOTE” silicon card wallet, for which HeadCount will receive 5 percent of the proceeds as an Every Case Counts charity of the month.

Casely is mainly rooted in current social issues, including Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ rights and women’s causes.

“But like the market, and like the country, we are changing as well,” Smith said. “We spread our efforts as best we can at the time.”

A BNPL LOYALTY BOOST

Offering installment payment options at checkout can help customers support social causes by allowing them to achieve the more predictable cash flow necessary to afford these donations.

“We want our customers to have an option and a system in place to make a purchase, especially if they identify with us because of our mission, social issues and the charities we support,” Smith said.

Such an approach has helped the company gain customer loyalty and return visits.

“Consumers now are socially conscious and holding brands accountable,” he said. “I think we do a good job of being transparent and picking good organizations with good values that we believe in, and I think our customer base agrees with that, which helps us acquire and continue to have customers order more than once.”

A variety of nonprofits are in dire need of assistance during the pandemic, representing an opportunity for retailers to engage customers looking for ways to help. Casely has thus far raised \$64,660 for pandemic-related causes, with such partners as the World Health Organization COVID-19 Response Fund receiving a donation of \$13,297; Blessings in a Backpack, a nonprofit that helps feed children in the U.S., receiving \$20,170; and Feeding America, the nation’s largest domestic hunger relief organization receiving \$15,150. The company projects its total charitable giving will reach \$200,000 by year end, up from \$52,000 in 2019.

Smith predicts there will be a trend toward more charitable giving among retailers in a post-pandemic world.

“I think it’s very important for all brands to find their niche,” he said. “While charitable giving has always been a priority at Casely, we have made it even more of a focus to find brands to be part of our Every Case Counts initiative.”

Today’s consumers want to shop at merchants that meet their needs and support causes that resonate with them. This creates an opportunity for businesses not just to boost customer engagement and loyalty but also to make lasting charitable impacts. How retailers leverage social justice issues of concern to their customers can go a long way in developing lasting relationships that create positive brand awareness.

NEWS & TRENDS

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE SHOPPING AND BNPL SOLUTIONS

HOW RETAILERS CAN CRAFT MISSIONS, MESSAGES TO WIN SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS

Merchants are working diligently to understand what makes certain companies appealing to consumers, and research is beginning to show that [cultivating](#) a clear socially or environmentally responsible purpose could be key – especially among younger generations. This represents a shift from the charitable practices that previously dominated the retail space, with merchants now focusing on finding core social or environmental missions with which to align instead of simply donating proceeds to charities.

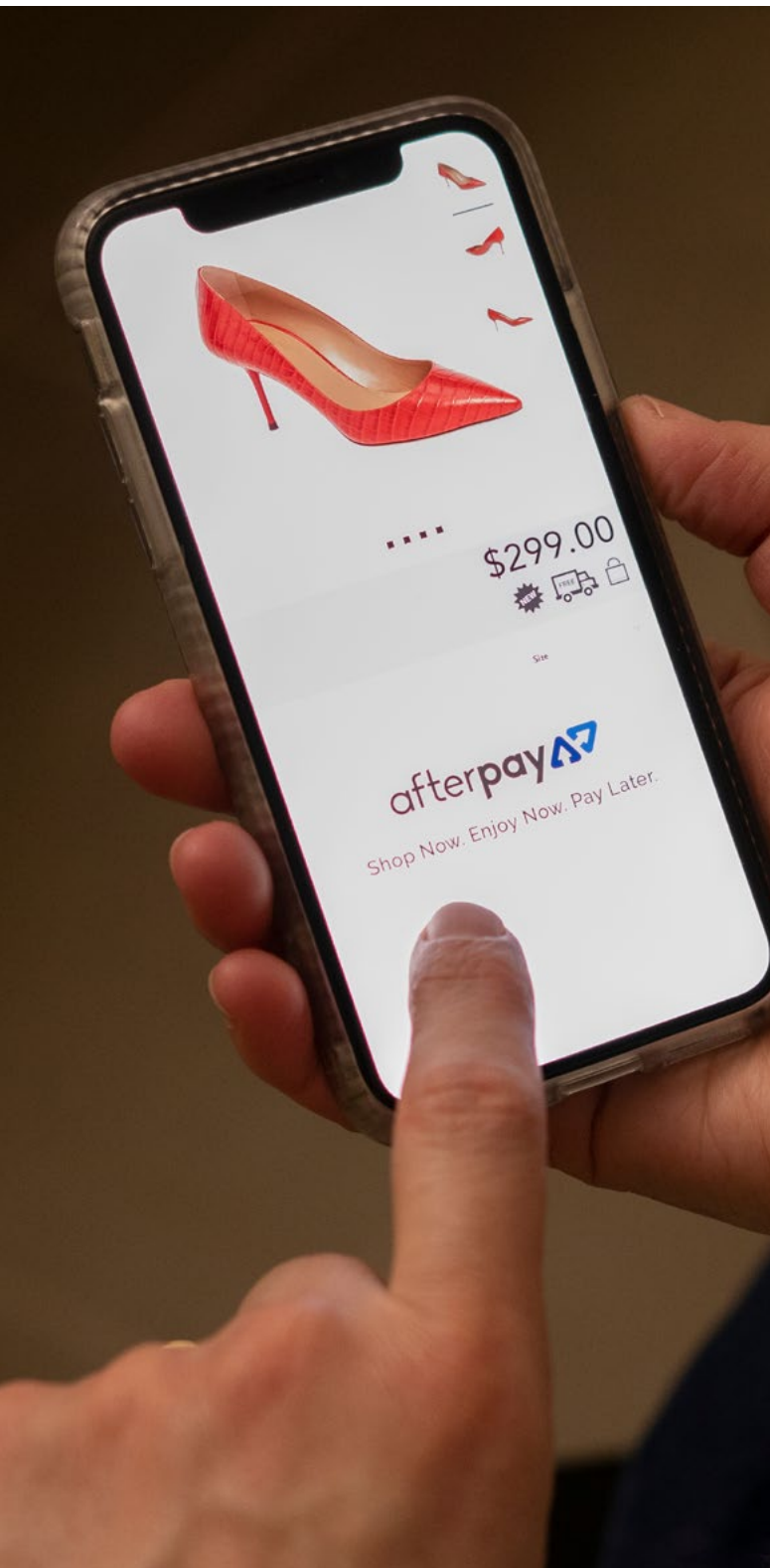
Millennials have been crucial to kick-starting this retail trend, as many are eager to support brands with missions that reflect their personal values while avoiding those that do not. Additional [research](#) found that Generation Z consumers have set the bar even higher for merchants, however, with 75 percent willing to openly share their disapproval of retailers whose practices or messages go against their beliefs. Merchants that work to develop a clear purpose and offer compelling payment options that [enable](#) shoppers to seamlessly support the issues that

matter most to them thus stand to foster brand loyalty for a growing number of consumers.

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE GEN Z CONSUMERS ARE AFFECTING RETAIL, BNPL SOLUTION USAGE

Many retailers are looking to cater to socially conscious Gen Z consumers, especially as their spending power grows. A recent Afterpay [study](#) found that Gen Z members – identified in the report as those ages 25 and younger – represent 40 percent of all consumers. Members of this generation value brands that champion their causes as well, with 89 percent stating that they feel merchants should aid in pandemic-related relief efforts, for example.

Gen Z consumers are also inclined to use payment options that give them more flexibility and allow them to eschew debt risks. The report found that 94 percent of Gen Z Afterpay users link their accounts to debit cards rather than credit cards, further revealing their reluctance to use traditional credit products with fees and interest rates. This means retailers that offer flexible installment payment plans and support social and environmental issues are likelier to earn and retain Gen Z consumers' business.



LIFESTYLE BRAND BLACKCOOL SEES SALES BOOST AFTER OFFERING BNPL TOOLS

Installment payment solutions are also creating new horizons for a diverse mix of retailers, including lifestyle brand BlackCool. The retailer, which sells apparel, fragrances and other products, has witnessed a 600 percent [increase](#) in sales since releasing BNPL payment plans about four months ago, according to Rocky D. Williform, founder and CEO of the three-year-old Atlanta-based company.

Williform explained that customers appear to feel more at ease and in control when using BNPL tools for purchases, and these options have allowed BlackCool to embrace a broader spectrum of customers. He also stated that installment plans have helped consumers make purchases that further support the company's charitable efforts, including sales of a \$50 T-shirt from which part of the proceeds will go toward the creation of a nonprofit that promotes Black cultural heritage.

BNPL SOLUTIONS SEE CONTINUED GROWTH

AFTERPAY POSTS 92 PERCENT YEAR-OVER-YEAR GROWTH IN IN-STORE BNPL SALES

BNPL solutions continue to experience record sales growth, especially in the American market. Installment payment solution provider Afterpay recently [announced](#) \$4 billion in U.S. sales for its fiscal year ending June 30, marking a 330 percent year-over-year increase. The company also posted strong sales in the United Kingdom buoyed by an expanding retailer base, witnessing a 74 percent increase in the number of active merchants in the market in its most recent quarter compared to the previous one.

Afterpay attributed the strong growth, especially in the U.S. market, to the introduction of new merchants using its platform as well as a general increase in consumers' eCommerce spending. The number of small to mid-sized businesses (SMBs) that adopted the company's solution also grew rapidly in the three-month period ending in June, with underlying sales from such merchants providing the solution in stores rising 92 percent year over year. These trends reveal that customers are continuing to leverage BNPL offerings to support smaller, local retailers as well as larger, international merchants during the health crisis.

STUDY REVEALS BROAD GROWTH IN US CONSUMERS' USE OF BNPL SOLUTIONS

Interest in BNPL services is increasing in the U.S. as debt-wary consumers seek flexible payments options. One recent [report](#) polled 1,800 individuals and revealed that more than 37 percent of the nation's consumers have used such solutions. It found that those ages 35 to 44 were the likeliest to leverage installment payment plans at 50.1 percent while respondents ages 54 and older were the least likely to do so at 20.6 percent. Consumers indicated that they were most inclined to use BNPL solutions to purchase electronics, clothing and accessories and furniture or appliances.

The study showed that most consumers use installment payment solutions just once every three months or less, despite the payment method's rapidly increasing popularity in the American market. This could indicate that further outreach is necessary to educate consumers on the benefits of using BNPL services for everyday purchases as well as special expenses.

DATA SUGGESTS THAT BNPL USE COULD DECREASE CHECKOUT FRICTION

One of BNPL services' main benefits is that they can allow consumers to flexibly make purchases without worrying about incurring debt, and recent evidence [suggests](#) that this can positively impact conversion rates. BNPL offerings can be attractive to budget-conscious consumers who are reluctant to accept credit cards' high interest rates, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic causes record unemployment levels. Credit cards [charge](#) an average interest rate of 18.6 percent, for example, while BNPL solutions typically allow consumers to make several interest-free payments without undergoing credit checks. Such flexibility could continue to prompt strong market growth, too, with one BNPL solutions provider recently reporting a 60 percent hike in average order value.

SPOTII ROLLS OUT NO PAY TODAY

Some solution providers are launching offerings that put a slightly different spin on the standard BNPL model. eCommerce payment technology provider Spotii recently [released](#) No Pay Today, which allows customers to purchase items online, forgo making payments for 14 days and thereafter split their payments into four equal installments every two weeks. Such an approach could be paying off, too, with recent research revealing an average increase in online checkout basket size for consumers who are allowed to defer payments of 50 percent to 70 percent. Such services could also boost conversion rates by 20 percent to 40 percent, according to recent data.

Spotii said the program is designed to assist consumers experiencing difficulties during the pandemic by ensuring that there are no invisible fees. The offering is currently available in the United Arab Emirates and it is expected to be rolled out in other Persian Gulf nations in the coming months.

GEN Z SHOPPERS LEVERAGING BNPL SOLUTIONS ACROSS MULTIPLE COMMERCE CHANNELS

Retailers are [targeting](#) Gen Z members with omnichannel offerings, especially as recent research shows that these consumers are willing to use BNPL solutions both in-store and online to conveniently make purchases. Roughly half of Gen Z consumers have said they are shopping online more now than they did before the pandemic, and 34 percent plan to keep shopping online after it ends. These consumers are still inclined to make purchases in stores, too, with 81 percent stating that they prefer brick-and-mortar shopping experiences and 73 percent reporting that they like to explore new products in person. This means that merchants must ensure they offer flexible payment options that can allow these consumers to make purchases wherever and whenever they see fit, whether online, via mobile or in stores.

FLEXIBLE PAYMENTS FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

TICKETEK NEW ZEALAND PARTNERS WITH AFTERPAY FOR BNPL TICKET SALES

BNPL may have gained a strong foothold in retail, but it is also moving into a variety of new sectors, including live entertainment ticketing. Ticketek New Zealand recently began [offering](#) BNPL payment plans for ticket purchases through its new partnership with Afterpay at the beginning of August. The development comes on the heels of Ticketek Australia integrating Afterpay's services in early July and claiming to be the first ticketing platform in the world to offer such services from the BNPL provider.

Ticketek has been ramping up flexibility in its payment offerings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving consumers with less financial stability and more need for payment choice. The service will allow fans to pay for tickets in four equal installments paid every two weeks after they reserve their seats with their first payment. This move also comes at a time when Australia and New Zealand are working to prepare for a safe return to live events and entertainment.

UK ONLINE SUPERMARKET FLAVA OFFERS BNPL TO HELP FAMILIES AFFORD GROCERIES

Another sector embracing more flexible payments to help support struggling consumers during this time is that of supermarkets. U.K.-based online supermarket Flava was founded with the mission to provide affordable groceries for budget-wary consumers and has recently begun [offering](#) BNPL options to help those who may be waiting for a paycheck or having difficulty feeding their families. The supermarket is allowing up to £120 (\$159 USD) in credit for its regular customers and as much as £100 in credit to new shoppers, which they can pay back in installments with no interest attached. Customers can get more credit once their bills are paid off.

Flava co-founder Stuart Pearson said the company wanted to help families trying to manage their budgets, as many are having to resort to using credit cards and loans. The installment plans are easier to manage than paying upfront or bearing high credit card fees and lending costs.

DEEP DIVE

HOW BNPL TOOLS CAN HELP **CUSTOMERS SUPPORT THE CAUSES THAT MATTER MOST**

Consumers care about supporting causes and charities that closely align with their values, and they are continuing to look for new ways to do so. This includes doing business with companies and using payment methods that allow them to support these issues. One recent [study](#) revealed that almost 47 percent of consumers around the globe would place more trust in a company that embraced environmental or social causes they backed, while 53 percent said they would be more willing to recommend such businesses to others.

Cultivating these deeper ties requires companies to identify and support causes that make a difference in the regions in which they operate as well as those that closely align with customers' priorities. The same [survey](#) found that 91 percent of consumers would like firms to choose causes that are important to the communities in which they do business, another 91 percent would like them to choose focuses consistent with ethical business





practices and 89 percent said it was important for companies to target issues that mattered most to their consumers.

Many retailers are looking to payment solution providers that can help their consumers contribute to worthwhile causes and charities, especially as customers around the world face the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic fallout it has created. The following Deep Dive examines how retailers are getting involved with socially responsible projects as well as how flexible payment options, such as BNPL solutions, can help consumers support merchants that tackle the issues that matter to them.

COVID-19 RELIEF EFFORTS

Numerous merchants and flexible payment providers are working to offer relief to consumers hit hard by the pandemic. BNPL solution provider Afterpay is [teaming](#) with two charities to provide aid to those the pandemic has affected. Customers who use the payment method can donate to A Common Thread – a collaboration between the Council of Fashion Designers of America and the Vogue Fashion Fund – or Baby2Baby, which collects items and supplies for babies and distributes them around the globe. Consumers using the BNPL solution when making purchases online can contribute \$1 toward either initiative, and Afterpay noted it plans to give \$200,000 directly to the charities as well.

A Common Thread was formed in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and it recently announced that it is shifting its focus to those in the fashion community who have been affected by the pandemic. Baby2Baby has meanwhile donated more than 15 million baby essentials – including diapers, formula, soap, shampoo and baby food – to affected families.

Such collaborations come as BNPL solutions [experience](#) a surge in usage. Consumers continue to flock to online commerce for everyday purchases, and many are closely monitoring their budgets and turning to payment methods that can help them avoid high interest rates, fees or revolving debt. Afterpay co-founder and U.S. CEO Nick Molnar recently [said](#) consumers can use BNPL offerings at more than 15,000 brands and merchants, many of which contribute to a host of charitable causes themselves.

BNPL OFFERINGS IN THE UK, AUSTRALIA

Australian consumers are also looking to use BNPL payment plans to support charitable causes. BNPL solution provider Zip allowed users to [contribute](#) directly to one of two nonprofits that aided residents affected by the wildfires that devastated the country earlier this year. Customers could choose to [support](#) either the Australian Red Cross Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund or the nonprofit WIRES' Emergency for Wildlife Fund, which [provides](#) essential items needed to rehabilitate animals. Zip stated in a January [Facebook post](#) that customers could contribute via the websites and that all donations over \$2 were tax deductible for Australian citizens. It also urged any affected customers to email the firm to receive approval for aid with their accounts.

Such key support from retailers and flexible payment providers is becoming crucial as the pandemic continues. One U.K. [survey](#) examining the health crisis's impacts on charities [found](#) that 45 percent of philanthropic organizations working abroad would be forced to close by the end of the year, while 15 percent would have to cease operations within six months if they could not procure additional funding.

This environment is putting merchants – and the flexible payment partners with which they work – in a unique position to help, however. Ninety percent of consumers are [willing](#) to choose brands that support the causes they value, and this means retailers have the opportunity to align themselves with issues that resonate deeply with their customers. Those that can help customers contribute to the causes that matter most stand to earn their business and ultimately keep them loyal for the long haul.



ABOUT

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[PYMNTS.com](#) is where the best minds and the best content meet on the web to learn about “What’s Next” in payments and commerce. Our interactive platform is reinventing the way in which companies in payments share relevant information about the initiatives that shape the future of this dynamic sector and make news. Our data and analytics team includes economists, data scientists and industry analysts who work with companies to measure and quantify the innovation that is at the cutting edge of this new world.

afterpay

[Afterpay](#) is a financial technology company and buy now, pay later solutions provider for retail and merchant brands worldwide. The company’s BNPL solutions provide alternative payment support for over 42,000 global merchants both online and in-store, including luxury brands such as Anthropologie, KylieSkin by Kylie Jenner, Ray Ban and Ulta Beauty. It operates both the BNPL solution Afterpay as well as the United Kingdom payment service Clearpay. The company is headquartered in Melbourne, Australia.

We are interested in your feedback on this report. If you have questions or comments, or if you would like to subscribe to this report, please email us at work feedback@pymnts.com.

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