



Online retailers edge into grocery market

Two services offer online shopping, centralized pickup of finished orders

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Sally Bolecek of Relay Foods distributes groceries to customers in Staunton on Thursday. Relay is an online grocery service based out of Charlottesville, one of two online shopping services delivering food items to downtown drop-off spots. / Laura Peters/The News Leader

Written by Laura Peters

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STAUNTON — Sally Scimé doesn't own a car and lives downtown, so shopping for groceries involves a trek.

Walking uphill to a not-so-nearby grocery isn't how she wants to spend her day.

But, because of an internet shopping service, a Charlottesville company now is the closest grocery to where she lives.

Relay Foods partners with grocers and growers to provide fresh organic food and other products, from broccoli to toilet paper, all online.

It's not exactly home delivery, but it's close to it for some, with Fishersville and downtown Staunton pickup spots.

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Reid Conklin peers into a temperature-controlled bin while his grandmother, Shirley Masters, picks up groceries from Relay Foods. The online grocery store established a pickup site in Staunton. / Laura Peters/The News Leader

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“It’s a great concept,” Scimé said.

The retailer has been at it since 2008.

“We’re completely great for anyone who gets groceries,” said Sarah Carter, who is part of business development for Relay Foods. “It’s absolutely wonderful in that you are able to shop from wherever you are, whenever you have a free moment. It’s super nice at the end of the day ... get on your computer, place your grocery order when you have time to think about what you need from the grocery store, instead of fitting it in between of this and that.”

Among Relay’s partners is Whole Foods. The store’s products are offered without additional markup.

Customers must place their order online by the midnight before the scheduled delivery. Fishersville deliveries are picked up at the Village Garden Center 3:30 to 7 p.m. Tuesdays. Staunton customers get their groceries from 4 to 7 p.m. at the downtown BB&T bank parking lot.

“You’re not committed to shop with regularity. You shop like any other grocery store,” Carter said.

After an order is placed, orders are assembled in a Charlottesville warehouse. Frozen foods are packed in ice. Then they’re trucked to the delivery point.

It’s one step beyond another local retailer who offers online ordering for fresh local foods.

Staunton Fresh owner Michael Reeps takes orders Thursday through Sunday nights online and delivered for pickup 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesdays at the American Hotel Banquet Room, 125 South Augusta Street in Staunton.

“Our customers are buying food directly from the producer and we’re just acting as the delivery mechanism to get it to them,” Reeps said. “I think that Relay and Staunton Fresh can easily co-exist in Staunton.”

Unlike Relay Foods, Staunton Fresh requires an annual membership.

Thursday marked Relay Foods first delivery day in Staunton, with 25 customers getting orders and more inquiring.

“We like the fact that it’s organic and they use local farmers as much as possible,” said Cindy Hodge, of Staunton, while picking up

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groceries for her family after work. "I don't know if it's a way easier, it's just different and something we wanted to try."



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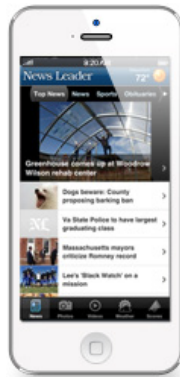
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