Returns are a promise problem, not a product problem.

Customers are sending back good bags that did not match what they were shown. The fix is to trace each return to the ad or listing that set the expectation, and correct it there.

Client Breltz, Bengaluru D2C backpacks, since 2019 **Revenue** ₹38 Cr, up 40% **Channels** website 55%, Amazon 25%, Myntra 12%
Margin contribution 22% → 9%

Prototype: https://breltz.shambhu.dev

1. WHAT I THINK THE REAL PROBLEM IS

WHAT THEY SAY

Returns, 30% on the dashboard, are eating margin. Each leader has a theory: quality, COD customers, sizing.

WHAT IS CAUSING IT

Over-promising
Ads and listings show more than the bag is. Nobody owns the gap.

Rewarded by ads
Meta sees the purchase, never the return, so over-promising ads get scaled.

Invisible
Seven tools, no shared ID, and a return dropdown that says almost nothing.

2. EVIDENCE FROM THE CALL

The bags are fine. 75–80% of Commuter returns arrive unused. Damage is 4–5%. Stricter vendor QC changed nothing. 06:56 · 13:57

Colour is filtered. Golden-hour reels run as paid ads. Sage Green and Dusty Rose return most. 11:20 · 14:09

Ads never see returns. Dashboard ROAS is 3.2× and the P&L disagrees. Ad copy is approved on WhatsApp. 09:12 · 16:25

Ads promise more than the spec. The overlay says "fits 16-inch". The bag is rated 15.6". The top video shows a petite creator and a smaller laptop. 10:22 · 09:53

Amazon is the control. Same bag, 13–14% returns, with reviews and a size image. Website 21–22%. Myntra 31% on a stale listing. 13:11 · 12:41

COD is a small slice. RTO is about 6% of website orders, separate from the 21–22% customer returns. 02:32

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED, AND WHY THIS ONE

Analytics dashboard only	Answers "why" but changes nothing on its own.	Part of it
Pre-publish ad check	Catches "16-inch". Misses scale and colour, and says nothing about profit.	One feature
Return prevention only	Treats the symptom. The COD fee and size-guide PDF were already tried.	Small piece
Return-adjusted growth	Join the data, price returns into ROAS, fix the promise at the source, then prevent.	**Chosen**

Why: it is the only option that hits all three causes, gives each leader what they asked for, and does not cut ad spend, which Aditya ruled out. The prototype shows one Monday-meeting journey: spot the leak, find the cause, check ads after returns, assign the fix. In the sample data two ads pass the 3× scale rule and still lose money once returns are priced in.

4. HOW I WOULD KNOW IT IS WORKING

OUTCOME

Website returns 21.5% to under 12% in two quarters, first milestone Amazon's 13.5%. Contribution margin 9% to 18%.

LEADING

Expectation-gap share of returns. ROAS after returns per ad. Returns with a specific reason, from under half to over 80%.

GUARDRAILS

Conversion, revenue and customer satisfaction. The goal is not to grow less.

How they connect: accurate promise → fewer expectation-gap returns → lower return rate → lower handling cost and fewer reversed sales → margin. First 30 days: fix the Myntra listing and the 16-inch claim, join the data, capture structured reasons, then rank ads after returns.

5. TRADE-OFFS AND WHAT I AM UNSURE ABOUT

- **Cause is a hypothesis.** The v2 launch, vendor change, copy change, ad scaling and free returns overlap. Only per-ad and per-batch splits can separate them.
- **Attribution covers about 40% of orders.** Per-ad return rates stay directional until every ad carries its ID. I chose joined data and simple rules over AI, which is used only to read ticket text.
- **The 30% headline does not reconcile.** My weighted average of the channel rates is 22–24%. I would ask what it counts.

Figures beyond those stated on the call are sample data. Timestamps refer to the call transcript.