

INTERNET RETAILING



SELLING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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SELFRIDGES

REVIEW

Internet Retailing asked 4 retail experts to take a look at Selfridges.com and give readers insight into the company's retail strategy, site performance, usability and customer experience.

RETAIL STRATEGY

Emma Speight, Senior Multi-channel Consultant, CVL

The Selfridges website is a welcome addition to the online world, and as the last major department store to launch online, a late entrant to the marketplace.

The site is fully transactional for home delivery for over 10,000 products, and although this only represents 10% of their store stock holding, it's a good sub-section of the range and makes for an intuitive customer proposition.

In terms of the site's usability and functionality, selfridges.com unfortunately falls short of the high standards set within the highly competitive online world. One of the most frustrating things about the site is its overall performance in terms of page loads and response times - a factor which tends to mar the overall usability of the site. In addition to this they have made some odd design decisions, choosing to place the secondary navigation on the right which breaks a well established convention and only serves to make the customer think more about how to use the site rather than focusing on the content itself - not dissimilar to having to write your name with the wrong hand, perfectly possible but generally uncomfortable. Given that 50% of users prefer to search rather than browse, the search experience is especially weak both in terms of data and presentation.

Selfridges online has introduced some advanced features such as the Wish Room where you can design your own outfit and theoretically see your choices in context. Unfortunately the execution falls short of the concept, requiring users to select a size before adding to the room (generating an error message too subtle to notice) and creating a confusion of registration and log-in requirements to save rooms and looks. More fundamentally not all items I added appeared in the room and those which did were not always rendered onto the mannequin but were re-displayed in their square boxes.

On the positive side, the site has captured a lot of the charm and vivacity of the Selfridges brand, and

is especially good in the use of naming and copy, maintaining an informal and on-brand tone of voice throughout.

The site represents a great step forward for Selfridges, but given the online competition from the likes of John Lewis and Net-a-Porter it still has some way to go.

USABILITY

Jamie Sands, Usability Consultant, User Vision

Selfridges opened its doors in 1909 and became an established chain of high end department stores through innovative marketing techniques. The homepage is welcoming and bright, but the eye-catching colours divert attention from the navigation links which are small and difficult to pick out.

Like ASOS, the site offers a drop down menu that can be fiddly and difficult to read. The menu can frustratingly take the user in numerous directions, such as 'Brand Rooms' and 'Designer' pages, and often not directly to the products. Selected links are only subtly identified when rolled over with darker text; the traditional method of underlining has not been used.

Individual items can be viewed with large clear images. However, only a small number are shown per page as default and the icons to increase the number of items are unclear. Options to view complementary products are provided. 'Get the Look' shows related items, however the 'More like This' link is small and difficult to see. Zoom and 360 degree options are provided to allow an enhanced view of products, but the controls are awkward, making the process feel unfinished and lacking in quality.

Some questionable features have also been implemented, in particular the 'Sneak a Peek' feature, which appears to offer the same functions as the full item view - in a smaller window. It is likely that this will serve only to confuse users and not enhance the experience.

Overall the site offers a clear and effective means of viewing the range of online products. However, a number of flaws make the shopping

Eye tracking gaze plot for Selfridges.com
Source: SimpleUsability

process unnecessarily complex. Currently the site feels as if it has been launched prematurely and the rough edges detract from the quality experience people would expect from the Selfridges brand.

EYE TRACKING ANALYSIS

Guy Redwood, Managing Director, SimpleUsability

With Father's Day approaching users were asked to shop for a gift for a man on the Selfridges' website.

From the homepage users hesitated to get started because the page was filled with one large graphic that advertised the sale. Users were forced to interact with the primary navigation drop down menus. Some users found this quite difficult, because when accessing the 'Menswear' drop down menu the 'Categories' section started with three unexpected titles 'SALE', 'NEW IN' and 'ONLY AT SELFRIDGES' which were displayed in upper case. This made the category list very hard to scan and choose an area to start browsing from.

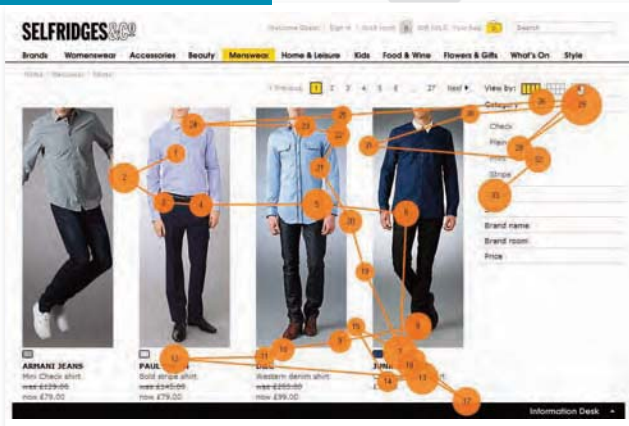
When accessing a category, eg 'Shirts' from 'Menswear', users were shown a page that had a low number of products as its default. We observed that users were looking around the page to access more products. It was not always obvious that the user could change the number of items displayed from the 'View by' section in the top right hand corner of the screen. This display was quite different to other clothing retail websites that users were familiar with, and some users were looking for links to subsequent pages from the bottom right hand corner of the page.

Users had choices on the right hand side of the page to narrow down the products displayed. Users had already selected a category eg 'Shirt'. The title 'Category' title was repeated on the right hand side, but expanded underneath it was types of shirt, eg 'Check', 'Plain', etc. This small inconsistency did not help with the browsing confidence of the user. The top filter was expanded but the others were not so users often missed these filters and did not understand how to interact with the titles.

SITE PERFORMANCE

David Flower, Vice President, EMEA, Gomez

Gomez tested the performance of Selfridges.com's homepage from 18 May - 2 June 2010. Considering its exceptional high-street reputation among consumers, you'd expect this new online initiative to deliver a superior web experience. But this wasn't the case: the website's overall performance was average compared with others in Gomez's benchmark.



We evaluated how websites within the benchmark performed on actual users' computers, ie 'the last mile'. This was measured according to their response time (how quickly the site loads) and availability (how successfully a website loads each time). The average response time and availability scores for this benchmark were 16 seconds and 61%. Compared to this Selfridges.com fared reasonably: on average it took 11 seconds to load, making it the second fastest behind Tesco, with a score of 7 seconds. Selfridges.com's average availability for the test period on the last mile was 59%; however, what needs to be acknowledged is that from 3 June Selfridges.com's average availability score increased to 93%.

Selfridges.com's performance on the internet backbone (from various UK backbone nodes on the internet) was assessed too. It had an average response time of 1.2 seconds, ranking it fourth behind Tesco (0.1 seconds), Next (0.9 seconds), and Ann Summers (1.2 seconds). While this appears good it must be balanced by the fact that this was inconsistent between 20 and 21 May and on 27 May. Selfridges.com's inconsistency is attributed to the performance of certain ISPs - and depending on where Selfridges.com's Content Delivery Networks are, this could also affect response time and consistency, which in turn affects the overall end-user experience.

On the whole Selfridges.com performed well across the most popular desktop and mobile browsers during this test, but it failed for users of the Blackberry Curve and iPhone.

GOMEZ SCORES THE SELFRIDGES.COM SITE 3 STARS OUT OF 5 MADE UP OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Availability on Last Mile Score:** 5 out of 25
- Response Time on Last Mile:** 24 out of 25
- Consistency on Backbone:** 8 out of 15
- Competitiveness on Backbone:** 14 out of 15
- Browser Support:** 15 out of 20
- Total 66 out of 100**