

INTERNET RETAILING



SELLING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ASOS REVIEW

Internet Retailing asked 4 retail experts to take a look at ASOS.com and give readers insight into the company's retail strategy, site performance, usability and customer experience. We only have room for a synopsis in the magazine – visit InternetRetailing.net for more, in depth coverage and to voice your opinion.

RETAIL STRATEGY

Emma Speight,
Senior Multi-channel Consultant, CVL

ASOS.com deftly manages to balance the look and user experience of a fashion site with the practicality of a retail trader.

A key point of differentiation for ASOS is that customers are offered "looks", tied into the celebrities their customers want to emulate. Whereas navigation schemes can be copied and improved upon by competitors, the way ASOS channels its trends knowledge into product attribute data is hard to replicate.

In terms of design and functionality, ASOS sets the standard for fashion product detail page presentation. The layout is simple, prioritising the most important and relevant information.

Prominent and interactive imagery is supported by need-to-know information on delivery, care instructions and returns without forcing the user to go looking.

The imagery is exemplary with multiple views and the catwalk video providing detail on how material moves; cleverly breaking down the tangibility barrier that hampers online fashion retailing.

The delivery offer is well communicated, built into the global navigation structure with a default tab on the product detail page. I think the offer itself could be simplified (5+ variations), but the prominence and clarity is definitely best practice.

The amazon-esque ASOS Premier is an interesting strategic development, growing customer retention and life time value through a pay-once premium delivery offer.

On the minus side, the product list navigation is functionally sound, but clunky in operation and requires too many page refreshes to be a quick and easy navigating experience.

There are some peculiarities in categorisation. For example, four product lists for every product category (e.g. dresses appear in all lists) could lead to confusion for shoppers.

However, these are minor points which do not outweigh the strength of the ASOS retail brand experience.

In summary, ASOS has successfully created a market niche based on establishing fashion authority combined with the best-in-class retail trading.

USABILITY

Jamie Sands, Usability Consultant, User Vision

ASOS has become a major player in online clothes retailing with sales growing by 112% in the six months prior to September. Considering that other businesses have suffered, what is ASOS doing that differentiates it from its competitors?

ASOS aims to provide the customer with outfits similar to those of celebrities seen on the high street. This 'streetwise' theme is adopted in the magazine style of the homepage. By compartmentalising content into defined areas, the page appears busy but not overwhelming. The site combines clear global navigation with an extensive departmental drop down list, let down only by its small text and fiddly nature.

ASOS offers the customer the ability to see up to 200 items per page, also providing a comprehensive method of filtering results, including a minimum and maximum price slider bar. These options allow the user to be as broad or specific as they wish in their search. Products are showcased using multiple thumbnail images of models wearing them, and even a catwalk option to view the products on the move. Unfortunately the zoom option is not interactive precluding detailed examination of items.

The 'Complete the look' and 'What others bought' sections cleverly promote complimentary items alongside the main item and with a single click from this page, users can also see a size guide, save the item for later, email, bookmark it on Facebook or tweet it.

ASOS handles an enormous product range in a lively and trendy style whilst making the user's choices straightforward and unpressured. It effectively combines the browsing qualities of the high street with the product range offered online. Although some aspects of the site may be more accessible to younger/familiar audiences, it is clear to see why ASOS is second only to Next as an online clothing retailer.



Eye tracking gaze plot for ASOS.com
Source: SimpleUsability

EYE TRACKING ANALYSIS

Guy Redwood, Managing Director, SimpleUsability

Participants looking at the ASOS website for an outfit immediately accessed the mega drop down menus from the top primary navigation titles. They generally accessed either the 'Women' or 'Men' sections. From the eye tracking data, we observed users accessing a drop down menu and their eyes continuing straight down. This meant that they would see the 'Shop by products' sub-categories very quickly but often miss the other options available to them such as 'Shops', 'Inspire me' and 'What's on trend'.

Users liked the filters available on the left hand side of the page when accessing a sub category section. The price slider was particularly popular because users could set a minimum price as well as a maximum price. Some users became confused when they could not reset filters by clicking on greyed out titles instead of clicking on the 'clear' link beside each filter title. After selecting a filter, the central page faded to grey and a timer appeared to let the user know that something was happening. We saw that the users noticed that this was happening and waited for the filters to finish loading. When filters do not acknowledge that the user has told the website to do something in an obvious way within the user's field of view, then users try and click again and this leads to confusion. After this process happens, other filter titles become grey and are unavailable for the user to click on. Within a filter section such as 'Brand' users often missed that they could scroll past greyed out options to access more brand names that were available.

Users perceived the photographic product detail information to be of high quality. Although many users missed the option, users accessing the catwalk option found it extremely helpful.

SITE PERFORMANCE

David Flower, Vice President, EMEA, Gomez

Few of the websites tested in Gomez's online retail benchmark would have delivered much Christmas cheer to users during the busiest online shopping period of the year. Gomez tested the performance of ASOS' website from 11th November through 14th December and found mixed results. This review period included the all important Cyber Monday, the official start of the online Christmas shopping season.

The performance of many of the leading sites in the Gomez retail benchmark including big brands such as Marks & Spencer, Argos and Play.com - had room for improvement too so ASOS was not alone in this regard. Tesco, on the other hand, is a consistently top performing site and in this test its Last Mile average home page download was around 5.5 seconds. ASOS' Last Mile average home page download time of 25 seconds was not great - but it was on a par with the benchmark average.

Performance metrics from the internet backbone revealed an average download time of 2.86 seconds which, although a fairly respectable time, was too slow to make it into the top twenty of the Gomez retail benchmark. Tesco was again the top performer at 0.2 seconds and the second fastest was Argos at 1.2 seconds.

One significant factor slowing down the ASOS website was the intermittent, but erratic performance, of third party contributors to the home page. This resulted in a standard deviation of 2.45 seconds, which also places the ASOS website in the lower half of the Gomez benchmark. From an end-user perspective, deviation times are critical. Users want consistency. If users visit a site and get a Google-like response, they'll expect that same response every time. If, next time, a site delivers a performance below that, they'll be disappointed. The performance of a website needs to be consistently good - and ASOS did not achieve this during this test. ■

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