



Internet Retailing

Selling in the digital age

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Helping UK retail and consumers

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M&S
Retail REVIEW
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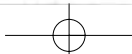
P.16

CAPACITY FOR CHANGE:
Innovation and trends for growth in 2011

P.22

M-RETAILING
The latest developments

P.40



M&S REVIEW



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

RETAIL STRATEGY

Emma Robertson, Senior Multi-channel Consultant, Transform

Since launching the redesigned site in late 2009, Marks & Spencer has delivered against a programme of continuous improvement. The most significant developments have centred on the multichannel proposition "Shop Your Way", with an enhanced online experience, the roll out of in-store collection and the launch of both M&S TV and an m-commerce site.

The online experience continues to benefit from the underlying Amazon platform, delivering a feature rich shopping experience with expandable navigation, recommendations and rich content. In addition, M&S has supplemented the underlying platform with best-of-breed software providers, partnering with Bazaarvoice to deliver reviews and social media, and with Transversaal to support the "help" area of the website.

The in-store collection initiative has moved from trial to roll out with some amazing results – as of mid 2010 in-store collection accounted for 13% of online orders and generated £2.5m a week – numbers which will have no doubt significantly increased by now. Logistically, the proposition is supported by the Home Delivery capability within the business, treating stores as alternate customer addresses and allowing for geographical expansion of the proposition without re-engineering systems or processes. Significantly, the M&S collection model requires customers to pay in-full before the product is delivered to store, reducing the likelihood of non-collection and enabling the banking of funds before moving product. However, unlike some other multichannel retailers, M&S are not efficient at stock allocation across channels and will currently deliver a single item to store via a carrier, even if the same item is in stock within the target store.

Unquestionably, M&S has grown rapidly in terms of multichannel and reach. The challenge facing them now is how to maintain and grow this capability through a period of significant structural

and logistical change. M&S has just increased its "Project 2020" efficiency target to £300m of savings in IT and logistics - partially through the creation of a newly combined National Distribution Centre and ecommerce DC in the East Midlands. Perhaps more significantly, M&S online is going to develop its own in-house platform, moving away from Amazon when the contract ends in 2013. As the starting point and underlying foundation for the "Shop Your Way" proposition this change may represent the biggest challenge of all.

USABILITY

Mark Westwater, Senior Usability Consultant, User Vision

Marks & Spencer have provided a comprehensive cross-platform shopping experience. Pointing at the site with an iPhone, the user is given the option to add a desktop link. An automatic redirect to a dedicated mobile site is then provided.

Signing up on the mobile site is straightforward. However, there is no clearly visible 'Register' link. Clear error reporting is provided and the user is directed to the appropriate field to rectify. Completion of the registration process means the user is automatically signed in.

On the homepage, a furniture event promotion impacts the mobile site length. The site navigation is well segmented with large touchpoints and clear labels. The active option is differentiated by colour and the architecture is not overly deep. It is possible to 'sort' the options by a variety of categories.

Adding a product to a basket means the user can view the product on another platform.

The 'desktop' site is a little messy. The 'Sale' links underneath the primary navigation visually appear as secondary navigation options and the 'recycle' and 'email' options as a tertiary navigation. However, clear calls to action are provided and all the information required is there. Multiple product views are provided, as is a video.

There are options provided for both 'Home Delivery' and 'Store Collection'. A helpful address finder and

store selection are provided. The security graphic at the foot of the page is comforting.

Overall, considering the cross-platform experience and the additional value-add features provided, M&S make the experience straightforward and engaging with a seamless integration of both the mobile and desktop web.

EYE TRACKING ANALYSIS

Guy Redwood, Managing Director, SimpleUsability

We ran a range of tasks relevant to the M&S Christmas cross-channel campaign, either browsing for a last minute present or choosing an outfit for the festive season.

Christmas 2010 was unusual due to wintry conditions disrupting deliveries – so online customers were forced to the high street. Far from stopping online activity, users turned to the web for information, inspiration, availability and reservation.

On the general website, gift shoppers looked for a gift section from the homepage, with 'Christmas shop' not always being obvious.

The 'Christmas helper' section had a limited selection of gifts available. Users were forced to look elsewhere on the site to find a gift section that they could browse. Within the 'Christmas helper' links to 'see more' returned the user to the 'Christmas helper' homepage.

It was hard for users to filter by offer and make purchase decisions. We observed users looking at the '3 for 2' call outs while browsing. This was particularly the case on the mobile website where there were limited sorting options.

Last minute shoppers were left with few options from 'Shop Your Way' as the first collect date for stores was often 4 or 6 January. On the mobile website, one user wanted to see if their item was available in stock at their local store.

When looking for an outfit included in the TV advertising, users found it difficult to get started. We observed users looking for a section for the outfits featured on TV within the general navigation. Users were initially missing products that were appearing on the right hand side of the TV advert playing. The scroll icons were unfamiliar and awkward to use. Users became frustrated with items being out of stock or not being able to easily find a product that one of the celebrities was wearing.

The 'all outfits' product linked to content that could be filtered easily, showing that the content was available but not easily accessible from elsewhere.

From the mobile website users had to rely on browsing through the product categories with users missing the 'narrowing' options available at the bottom of the pages.

SITE PERFORMANCE

David Flower, Vice President, EMEA, Gomez

During December Gomez measured the performance of M&S's homepage as well as its Christmas landing page. Both were viewed from both UK tier one data centres and Gomez's Last Mile peer community for the period 5 through 25 December.

M&S's homepage has been a strong performer throughout Gomez's benchmark tests and in the run-up to Christmas it didn't let customers down. Data from the internet backbone showed it was 4th fastest

behind Comet, Tesco and Sainsbury's and on the Last Mile it finished in the top half of the table.

As expected, M&S's Christmas landing page delivered a relatively consistent performance throughout the test, delivering an average response time of just below 1.2 seconds from the internet backbone. There was a slight rise in response times on 10 and 11 December when many of the backbone piers detected issues with specific style sheet objects. This suggests that changes were being made to the website over this period. In itself this was not an issue. It was more that the impact of these changes – slower response times – were clearly detected at 10am on Saturday 11 December when customer traffic would have been reaching its peak.

From a middle-of-the-road Last Mile response time of just under 5 seconds at the beginning of December, the performance of the Christmas landing page continued to improve throughout the test, achieving an average response time of 3.3 seconds. Looking at the page weight averages for the same period, there is a strong correlation of improved performance with decreased page weights; these decreased from around 700kbytes on 7 December to around 300kbytes on 19 December. This is a significant decrease and suggests that M&S was actively managing its website during this critically busy trading period. ■

GOMEZ SCORES MARKSANDSPENCER.COM 4 STARS OUT OF 5 MADE UP OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Availability on Last Mile Score:** 19.5 out of 25
- Response Time on Last Mile:** 19.00 out of 25
- Consistency on Backbone:** 11.4 out of 15
- Competitiveness on Backbone:** 13.2 out of 15
- Browser Support:** 16.8 out of 20
- Total 79.9 out of 100**



Eye tracking gaze plot for www.marksandspencer.com
Source: SimpleUsability