

Internet Retailing

Selling in the digital age

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WAITROSE REVIEW

Internet Retailing asked 4 retail experts to take a look at Waitrose.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

Waitrose.com has come in for a lot of critical comment since its re-launch, both from industry pundits and its own customers via the online forum. The issues experienced are well documented and have culminated in Waitrose publishing advice on how to get around the error codes and timeout issues; a less than glorious start to the Ocado challenge.

However, rather than repeat the problems in triplicate, it's worth looking a bit deeper at what Waitrose is trying (and to date its succeeding) to achieve.

Waitrose has clearly indicated its intent in the online and multi-channel space, not only taking on Ocado but also offering a credible alternative to the online experiences delivered by Tesco and Sainsbury's, and taking advantage of the lack of an online offer from M&S Simply Food.

In support of this, Waitrose has gone a lot further than a re-skin of its web experience by launching a new integrated platform and increasing its distribution capability across the UK. Waitrose have leased an additional site in Milton Keynes to build on its existing Kuehne + Nagel operation, and recently signing a deal to build a new regional DC in Chorley, Lancashire, indicating intent to establish a customer base in the North.

Waitrose is also taking an innovative approach to increasing reach and touch points. The most fundamental step forward is the integration of their grocery and value added propositions; finally beginning to realise the value of being part of the John Lewis Partnership. They already offer their customers a unique service in the multi-channel grocery market by allowing them to shop in-store and have their shopping delivered to their homes, providing an additional strand of convenience within the existing delivery operation, at low cost.

In addition, Waitrose are expanding their small-format convenience stores, with the aim of

opening 300 by the end of the decade.

Finally, Waitrose has partnered with Boots on a pilot to supply 90 Boots stores with chiller cabinet lunch and snack staples; a partnership that allows both companies to play to their strengths and benefit by association and minimal outlay.

Waitrose online still has a long way to go to fulfil all its customer and commercial aims and their teething problems have been well publicised. In particular their ability to scale whilst retaining the same sense of customer intimacy remains untested. However, as a brand and overall customer experience, Waitrose is clearly hitting a lot of the right notes, and despite the current hiccups, looks set to remain on a trajectory to growth.

USABILITY

Stephen Denning,
Senior User Experience Consultant, User Vision

The Waitrose homepage looks clean and up to date, and is dominated by a carousel showcasing current promotions. However, the visibility of the online shopping call-to-action is acceptable and not difficult to find. Branded as "Waitrose your way" it offers flexible shopping and delivery options.

Groceries are arranged into four intuitive categories, which is an effective way of distilling a bewildering array of items. However, searching for steak returns 80 items with the only further filter option being price. It would be useful to allow filtering by further criteria here, such as cut of meat. Steak is sold by weight, rather than as a pack as would often be found in the supermarket, which could prove confusing. The item description is clearly laid out and usefully includes recycling information. The image zoom did not work on my Safari browser however, though seemed fine in Firefox.

The order summary and trolley are clear, though some of the text is low-contrast and would fail accessibility guidelines as well as making it tricky to read. The checkout button is disabled when the basket value is below £50 and although there is a message to explain this, it is easily missed.

The checkout process begins by requesting a delivery address, despite having already entered one during registration. Viewing the terms & conditions also proved problematic, opening in a tiny popup window, which appeared to be another Safari-specific problem.

The Waitrose site provides a good overall user experience that is intuitive and helpful, though slightly diminished by potentially confusing aspects of the shopping journey. The contrast of some of the text is likely to cause problems for many users, and users of the popular Safari browser are likely to be left feeling frustrated by what appears to be a lack of basic cross-browser testing.

EYE TRACKING ANALYSIS

Guy Redwood, Managing Director, SimpleUsability

We invited users to participate in sessions to explore the new Waitrose.com website. These were people who shopped online and had different levels of experience regarding using grocery websites.

By using eye tracking technology we were able to observe users shopping naturally for basic items that they would regularly need.

Users struggled to find the most basic of items. The simplified initial drop down menu for 'Groceries' was limited. In order to find bread, users had to learn to click on 'Cupboard' > 'Food' > 'Bakery' and then choose an additional category such as 'Sliced bread'. This was felt to be a long route to individual items.

It was not obvious how these sections were ordered within the navigation area displayed at the top of the page, with some users commenting that they expected to see the most common sections first. Users were unable to narrow their results any further by brand, which caused issues when looking for particular items.

Users misinterpreted the 'Featured products' on pages for all the main products that they could browse through for that section. This caused confusion, and was only noticed by one user when she tried to re-find a product and it had been replaced with a newly featured product.

This accumulation of issues led to some users resorting to the search facility. A simple search for 'Milk' became difficult because the search results listed multiple products with small images and inconsistent product titles. This made it difficult to scan and choose.

We observed that it was difficult for users to move around within the main categories of the website. If a user chose to get started by clicking on the main 'Groceries' tab or from the 'Shop now' drop down menu item, a page is presented with a navigation area at the top with four columns. The 'Drinks' category was not available within this navigation area due to the limitation of the four columns so

users needed to revert to the drop down menu for 'Groceries' for these additional sections.

Users were also asked to find some ideas for a family gathering. When accessing the 'Delia & Heston's' section, one user became confused when clicking on a photo to access 'Heston's cherry and chocolate pudding' and being shown a recipe for rocket and parmesan salad. There

was also an inconsistency within this section regarding which photos could be clicked on as well as the titles. Within a recipe page, users were looking around to find their next steps which were grouped together easily on the left hand side of the page. Functionality to add items from these recipes to their shopping bag would have been welcomed.



Eye tracking gaze plot for Waitrose.com
Source: SimpleUsability

SITE PERFORMANCE

David Flower, Vice President, EMEA, Gomez

Gomez tested the performance of Waitrose.com from 19 March through 21 April to see how it is performing.

Waitrose performed fairly well in terms of its response time to load its site on the internet backbone. It took on average 1.37 seconds to load, ranking it ninth in Gomez's retail benchmark. The leader in this category was Tesco with a 0.21 second download time. The slowest was Halfords, taking 5.37 seconds. The average score for retailers on the backbone for this benchmark was 2.06 seconds - meaning Waitrose performed well. However, consistency was poor; Waitrose ranked 24th in the benchmark.

From the last mile, Tesco led the benchmark again taking 1.45 seconds to load in the real world. Waitrose came in second with a page load speed of 4.18 seconds. Interestingly, although Waitrose's page load speed is competitive, its availability score of 97.89% places it 21st in the table.

Additional analysis revealed Waitrose.com has a consistent pattern of performance degradation early in the day (probably traffic-related). External load testing could potentially help isolate and resolve this. ■

GOMEZ SCORES WAITROSE.COM 3.9 STARS OUT OF 5 MADE UP OF THE FOLLOWING:

Availability on Last Mile Score: 21 out of 25

Response Time on Last Mile: 24 out of 25

Consistency on Backbone: 3 out of 15

Competitiveness on Backbone: 10 out of 15

Browser Support: 20 out of 20

Total 78 out of 100