



Internet Retailing

Selling in the digital age

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B&Q REVIEW

Internet Retailing asked 4 retail experts to take a look at B&Q's diy.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

As the UK's largest DIY and Garden Centre retailer B&Q clearly knows its market and its customer base, with over 50% market share and nearly twice as big as its nearest competitor. The challenge remains in how to translate this success online.

In pursuit of this goal, B&Q have redesigned and reinvented the proposition several times since launching in 2001. The current incarnation of diy.com launched in 2009 on ATG, and involved a wholesale redesign of the customer experience around 3 persona types – inspirational, functional and trade.

At the heart of these personas lies the fundamental challenge of the market that B&Q operate in, exaggerated by the nature of the online environment. B&Q are trying to satisfy the needs, wants and behaviours of very different customer missions – ranging from the elongated decision making processes of the home improvers through to the in-and-out requirements of the trade customers.

Within this mêlée the current resolutions seems to be one of divide and conquer. New initiatives point to a separation of the trade offer through the launch of Trade Point and the continued development of the Screwfix brand both online and offline. The diy.com experience has moved further towards supporting the inspirational and browse based customer journeys, with the online experience replicating their high street retail competitors – including signing up with Bazaarvoice for customer reviews and using celebrity endorsements to advise on both style and DIY knowhow.

The most significant step change in the consumer offer has been the launch and roll out of Reserve and Collect. The operating model works by allocating store stock to an online customer, with the inherent risk that stock levels are inaccurate or already circulating the store in another customer's trolley. All of this can be mitigated by a risk based stock allocation algorithm, and gives B&Q the advantage of selling existing stock rather than

absorbing the cost of shipping to store.

The bad news for B&Q is that despite the redesign and these clearly positive developments, in a Which survey at the end of 2010 B&Q came out as joint worst online retailer. However, the fact that it was there with Homebase perhaps suggests that it is the market proposition for DIY & Home Improvements which is yet to be cracked online, rather than the retailer itself.

USABILITY

Laurene McCafferty,

Usability Consultant, User Vision

B&Q operates in a difficult space for online shopping since they sell a vast range of products, some of which may be practically impossible to deliver. B&Q also operates a sister site for next day delivery where all products are definitely available for rapid delivery which is actively promoted through the site.

The website offers a straight-forward browsing experience to its users. The global navigation is clearly broken down and a faceted left navigation allows users to see progressing subsections and the number of items in each.

Issues arise moving towards the purchase process. The gallery view does not provide a call to action button to add items to the shopping basket leading to a pogo-sticking effect. Whilst a useful link to select a store to check stock and reserve to collect is provided, there is no indication that this product is not available to purchase online for home delivery.

Starting the online purchase it soon becomes clear that the user may not be able to buy their product online after all. For many items the only option is to 'Save For Later'. Information about whether the product is available on B&Q's next day site is also not available.

Overall, the B&Q main site has many good features such as the categorisation and site navigation. There are some barriers to the typical user journey such as the gallery page presentation and the inconsistency between the purchase button labels. However the pervading problem is a lack of active notification to

the user which can lead to a time-consuming frustration for many. The fact that the B&Q site is not a true ecommerce site, and even reserve and collect is often unavailable, will surprise many and limit its overall value to many consumers.

EYE TRACKING ANALYSIS

Guy Redwood, Managing Director, SimpleUsability

Participants were taken to the B&Q home page and asked to find products that they could buy from B&Q that would reduce heating bills. Most users scanned over the various menus at the top of the page and then hovered over the black buttons and worked their way through the mega-droppdowns. Users were initially frustrated with the complexity of the menus and the way they changed if their mouse clipped a corner when going to click. Participants were unable to predict where a product would be within the menus as the structure seemed random to them. Where would you expect to find 'loft insulation'? Later on, some users were further annoyed with the huge mega-dropdown obscuring page content, if they moved their mouse to the top.

Once in the 'loft insulation' section, users expected some supporting guides, not just a list of products. The only contextual link offered was for the fast delivery. Users liked the crisp product photography and used it as a primary cue for navigating products in category pages. On product detail pages, some users initially assumed that the white space underneath the product code meant that there was no further product information available. Most participants realised that they needed to scroll down the page for further details and customer reviews.

Eyes bounced off the horizontal lines on the product page below the photographs. If users had clicked on a recommended product, they had to rely on the back button to explore a category further due to the bread crumb disappearing.

When navigating content sections, users were forced to consistently scroll at standard resolutions to reveal content below the banners. This design flaw meant that the top part of the left hand navigation was ignored as it was off-screen. Overall users were quite happy to work with the issues outlined above but struggled with the complicated 'shopping list' (basket) functionality.

SITE PERFORMANCE

David Flower, Vice President, EMEA, Gomez

The performance of the B&Q home page at diy.com was measured from major UK backbone nodes for the 30 days running up to 14 February 2011. While measuring the performance it was apparent B&Q was engaged in a third-party A:B testing programme that had an impact on the overall performance of the site.

We measured the home pages of another 24 major UK retailers at the same time from the same locations. The average page download speed for B&Q during this time was 2.254 seconds. This placed B&Q in the lower half of the Gomez benchmark at 15th fastest (out of 25 retailers). This time was slower than top performer - Tesco - which recorded an average of 0.258 seconds.

B&Q's website didn't perform as well when considering the consistency of the page speed downloads. A standard deviation for the period, of 4.605 seconds, placed its website 24th (second from bottom) in the consistency benchmark. The top performer (Tesco again) proved that a high degree of consistency is possible, with a standard deviation of 0.256 seconds. The only retail home page to fare worse in this test was Comet, with a standard deviation of 5.159 seconds.

From the Last Mile, B&Q's home page performance was poor sitting near the bottom of the Last Mile response time and availability benchmarks. Home page download speeds of 8.894 seconds to end user PCs (where customers sit) are about four times slower than the same page being delivered to UK internet Tier 1 data centres. Top performer, Tesco, again proves that it is possible to serve fast home pages to the end user - with an average speed of 1.647 seconds. Tesco's availability for the same period is 99.58%, over 4% more available than B&Q's 95.38% availability. As well as issues seen from third parties (see in backbone data), another contributor to the relatively poor performance was the constantly changing page weights, ranging from around 500kbytes, to a weighty 800+ kilobytes during the measured period.

But, again, it needs to be stressed that although these scores give the impression that B&Q's site isn't performing well, it needs to be balanced with the testing that is taking place as the brand prepares for the DIY season (which is a good thing for its customers). ■

GOMEZ SCORES DIY.COM 2 STARS OUT OF 5 MADE UP OF THE FOLLOWING:

Availability on Last Mile Score: 8.5 out of 25
Response Time on Last Mile: 5 out of 25
Consistency on Backbone: 1.2 out of 15
Competitiveness on Backbone: 7.2 out of 15
Browser Support: 17.5 out of 20
Total 39.4 out of 100



*Eye tracking gaze plot for www.diy.com
Source: SimpleUsability*