



# Internet Retailing

Selling in the digital age

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**HALFORDS:**  
Integrating for  
cross-channel mobilisation

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# MR PORTER REVIEW

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

## RETAIL STRATEGY

**Emma Robertson,**  
**Senior Multi-channel Consultant, Transform**

The newly launched Mr Porter site does exactly what you'd expect of it – showcases luxury brands within the framework of a solid online store. Whilst the experience is visually understated it is functionally rich with features including hover-over zoom, recommend to a friend and a wish list.

The site is built on the in-house platform and operational set up of Net-a-Porter, delivering worldwide from two distribution centres located in London and New Jersey. The delivery offering is comprehensive, including a reasonably priced same-day-delivery option for central London at only £1.50 above the standard charge.

The move into menswear was a natural progression for Net-a-Porter, arguably later than expected. The decision to create a standalone site rather than append a new category to the established brand was a bold choice that recognises the different needs and motivations of male shoppers. Perhaps surprisingly, rather than delivering a purely functional experience along the lines of competitor oki-ni.com, the Mr Porter site is far more community based, integrating articles and advice with product sales. The advice on how to play a Bob Dylan song on guitar is a bit more of a stretch, but the principle is clear – Mr Porter aims to be a trusted friend in the purchase process, and drive sales through relationship building, over and above the core product offering. Time will tell if this is commercially successful, but in terms of the online execution they have achieved a good blend of proactive suggestion and background advice that from an external (and female) perspective works well.

Mr Porter is off to an impressive start, delivering a great online experience that leverages an already established and efficient supply and distribution business. Over and above this, Mr Porter manages to deliver an inclusive experience

for an exclusive product range – broadening its reach and appeal beyond the traditional market for luxury menswear.

## USABILITY

**Jamie Sands, Usability Consultant, User Vision**

Launched in 2000, Net-a-Porter.com has established itself as a leading supplier of over 350 luxury designer brands. Initial impressions of the home page of its Mr Porter site are like many other high fashion websites, using high resolution images as links to style guides and collections. The site also uses a well established dropdown navigation style with global headings setting out the main sections and expansive drop downs to locate sub-categories. The site uses large images of the individual products worn by a 'headless' model, the focus clearly being placed on the item itself and not the model. Mr Porter also offers the user an extensive default page view; however the clear images make the viewing of the products quick and pleasurable.

Overall the site offers the expected functionality to find, filter and view items to make the shopping experience enjoyable and straightforward.

Where this site differentiates from others is the additional functionality and style advice. One area in particular is the 'Style Directory' where celebrity icon 'looks' are highlighted and direct links to purchasing these 'looks' are offered. Alongside the 'Style Directory' is 'Style Advice', where categorized style questions are posed and advice given, again with direct links to the related products.

It is clear that the Mr Porter site does not simply offer the user a clear choice of items to select from, but rather is a portal where advice and information on 'style' can be sourced and directly purchased. The Mr Porter site offers the user all the expected means of selecting, viewing and purchasing items and does this in a very effective way, however should the user choose to look deeper, the site offers much more.

**EYE TRACKING ANALYSIS**

**Guy Redwood, Managing Director, SimpleUsability**

We invited users to participate in sessions to explore the Mr Porter website. Users were either asked to purchase a replacement item of clothing or to buy a gift for someone.

By using eye tracking, we were able to observe users' natural behaviour as they interacted with the website.

Upon entering the website, users were drawn to the large promotion image that took up three quarters of the screen. However, due to the home page offering editorials over products, the users immediately resorted to using the main navigation to either select the department they were after, or the 'What's new' if they were just browsing.

Users responded favourably to the layout of the products when browsing. After accessing a department landing page, they were drawn to the large images and were content to scroll down a long list of results.

When a user hovered over an item, the image would change to an alternate view. Users concentrated on scrolling down the long page so users rarely left their cursor over an item, so the only time the alternate view appeared was after the user had clicked on the item. By that time they were looking elsewhere as the new page loaded.

When browsing, users mostly ignored the filter on the left side of the page, instead focusing their gaze heavily on the images of products. The filter section blends into the background of the page somewhat, and when it is used, the selected text is 'highlighted' to be almost the same colour as the background of the filter, proving difficult to read.

After landing on individual item pages, users would concentrate their gaze on the large image of the product and then look down and across to choose the size, colour and add it to the basket. By following this 'L' shape gaze pattern, users missed out not only on product information and the 'Editor's tips', but also the price.

**SITE PERFORMANCE**

**David Flower, Vice President, EMEA, Compuware Gomez**

Designer website boutique Mr Porter is a newcomer to the Gomez performance benchmark and given that it is targeted towards a premium audience we were expecting it to deliver a premium performance. Using its Gomez performance network Compuware monitored the performance of Mr Porter.com during May and June. During the test, the website failed to deliver a consistently satisfactory performance and the inconsistencies were such that Mr Porter's customers would surely



have noticed the bumpy ride.

The performance from the major ISPs' data centres showed significant peaks and troughs in the site's home page response times, ranging from sub 3-seconds to more than 30-seconds. Digging deeper into the data it became clear that the website's first byte time (the server's 'thinking' time after the connection between the client and the server is established) was the major factor behind this inconsistent and often slow response time.

Context is always useful when looking at website performance because it shows how your site is performing relative to others. What's the norm? Is your site faster, slower, more available than others? Within the Gomez performance benchmark, Tesco.com is generally the one to beat and in this particular test it proved to be the top performer again. It was telling that Mr Porter.com's first byte time was over 7-times slower than Tesco and although its home page was twice as heavy, it does indicate that Mr Porter.com's server administrators may have incorrectly profiled their load capacity and failed to create fast fail limits.

On the Last Mile where the end-users sit, the reduced availability of the site is also reflected in its poor consistency. With an availability of just 97.41%, Mr Porter.com finished halfway down the Gomez benchmark. By comparison Tesco recorded a near-perfect 99.59% availability. The errors recorded on the Last Mile mostly relate to connection error or server error, similar to those recorded on the Internet backbone. Again, Mr Porter.com's IT team should consider improving its server capacity to avoid potential performance issues during peak times. ■

**GOMEZ SCORES MR PORTER.COM 3.5 STARS OUT OF 5 MADE UP OF THE FOLLOWING:**

- Availability on Last Mile Score:** 21 out of 25
- Response Time on Last Mile:** 23 out of 25
- Consistency on Backbone:** 2 out of 15
- Competitiveness on Backbone:** 10 out of 15
- Browser Support:** 20 out of 20
- Total 76 out of 100**