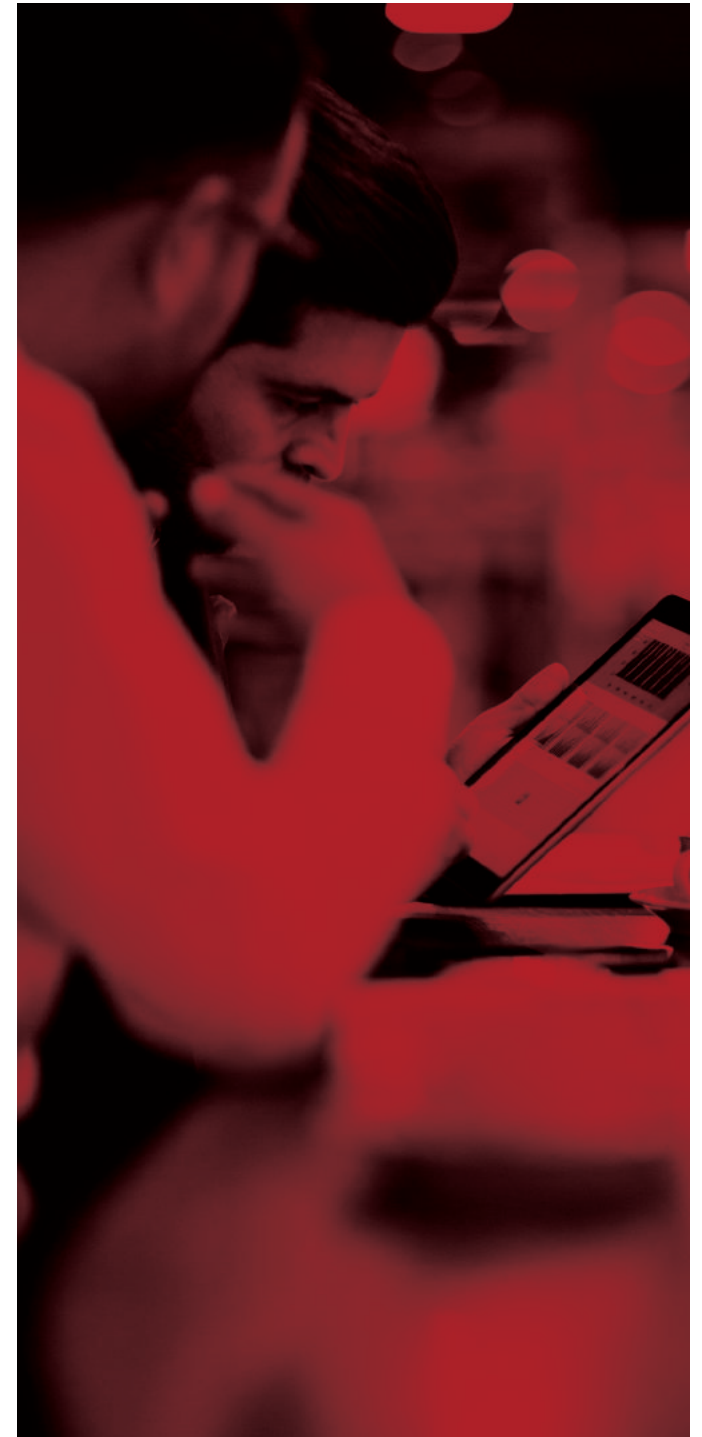


E-Retail Performance Report One Year On: 2018 Edition

A report analysing the effectiveness of UK e-retailers at achieving their growth potential.



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Foreword

Getting the basics right: are the UK's top online retailers still falling short?

It's been 12 months since we compiled our first e-retail performance report and in that time the sector has continued to see huge success. Latest ONS figures show that online now accounts for almost **20%** of retail sales – a figure which is growing at 10 times the rate of the physical store equivalent.

These figures are hardly surprising against a backdrop of net high street store closures; even industry heavyweights such as Marks & Spencer are closing dozens of their town-centre locations, shifting emphasis to their eCommerce operations.

This rapidly-changing and increasingly-saturated landscape demands that retailers fight harder than ever to attract and maintain shoppers. Add to this, external pressure such as the introduction of GDPR and a

relentless stream of tech innovation from the likes of Amazon and ASOS.

It's clear that the UK's top retailers have their work cut out to stay ahead of the game and that optimising website performance is of business-critical importance.

However, our latest report highlights a general picture of complacency within the biggest names in the sector when it comes to maximising online retail opportunities. We found that, whilst some small improvements have been made, many performance metrics have stagnated and some worsened significantly.

This year's list of retailers has changed to reflect the updated top 250 as defined by the industry. Therefore, where performance metrics have deteriorated, it is unlikely that individual retailers have downgraded their websites, but rather that the overall standard of the sample has dropped. This is worrying and suggests an

increasingly poor performance amongst the sector's supposedly leading players.

This provides a huge opportunity for smaller, hungrier businesses in the market to challenge the big brands – many of whom are clearly unable (or unwilling) to focus on getting the basics right - and are losing out on sales as a result.

At Visualsoft, we help these brands to punch above their weight and seize such opportunities. Through our shared-success model (where retailers benefit from our best-advice and expertise for a share of increased profits rather than upfront fees) we are working in partnership to take on the current big-players, maximising the true potential of the growth opportunities within each market.



Dean Benson
CEO



It's clear that the UK's top retailers have their work cut out to stay ahead of the game and that optimising website performance is of business-critical importance.

Methodology

Once again, we selected over 250 of the leading UK e-retail companies* across a range of sectors. There are therefore some differences in the retailers listed due to natural changes in the market – including shifting sales performance and store closures – which means that some names have dropped off the list, whilst others have joined.

Our research team tested and analysed each website against 17 criteria, making direct comparisons between the findings this year vs. those in November 2017.

Our aim was to identify what progress UK e-retailers have made to maximise their true growth potential in the past 12 months – and if they have made any at all.

Our results have been compiled, analysed and are broken down in the pages that follow.

* Retailers selected from the IRUK 500 2018 report

Specifically, we looked for:

- The quality of page speed and avoidance of likely visitor loss.
- Effective use of social media channels.
- The use of multichannel options to complement their main site.
- Effective use of Google tools.
- Offering a responsive website that adapts to screen size.
- Effective use of onsite search – e.g. suggestive search and recommendations.
- Effective use of navigation options allowing shoppers to easily and quickly find products.
- Acceptance of multiple currencies.
- Use of cross-selling and up-selling on product pages.
- Effective use of pop-ups and overlays – e.g. to remind customers of special offers or countdown of delivery slots.
- Effective use of secondary calls to action – e.g. wish lists, sharing of purchase.
- Wide variety of payment methods.
- Multiple delivery options available.
- Effective email sign-up.
- Number of steps to purchase.
- Buying assistance – e.g. live chat, virtual assistant.



Brands we tested (A-Z)

Abercrombie & Fitch	Bensons for Beds	Costco	Estée Lauder	Gear4music.com	House of Fraser	Kurt Geiger	Microsoft	Outdoor & Country	Ryman	Sweaty Betty	Very
Accessorize	Blacks	Cotswold Outdoor	Euro Car Parts	Getthelabel.com	HP	L'Occitane	Millets	Overclockers UK	Samsung	T.M. Lewin	Victoria's Secret
Adidas	Blackwell's	Cotton Traders	Evans	GO Outdoors	Hughes Electrical	Laithwaite's	Mint Velvet	Pandora	Scan	Ted Baker	Victorian Plumbing
Aldo	Boden	Crew Clothing Company	Evans Cycles	Goldsmiths	Hugo Boss	Lakeland	Miss Selfridge	Paperchase	Schuh	The Body Shop	Waitrose
AllSaints	Bonmarché	Currys PC World	F. Hinds	Grattan	Ikea	LaptopsDirect	Missguided	Paul Smith	Screwfix	The Entertainer	Wallis
American Golf	Boohoo.com	CycleSurgery	Fat Face	Gucci	Interflora	Laura Ashley	Molton Brown	Pavers	Selfridges	The Fragrance Shop	Warehouse
Andertons Music	Boots	Debenhams	Feelunique.com	Guitarguitar	Jacamo	Links of London	Monsoon	Peacocks	Shoe Zone	The North Face	Watch Shop
Anthropologie	Burberry	Decathlon	Fitness Superstore	H.Samuel	Jack & Jones	Littlewoods	Moss Bros.	Pets at Home	Simply Be	The Perfume Shop	Waterstones
Ao.com	Burton	Deichmann	Foot Locker	H&M	Jacks Wills	Lloyds Pharmacy	Mothercare	Phase Eight	size?	The White Company	Wex Photographic
Apple	Burton Menswear	Dell	Footasylum	Hackett	Jaeger	Long Tall Sally	Mountain Warehouse	Post Office Shop	Skatehut.co.uk	The Works	Whistles
AppliancesDirect	Calendar Club	Disney Store	Forever 21	Halfords	JD Sports	Louis Vuitton	Mr Porter	PrettyLittleThing	Smyths	Thorntons	White Stuff
Arco	Card Factory	Dorothy Perkins	Fortnum & Mason	Harrods	JD Williams	Lush	Net-A-Porter	Quiz	Snow+Rock	TK Maxx	Whittard of Chelsea
Argos	Carphone Warehouse	Dr. Martens	Fossil	Harvey Nichols	Jessops	M&Co	New Look	Radley	SoleTrader	Toolstation	WHSmith
Aria Technology	Cass Art	Dreams	Foyles	HMV	Jigsaw	MAC Cosmetics	Next	Reebok	Space.NK	Topman	Wilko
ASOS	Cath Kidston	Dune London	Fragrance Direct	Hobbs London	Jimmy Choo	MajesticWine	Nike	Reiss	Specsavers	Topps Tiles	Wynsors World of Shoes
Axminster	Chain Reaction Cycles	Dunelm	Fred Perry	Hobbycraft	Joe Browns	Mamas & Papas	Nisbets	Richer Sounds	SportsDirect.com	Topshop	Yankee Candle
B&Q	Charles Tyrwhitt	Early Learning Centre	Freemans.com	Holland & Barrett	John Lewis	Mango	Oasis	River Island	Stella McCartney	Ugg	Uniqlo
Banana Republic	Claire's	Ecco	French Connection	Hollister	JoJo Maman Bébé	Maplin Electronics	Ocado	Robert Dyas	Superdrug	Uniqlo	Urban Outfitters
Barbour	Clarks	Ellis Brigham	Furniture Village	Home Bargains	Joules	Marisota	Office	Rohan	Superdry	Urban Outfitters	Yours Clothing
Bathstore	Clas Ohlson	Ernest Jones	Game	Homebase	Kaleidoscope	Matalan	Oliver Bonas	Route One	Surfdome	USC	Zalando
Beaverbrooks	Coast	Espirit	GAP	Hotel Chocolat	Karen Millen	MenKind	Orvis	RS Components	Swarovski	Vans	

Summary of findings

Page Speed:

- Page speed when viewed on mobile devices has worsened across the board, with **62% of retailers rating as 'poor'** – taking longer than 9 seconds to load on 3G. This was in comparison to 54% of retailers that rated as poor in 2017.
- **16% of retailers took 15 seconds or longer to load.** Google estimates that these e-retailers will be losing a minimum of 32% of all potential visitors through load time alone. In 2017, 12% of retailers fell within this bracket.
- **Just 1% of retailers rated as excellent**, taking under 4 seconds to load and expected to experience low levels of potential visitor loss. This is compared to 2% of retailers that rated as excellent in 2017.

Mobile Page Load Speed – Google Rating

	2017	2018
Poor	54%	62%
Fair	32%	26%
Good	12%	11%
Excellent	2%	1%

Mobile Page Load Speed – Seconds

	2017	2018
> 15 seconds (poor)	12%	16%
9-14 seconds (poor)	42%	45%
6-8 seconds (fair)	32%	26%
4-5 seconds (good)	12%	10%
< 4 seconds (excellent)	2%	1%

62% of retailers rating as 'poor' - taking longer than 9 seconds to load on 3G.

Almost a fifth (17%) of the leading UK e-retailers lose the opportunity to achieve sales from a shopper's network of friends and contacts.

Social Media:

- **Almost a fifth (17%) of the leading UK e-retailers lose the opportunity to achieve sales** from a shopper's network of friends and contacts by failing to put sharing buttons on their sites.
- In 2017, 87% of retailers offered social share buttons but this dropped to 83% in 2018.

Social Media

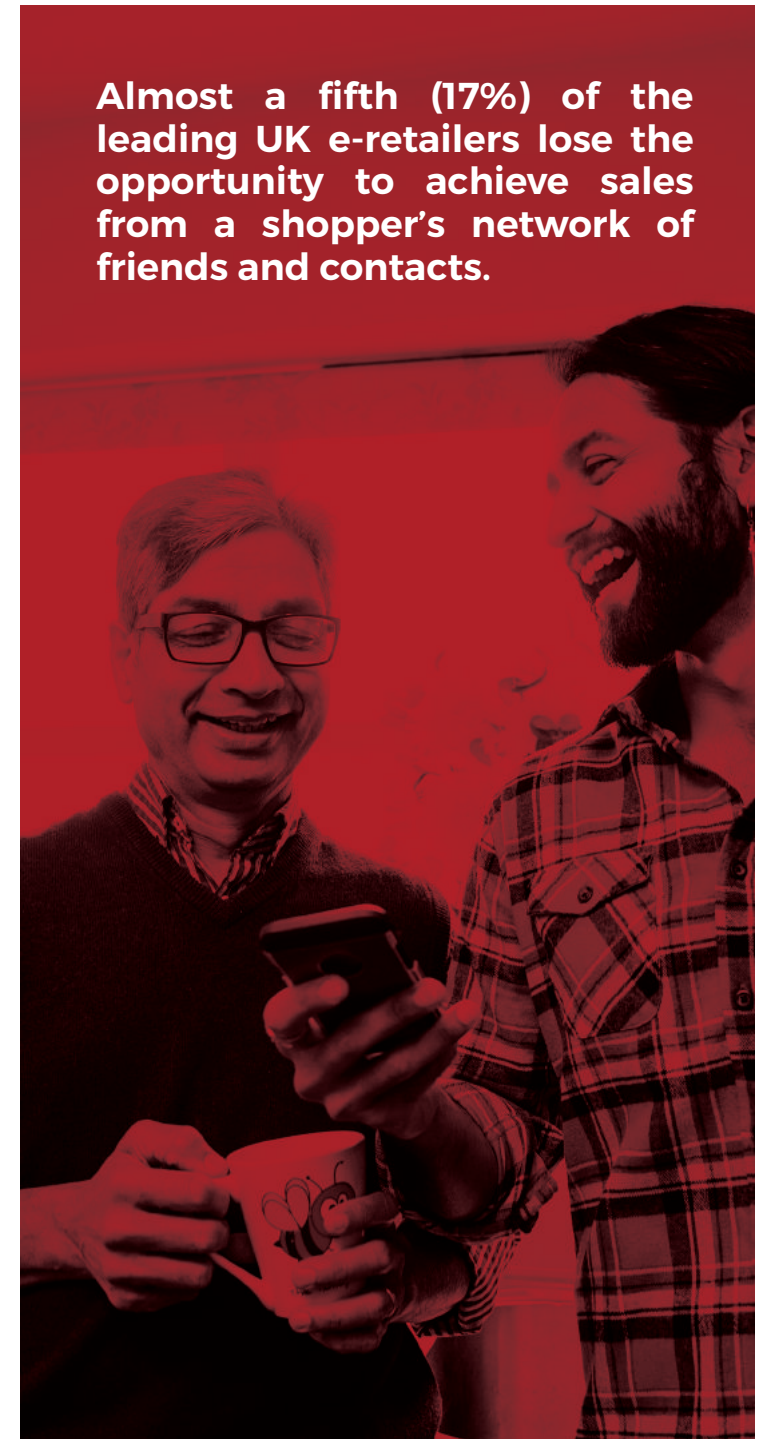
	2017	2018
Utilise social sharing buttons	87%	83%

Multi-channel:

- **Only 36% of leading e-retailers are making use of multi-channel options** such as Amazon and eBay – this has dropped from 39% in November 2017.
- **The number of e-retailers using Google Shopping tools** to increase sales opportunities has also worsened – from 31% to 28%.

Multi-channel

	2017	2018
Utilise marketplaces like Amazon and eBay	39%	36%
Utilise Google Shopping	31%	28%



Onsite Experience:

- **18% of top e-retailers fail to optimise onsite search** with functions such as autocomplete, well-targeted product suggestions or relevant recommendations. Whilst this has remained the same vs. 2017, it is still a worrying statistic given the importance of effective search tools for conversion rates.
- **Live chat functions are becoming less frequently used UK by e-retailers.** Only 37% of leading sites include this feature, despite the importance placed on such services by online shoppers. This figure has dropped from 39% in last year's report.
- On average, it takes **five steps from adding an item to basket to purchasing**, This has worsened over the past 12 months, when the average was three steps.
- **Over one in 10 e-retailers have eight or more steps** before purchase – a figure which is likely to deter many customers from spending.

Onsite Experience	2017	2018
Optimise onsite search	83%	83%
Utilise live chat functions	39%	37%
Average steps to purchase	3	5

Delivery Options:

- **16% of e-retailers still don't offer a premium or next-day delivery option**, despite this being expected by the majority of customers.
- **Store collect was only offered by 51% of our sample** – a drop from 62% last year.
- **Less than 1% of retailers** offer customers the option to collect from collection points or at local convenience stores.

Delivery Options	2017	2018
Offer next-day or premium delivery	16%	16%
Offer store collect	62%	51%



16% of e-retailers still don't offer a premium or next-day delivery option, despite this being expected by the majority of customers.



Almost a quarter (23%) of retailers are failing to offer a payment choice other than a mainstream credit or debit card.

Payment Options:

- Almost a quarter (23%) of retailers are failing to offer a payment choice other than a mainstream credit or debit card. This has increased from 19% in 2017.
- PayPal is still the most popular alternative payment method (71%).
- Despite only being in the market for little over a year, Amazon Pay is already being used by 10% of retailers.
- The number of retailers offering customers the option to pay in international currency was 81%. This was a positive improvement, as only 62% of retailers offered international payments in 2017.
- Promisingly, one in 10 retailers now offer retail finance options from companies such as Klarna – a negligible point in last year's data.

Payment Options

	2017	2018
Only offer mainstream credit card	19%	23%
Offer international currency	19%	23%

Increasing average basket value:

- 90% still encourage shoppers to register their email for more information, although our researchers once again found that many retailers could give sign-up opportunities higher profile (especially within mobile versions of their site).
- 91% of retailers up-sell or cross-sell to site users. This has seen an improvement on 2017 when 82% of retailers were found to put this best practice into action.
- The lack of pop-ups and overlays is a major missed opportunity – only 66% of the retailers surveyed were found to use these as methods to increase sales. This figure has dropped from 70% in 2017.

Increasing Average Basket Value

	2017	2018
Encourage email sign-up	90%	90%
Upsell or cross-sell to customers	82%	91%
Utilise pop-ups and overlays	70%	66%

Page speed and visitor loss on 3G

The importance of page speed

Page load speed is of utmost importance to online retail businesses. It's one of the biggest contributors to customer frustration, basket abandonment and – consequently – lost sales.

[Research](#) shows that 47% of customers will expect a site to load in less than two seconds; an indication of consumer expectations now and in the future.

Despite this, we found that page speed has worsened across the board since we compiled last year's report. Almost two-thirds (62%) of retailers' websites rated as 'poor' – taking longer than nine seconds to load on 3G.

This was in comparison to 54% of retailers that rated as poor in 2017.

A further 16% of retailer sites took 15 seconds or longer to load – an increase of 4% in 12 months. Google estimates that these e-retailers will be losing a minimum of 32% of all potential visitors through load time alone.

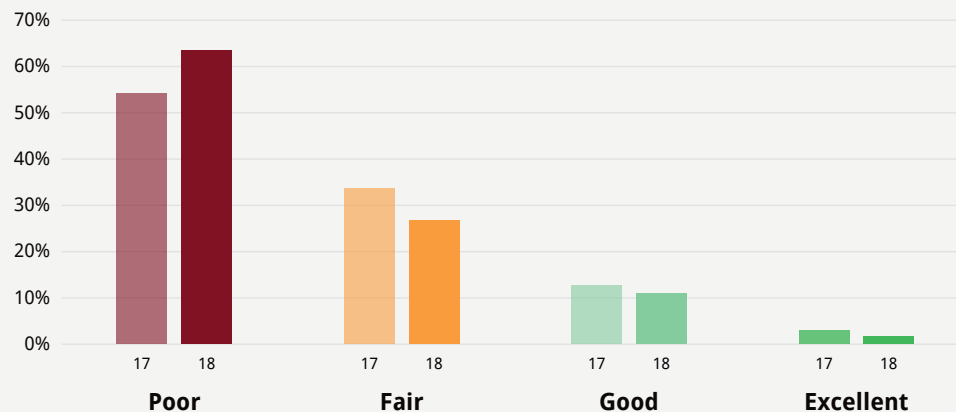
Just 1% rated as excellent, taking under four seconds to load and expected to experience low levels of potential visitor loss. This is down from 2% of retailers that rated as excellent in 2017. These figures – which relate specifically to mobile load speeds – are particularly worrying in light of Google's July 2018 site

speed update. The algorithm change, which now officially takes 3G mobile site speed into account for search engine rankings, only rates sites that load in under four seconds as "excellent" and penalises those that don't.

Given that [mobile](#) drives 62% of all website traffic, with orders made via mobile devices growing 40% year-on-year globally, mobile speed performance is a key brand differentiator.

By neglecting this aspect of site performance, the UK's top retailers are risking a significant drop in online visibility – something which is of critical importance to many retailers' businesses.

Page Loading Speeds - UK's Top E-Retailers 2018 vs 2017



Research shows that 47% of customers will expect a site to load in less than two seconds.



Although the findings here may seem surprising, unfortunately it's still common for retailers to unwittingly sacrifice mobile performance as they grow their online stores.

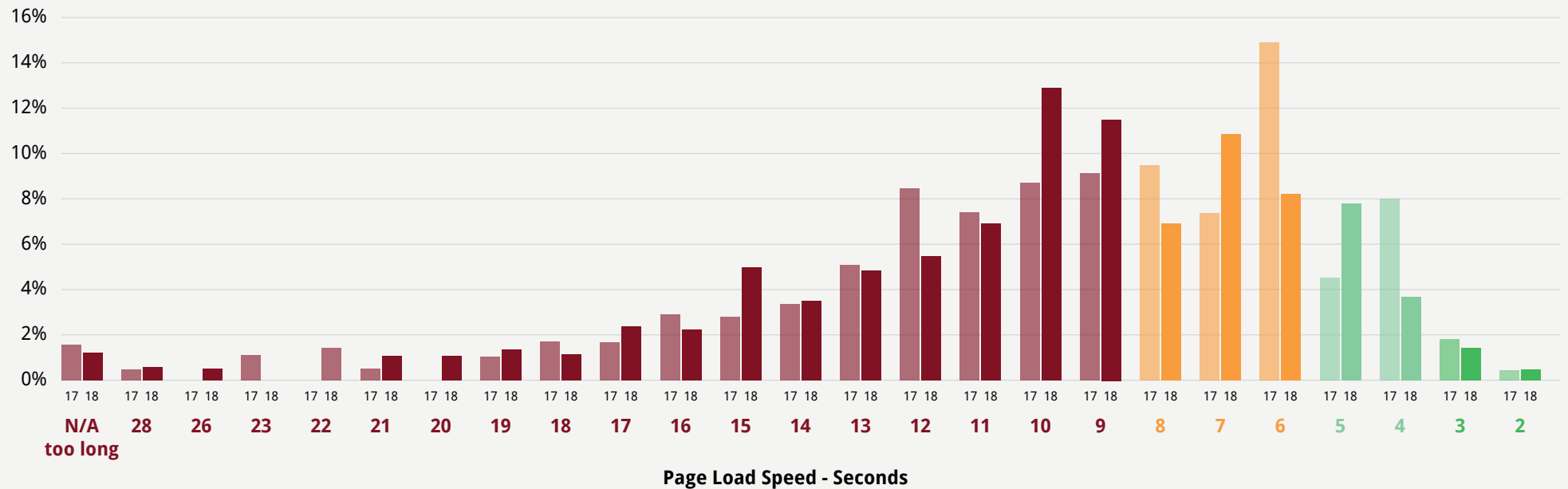
Decreased page speeds are often the result of increased graphics and features that simply haven't been optimised for mobile, leading to poor user experiences for the millions of customers that prefer to shop via their smartphones. The usual culprits are oversized images and/or videos on mobile homepages, unnecessary animations, overzealous tracking code, prematurely-loading content, and superfluous image carousels.

In addition to identifying and eliminating these common errors, we always recommend that every new element of a store is designed 'mobile up', as pages that perform poorly on smartphones are proven to drive away customers, and since Google's 'Speed Update', they can decrease organic traffic to your store too.



Sarah Louise Taylor
Head of Platform

Page Loading Speeds - UK's Top E-Retailers 2018 vs 2017



Social Media: the new frontier

Over the last 12 months alone, shopping through social media has seen radical progress, with new features such as Instagram shoppable posts creating an entirely new channel through which retailers can increase their reach and grow sales.






In fact, a recent survey by [PwC](#) found that social networks are the number one influencer for customers when deciding where to shop. If retailers can harness the power of this platform and make shopping through social media a completely seamless operation, they stand to see significant benefit.

However, we found that a significant number of retailers do not facilitate shoppers' being able to share their purchases and wish lists through social media.

Almost a fifth (17%) of the leading UK e-retailers lose the opportunity to achieve sales from a shopper's network of friends and contacts by failing to put sharing buttons on their sites. This figure has increased by 4% vs. 2017 – a surprising fact given the increasing role these platforms are playing in shopper behaviour.

The average number of social media followers has also increased hugely across all channels – doubling for Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest – but not for Instagram, despite the clear opportunity that Instagram shoppable posts offer.

Average Followers:

	2017	2018
	2,252,704	2,256,861
	1,754,365	2,496,271
	181,618	316,974
	25,022	62,347
	28,915	68,212



With more and more people using social media to research and influence their purchasing decisions, many platforms have added a number of features to allow brands to engage natively. Features such as Instagram Shopping which allow brands to tag products in their posts, which are clickable through to the product page on their website for the consumer, are shortening the customer journey.

Further to this, brands should be leveraging the power of 'user-generated content'; encouraging their customers to share images of the products they have purchased. This has the knock-on effect of increased reach for the brand by customers becoming 'micro influencers' to their own networks. Brands can encourage this through the use of branded #hashtags and photo competitions.



Daniel Dixon
Head of Social

Utilising all channels

The retail market is becoming increasingly fragmented, with an ever-growing range of channels through which shoppers can begin, continue and end their purchasing journey. Whilst focusing on an effective website is vital, brands must never underestimate the importance of multi-channel selling.

So, how did the UK's top e-retailers fare this year?

Worryingly, the figures have slumped slightly across key metrics – most of which were already underperforming. Many leading brands are therefore swimming against the tide of consumer behaviour and missing out on growth opportunities as a result.

Mobile-friendly websites – shopping via mobile accounts for almost two-thirds of purchases. Consumers are also increasingly researching and browsing on their mobile device before making a final purchase, so this channel provides an ideal shop window.

Simplifying this process is a fundamental way to maximise sales and we found that almost all (98%) of the retailers we surveyed optimised their site for mobile. This has not changed over the past 12 months.

Third-party marketplaces – Amazon and eBay are key platforms to boost reach and revenue. In fact, latest [figures](#) show that consumers are more likely to go first to Amazon when looking for an item than anywhere else.

However, we found that just 36% of retailers are utilising third-party marketplaces in their sales activity. This has dropped from 39% in 2017.

Google Shopping – recent statistics show that Google Shopping adverts are driving three-quarters (76%) of the global retail search advertising spend – a huge share of market.

Our analysis found that just 28% of the UK's top 250 retailers are taking full advantage of the benefits of Google Shopping; a 3% drop since last year.

Brands that fall outside of the top 250 should therefore be jumping at the chance to make the most of this channel and the sales boost it can provide.

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- **Optimise your listings for each channel.** Customers use each marketplace differently, so do not assume your website content is optimised fully for all locations.
 - **Keep an eye on price.** One of the main ranking factors on marketplaces like Amazon and eBay is product price. Monitor your prices closely as small reductions can have a big impact on sales volume.
 - **Maintain high standing on seller metrics.** Selling on marketplaces means you will run your own 'shop.' This shop can get customer feedback; one of the largest factors in how often your products will show in product listing pages. Ensure you meet your customers' expectations, answer their questions and deal with any issues they have. Remember the customer is always right. Any negative feedback can massively affect your sales.
 - **Re-list items that are not selling.** If your items have not sold in 30+ days then delete and relist them, this often gives them a boost in listing strength.
 - **Change delivery options to meet marketplace requirements.** Each marketplace offers different delivery options. Ensure you have everything in place to meet these requirements and meet customers expectations.



Chris Fletcher
Head of Onboarding

Online customer experience and ease of purchase

Great customer service is clearly a key facet of bricks-and-mortar retail. However, online stores must also ensure that their site provides an enjoyable and simple buying process, with easy access to help should they need it.

Not only does this engender brand loyalty (as consumers are more likely to come back to a site that they found simple to use), it also increases sales.

However, we found that customer experience performance has slipped slightly across the board vs. 2017.

Online search - sites with effective search platforms, which include autocomplete, well-targeted product suggestions or relevant recommendations, are twice as likely to convert than other shoppers, due to these shoppers having a greater degree of intent than those who are simply browsing. Providing these “warm” customers with what they want or need at the right time can therefore prove crucial.

However, almost a fifth (19%) of retailers are failing to optimise their online search – an increase of 1% vs. 2017.

Few retailers (37%) are also making use of **live chat or virtual assistant services** – a figure which has dropped by 2% in the past 12 months. [Studies](#) show that this “humanising” aspect of an online brand, in which customers can receive an instant response to their queries - can boost conversion rates by as much as 40%.

Ease of purchase saw a widespread decline for the retailers we analysed. Brands had an average of five steps to purchase (the point from adding an item to basket to receiving a ‘thanks for your order’ message). This has increased from three steps last year, which may be due to increased number of delivery options becoming available to customer, services like collect in store, collect plus and lockers have become very popular over the last 12 months. This means the checkout process must be expanded to offer customers the ability to choose the appropriate locations and services.

Once again, we found that one in 10 took as many as eight steps.

Every additional step to purchase is likely to cause customers to drop out of the sales process. According to statistics from Amazon Pay, 35% of online shopping basket abandonment is due to sites asking customers to create accounts. We found that 67% of retailers forced shoppers to follow this step and this extra hurdle alone could be costing retailers dearly in missed sales.

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- **Ensure site search is clearly positioned on all pages of the site. Provide suggestions for categories and products to speed up the search journey.**
 - **Welcome guests - only a handful of industries may require users to create an account so, where possible, offer a guest checkout option. Remove any friction when requesting customer details, stick to just the essentials and remove the create a password field. You can ask users to create an account at the order success stage.**
 - **Quick checkout options - offer options for users to login and use previously saved details on other online platforms such as Google, Facebook, PayPal and Amazon Pay.**

Whilst some of these points may sound simple, it’s often difficult for frequent users (ie. employees and owners) of a site to really see where a typical user may be struggling to use it. Where possible gather regular feedback on the customer experience, use surveys, heat/scroll mapping user testing and review analytics data to get an understanding of the user, listen to what these users have to say and act on it.

What may seem like a simple user journey to you, may not be for the majority of your website visitors.



Dale Higginbottom
Head of CRO

Delivery options

As appetite for eCommerce grows, consumer demand and expectations around delivery options have also increased exponentially. Shoppers want flexibility and convenience. They want to order at 10pm and have their package guaranteed next day; they want the choice to pay less if they're happy to wait; they want to be able to drop into a local store to collect if it better suits their lifestyle. In order to maximise their sales potential, retailers must be aware of these demands and be able to respond to them on a daily basis and on a large scale.

In fact, PwC's 2018 Global Customer Insights [survey](#) shows that over 40% of online shoppers would be willing to pay an extra charge for same day delivery, with [27%](#) of customers rating same-day delivery options as important when considering which retailer to purchase from. A further [three-quarters](#) (74%) of consumers who received same-day delivery said they are more likely to purchase from that company again.

Despite this, 16% of retailers still don't even offer a premium or next-day delivery option - let alone same-day. This figure has stayed the same vs. 2017; a worrying statistic given how quickly customer expectations are moving.

By contrast, PwC found that only 11% of consumers would be happy to pay a fee for a delivery that took two business days or longer.

[Research](#) also shows that 52% of online shoppers are interested in shipping to alternate locations than their own home. However, collection was only offered by half (51%) of retailers – a drop from 62% last year.

Whilst this may be due to more retailers moving online-only (and therefore waiving the option of store collect), only 0.5% retailers have mitigated against this by offering collection from a convenience store or other collection point.



Over 40% of online shoppers would be willing to pay an extra charge for same day delivery.

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- **Free** - where possible, include a Free Delivery option, even if that requires a basket value threshold.
 - **Assurance** - build in assurance of the delivery options throughout the site. Ensure that the availability of delivery options is promoted clearly on homepage and product pages, as well as at the basket.
 - **Choice** - provide plenty of delivery options to suit all customer needs. Consider convenience, timescales, price sensitivity, tracking etc.
 - **Clarity** - ensure all delivery options are clearly defined. Clearly show the differences in price, estimated delivery dates, locations (for collection options).
 - **Data** - regularly review the data of when users select non-standard delivery options. It's likely that on some days of the week/times of the day users are more likely to choose alternative delivery options. Use that data to your advantage, apply time-limited promotions, be clearer about costs of specific options at specific times etc.
 - **Timers** - utilise next day delivery cut-off countdown timers to encourage conversion at time-sensitive points of the day.



Dale Higginbottom
Head of CRO

Payment options

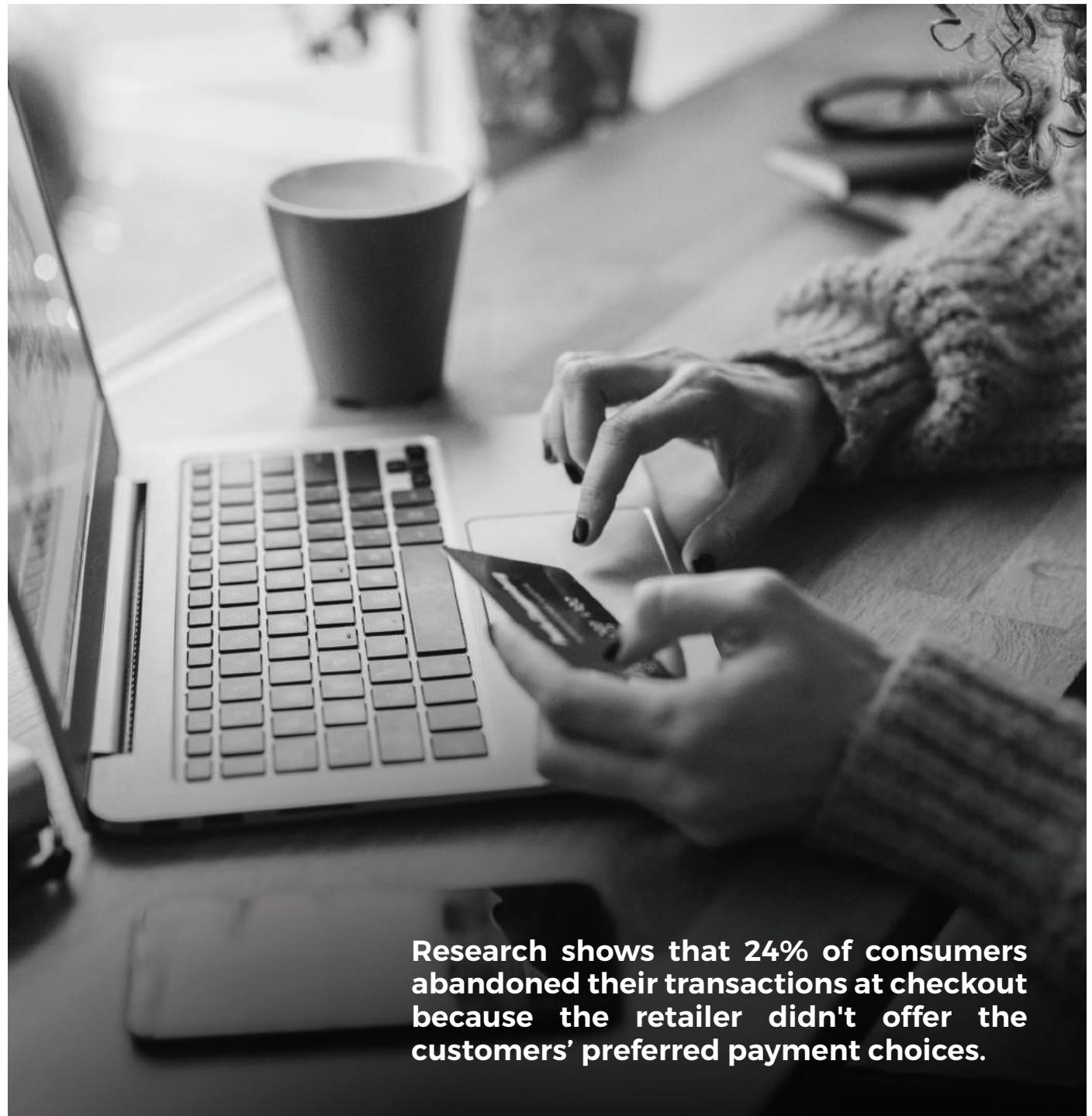
A wide range of payment options is also an incredibly important factor for retailers to maximise their sales potential. [Research](#) shows that 24% of consumers abandoned their transactions at checkout because the retailer didn't offer the customers' preferred payment choices.

What's more, over half (58%) of [shoppers](#) said they preferred to pay via options that aren't card – but 23% of retailers are failing to offer a payment choice other than a mainstream credit or debit card. This has increased from 19% in 2017. PayPal remains the most popular alternative payment method – offered by 71% of top retailers.

Interestingly, we found that the prevalence of innovative payment methods is increasing. Amazon Pay, for example, is being used by 10% of retailers. This shows at least some movement towards a more diverse spectrum of payments offered.

A further one in 10 retailers were found to offer retail finance products from lenders such as Klarna. [Research](#) has found that around three-quarters (78%) of consumers would consider purchasing through retail finance in future, with the average spend of £620, so offering this type of payment could prove a fundamental avenue for growth.

The impact of Brexit may be having some impact on the way retailers are doing business, with 81% now offering customers the option to pay in international currency – an uplift of almost 20% on 2017's figures. The majority of these are Euros and USD, with 1% of retailers offering Yen.



Research shows that 24% of consumers abandoned their transactions at checkout because the retailer didn't offer the customers' preferred payment choices.

Making the most of a captive audience



Retail dwell time is usually just a few short minutes, so it's vital that brands maximise every second that shoppers are browsing their site to boost sales. However, we found that many of the UK's most successful e-retailers are failing to utilise all available opportunities to their full advantage.

Email sign-up

Email marketing has taken on a new meaning in a post-GDPR world, with subscriber lists slashed; drastically reducing the reach of promotional messages sent via this channel.

It was concerning to see that 10% of the brands analysed still do not encourage shoppers to sign up to their email database – and that this figure has remained unchanged vs. the previous year. For many of these retailers, the sign-up button is also not prominent on the page, highlighting a huge missed opportunity.

On average, we found that retailers lost 91% of their email subscribers during the GDPR process, so it's vital to use every tool possible to rebuild this database, given that email is the highest-converting [channel](#) available to retailers.

Focusing on list growth is key for email marketing and has been an objective for many brands post-GDPR. There are a few tactics we recommend to optimise your website for acquisition which are easy to implement:

- **Overlays are a proven way to grow your list - pop-ups which capture email address. These should always be behavioural due to performance and UX impact, so only show if it appears that the user may be about to leave your site.**
- **Ensure any points where data is captured - checkout, back-in-stock reminders, contact us - have a newsletter sign up option.**
- **Include a call to action encouraging customers to subscribe in your transactional emails, such as order confirmation emails, basket abandon emails, dispatch notifications etc.**

One of the most important things is making sure that your sign up forms are compelling. Your copy should make site visitors and customers want to subscribe. Tell them the benefits of subscribing. They're going to give you their email address - what are you giving them in return? Many brands offer incentives for new subscribers, for example a discount off their first purchase.

As well as making them compelling, your subscription points also need to be compliant. You need to make sure you're collecting explicit, freely-given and informed consent; this means letting people know what exactly they're signing up to, how their data is going to be used (i.e. linking to your up-to-date privacy policy) and that subscribing is a choice.

Once you've got their email address, make sure you send a triggered welcome email or a series of emails to nurture them. These campaigns are often high performers. The hard work doesn't end there, and you should have a solid email strategy to retain your subscribers and keep them engaged and ultimately, spending on your site.



Lindsey Roberts
Head of Email



Encouraging incremental spend

Up-selling and cross-selling to shoppers, both whilst on site and beyond, is a highly effective way to inspire purchase and boost impulse spend.

We found that this had significantly improved since we compiled last year's report; 91% of retailers are now upselling and cross-selling to customers – up 9% vs. 2017. However, given that these techniques are responsible for an **average** of 10-30% of eCommerce site revenues, we would expect all retailers to be incorporating them into their online strategy.

Similarly, whilst the majority (66%) of our sample was found to utilise pop-ups, banners and overlays to highlight promotions or encourage email sign-up, this figure has dropped by 4% since 2017.

The technology is one of the only real-time methods available to the majority of retailers where they can interact with visitors on the fly as they journey through their website. The key is to ensure your overlays are configured to interact with visitors in very considered and specific ways, and not as a surprise. Best practice ranges from the obvious (restricting the number of overlays which can trigger to a particular customer) through to the utilisation of visitor behaviour to customise the message shown.

For example, a simple option is to target a visitor who shows intent to leave on the basket page differently to a visitor who intends to leave on the homepage. You could take this a step further and customise your message based on the amount of value in the visitors basket, most commonly offering an incentive for a higher value and a USP lead approach for a smaller basket.

At Visualsoft we recommend:

- Target visitors based on their intention, behaviour and stage.
- You don't need to lead with an incentive, customise your offering based on the perceived value of the visitor (e.g. basket value, number of pages visited).
- Consider using time of day and day of week to further adjust your messages.
- Cover all of your bases and ensure your overlays target mobile, tablet and desktop.
- If you receive a lot of international traffic, you may want to target by country of origin.
- Always check the features available by your provider.



Luke Atherton
Network Director

Conclusion

In a ferociously competitive retail landscape which, in the past year alone, has seen profit warnings and store closures on a near-daily basis, it is surprising to find that the UK's most successful retailers are not putting simple best-practice into action. More worrying still is that performance metrics have actually gone down over the past year, suggesting that even fewer brands are maximising their sales potential.

Of course, many may not see these metrics as critical as long as consumer appetite for online shopping remains strong. However, as the eCommerce market continues to fragment and becomes ever-more saturated, it will be those websites based on a robust set of basic principles that thrive.

The closure of Tesco Direct – a household name which simply couldn't make eCommerce work – has highlighted just how precarious some brands are in the online marketplace. It's not enough to simply sit back and watch the sales flood in; retailers must ensure they make the most of every single opportunity in order to succeed.

Concerned about the performance of your business but unsure where to begin?

That's where we come in. Our experts can help you identify the key areas most important to your brand through a tailored digital strategy. We'll get to work on improving your site to increase conversions and offer your customers a superior online experience!

Get in touch with us today and ensure your site is ahead of the rest.

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