

The Online High Street: 5 Years of Improvement

Ecommerce usability for UK high street retailers (2010)



webcredible

user experience • research • design • training ●●●

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Introduction

The market opportunity

The size of the Internet retailing marketplace has continued to grow over the past 12 months since we published our last ecommerce usability report in October 2009¹.

As of June 2010, the ITU reported an estimate of 51.4 million Internet users in the UK (2.5% increase since 2009), representing almost 82.5% of the population². Now with 73% of households (as opposed to 63% last year) having an Internet connection, shopping on the Internet has never been more convenient³.

This is illustrated by the amount of money being spent on Internet purchases. 31 million adults (62% of all adults) have bought or ordered goods or services over the Internet since the past year, with 52% of the purchases being clothes and sporting goods.

The August results from the IMRG Capgemini e-Retail Sales Index reveal that British shoppers spent a total of £4.4 billion pounds online during August, equivalent to £72 per person. This shows an impressive 15% increase compared to August 2009⁴.

About this report

In September 2010, Webcredible investigated the usability of the websites of 20 of the UK's leading high street shops. To keep up with the latest trends in ecommerce, we made slight amendments to a few of our existing guidelines. 3 new guidelines have been added (and old guidelines removed) to allow the investigation of other aspects of ecommerce.

Some other changes include removing Woolworths from this year's evaluation to keep the focus consistent on businesses with multichannel presences, both online and offline. In replacement, we evaluated Tesco Direct which currently stands as one of the most visited top 10 websites according to the IMRG Experian Hitwise Hot Shops list 2010. Also, instead of Accessorize, which is now part of the Monsoon website, we evaluated the Monsoon Accessorize website as a whole in this report.

Evaluations of the 20 websites were conducted throughout September 2010.

Who is this report for?

This report is aimed at anyone involved with a website trying to sell products or services, including marketing managers, Internet managers and web developers. Although our analysis was of the ecommerce websites for high street retailers, the guidelines are highly transferable to other websites. The report assumes no prior usability or technical knowledge.

Methodology

Webcredible analysed the websites of 20 of the UK's leading UK high street retailers in September 2010.

Each website was evaluated against these 20 best practice guidelines and assigned a score of 0 to 5 for each guideline, with 5 being the maximum. With 20 guidelines in total, websites were assigned a total Web Usability Index rating out of 100.

The guidelines against which we benchmarked the 20 ecommerce sites were:

General

1. Search function is in the same place on every page and is highly visible
2. A link to both the basket and checkout is clearly visible on every page
3. Price is always clearly displayed next to any product
4. Users are given help in choosing products
5. Store locator is easy to find and use [New guideline]
6. Online business proposition is clear on the website [New guideline]

Search results

7. Number of results and search term are clearly displayed at the top
8. Option to change the number of products displayed is provided
9. Sort and filter options are available

Browsing

10. Orientation cues are provided and clearly visible on the homepage
11. Navigation within a category is possible
12. Website tracks previously viewed items [New guideline]

Product page

13. Highly visible 'Add to basket' button provided
14. Product description & enlargeable image offered
15. Similar & complementary products available

Basket

16. Highly visible 'Proceed to checkout' button at the top and bottom

Checkout

17. The same form is used for logging in and registering
18. Highly visible progress bar provided during checkout
19. Delivery costs are highlighted at the very beginning of the process
20. Users are provided with sufficient help when an error is made

Results

Executive summary

The 20 ecommerce websites received the following scores in total, out of 100:

2010 rank		2009 rank	Website	2010 score	2009 score
1	↑	3	John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com)	91	81
2	↑	8=	Early Learning Centre (www.elc.co.uk)	90	75
3	↓	1=	Marks & Spencer (www.marksandspencer.com)	86	83
4	↓	1=	WHSmith (www.whsmith.co.uk)	85	83
5	↓	4=	Boots (www.boots.co.uk)	80	80
6=	↑	14	Hamleys (www.hamleys.com)	79	72
6=	↑	18	Debenhams (www.debenhams.com)	79	67
8=	↓	6=	B&Q (www.diy.com)	78	76
8=	↑	11=	Game (www.game.co.uk)	78	74
10=	↑	13	Argos (www.argos.co.uk)	77	73
10=	↑	17	Next (www.next.co.uk)	77	68
12	↓	11=	Mothercare (www.mothercare.com)	76	74
13	↓	8=	HMV (www.hmv.co.uk)	75	75
14	↑	15	Currys (www.currys.co.uk)	74	70
15=	↓	6=	H.Samuel (www.hsamuel.co.uk)	72	76
15=	↑	16	The Body Shop	72	69

			(www.bodyshop.co.uk)		
17	↓	8=	Waterstones (www.waterstones.co.uk)	71	75
18	↑	20	Top Shop (www.topshop.co.uk)	67	56
19		-	Tesco Direct (http://direct.tesco.com)	65	-
20	↓	19	Monsoon Accessorize (www.monsoon.co.uk)	59	59
			Average score	76.6	72.9

Last year's lowest score of 59 remains the same this year but the overall average across the sample has increased by 3.7 percent to 76.6. A few websites have also made improvements since last year, with 12 websites scoring within the 70s range, 3 websites within the 80s, and 2 websites with a score of 90 or above.

Two of the top scorers from last year – Marks and Spencer and WHSmith have dropped two places onto the 3rd and 4th places this year. John Lewis has climbed two places this year, putting them at the first place with a high score of 91, which is 10 points more than what they scored last year.

The most dramatic improvement was made by Early Learning Centre which was the other website who scored within the 90s range, climbing 7 places (and improving by 15 points) from the 8th to the 2nd position this year.

However, it's important to note that as some of the guidelines have changed this year, direct comparisons from last year's scores wouldn't be an accurate reflection of the websites' performance from last year.

Still, the overall increase in the range of scores indicates that many websites are starting to put effort into improving their website based on the guidelines. Whilst this is good news for these particular sites, it's clear that the many sites scoring between the 70s to 50s range can do much more to improve the usability of their online offering.

Trends over the last 5 years

Webcredible conducted the first ecommerce report in 2006, using a set of 20 guidelines which we deemed as most important for ecommerce websites based on our experience over years of testing ecommerce websites.

Over the past 5 years, we've seen improvements in most of the websites evaluated, which no doubt indicates the emphasis that businesses are putting on improving their websites which generate a huge part of their revenue.

Year	Average score of 20 sites	Websites added/removed
2006	56.8	-
2007	57.0	Clinton Cards replaced by B&Q
2008	67.8	No changes
2009	73.3	No changes
2010	76.6	Woolworths replaced by Tesco Direct

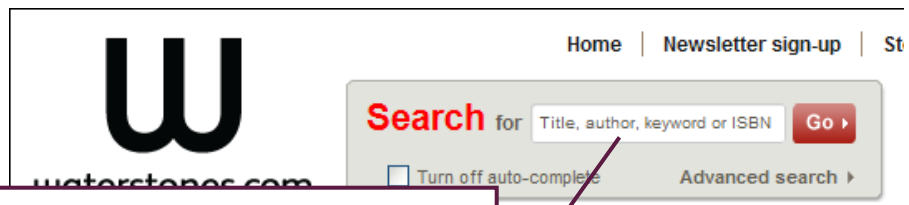
On average, the websites have improved from an average score of 56.8 in 2006 to 76.6 in 2010. The biggest jump in the average score was a 10.8 points increase from 2007 to 2008.

1. Search function is in the same place on every page and is highly visible

Average score: 4.4 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.9]

Some users don't immediately run a search on a website but, if they can't find what they're looking for by browsing, a site search function can act as a Plan B or 'get-out' clause. By placing the search function in the same place on every page users can be reassured that their plan B is easily accessible.

In addition, it's important that search boxes contain guidance (e.g. search by product name, category etc.) so that site visitors know what they can search for.



Waterstones' search remains a good example as it's highlighted and easy to find on every page. Clear guidance on search terms is provided in the search box, making it easy for users to search for specific items.



Monsoon Accessorize lost marks for not having a clear contrast between the search box and its background, as well a very small search area. The guidance displayed in the search box doesn't clarify what keywords can be used.

This is a well-established usability guideline and most websites scored either 4 or 5 out of 5. Most websites scored 4 because their search function didn't immediately stand out or didn't contain guidance on what search terms could be used. Where possible, the search function should conform to the following criteria:

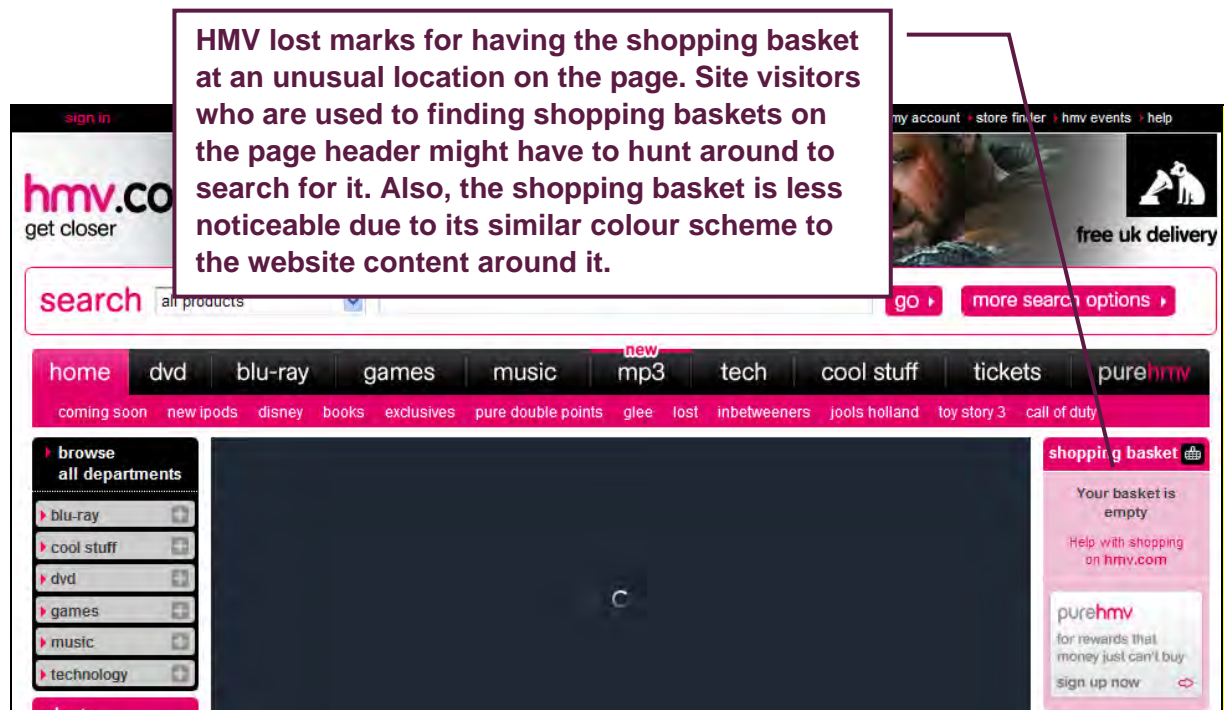
- It should be above the fold, near the top of the screen
- The 'Search' or 'Go' button should look like a button and the word 'Search' should be used at least once
- There should be good contrast between the search function and surrounding space
- Guidance should be provided on what site visitors can search on (e.g. product brand name, product code, designer name etc.)

2. A link to both the basket and checkout is clearly visible on every page

Average score: 4.8 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.0]

No matter where users are on the site, they should be able to instantly access their basket and proceed to checkout. Accessing the former will of course allow users to review what they plan on buying, and the latter to actually buy it.

By not providing these links in the same, highly visible place on every page, it makes it that much harder for users to check out – and ultimately buy products.



HMV lost marks for having the shopping basket at an unusual location on the page. Site visitors who are used to finding shopping baskets on the page header might have to hunt around to search for it. Also, the shopping basket is less noticeable due to its similar colour scheme to the website content around it.



Argos sets a good example by providing a clear 'My Trolley' section on the page header. The good colour contrast, big font size and icon make it stand out from the page.

With an average score of 4.8, it's definitely a good sign as websites realise the importance of making it easier for their site visitors to monitor their shopping basket and eventually check out. Improvements can be made to some sites so that the shopping basket is displayed in a more prominent location with good contrast so that it stands out from other site content on very busy pages.

3. Price is always clearly displayed next to any product

Average score: 5.0 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.3]

Every single time a product is displayed, its price must also be displayed next to it. No one is going to buy a product without first finding out its price, so ecommerce websites shouldn't force site visitors to click through just to see this most basic of information.



The diagram illustrates the user journey for finding a product price. It starts with a banner for 'New FitFlop Autumn Winter styles'. An arrow points to a 'Womens FitFlop Selector' tool showing two shoe options. A second arrow points to a product page for 'Fitflop Mukluk Boot- Black' with a price of £135.00. A callout box points to the selector tool with the text: 'Boots lost marks by not displaying prices of products early enough in the process. In this example, site visitors need to click through the 3rd page in order to get the price of a product.'

With 19 of 20 websites scoring full marks, it's obvious that displaying prices as early as possible next to products is crucial for the success of ecommerce sites in keeping potential customers on the site.

4. Users are given help in choosing products

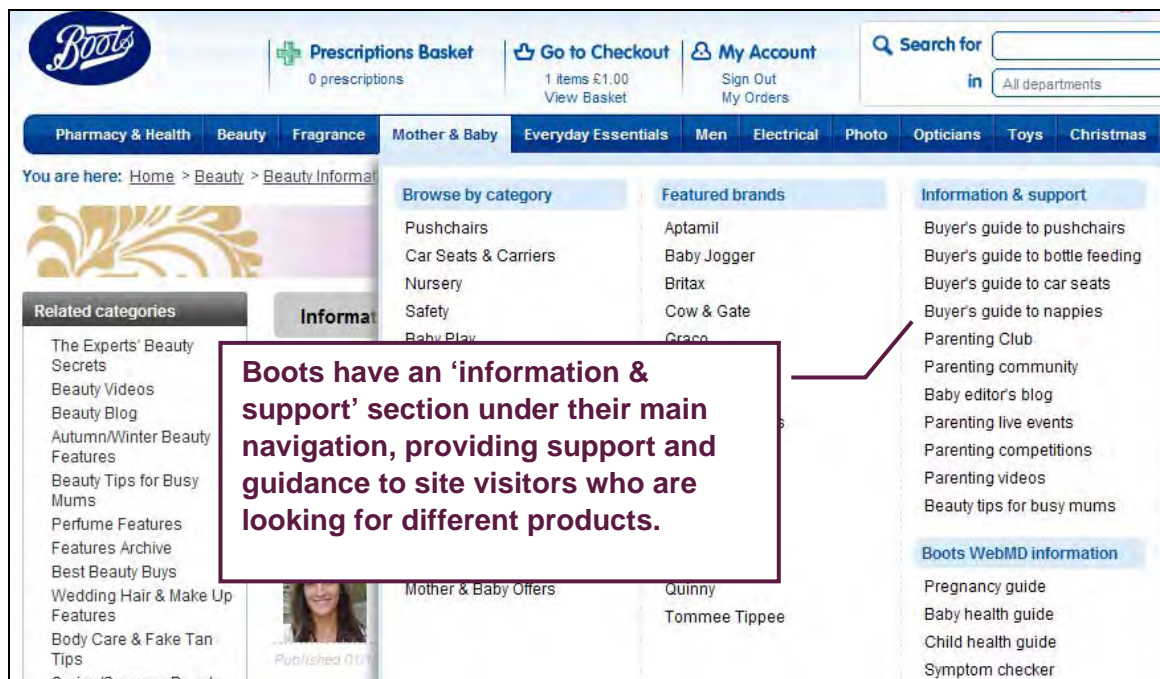
Average score: 3.6 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.8]

On ecommerce websites there are no shop assistants helping site visitors find products. It's crucial that users are given guidance as to which products to buy because often they'll be unsure which product suits their needs.

To remedy this, websites can provide:

- Special offers
- Recommended or alternative products
- Buyers' guides
- List of best sellers
- User reviews

User reviews, and to some extent best sellers, are perhaps the most effective from the above list. This is because they're essentially user-driven content so are perceived as being unbiased.



The screenshot shows the Boots website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Boots logo, a search bar, and links for 'Prescriptions Basket', 'Go to Checkout', and 'My Account'. Below this is a main navigation menu with categories like 'Pharmacy & Health', 'Beauty', 'Fragrance', 'Mother & Baby', 'Everyday Essentials', 'Men', 'Electrical', 'Photo', 'Opticians', 'Toys', and 'Christmas'. The 'Beauty' category is selected, and the breadcrumb trail shows 'Home > Beauty > Beauty Information'. A callout box points to the 'Information & support' section, which lists various resources like 'Buyer's guide to pushchairs', 'Parenting Club', and 'Boots WebMD information'.

Boots have an 'information & support' section under their main navigation, providing support and guidance to site visitors who are looking for different products.

Here the average score has dropped 0.2 from last year to 3.6 out of 5. Although some websites have very comprehensive guidance and recommendations, it's still surprising that some websites are still lagging behind given the increased revenue in online shopping.

5. Store locator is easy to find and use

Average score: 4.0 (out of 5) [New guideline]

It's important for websites with a multichannel offering to have a store locator function that's easy to find and use. Site visitors might want to view products in reality, make comparisons, and try on different products in store before purchasing them online.

In addition, many websites offer in-store collection services, making it more important that customers are able to find their nearest store. Information such as opening hours and having a clear map with directions to the store can make it easier for site visitors to plan their visits to the store.

Store Finder

We have over 700 stores located throughout the UK, this includes our largest store at Marble Arch, London. In addition, the company has over 300 stores worldwide, operating in more than 40 territories.

[Click here for our International store finder](#)

Find a Store Near You

Enter the postcode or town name where you want to search for a store.

Street:

Town:

or Postcode:

Stores that have:

CONTINUE

Store Finder

Enter the store name, or part of the store name, in the text field below.

Store Name:

e.g. Marble Arch

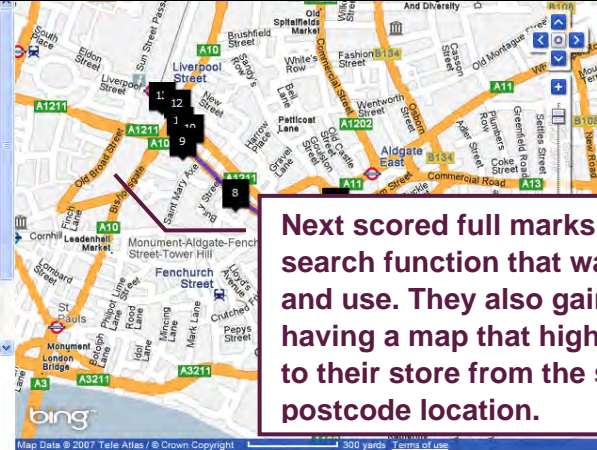
CONTINUE

M&S lost marks for having different store finder functionalities and an unconventional 'Store Finder' which might initially confuse its site visitors.

Travel Directions

From: e18ax
To: London - Liverpool Street

1. Depart on Mansell Street (A1202) for 0.01 miles
2. Turn left onto Chamber Street for 0.18 miles
3. Turn left onto Leman Street (A1202) for 0.04 miles
4. Turn left onto Prescot Street (A1202) for 0.16 miles
5. Continue onto A1202 for 0.21 miles
6. Bear left onto Aldgate High Street (A1211) for 0.11 miles
7. Turn right onto Duke's Place (A1211) for 0.12 miles
8. Continue onto A1211 for 0.14 miles
9. Turn right onto Outwich Street (A1211) for 0.03 miles
10. Turn left onto Houndsditch (A1211) for 0.03 miles



Next scored full marks for having a search function that was easy to find and use. They also gained marks for having a map that highlighted the route to their store from the site visitor's postcode location.

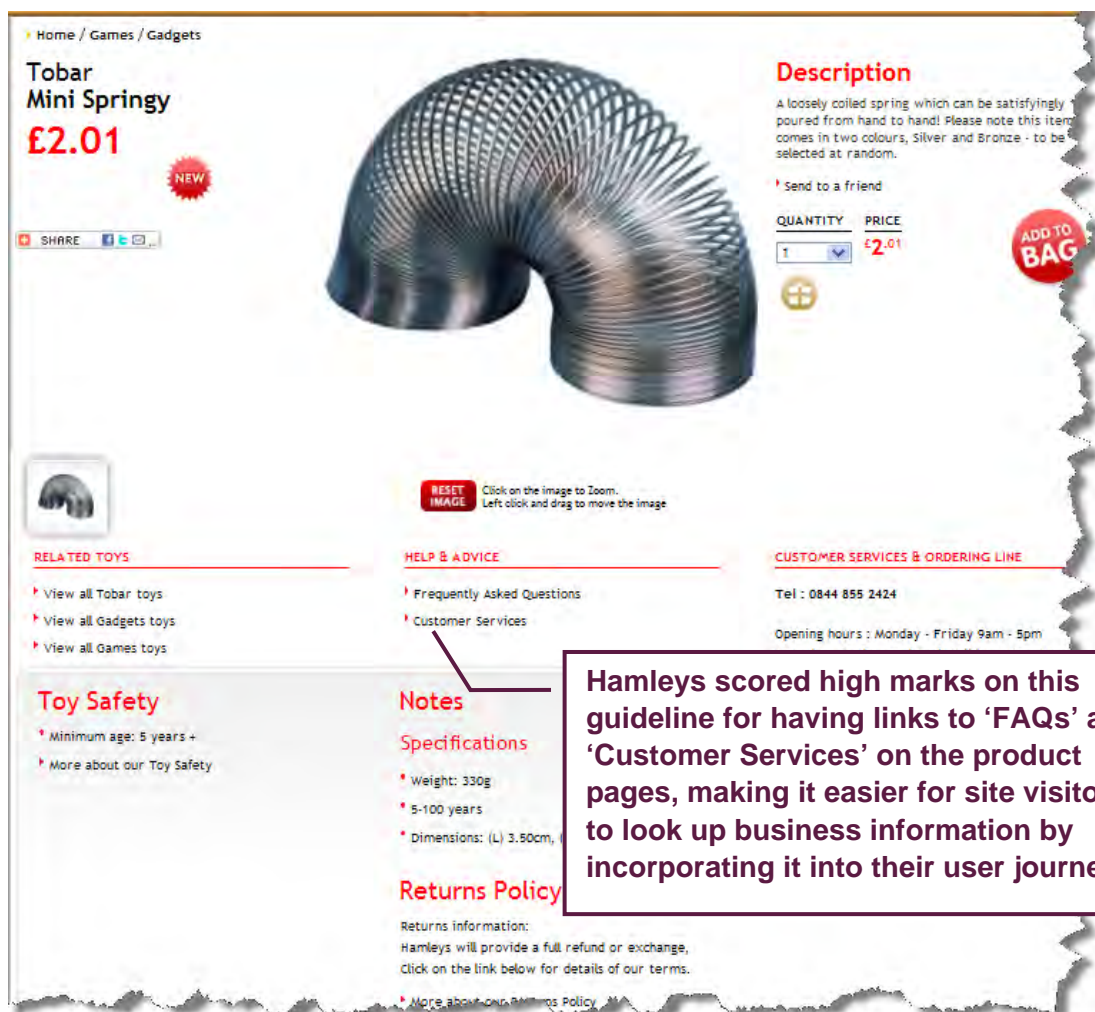
With an average score of 4.0, it's clear that businesses realise the importance of having a store locator on their website. However, improvements can be made by using more familiar search functionality and clear travel directions supported by an appropriately highlighted map.

6. Online business proposition is clear on the website

Average score: 4.0 (out of 5) [New guideline]

All of the websites that we evaluated are businesses that initially started off as brick and mortar stores and extended their businesses online. Customers of these companies might not be familiar with the website proposition if they are not familiar with ecommerce websites.

Hence, it's important that information about the companies' online proposition is stated clearly on the website. This includes providing clear instructions on how site visitors can purchase items from the websites and/or collect items from a store. Also, different businesses might have slightly different business propositions online, which should be provided contextually so that site visitors don't need to hunt around for this information while they're in the middle of shopping for products.



Home / Games / Gadgets

Tobar Mini Springy
£2.01

NEW

SHARE

Description
A loosely coiled spring which can be satisfyingly poured from hand to hand! Please note this item comes in two colours, silver and bronze - to be selected at random.

send to a friend

QUANTITY	PRICE
1	£2.01

ADD TO BAG

RESET IMAGE Click on the image to Zoom. Left click and drag to move the image

RELATED TOYS

- View all Tobar toys
- View all Gadgets toys
- View all Games toys

HELP & ADVICE

- Frequently Asked Questions
- Customer Services

CUSTOMER SERVICES & ORDERING LINE

Tel : 0844 855 2424

Opening hours : Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm

Toy Safety

- Minimum age: 5 years +
- More about our Toy Safety

Notes

Specifications

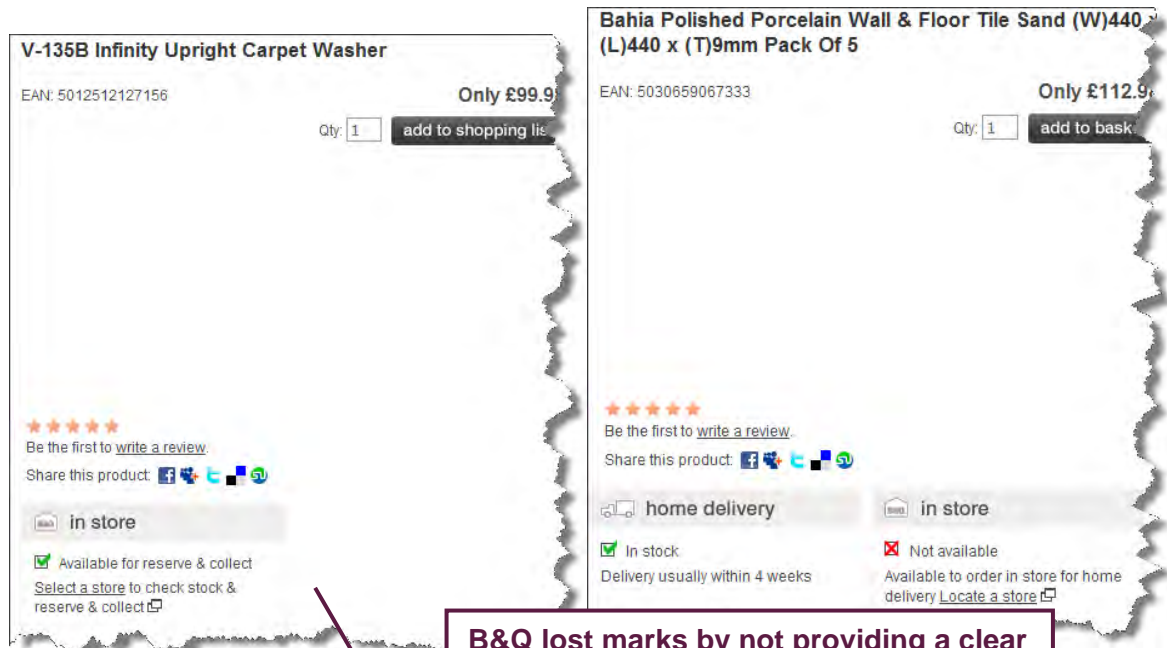
- Weight: 330g
- 5-100 years
- Dimensions: (L) 3.80cm, (H) 3.80cm, (W) 3.80cm

Returns Policy

Returns information:
Hamleys will provide a full refund or exchange. Click on the link below for details of our terms.

More about our Returns Policy

Hamleys scored high marks on this guideline for having links to 'FAQs' and 'Customer Services' on the product pages, making it easier for site visitors to look up business information by incorporating it into their user journey.



B&Q lost marks by not providing a clear explanation of their website proposition at relevant sections such as on the product page. The lack of consistency in terms of displaying their 'home delivery' options is also potentially confusing.

Overall the websites scored well on this guideline with an average score of 4.0. This indicates that most companies realise the importance of presenting their website proposition clearly to help site visitors make purchases online.

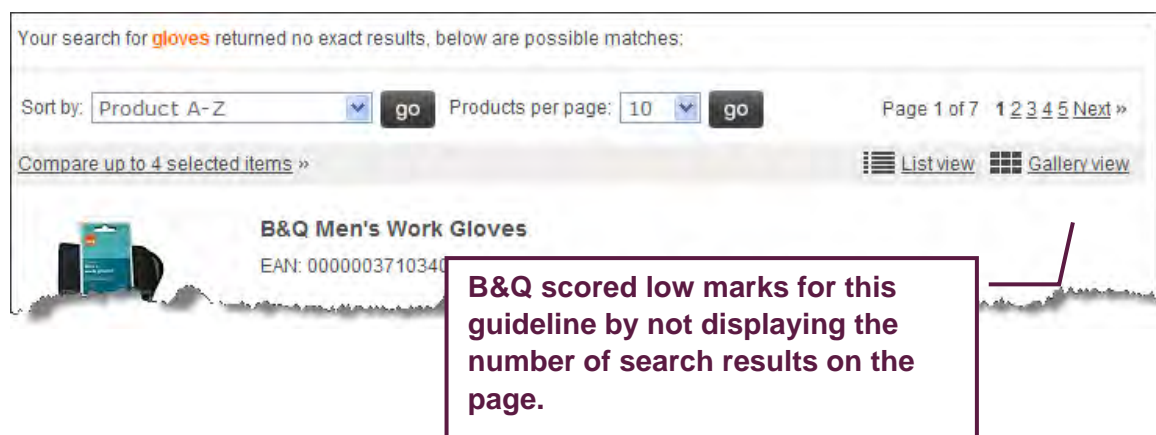
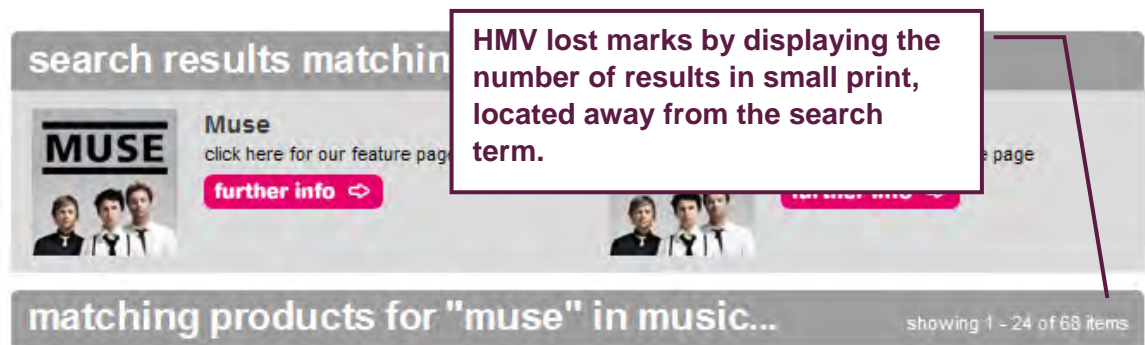
However, improvements can be made by providing important information within context instead of hiding it under sections. Site visitors might not consider looking at sections such as 'help' or 'customer services' unless they're having difficulties online.

7. Number of results and search term are clearly displayed at the top

Average score: 4.2 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.4]

After running a search, it's crucial that users are provided with feedback to reassure and remind them that the results they can see are for the search term they wanted. This also provides them with a base to search again if they're not happy with the search results.

Additionally, the number of search results should be clearly displayed at the top of the page. This way, users can decide whether or not they should refine their search (if there are a lot of results).



With an average score of 4.2, it's clear that websites realise the importance of displaying the searched term and number of search results for that term on top of the page after site visitors perform a search.

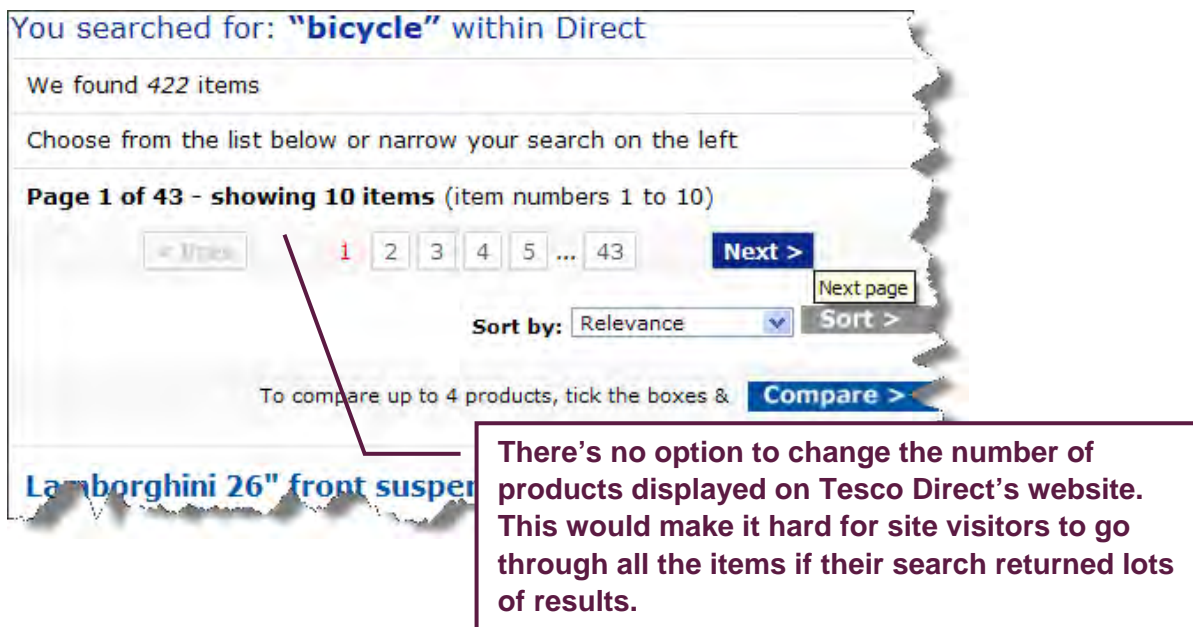
However, most websites lost marks by not providing this information in a consistent format, making it harder for site visitors to locate this information while they should logically be presented together every time a search is being performed.

8. Option to change number of products displayed is provided

Average score: 2.4 (out of 5) [Last year: 2.1]

Historically, most ecommerce sites displayed ten products per results page, although with the advent of broadband this number is increasing as download speeds are of course quicker. However, with a number of Internet connections still based on dial-up it's crucial that websites cater to both broadband and dial-up connections.

It's of course better to display as many products as possible on a search results page for ease of comparison, but this needs to be offset against download speed. With broadband, pages featuring a lot of products can obviously still be downloaded quickly.



More websites have improved on this option compared to last year, raising the average score to 2.4 out of 5. With only 4 (instead of 10 last year) out of the 20 websites not having this option this year, this is good news for site visitors who prefer to view and compare more products per page.

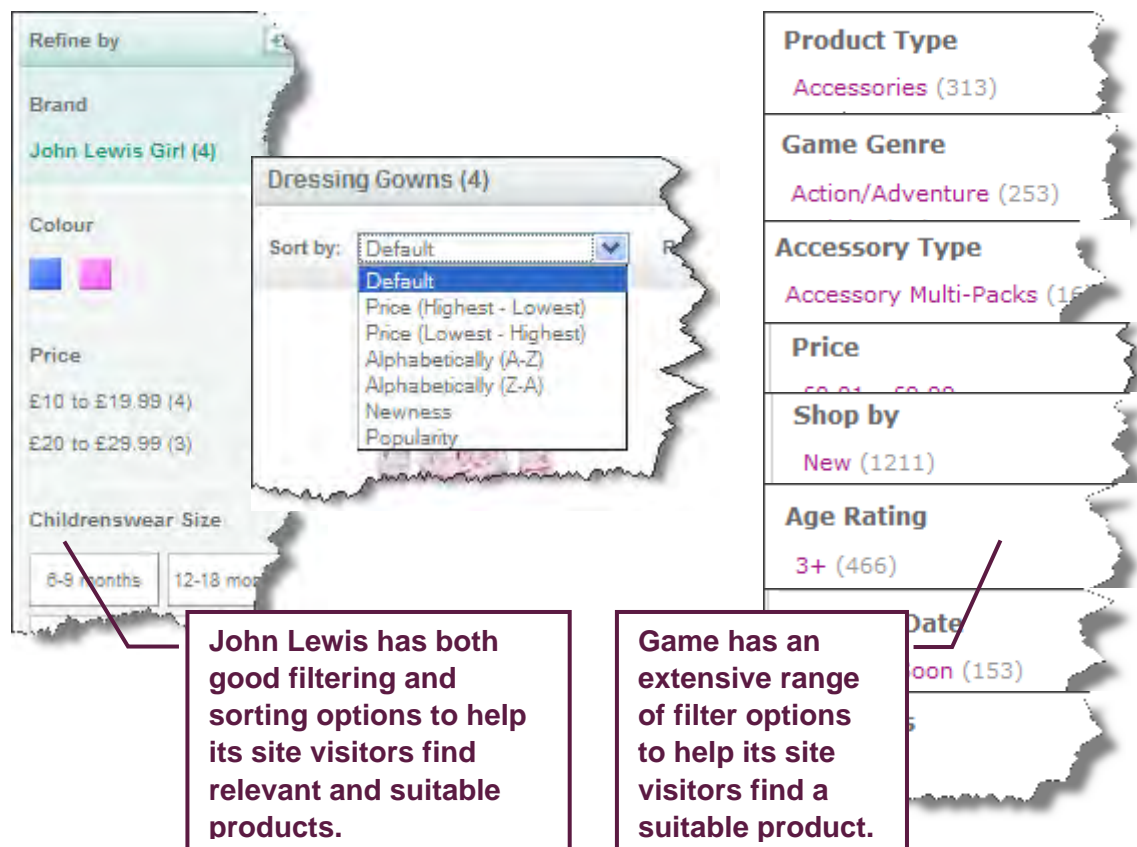
9. Sort and filter options are available

Average score: 4.2 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.5]

Sorting and filtering are crucial in helping site visitors find the exact product they're after.

Sorting a product listing allows site visitors to bring products with certain criteria to the top of the page. This is particularly useful for those who aren't exactly sure what they want. Site visitors can usually sort by price to bring the cheapest products to the top, or by best selling to immediately see what other's have bought.

Filtering on the other hand lets site visitors reduce the number of items in the list by filtering out products that don't conform to a certain criteria. This is often more useful for site visitors who know a bit about the product as filtering with criteria is usually product-specific.



The image shows two examples of product filtering and sorting options. On the left, a 'Refine by' sidebar for 'Dressing Gowns (4)' includes filters for Brand (John Lewis Girl (4)), Colour (blue and pink), Price (£10 to £19.99 (4) and £20 to £29.99 (3)), and Childrenswear Size (6-9 months and 12-18 months). A 'Sort by' dropdown menu is open, showing options: Default, Price (Highest - Lowest), Price (Lowest - Highest), Alphabetically (A-Z), Alphabetically (Z-A), Newness, and Popularity. On the right, a 'Product Type' sidebar for 'Game Genre' includes filters for Accessories (313), Game Genre (Action/Adventure (253)), Accessory Type (Accessory Multi-Packs (16)), Price (€0.01 - €9.99), Shop by (New (1211)), Age Rating (3+ (466)), and Date (Moon (153)).

John Lewis has both good filtering and sorting options to help its site visitors find relevant and suitable products.

Game has an extensive range of filter options to help its site visitors find a suitable product.

Most websites now offer some sort of sorting and filtering options. However, improvements can be made to offer more relevant sort options than just by alphabetical order. More product-specific filtering options can also guide site visitors find a product that they want.

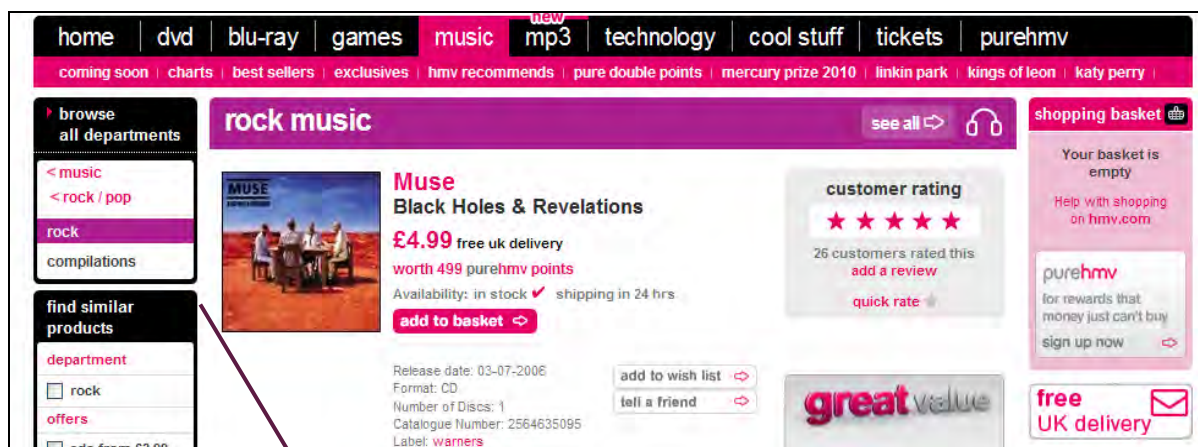
10. Orientation cues are provided and clearly visible on the homepage

Average score: 3.1 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.3]

Being able to browse to find a product is crucial for many web users, especially those individuals that are opposed to searching. Orientation cues are essential for these users to help them work out where they are within the site. These cues can include:

- Highlighted navigation, to indicate the section in which users are in
- Breadcrumb trail (e.g. “You are in: [Home](#) > [Clothing](#) > Shoes”)
- Descriptive main heading

Orientation cues are particularly important for users entering the website directly on the product page (e.g. from a search engine or shopping comparison site) as they can instantly orientate themselves within the site. These cues also allow them to easily navigate on to category pages for similar products and to explore the website in general.



The highlight on HMV's main navigation is potentially confusing and the breadcrumb trail is unconventional as well as located in an unfamiliar location. The product heading doesn't say what type of product that it (e.g. CD or DVD).


The average for this guideline dropped 0.2 points to 3.1 this year. The lack of progress is disappointing as this (long established) guideline isn't particularly challenging to implement.

Without effective orientation cues customers may get lost on the site, which will only make it more likely that they visit a competitor's site.

11. Navigation within a category is possible

Average score: 3.9 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.0]

For users that are browsing in order to find a product, navigating within a category is of course crucial. Users should be able to narrow the number of available products down to a small handful by clicking on available filter options. A search within the category could also be provided.



Kids Skirts
33 products found

SAVE up to 20%* online with the **Daily Mail** (until 26 Sept) [> Find out more](#)

Find in **My Selection** Sort by **Best selling (default)**

View [all products](#)

Material

Chrome (1)	Chrome-plated (3)
Gold-plated (2)	Silver (3)
Silver-plated (2)	

Price

£0 - £20	£20 - £40
£40 - £60	£60 - £100
£ <input type="text"/> - <input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="➤"/>	

Debenhams allows site visitors to search within the category that they're looking at, as well as providing them with relevant categories to help narrow down the search.

H.Samuel allows site visitors to enter a price range of their choice within the search results.

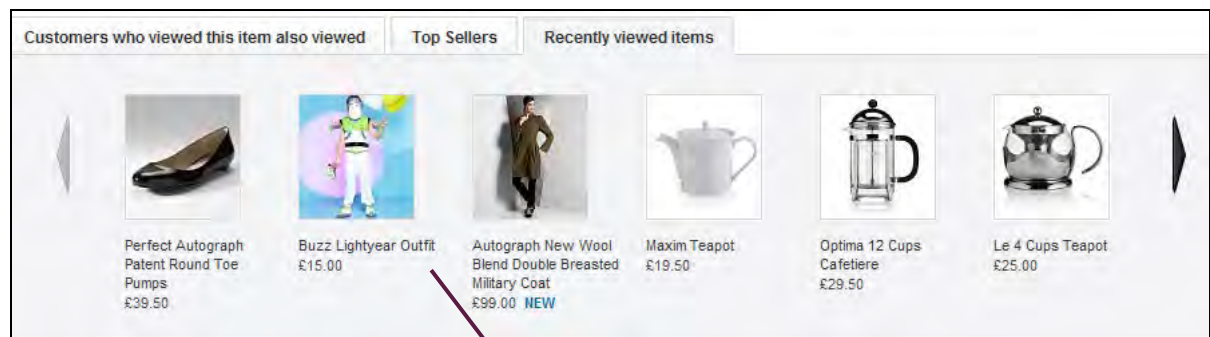
There hasn't been much change in this guideline since last year, with a 0.1 point drop in the average score this year to 3.9. Many websites are still missing top points as they don't enable site visitors to search within categories. This feature can be useful when site visitors know which category to look in and will save them some time compared to searching the entire site.

12. Website tracks previously viewed items

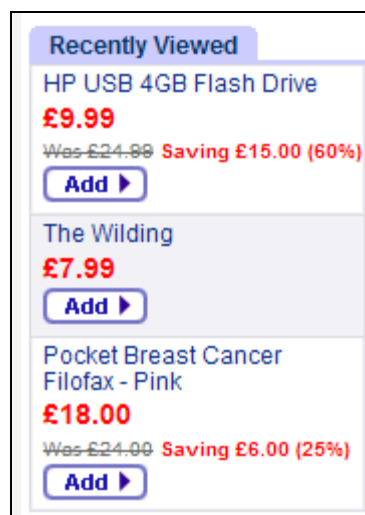
Average score: 2.0 (out of 5) [New guideline]

Shopping online gives site visitors the flexibility to browse multiple websites and compare different options. This would mean that site visitors won't necessarily remember their previously viewed items on a particular site unless they write it down on pen and paper.

Websites that track site visitor's previously viewed items (using a browser cookie) make it easier for them to revisit items that they previously viewed, increasing the chances of the product being purchased.



M&S has a good 'recently viewed items' section which displays not only the most recently viewed products but also the price of the product. However, it might take site visitors a while to find the option amongst the tabs.



WHSmith has a recently viewed section which also contains the price of the products and a button to add the product to the shopping basket.

With a low average score of 2 out of 5, most websites don't track viewed items to help make it easier for site visitors while they shop online. There's much room for improvement on this guideline to boost a website's image as well as increase its revenue.

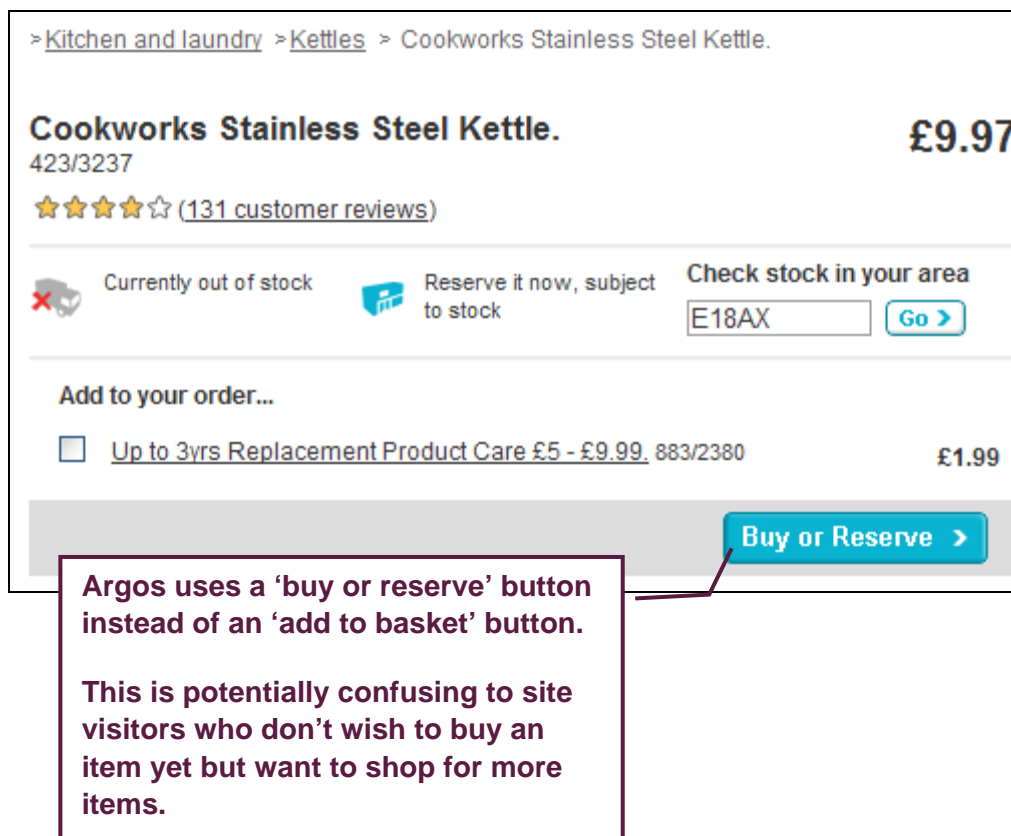
13. Highly visible 'Add to basket' button provided

Average score: 4.4 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.1]

The most important item on the product page, the 'Add to basket' button should:

- Have lots of white space around it
- Be above the fold
- Employ a strong background colour that's different to everything else on the page
- Say more than just 'Add' or 'Buy', as these will make it visually too small

In addition, it is important to provide clear feedback after an item has been added to a basket. Also, it's crucial that site visitors are given options to either continue shopping or go to checkout after adding an item to the basket.



> [Kitchen and laundry](#) > [Kettles](#) > Cookworks Stainless Steel Kettle.

Cookworks Stainless Steel Kettle. **£9.97**
423/3237
★★★★☆ (131 customer reviews)

Currently out of stock Reserve it now, subject to stock Check stock in your area

Add to your order...

Up to 3yrs Replacement Product Care £5 - £9.99. 883/2380 **£1.99**

Argos uses a 'buy or reserve' button instead of an 'add to basket' button.

This is potentially confusing to site visitors who don't wish to buy an item yet but want to shop for more items.

With 11 out of 20 sites scoring 5 out of 5 on this guideline, and a 0.3 points increase in the average score since last year, it's great to see that retailers are focusing on improving what is probably the most important button on their website.

14. Product description & enlargeable image provided

Average score: 4.0 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.9]

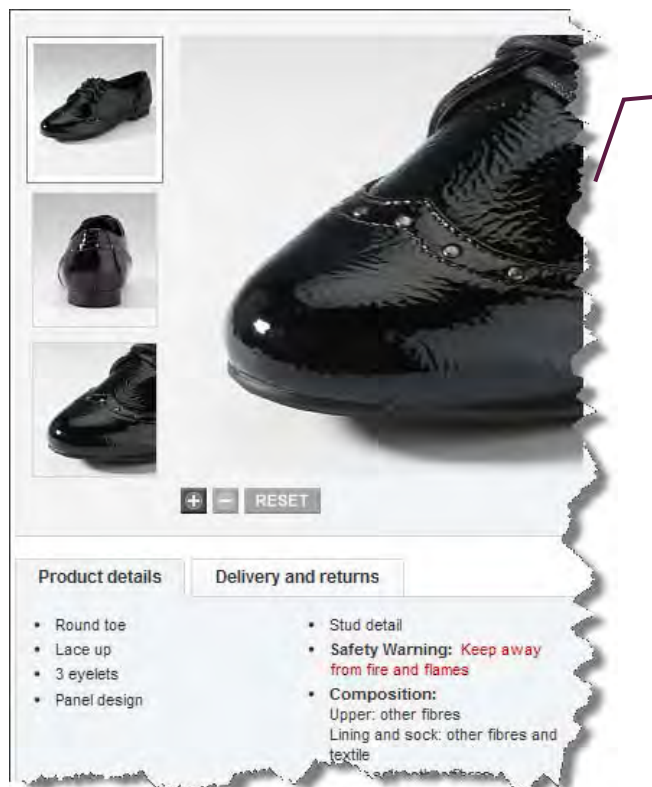
Bricks-and-mortar stores differ from ecommerce sites because shoppers can touch a product and view it from all angles and/or ask a shop assistant for help or additional information. In order to help site visitors gain a better view and understanding of a product online,

Product images need to:

- Be enlargeable and have zoom-in functionalities
- Contain multiple photos of a product from different viewing angles or in different states

Product descriptions need to:

- Be clear and concise
- Contain relevant details



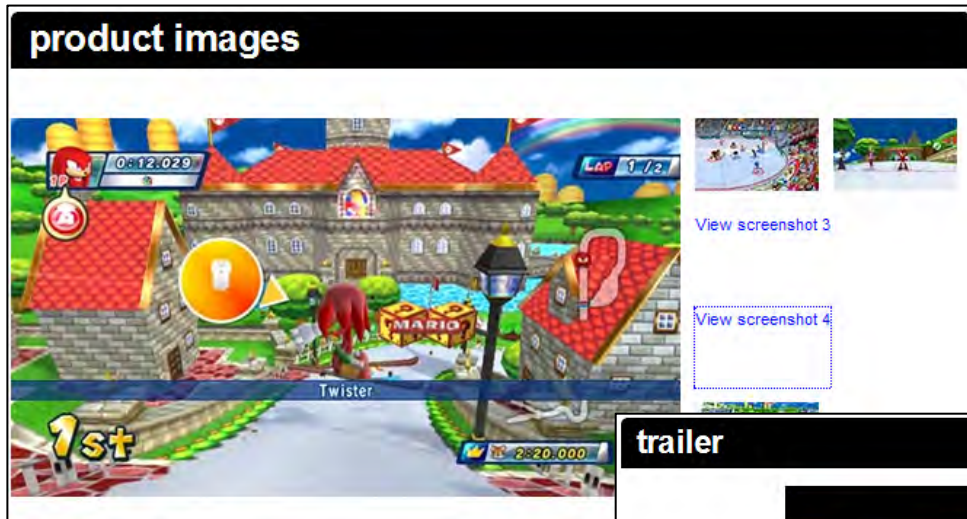
M&S scored high marks for having clear crisp images which automatically enlarges upon mouse-over, with the option to zoom-in further. Having multiple photos of the same product also provides site visitors with a more accurate view of the product.

In addition, the clear and concise details which are relevant to the product are also displayed clearly right below the product.

These options combined help site visitors make better decisions while shopping online.

Web users are obviously less likely to buy a product if insufficient information is provided about it and if they can't view detailed pictures. This becomes more important for products which are more costly.

As more products are available for purchase online (e.g. games, different types of interactive devices), it's important that websites provide suitable images (or videos when appropriate) to showcase the different types of products to their potential customers.



HMV displays product images and trailers for most of their games on their website. This provides site visitors with more flexibility while choosing a suitable product, which creates a more engaging shopping experience.

The average score for this guideline has decreased by 0.9 points from last year to 4.0. However, it's worth noting that the scoring criteria have been amended slightly to reflect the current trends of ecommerce websites.

As product images are the only way of seeing what a product looks like before buying, it's one of the crucial determining factors in persuading site visitors to buy online. The only alternative is to make a trip to the store.

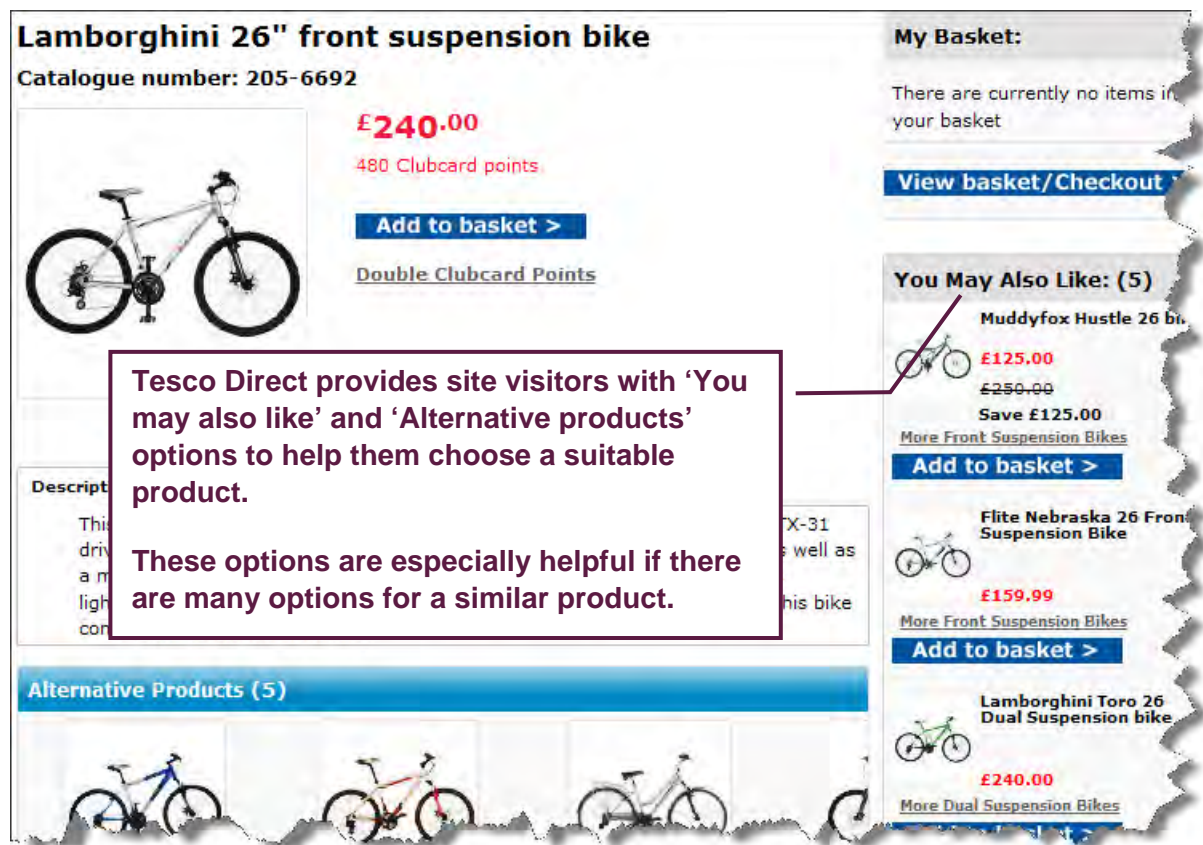
Given the importance of this guideline, we think more can be done to those websites that lost marks due to not having zoom-in functions for their images and/or having only a single image of a product.

15. Similar & complementary products available

Average score: 4.3 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.1]

If users visit a product page and don't add the product to their basket there's of course a good chance they won't be buying this product. As such, it's essential that any product page cross-sells, showcasing other similar products.

Product pages that don't conform to this rule don't show users an immediate path to more desirable products, making it harder for them to find a better choice or add to their existing choice.



Lamborghini 26" front suspension bike
 Catalogue number: 205-6692

£240.00
 480 Clubcard points

[Add to basket >](#)
 Double Clubcard Points

My Basket:
 There are currently no items in your basket
[View basket/Checkout](#)

You May Also Like: (5)

- Muddyfox Hustle 26 bi
 £125.00
 £250.00
 Save £125.00
[More Front Suspension Bikes](#)
[Add to basket >](#)
- Flite Nebraska 26 Fron
 Suspension Bike
 £159.99
[More Front Suspension Bikes](#)
[Add to basket >](#)
- Lamborghini Toro 26
 Dual Suspension bike
 £240.00
[More Dual Suspension Bikes](#)

Alternative Products (5)

Tesco Direct provides site visitors with 'You may also like' and 'Alternative products' options to help them choose a suitable product.

These options are especially helpful if there are many options for a similar product.

Major improvements were observed this year with 16 out of 20 websites scoring 5 out of 5 for this guideline. However with 2 sites still not providing such options, there's room for improvement.

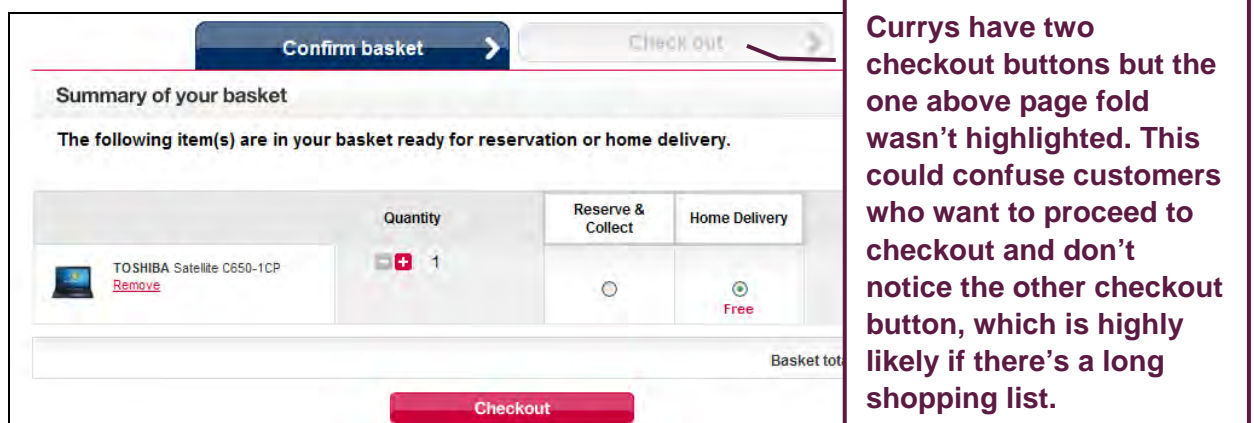
Providing similar and complementary options can definitely boost sales. In addition, similar to the expert sales person in stores, these options can also act as an expert recommendation feature to increase site visitors' shopping experience.

16. Highly visible 'Proceed to checkout' button at the top and bottom

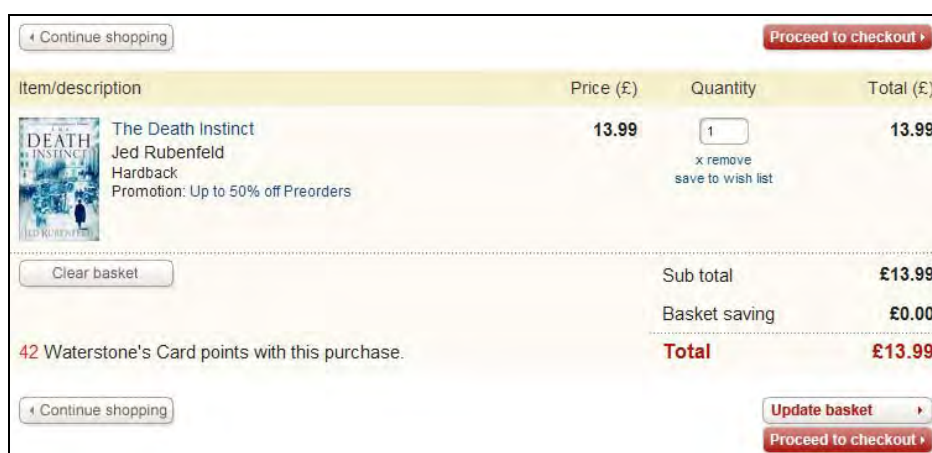
Average score: 4.4 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.9]

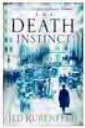
The most important item on the basket page, the 'Proceed to checkout' button should:

- Be at both the top and bottom of the page (so it's visible when the page first displays and also when users scroll to see the contents of their basket)
- Use identical formatting to the 'Add to basket' button and a different background colour to everything else on the page
- Have lots of white space around it so that it's easily noticeable amongst other site content



Currys have two checkout buttons but the one above page fold wasn't highlighted. This could confuse customers who want to proceed to checkout and don't notice the other checkout button, which is highly likely if there's a long shopping list.



Item/description	Price (£)	Quantity	Total (£)
 The Death Instinct Jed Rubenfeld Hardback Promotion: Up to 50% off Preorders	13.99	1 x remove save to wish list	13.99
		Sub total	£13.99
		Basket saving	£0.00
42 Waterstone's Card points with this purchase.		Total	£13.99

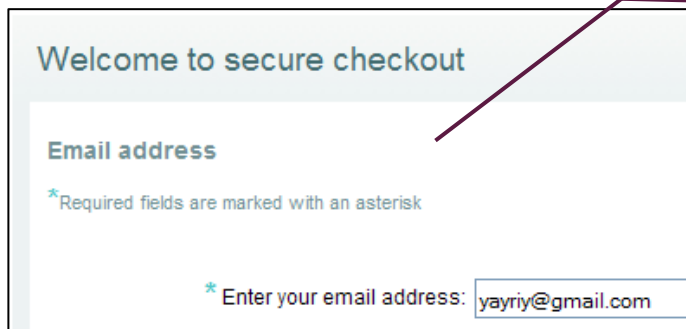
This guideline has shown some improvements since last year. Most of the websites lost marks by not displaying the checkout button above the page fold or not using the term 'Checkout' or 'Proceed to checkout'. This is an important guideline which is fairly easy to implement through careful design hence shouldn't be ignored by the 7 websites who didn't score full marks on this guideline.

17. The same form is used for logging in and registering

Average score: 0.9 (out of 5) [Last year: 0.4]

When entering the checkout process, websites historically had one form for logging on and a link to register for non-registered users. Drawn to the form, first time users would often enter their email (or username) and make up a password, thinking this was the form to register while it's actually for logging on. With such generic form labels as 'Email' and 'Password', this wasn't too surprising.

To prevent this error, more and more websites are combining the login and initial registration into one form.



John Lewis remains the only website which uses a same 'Email address' field for site visitors to log-in or register.

Speeding up the purchase process with a simple register/login function is also more likely to ensure that site visitors complete their purchases online.

However, some websites got around this by presenting only one form on the screen to reduce the confusion described earlier.



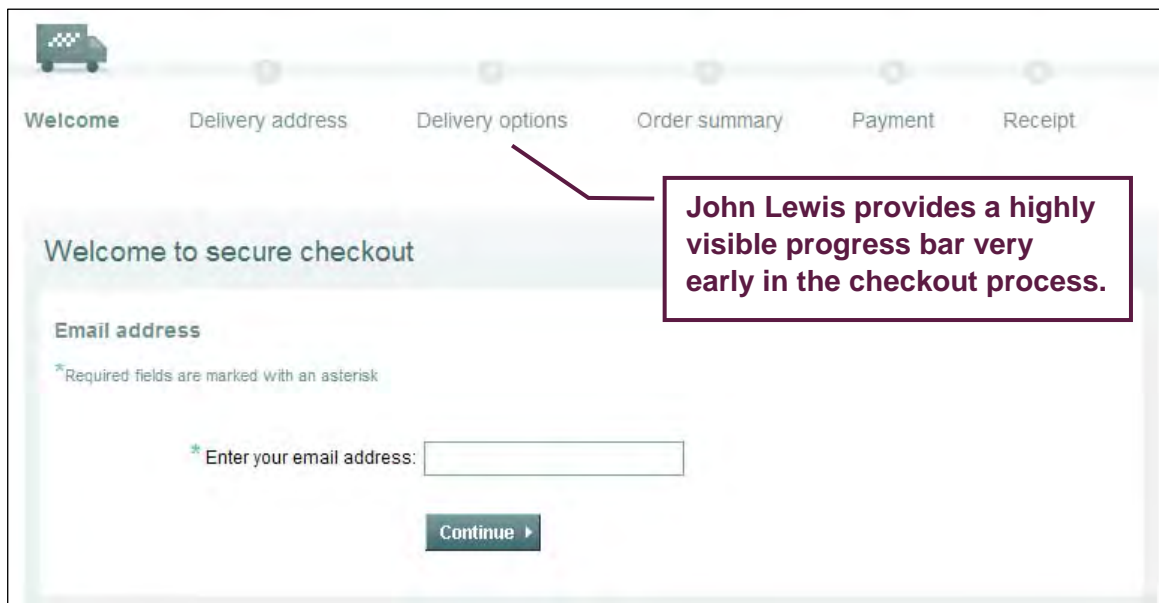
HMV uses a login form for existing customers and incorporates the registration for new customers into the checkout process.

With only one website using the same form for login and registering, and 3 websites incorporating the registration process into the checkout process in some way, there's a lot of room for improvement to simplify this process for a better user experience.

18. Highly visible progress bar provided during checkout

Average score: 4.4 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.4]

During the checkout process, users must be informed of where they are and how much further they have to go. This is usually achieved with a progress bar.



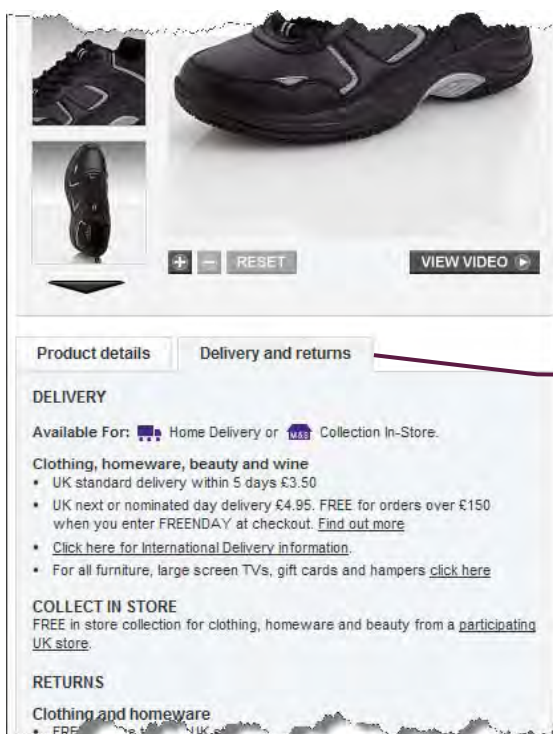
17 of our 20 websites scored 5 out of 5 for this old and well-established guideline showing that its importance is well recognised by most businesses. As site visitors are getting used to this convention on ecommerce websites, businesses who don't have progress bars on their websites could potentially frustrate users who are accustomed to tracking their progress while making payments online.

19. Delivery costs are highlighted at the beginning of the process

Average score: 4.9 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.3]

Before entering into the checkout process, users need to know exactly how much they'll be paying. There's nothing worse for an online shopper than to work through an ecommerce checkout and suddenly be told there are (hidden) extra charges.

Shipping costs can sometimes vary depending on the buyer's address and the shipping method. To remedy this, some ecommerce sites now provide an estimate of the delivery charges up front.



With an average score of 4.9 out of 5, it's great to see improvements on this guideline from last year's average score of 4.3. Most websites now realise the importance of providing delivery information upfront and not just during the checkout process to encourage site visitors to make purchases on their website.

20. Users are provided with sufficient help when an error is made

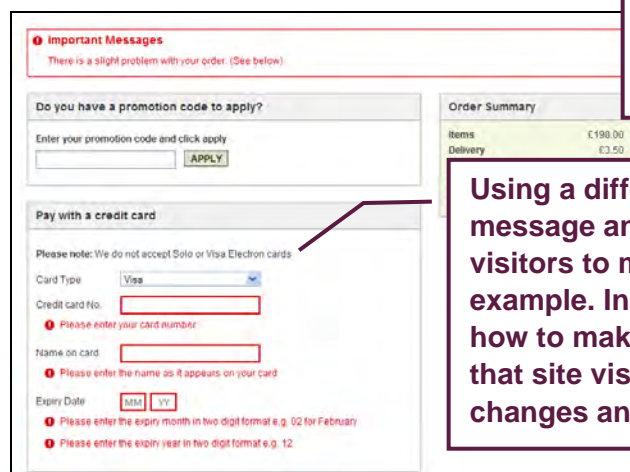
Average score: 3.9 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.2]

No matter how much ecommerce sites try to prevent it, users will make mistakes during the checkout process. If users can't immediately work out the error and how to fix it, they may be unwilling (or even unable) to continue with the checkout process. By providing them with highly visible and informative error messages, users can correct mistakes and continue on through the checkout process.

It's a better user experience if ecommerce websites predict and pre-empt user errors (through usability testing and analysis of web stats), rather than letting users try to resolve them when they happen. Websites can then take steps to ensure these errors don't take place, by providing written instructions or fixing the error automatically.



It's not recommended to use a pop-up to summarise or highlight errors as the information about the error and how to fix it will be lost as soon as the site visitor closes the box.



Using a different colour to display the error message and error fields makes it easier for site visitors to make changes as shown in the M&S example. In addition, providing instructions on how to make these changes also helps ensure that site visitors can easily make the appropriate changes and proceed with their checkout

There's been a slight improvement compared to last year with a 0.7 point increase in the average score this year. However, given the importance of this guideline (as it ensures site visitors complete the checkout process), more improvements can be made to support them while checking out. As making payments in a physical store is much easier and straightforward than online payments, businesses should improve their online checkout process to encourage their site visitors to shop online.

Conclusion

This has been another year of continuous improvement in website scores, which is good news for consumers trying to find good deals.

This improvement in site quality seems to be paying dividends for the retailers. John Lewis who is a consistent high performer in our analysis has reported a record number of site visitors and a 20% year on year increase in sales.⁵

To wrap-up the performance of the 20 websites over the past 5 years, we've made comparisons between average scores to determine:

- **John Lewis** was the only website that has consistently remained in the top 5 since 2006
- **GAME** and **WHSmith** have improved the most over the 5 years
- **Accessorize** (this year Monsoon Accessorize) has improved the least over the 5 years
- **NEXT** and **The Body Shop** have shown steady improvements every year
- **HMV** and **Mothercare** haven't changed much over the 5 years

Retailer	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
John Lewis	71	62	72	81	91
Early Learning Centre	74	59	75	75	90
Marks & Spencer	81	55	68	83	86
WHSmith	44	50	83	83	85
Boots	67	51	64	80	80
Debenhams	50	57	67	67	79
Hamleys	54	54	72	72	79
B&Q (added in 2007)	-	54	69	76	78
Game	35	66	67	74	78
Argos	69	62	67	73	77
Next	43	49	65	68	77
Mothercare	73	64	64	74	76

HMV	70	70	72	75	75
Currys	66	61	68	70	74
The Body Shop	54	62	65	69	72
H.Samuel	64	57	70	76	72
Waterstones	62	59	69	75	71
Top Shop	31	47	56	56	67
Tesco Direct (added in 2010)	-	-	-	-	65
Accessorize	52	54	58	59	59
Clinton Cards (removed in 2007)	25	-	-	-	-
Woolworths (removed in 2010)	50	48	65	80	-

The usability guidelines presented in this report represent just the start to achieving excellent usability and an outstanding user experience. The use of usability guidelines is essential, but they should always be used in conjunction with usability testing on a regular basis. Usability testing involves analysing typical site visitors complete typical tasks on your website (see www.webcredible.co.uk/testing for more).

For more information on other general usability guidelines that should be conformed to, visit www.webcredible.co.uk/articles or book a place on a Webcredible usability course at www.webcredible.co.uk/training.

References

1. Webcredible, 'The Online High Street: Ecommerce usability for UK high street retailers in 2009' (www.webcredible.co.uk/ecommerce2009)
2. Internet World Stats (www.internetworldstats.com/eu/uk.htm)
3. Office for National Statistics (www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?ID=8)
4. IMRG Capgemini Sales Index: Bad Weather Prompts Electrical Goods Summer Surge (www.imrg.org)
5. Marketing Magazine, 'John Lewis profits up 20% following year of profound change' (www.marketingmagazine.co.uk/news/989665/John-Lewis-profits-20-following-year-profound-change)

Appendix: Full results

The full list of websites audited, and the score they achieved for each guideline is as follows:

Website	Guideline number																				TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
John Lewis	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	1	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	91
Early Learning Centre	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	5	5	0	5	5	5	90
Marks & Spencer	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	1	5	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	0	5	5	5	86
WHSmith	4	5	5	3	2	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	0	5	5	3	85
Boots	4	5	4	5	5	3	5	5	5	3	4	0	3	4	5	5	0	5	5	5	80
Hamleys	5	5	5	3	1	5	4	0	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	0	5	5	3	79
Debenhams	4	5	5	3	5	4	4	1	5	3	5	0	5	4	5	5	2	5	5	4	79
B&Q	4	5	5	4	5	2	2	5	5	5	4	0	5	4	5	3	0	5	5	5	78
Game	4	4	5	4	5	3	4	0	5	3	4	0	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	78
Argos	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	1	4	0	3	3	5	3	0	5	5	5	77

Next	4	5	5	2	5	4	2	5	5	3	4	0	4	4	5	5	0	5	5	5	77
Mothercare	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	1	2	2	3	0	5	5	5	5	0	5	5	5	76
HMV	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	0	5	1	4	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	2	75
Currys	4	5	5	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	4	0	4	3	3	2	0	5	5	3	74
H.Samuel	5	4	5	2	3	4	4	1	5	5	5	0	4	4	3	3	0	5	5	5	72
The Body Shop	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	1	0	3	2	5	4	3	5	5	0	5	5	1	72
Waterstones	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	1	5	0	4	3	5	5	0	0	5	2	71
Top Shop	4	5	5	3	5	5	2	1	0	3	2	5	5	4	0	5	0	5	5	3	67
Tesco Direct	5	5	5	3	3	4	4	0	5	1	4	0	2	3	5	5	0	3	3	5	65
Monsoon Accessorize	3	5	5	1	2	5	5	1	2	2	3	5	5	4	0	4	0	0	5	2	59
TOTAL	87	96	99	72	80	84	83	47	84	62	78	40	87	79	86	87	17	88	98	77	76.6
Average score	4.4	4.8	5.0	3.6	4.0	4.0	4.2	2.4	4.2	3.1	3.9	2.0	4.4	4.0	4.3	4.4	0.9	4.4	4.9	3.9	

About Webcredible

Webcredible is a user experience consultancy, offering a range of usability, accessibility, design & training services based around your specific requirements:

User-centered design

- Information architecture
- Interaction design

User research

- Usability testing
- Interviews & focus groups
- Persona creation

Accessibility

- Accessibility testing
- Accessible web design

Training & mentoring

- Usability & accessibility courses
- Online copywriting courses
- Web development courses

Webcredible is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and respected user experience consultancies in the UK. Our 200+ research articles and reports have been re-published on 100s of websites and we receive 250,000 visitors to our website each month.

We believe in taking a proactive approach with clients, whilst maintaining a regular open line of communication. We believe that we are being paid for our expertise and as such always take the initiative and offer our recommendations for any course of action. We are:

- **Focused on client needs** – Our aims are to optimise conversion rates for companies and ensure public sector organisations effectively disseminate information.
- **Passionate** – The team here at Webcredible loves what they do and we only recruit staff passionate about usability and accessibility.
- **Approachable** – We're friendly and jargon-free. Consultants, despite being highly educated and experienced, only communicate in a user-friendly manner.

Clients include Airmiles, Asda, BBC, eBay, EDF Energy, Filofax, I Want One Of Those, JD Sports, Laura Ashley, Liz Earle, Lloyds TSB, More Th>n, Sony and T-Mobile.