

The Online High Street

Ecommerce usability for UK high street retailers in 2008



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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 2007¹. Now, there's an estimated 41.8 million Internet users in the UK representing nearly 69% of the population². According to the Office for National Statistics, 56% of adults claim to have purchased products over the Internet³. With 90% of these web users on broadband connections, shopping online has never been more convenient⁴.

This is illustrated by the amount of money being spent on Internet purchases. UK consumers spent £16 billion online in 2004 across 262 million transactions. By 2005 this had risen to £22 billion spent across 310 million transactions. By April 2010, online spending will have almost tripled to £60 billion per year⁵.

However, this phenomenal growth is not being matched on the high street. In May 2005, total retail sales growth was at its slowest rate since 1947, with a year-on-year increase of just 0.9%. In contrast, Internet sales reached an all-time high, with online shopping growth outstripping that of the high street by a factor of 40. In 2006, Internet Christmas shopping exceeded all expectations, with close to £1 billion of sales a week during the first three weeks of December.

About this report

In October 2007, Webcredible investigated the usability of the websites of 20 of the UK's leading high street shops. Last year, the top high street retailers simply weren't doing enough to maximise their share of this potential revenue in preparation for Christmas. This year, Webcredible has decided to re-investigate against the same essential usability criteria to see if there's been any change in the run-up to Christmas this year.

Increasing the usability of any ecommerce website will increase sales – it's as simple as that. This sales increase could even be as high as 100%⁵. Improved usability will also lead to an increase in brand loyalty and return site visitors, and an improvement in the perception of your brand (both online and offline).

Evaluations of the 20 websites featured in this study were conducted throughout October 2008.

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 October 2008.

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. Visited links to products change colour

Search results

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

Browsing

9. Product categories are provided and clearly visible on the homepage
10. Orientation cues are provided
11. Navigation within a category is possible

Product page

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

Basket

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

Checkout

16. The same form is used for both logging in and registering
17. Highly visible progress bar provided during checkout
18. Delivery costs are highlighted at the very beginning of the process
19. Users are provided with sufficient help when an error is made
20. Summary page is used and clearly shows the purchase hasn't been made

Results

Executive Summary

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

2008 rank	2007 rank	Website	2008 score	2007 score
1	↑ 17	WHSmith (www.whsmith.co.uk)	83	50
2	↑ 8	Early Learning Centre (www.elc.co.uk)	75	59
3=	↑ 15	Hamleys (www.hamleys.com)	72	54
3=	↓ 1	HMV (www.hmv.co.uk)	72	70
3=	↑ 5	John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com)	72	62
6	↑ 11	H.Samuel (www.hsamuel.co.uk)	70	57
7=	↑ 13	B&Q (www.diy.com)	69	54
7=	↑ 9	Waterstones (www.waterstones.co.uk)	69	59
9=	↓ 7	Currys (www.currys.co.uk)	68	61
9=	↑ 12	Marks & Spencer (www.mands.com)	68	55
11=	↓ 4	Argos (www.argos.co.uk)	67	62
11=	↑ 10	Debenhams (www.debenhams.com)	67	57
11=	↓ 2	Game (www.game.co.uk)	67	66
14=	↓ 6	The Body Shop (www.bodyshop.co.uk)	65	62
14=	↑ 18	Next (www.next.co.uk)	65	49
14=	↑ 19	Woolworths (www.woolworths.co.uk)	65	48
17=	↓ 16	Boots (www.boots.co.uk)	64	51
17=	↓ 3	Mothercare (www.mothercare.com)	64	64
19	↓ 14	Accessorize (www.accessorize.co.uk)	58	54
20	- 20	Topshop (www.topshop.co.uk)	56	47
		Average score	67.8	57.0

Compared against last year's results, there's a significant and promising trend towards improvement across the sector.

Last year's lowest score of 47 has increased to 56 in 2008 with an overall average of 67.8 across the sample.



User experience research & design

3 of the top scoring sites have increased their position dramatically this year – 16 points in the case of the Early Learning Centre, 18 for Hamleys and most significantly WHSmith with 33 points difference. This change has placed WHSmith at the top of our table with 83 points.

The dramatic changes observed in these 3 websites have undoubtedly contributed to the wholesale increase in the average across the sample. Whilst this is good news for those sites at the top of the list, it's clear that the many sites scoring in the 50s and 60s can do much more to improve the usability of their online offering.

This year, the online retailers were much more effective at supporting their site visitors with better searching and browsing controls. Web users will generally explore your catalogue through a combination of search and browse behaviour. Therefore the quality of the tools you provide at the beginning of the user journey makes a big difference to whether they can find what they're looking for.

Once your site visitors have found what they want, they'll expect to find good quality product descriptions and images used on product pages. This is another area of significant positive change this year.

The usability of the checkout process on your website has a huge impact on your conversion statistics. It's promising that so many of the top high street brands are providing a better user experience on this important part of the journey this year.

For example, the 20 sites have improved their summary pages before checkout. It's important that retail websites adopt a clear summary page, communicating clearly to site visitors and allowing them the chance to perform a final review of their order details before committing to the purchase.

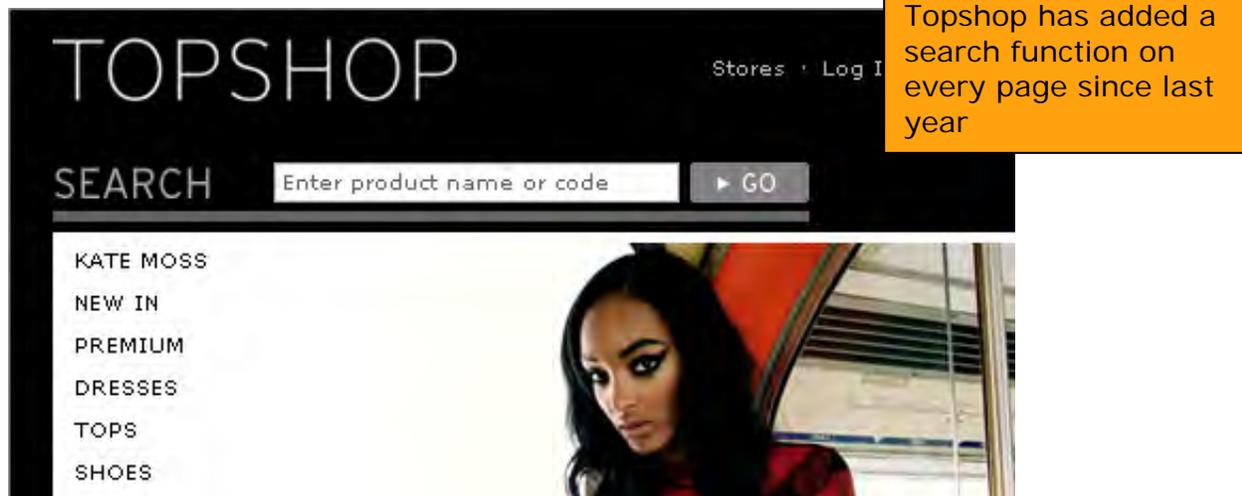
Please consult the appendix on p28 for a full breakdown of scores.

Category: General

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

Average score: 4.9 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.7]

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.



This is a well established usability guideline and once again most of the websites performed very well against it. While 18 websites scored 5 out of 5 for this guideline the remaining 2 scored 4 only because their search function didn't immediately stand out as highly visible.

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
- There should be plenty of white space surrounding the search function
- The word 'Search' should be used at least once

Category: General

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

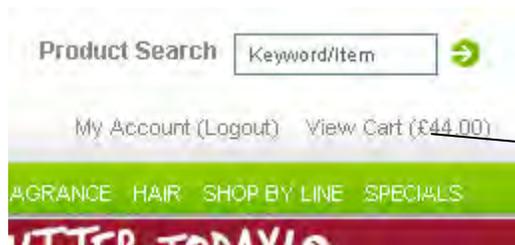
Average score: 3.7 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.8]

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.



Hamleys' website visitors can see the contents of their shopping bag as well as go straight to the checkout from every page



The Body Shop's shopping basket is hardly visible although it's in the same place on every page

There's not much movement in the scores this year so the risk remains as last year that many high street retailers leave themselves open to risking lower clicks into their checkout process. If site visitors can't find the basket and checkout then they can't buy any products!

Category: General

3. Price is always clearly displayed next to any product

Average score: 3.9 (out of 5) [Last year: 4.2]

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 users to click through just to see this most basic of information.



12" Manchester United Bike

Now: £69.99



Description
Your little Red Devil will love getting to grips with the outdoors on this 12" Manchester United Bike. In their signature bright red, this bike features a fully enclosed chain guard, removable stabilisers and adjustable short reach lever brakes for extra safety. Complete with the legendary club badge printed on front wheel disc and stabilisers. Suitable for ages 3+

Features

- Manchester United bike
- 12" wheels
- Club badge printed on front wheel disc and stabilisers
- Fully enclosed chain guard
- Removable stabilisers
- Adjustable short reach lever brakes
- Inside leg: 14" to 19"

 **Enlarge Image**

Surprisingly, this year the average dropped to 3.9 out of 5. Overall, 13 out of 20 sites are still doing an excellent job for this guideline, but what about the 2 sites that scored only 2 out of 5?

Category: General

4. Users are given help in choosing products

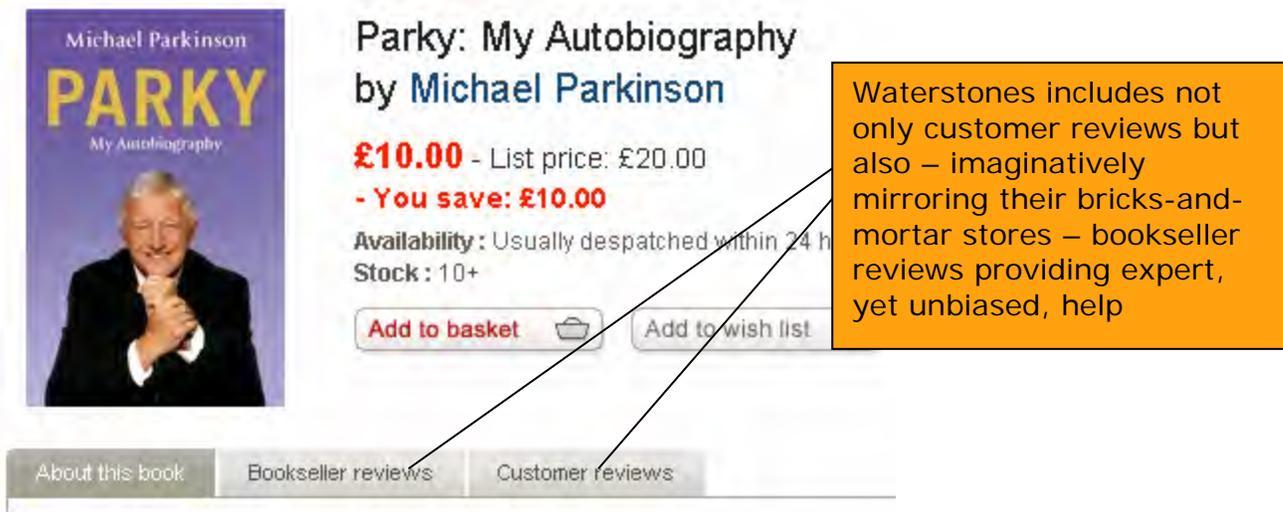
Average score: 3.3 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.1]

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 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.



There has been a very small rise again this year with an average score of 3.3 out of 5 (up 0.2 on last year). While this is a good average score, it's disappointing that the top high street retailers aren't doing more with this guideline as they're very good at doing this in their bricks-and-mortar stores.

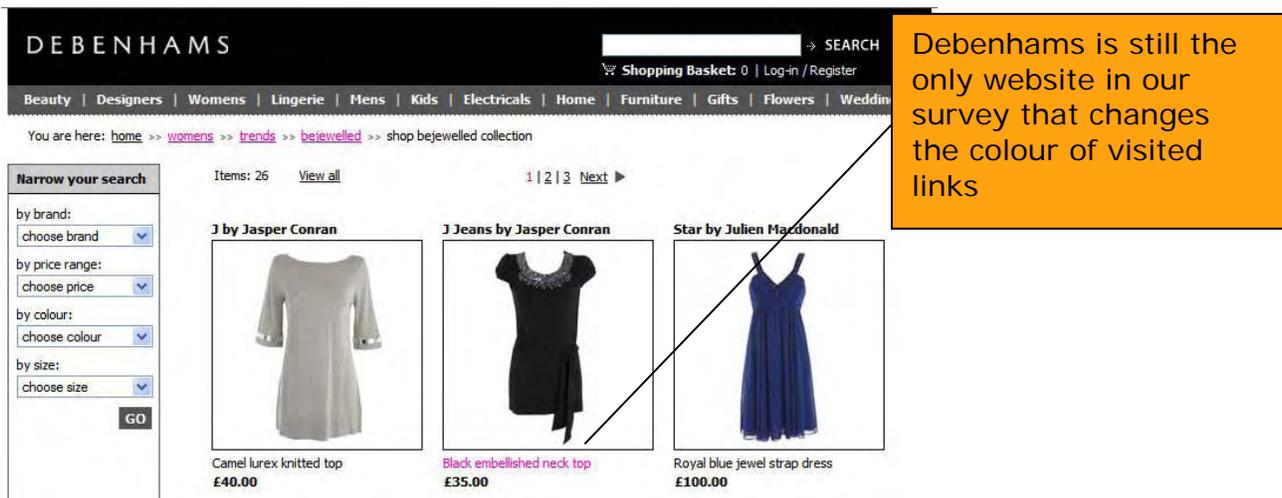
Category: General

5. Visited links to products change colour

Average score: 0.2 (out of 5) [Last year: 0.2]

In any product listing, it's crucial for site visitors that visited links to products are highlighted as being visited. Users may click on a product link, have a look at the product and then return to the product listing to look at a different product. Once they've done this a few times, it can be difficult to remember which products they've clicked on so they may be unable to remember which they thought was the best one.

Visited link text colour should ideally be a low contrast version of the regular link text colour.



Prescription results (36)

These results are to be used if you have a prescription for the items you searched for.

ALPHOSYL 2-IN-1 SHAMPOO
ALPHOSYL 2-IN-1 SHAMPOO
BETADINE SHAMPOO 4%
CAPASAL SHAMPOO
CEANEL CONCENTRATE SHAMPOO
CEANEL CONCENTRATE SHAMPOO
CLINITAR SHAMPOO
DANDRAZOL SHAMPOO 2%
DANDRAZOL ANTI-DANDRUFF SHAMPOO 2%
DANDRAZOL ANTI-DANDRUFF SHAMPOO 2%

It's very difficult to see which link has been visited from this list of search results for shampoo on the Boots website

Yet again, as last year, only Debenhams changes the colour of visited link text this year. This result continues to be very disappointing.

So why do so few sites conform to this guideline? We suspect the reason may be to do with aesthetics as pages can appear 'messy' if littered with a mix of visited and normal link colours. However this guideline is among the simplest to implement in technical terms and could take as little as a few minutes to change. The benefit to the site visitor however would be much more long lasting.

Category: Search results

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

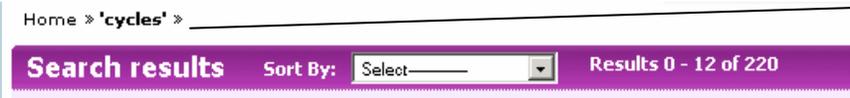
Average score: 4.4 (out of 5) [Last year: 2.9]

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).



Mothercare clearly highlights the search term in a different colour alongside the number of results returned



Although the search term is displayed on the Woolworths website, it's small and too far away from the number of results; it's also 'hidden' in the breadcrumb

There has been a significant improvement in the average scores of the 3 guidelines in the search results category but, of the 3, this guideline saw the biggest rise in average from last year (a staggering 1.5).

It's reassuring to see that care is being taken to ease the site visitor's search in this simple yet highly effective way.

Category: Search results

7. Option to change number of products displayed is provided

Average score: 1.2 (out of 5) [Last year: 0.3]

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.



Boots allows the site visitor to change the number of results per page

Last year only 1 site scored well for this guideline but this year there are 6 sites scoring between 3 and 5 out of 5. While the overall average has been raised this is mainly due to big improvements in a small number sites rather than incremental change across the board.

Category: Search results

8. Sort and filter options are available

Average score: 4.1 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.0]

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

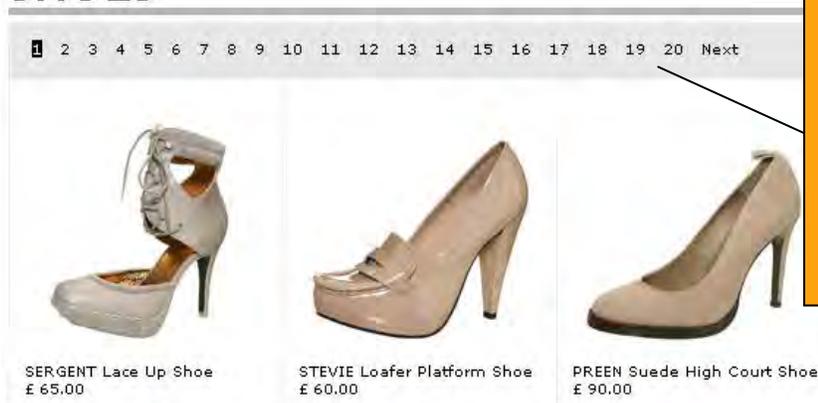
Sorting a product listing allows users to bring products with certain criteria to the top of the page. This is particularly useful for users who aren't exactly sure what they want. Users can usually sort by price to bring the cheapest products to the top, or by best selling to immediately see what other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

Filtering on the other hand lets users 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 users who know a bit about the product(s) as filter criteria are usually product-specific.



Next allows their users to both sort and filter (refine) their search results

SHOES



There's no way of narrowing the search with filters and no indication of how many products are returned in this search on the Topshop website; site visitors can expect a long trawl through over 20 pages of results

It's heartening to see such a significant rise (1.1) this year. 14 out of the 20 sites scored either 4 or 5 out of 5 for this guideline. Those sites have obviously seen the benefit of easing the site visitor's search for just exactly what they are looking for. This in turn more easily converts into a sale.

Category: Browsing

9. Product categories are provided and clearly visible on the homepage

Average score: 4.9 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.8]

Upon entering any ecommerce website, users will use one of two methods to find the product they want: browse or search. Due to historically bad search engines within websites, many users don't trust site searches so will often begin by browsing to find products. Only if they can't find what they're looking for will they resort to the site search.



This is one of the 3 highest scoring guidelines this year, seeing a significant rise from last year (3.8). This year 17 out of 20 sites scored 5 out of 5. Easy-to-find products convert to sales more efficiently. Well done!

Category: Browsing

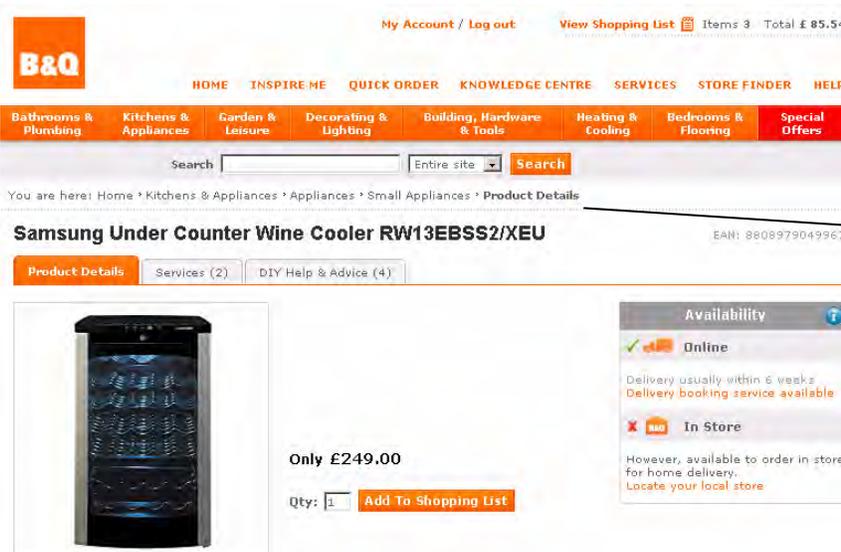
10. Orientation cues are provided and clearly visible on the homepage

Average score: 3.2 (out of 5) [Last year: 2.8]

Being able to browse to find a product is crucial for many users, especially users 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.



Apart from the breadcrumb there are no cues on the B&Q website to show users where they are in the site

Improvements in this guideline are spread across the board. However, with only 9 out of 20 sites scoring either 4 or 5 out of 5 there's clearly still room for improvement across the top 20 retail sites. Last year there were 11 sites that scored 4 or 5 out of 5 – this drop is disappointing.

The use of orientation cues to help users know where they are within the site is a long established guideline that can (and should) be applied across all websites.

Category: Browsing

11. Navigation within a category is possible

Average score: 3.8 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.2]

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.



The screenshot shows the WHSmith website's navigation menu. The 'BOOKS' tab is selected. A dropdown menu is open, showing 'Browse Books' with a list of sub-categories: Art, Craft & Photography, Audiobooks, Biography, Business & Finance, Children's, Comics & Graphic Novels, Computing & Technology, Crime & Thriller, and eBooks. To the right, there are filter options: 'Browse Blank Media' (with an 'Expand Results' link), 'Back to Stationery', 'Narrow by Sub Category' (listing DVD (31), CD (18), USB (6), and Blank Media Clearance (1)), 'Narrow by Price' (listing Under £5 (6), £5 - £10 (28), £10 - £15 (15), £15 - £20 (10), and £20 - £30 (5)), and 'Search Within Results' (with a search input field and a 'Go' button). An orange callout box points to the 'Browse Books' dropdown menu.

WHSmith provides a substantial breakdown within categories and enables it via sub-navigation and search and filter functions

Only 5 out of the 20 websites scored under 4 out of 5 this year. This is a great improvement from 9 out of 20 last year and shows that high street retailers are less inclined to forcing their site visitors into using the search function regardless of whether they want to or not.

Category: Product page

12. Highly visible 'Add to basket' button provided

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

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



14 out of websites scored more than 3 out of 5 this year compared to 7 websites last year. Across the board the score averages at 3.9 which is a healthy rise from last year's 3.2.

As the primary call-to-action, it's essential that ecommerce websites have an effective 'Add to basket' button. It looks like this year websites have taken on this challenge.

Category: Product page

13. Product description & enlargeable image provided

Average score: 4.8 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.7]

Bricks-and-mortar stores differ from ecommerce sites because shoppers can:

- Touch a product and view it from all angles
- Ask a shop assistant for help or additional information

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 as the price of the product increases.



marc eckō
watches

A stunning limited edition Marc Ecko box set. Featuring a presentation box, choice of straps and a stylish glittering Marc Ecko watch this a fashionable watch for any occasion.

Brand	Marc Ecko
Case material	Stainless steel
Stone colour	White
Face colour	Silver
Face diameter	4.4 cm
Face shape	Round
Stone type	Swarovski crystal
Strap style	Bracelet
Watch feature	Water resistant to 50m

H.Samuel provides a succinct summary description and the possibility to enlarge the image to view the detail

Enlarge this image

There's been an impressive rise this year in this guideline from 3.7 last year to 4.8 out of 5. Excellent!

While it takes effort to produce high quality content and definition images, the pay off has to be worth it if site visitors can make an informed choice and compare like with like. After all, users are highly unlikely to buy a product without first reading about it and seeing decent photos.

Category: Product page

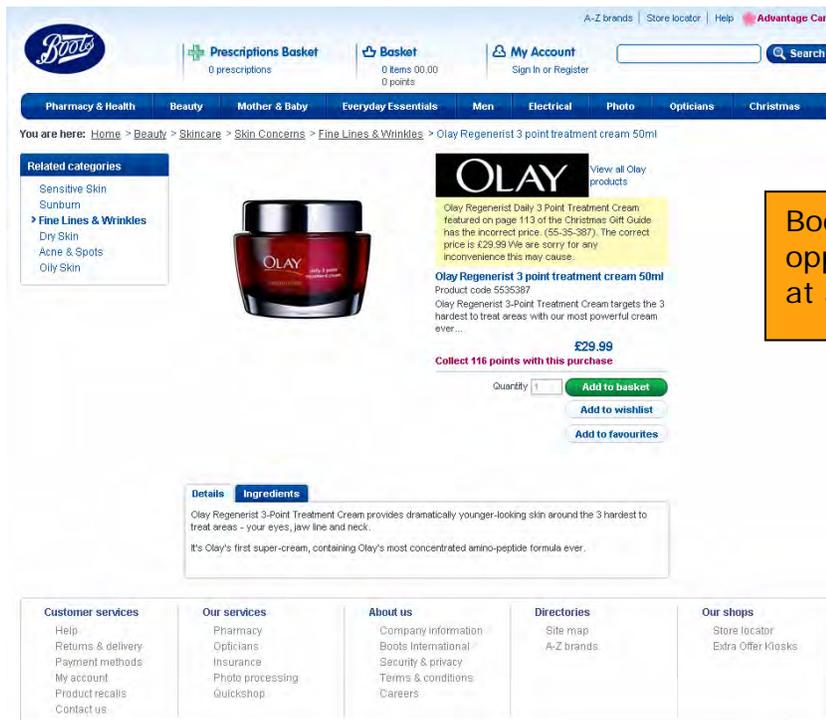
14. Similar & complementary products available

Average score: 3.6 (out of 5) [Last year: 2.8]

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 not conforming 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.



Accessorize uses natural language in suggesting complementary products



Boots doesn't take up the opportunity for cross-selling at all

With half of the 20 websites scoring 4 or 5 out of 5 (up from 7 last year) there is still work to be done in improving the opportunity to promote similar products on product pages. Your site visitors shouldn't have to hunt around the website to find these products themselves – something they're unlikely to do when the switching costs of visiting your competitors' website are very low indeed.

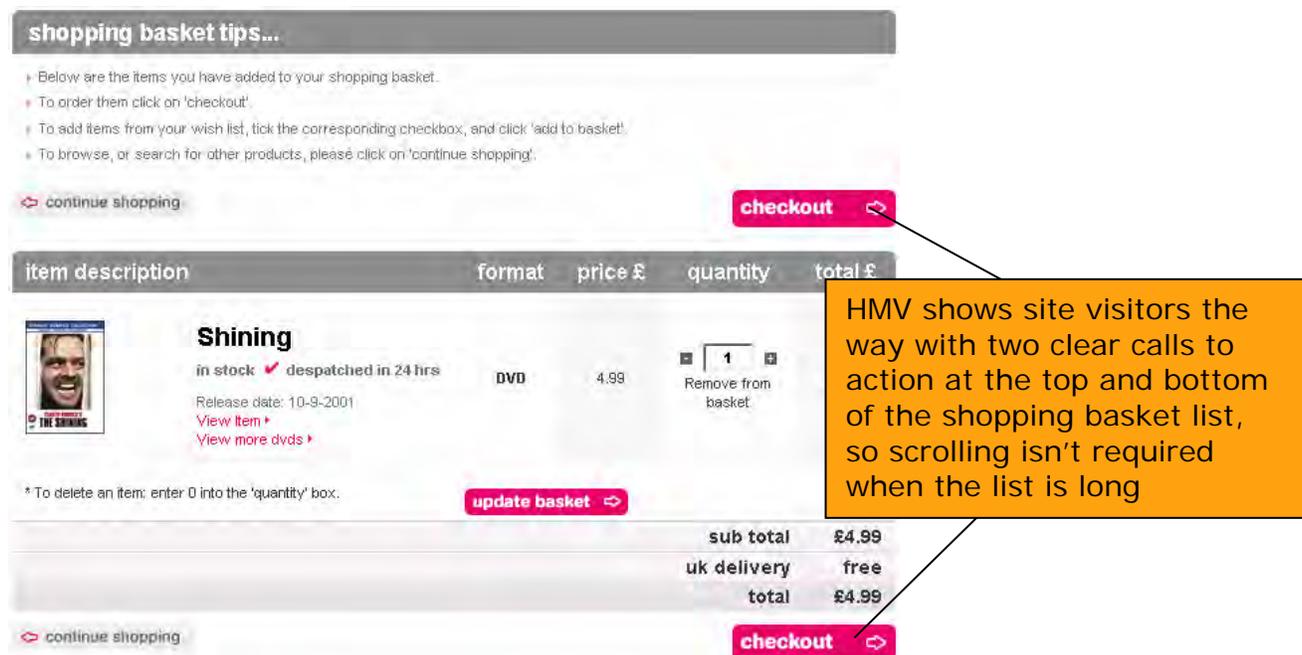
Category: Basket

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

Average score: 4.3 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.4]

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



The screenshot shows a shopping basket page with a grey header 'shopping basket tips...' containing instructions. Below is a table with columns: item description, format, price £, quantity, total £. The first item is 'Shining' (DVD, £4.99, quantity 1). Below the table is an 'update basket' button. At the bottom right, a summary shows: sub total £4.99, uk delivery free, total £4.99. Two 'checkout' buttons are highlighted with orange callouts: one at the top right and one at the bottom right. The callout text reads: 'HMV shows site visitors the way with two clear calls to action at the top and bottom of the shopping basket list, so scrolling isn't required when the list is long'.

This guideline has shot up from the 4th lowest last year to 5th overall this year and the average score has increased from 3.4 to 4.3 out of 5.

Having site visitors actually notice the button that leads to the checkout process is absolutely critical. Additionally having that functionality at both ends of the shopping list ensures site visitors don't get lost along the way to their purchase.

Most of these ecommerce sites could learn a thing or two from the HMV basket page, where the two 'checkout' buttons are easily the most visually striking items on the page.

Category: Checkout

16. The same form is used for both logging in and registering

Average score: 0.3 (out of 5) [Last year: 1.8]

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, registered users would often enter their email (or username) and make up a password, thinking this was the form to register. 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 doesn't require site visitors to fill out a separate form when registering/logging in

The Early Learning Centre launches a pop-up to log in and has a completely separate page for registration, which goes part way towards curing the potential ambiguity between the forms, but isn't ideal

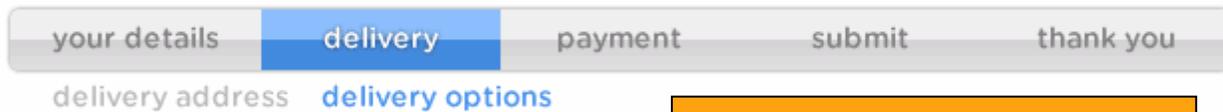
With an average of just 1.8 out of 5 and 35% of the websites scoring 0 out of 5 in 2007 it's abundantly clear that many websites have taken a step backwards from 2006's average of 3.2 out of 5. This year the average is 0.3 out of 5 and shows that online retailers are opting to keep the two processes separate.

Category: Checkout

17. Highly visible progress bar provided during checkout

Average score: 4.0 (out of 5) [Last year: 3.2]

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.



Currys has a very clear progress bar and also highlights sub-steps to provide even more granular transparency to their site visitors

14 of our 20 websites scored 4 or 5 out of 5 for this old and well established guideline showing a continued increase in the adoption of this guideline (from 10 last year). However 2 sites are still failing to provide a progress bar at all, which is disappointing. Those sites that did provide a progress bar may have lost marks because the visibility of theirs was too low.

Category: Checkout

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

Average score: 3.5 (out of 5) [Last year: 2.6]

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.



Free standard delivery on everything

Buy online or in our shops and get free standard delivery.

John Lewis' website includes this banner on most of their pages, including the shopping basket, before proceeding to checkout

After last year's drop, this year sees a healthy rise showing that retailers want to be more transparent about the online shopping process. However, 7 out of 20 websites still score less than 4 out of 5 in this guideline. This simply isn't good enough.

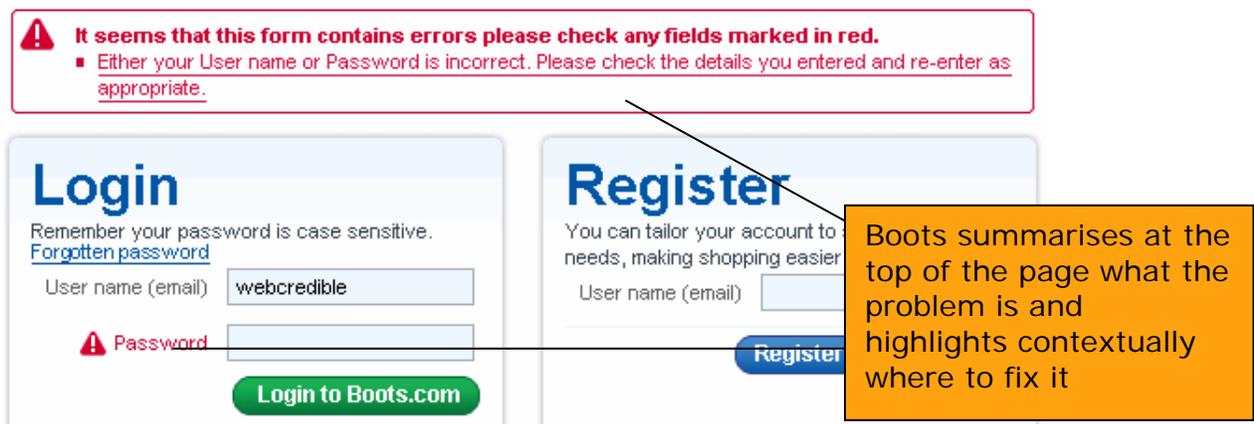
Category: Checkout

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

Average score: 3.0 (out of 5) [Last year: 2.7]

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 seems that this form contains errors please check any fields marked in red.

- Either your User name or Password is incorrect. Please check the details you entered and re-enter as appropriate.

Login
Remember your password is case sensitive.
[Forgotten password](#)
User name (email)
⚠ Password
Login to Boots.com

Register
You can tailor your account to needs, making shopping easier
User name (email)
Register

Boots summarises at the top of the page what the problem is and highlights contextually where to fix it



Login / Register Here

Register
Not got a GAME Account?
Create one here!
Create Account

Login to your GAME account
Email:
Password: *
Login
Lost Password?
• Please enter your password

Game's website doesn't highlight the invalid email address input and summarises the errors after the form

About the same number of retailers scored 4 or 5 out of 5 this year as last (6 for 2008 and 5 in 2007). The rest are taking a risk by potentially frustrating their users during checkout.

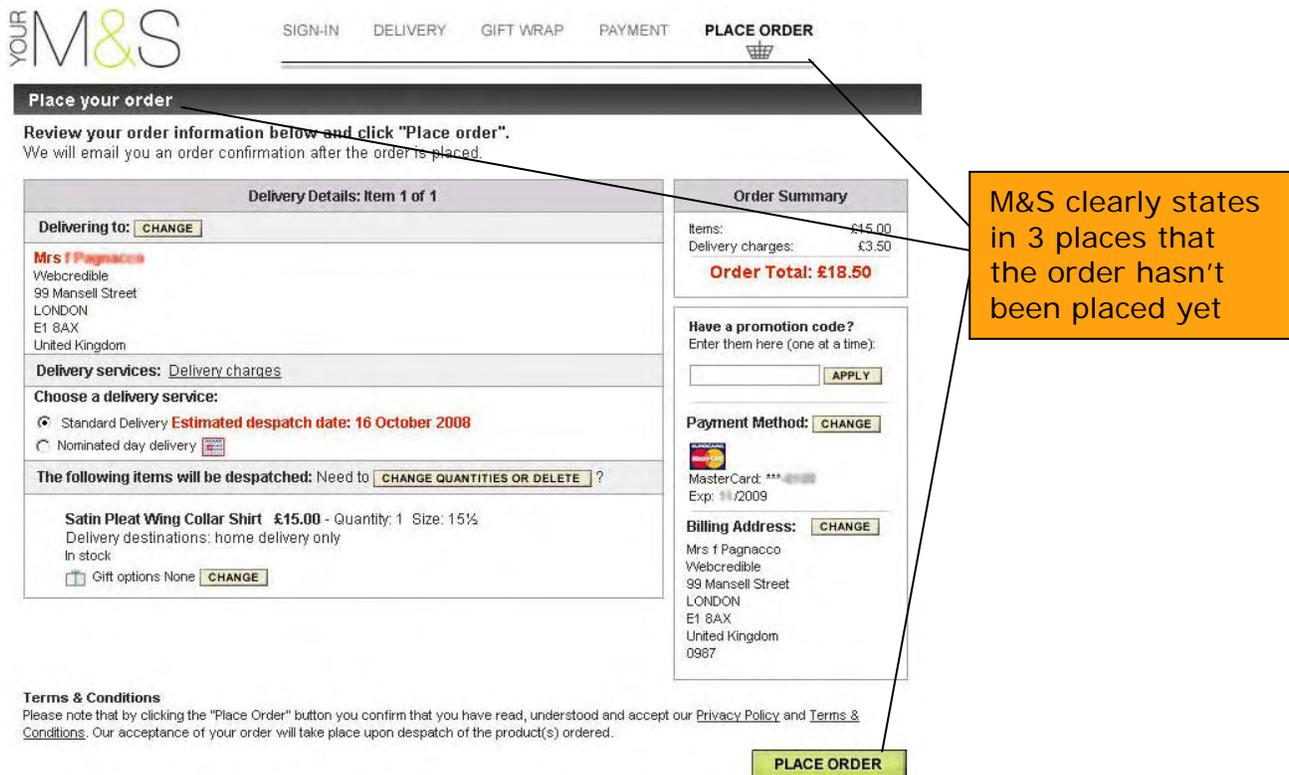
Category: Checkout

20. Summary page is used and clearly shows the purchase hasn't been made

Average score: 3.3 (out of 5) [Last year: 2.2]

Ecommerce websites have lost literally millions of pounds by users clicking away from the summary page, without realising they haven't actually bought their products. The summary page, when present, is usually the final page in the checkout process and users often mistake it for the sales confirmation page.

It's crucial that a summary page is provided so users can perform a final review of their order details before committing to the purchase. To avoid users thinking they're on the confirmation page, the summary page should very clearly state that the products haven't yet been purchased.



The screenshot shows the M&S checkout summary page. At the top, there are navigation links: SIGN-IN, DELIVERY, GIFT WRAP, PAYMENT, and PLACE ORDER. Below this is a dark bar with the text "Place your order". The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is titled "Delivery Details: Item 1 of 1" and contains fields for "Delivering to:" (with a CHANGE button), the customer's name and address (Mrs F Pagnacco, Webcredible, 99 Mansell Street, LONDON, E1 8AX, United Kingdom), "Delivery services:" (with a CHANGE button), and "Choose a delivery service:" (with radio buttons for Standard Delivery and Nominated day delivery). Below this is a section for "The following items will be despatched:" with details for a "Satin Pleat Wing Collar Shirt" (£15.00, Quantity: 1, Size: 15½) and a "Gift options None" field (with a CHANGE button). The right column is titled "Order Summary" and shows "Items: £15.00" and "Delivery charges: £3.50", with a bold "Order Total: £18.50". Below this is a "Have a promotion code?" section with an input field and an APPLY button. The "Payment Method:" section shows "CHANGE" and "MasterCard: **** * Exp. 11/2009". The "Billing Address:" section shows "CHANGE" and the same address as the delivery address. At the bottom of the page, there is a "Terms & Conditions" section and a prominent "PLACE ORDER" button. An orange callout box with a black border points to the "Order Total" and "Billing Address" sections, containing the text: "M&S clearly states in 3 places that the order hasn't been placed yet".

This is another guideline which has seen a significant rise since last year (up 1.1). It's clear that retailers are increasingly more uncomfortable with the idea of losing their customers at this late point in their journey.

It should be pointed out that on 2 websites it proved impossible to finish the transaction which despite several attempts had to be abandoned.

Conclusion

This year has seen a wholesale increase in scoring across the sector, which is good news for users in the run-up to Christmas. Whilst, there's a promising trend across many of the 20 guidelines, there are still some that showed little change this year. This clearly provides an opportunity for improvement. Overall, UK high street retailers still aren't doing as much as they can to maximise their share of the potential revenue in this lucrative channel.

IMRG has recently stated that 68% of shoppers are more likely to do their Christmas shopping online with 77% of shoppers planning to carry out half or more of their shopping online this year⁷. The current economic climate may also encourage greater online shopping as consumers turn to the Internet to get the best deals in the market. 'This Christmas will sort the e-retailing wheat from the chaff, with online merchants having to draw on their retailing skills to survive a challenging market for the first time'⁸.

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

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5. IMRG, 'Internet shopping rockets 30% in April and marks the end of rip-off Britain (19/05/2005)' (www.imrg.org)
6. Return on Investment for Usability (www.useit.com/alertbox/20030107.html)
7. Retail Bulletin, 'IMRG Research Reveals Online Christmas Shopping Is Set To Grow Strongly' (www.tinyurl.com/69g8nn)
8. IMRG Senate Annual General Meeting, 25 September 2008 (www.imrg.org)



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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	
WHSmith (www.whsmith.co.uk)	5	5	5	4	0	5	4	5	5	3	4	5	5	5	5	0	5	5	3	5	83
Early Learning Centre (www.elc.co.uk)	5	5	3	5	0	5	0	5	5	1	4	5	5	5	4	0	5	5	5	3	75
Hamleys (www.hamleys.com)	5	5	5	4	0	5	0	5	5	3	4	3	4	3	5	0	5	3	3	5	72
HMV (www.hmv.co.uk)	5	5	5	5	0	3	0	5	5	4	4	5	3	3	4	0	5	5	2	4	72
John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com)	5	3	4	1	0	5	0	2	5	5	3	4	5	3	4	4	5	5	4	5	72
H.Samuel (www.hsamuel.co.uk)	5	3	3	4	0	5	3	5	4	3	4	4	5	3	4	0	5	5	3	2	70
B&Q (www.diy.com)	5	3	3	4	0	4	0	5	5	2	4	4	5	5	4	0	5	4	2	5	69
Waterstones (www.waterstones.co.uk)	5	4	5	5	0	5	0	3	5	4	3	3	5	5	5	0	3	5	1	3	69
Currys (www.currys.co.uk)	5	2	5	3	0	5	0	5	4	0	4	4	5	5	5	0	4	5	3	4	68
Marks & Spencer (www.mands.com)	5	3	4	2	0	5	0	3	5	3	4	4	5	5	5	1	5	0	5	4	68
Argos (www.argos.co.uk)	5	3	5	4	0	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	4	0	3	0	5	1	2	3	67



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Website	Guideline number																				TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
Debenhams (www.debenhams.com)	5	3	4	2	4	5	0	5	4	4	4	3	5	5	3	0	3	1	4	3	67
Game (www.game.co.uk)	5	3	4	4	0	3	0	3	5	4	4	4	5	3	4	0	5	4	3	4	67
The Body Shop (www.thebodyshop.co.uk)	5	3	4	2	0	5	3	4	5	3	3	3	5	3	4	0	5	5	0	3	65
Next (www.next.co.uk)	5	5	2	2	0	3	5	5	5	3	4	4	5	5	5	0	0	4	3	0	65
Woolworths (www.woolworths.co.uk)	5	5	5	3	0	4	0	3	5	3	4	4	5	3	5	0	2	4	3	2	65
Boots (www.boots.co.uk)	5	3	2	2	0	5	4	5	5	2	3	4	5	0	5	0	5	4	5	0	64
Mothercare (www.mothercare.com)	4	2	4	4	0	5	0	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	3	0	5	3	3	0	64
Accessorize (www.accessorize.co.uk)	4	3	3	2	0	4	0	5	5	4	4	3	5	5	4	0	0	1	1	5	58
Topshop (www.topshop.co.uk)	5	5	3	3	0	1	0	0	5	4	3	4	4	0	5	0	3	1	5	5	56
TOTAL	98	73	78	65	4	87	24	82	97	64	75	77	95	71	86	5	80	70	60	65	
Average score	4.9	3.7	3.9	3.3	0.2	4.4	1.2	4.1	4.9	3.2	3.8	3.9	4.8	3.6	4.3	0.3	3.9	3.5	3.0	3.3	67.8



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About Webcredible

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

User-centered design

- Information architecture
- Interaction design

Web development & audits

- Accessible CSS web design
- Accessible content management system
- Accessibility audits

User research

- Usability testing
- Interviews & focus groups
- Persona creation

Training & mentoring

- Usability, IA & web writing
- Accessibility & CSS
- Ongoing support & mentoring

Webcredible is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and respected user experience consultancies in the UK. Our 150+ research articles have been re-published on 100s of websites and we receive 200,000+ visitors to our website each month.

We are:

- Focused on client needs** – Our aims are to ensure public sector organisations most effectively disseminate information and increase conversion rates for companies.
- 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, BBC, eBay, EDF Energy, Lloyds TSB, Norwich Union, Sony, T-Mobile, Thomson and World Health Organization.

For more information please:

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