Omnichannel Customer Experience Report 2017

Ranking 30 UK retailers on the omnichannel experience they provide to customers
Omnichannel and customer experience are two concepts that many retailers say they are obsessed with. Yet we know how difficult it is to actually provide a joined-up customer experience across multiple sales, marketing and customer service channels; particularly when teams and processes are often still siloed.

To help retailers understand where there are gaps in the experience they deliver, we designed this piece of benchmarking research to look through consumers’ eyes. Although we ranked retailers, none provided a universally bad or perfect experience.

We’ve shopped websites, conducted mobile searches, visited stores, asked questions, signed up for emails and viewed online and offline marketing. Most of all, at each stage in the customer journey we’ve asked the question “Does this feel like a seamless experience for the customer, and would they always feel like they were dealing with the same brand?”

The results and accompanying advice should help retailers to think about how to cost-effectively optimise the experience at every stage of the customer journey.

Nicola Hollow, Chief Marketing Services Officer, Practicology

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In January 2017, Practicology identified 30 well-known UK non-food retailers who sell via stores, and mobile and desktop versions of their sites. We created a scoring matrix for aspects of the customer experience at every stage of the customer journey, with a particular focus on cross-channel sales and marketing elements.

Each retailer was scored and then ranked based on this matrix. We looked at search, desktop, mobile sites and apps. In addition we visited stores, registered for an online account and opted-in to receive email marketing. We also researched recent above the line advertising, viewed their social channels and content, and collected printed marketing materials from stores.

Scores were awarded for cross-channel customer experience factors – with the retailers that ranked highest showing that they support all types of customer journeys that incorporate both online and offline channels. For example, points were awarded for online store stock checkers, multichannel giftcards, e-receipts, stores that promoted the site, easy to use store locators and free in-store WiFi. The total maximum points that a retailer could score was 83.

The report was researched and compiled by Practicology’s Sam Gaunt and Joanna Perry, with advice from Lee Howard and Nicola Hollow.
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Omnichannel Customer Experience Report 2017

In numbers

- 50% reply to an email customer query within 24 hours
- 37% have Live Chat on their site
- 43% include a store stock checker on their site
- 80% have customer ratings & reviews on their site
- 17% offer same day delivery options
- 87% offer a cross-channel shopping bag to signed-in customers
In numbers

70% sell giftcards that can be redeemed online

37% offer an e-receipt in store

33% do not mention or promote their online channels in their stores

Practicology

63% offer free in-store WiFi

37% have a designated click and collect desk or area in store

10% provide the location of the click and collect desk on the store details page
Handling trillions of searches every year, Google remains the starting point for many customer journeys.

Search functionality has evolved to support consumers who want to shop in-store as well as online. Retailers need to respond to their customers' changing search behaviour.

Research by Hitwise estimates that 65% of searches are carried out on mobile devices; and consumers search for store locations and locally available products, as well as to make online purchases.

84% of searches around product reviews and 77% of searches around Sales and promotional offers are conducted on mobile devices, according to Hitwise. This means optimising the search experience on mobile is crucial for UK retailers, irrespective of whether their customers go on to buy online or offline.

With this in mind, retailers must ensure that store operations data - such as store openings and closures, store opening hours and contact details - are all fed through to the SEO manager/team.

We checked that the 30 retailers researched were using natural mobile search results to promote store locations. In addition, all but one of the retailers assessed placed first in organic Google search results on their brand term, on both desktop and mobile.
A smartphone is increasingly the starting point for a customer journey that ends in a store. 82% of searches for store opening times are carried out on mobile devices, says Hitwise.

It’s essential to publish all of the relevant information for each of your stores through Google My Business. These results appear top on mobile search results pages and Google will attempt to populate this data if you don’t submit it yourself.

Store locations displayed in mobile search results for all 30 retailers in our research; including opening hours and telephone numbers for stores.
We mapped customer journeys that begin online and finish with a purchase in store to determine how well each retailer supports offline journeys through their digital channels.

We considered what customers would find helpful on a site before a visit to store, particularly if they wanted a certain product or service.

The information provided for customers collecting online orders from store was also considered.

An easily accessible link to a store locator is a must on a site, and we also checked for location detection technology. 47% of retailers provided geolocation functionality on their mobile sites, to let customers find the stores closest to their current location.

However, 13% had geolocation tools that did not work. Currys PC World, Pets at Home, New Look and Matalan all included geolocation tools that did not work when we tested them.

A point was also awarded to sites that display stock availability information for individual stores.

As mobile becomes the starting point for more offline purchases, pushing stock information to consumers’ fingertips is a powerful tool to drive store footfall that is likely to convert.
After researching online, a customer choosing to purchase offline may be interested in information found on the store details pages.

Retailers offer a range of information to help customers along their customer journey; a full breakdown of which can be found on the next page.

John Lewis, House of Fraser and Debenhams all went beyond the minimum, providing the in-store locations of click-and-collect desks on their store pages.

Similarly, Pets at Home indicated the day of the week that live food is delivered to each store providing customers with the information they need to complete store purchases.

However, 53% of retailers did not include a click-to-call telephone number within the store details pages of their mobile site.

47% of retailers had telephone numbers set to click-to-call
43% of retailers did not have telephone numbers set to click-to-call
10% of retailers did not have telephone numbers on their store details pages
Information included on store details page by % of retailers

- Address
- Opening hours
- Telephone
- Map
- Directions
- In store services
- Collections available
- Distance
- Store/Manager info
- Transport info
- Photo of store
- Event info/book appointment
- Email/contact form
- Click-and-collect location
- Fax

Desktop vs Mobile
Researching online and purchasing offline (webrooming) is an established buying behaviour, and according to BookingBug research 71% of UK consumers either sometimes or often browse retail sites before shopping in store.

43% of the retailers catered for this type of customer journey and incorporated stock checkers for stores on their sites.

Oasis caters well for cross-channel customers with a couple of features on its website. Not only can they check the stock of a particular item in a chosen store, but the site also allows them to filter their product search according to the availability in a chosen store.
A well designed mobile app with targeted functionality can add value to the shopping experience.

60% of retailers had apps available for download, but only 40% of the 30 provided an app that directly supported in-store shopping. 27% of retailers offer an app with a barcode scanner and 13% offer in-app loyalty cards.

We recommend that you do not invest in developing an app unless it supports store shopping or provides your customer with functionality or content that cannot be found on your mobile site.

Marks and Spencer’s ‘Cook with M&S’ app provides users with recipe inspiration and allows them to add necessary ingredients to an in-app shopping list they can take to store.

Matalan’s app includes customers’ loyalty card details and shows all in-store and online promotions.

**APPS SUPPORTING OFFLINE SHOPPING**

- Yes. App supports in-store shopping
- No. App does not support in-store shopping
- Retailer does not have mobile app.
As cross-channel shopping behaviour and services have become more commonplace, the role of stores to promote online channels has increased.

A BookingBug survey revealed that 51% of customers research in store before they complete their purchase online. Our research acknowledged this and noted the measures retailers were taking to improve the showrooming journey.

10 of the 30 retailers did not mention, let alone promote their online channels - such as their site or app - in their stores. These included Pets At Home, Maplin and Monsoon. B&Q, John Lewis and New Look all promoted their online propositions well in their stores.

Sales attribution models sometimes leave store teams unwilling to promote their web site. However customers don’t care who is given credit for a sale, but while in a store they do want to know if a wider range is available online.
Half of our retailers have introduced technology to stores to allow customers to browse online ranges and complete purchases online.

On our store visits we checked whether web kiosks were available or staff were assisting customers using tablet devices.

When visiting Monsoon, our researcher asked a member of staff with a tablet about the availability of a product, and was asked to enquire at a busy checkout desk, ignoring the technology available.

So, retailers who incorporate technology into stores are advised to educate and train members of staff on using the technology available to assist a customer in their journey.

63% of retailers offer free in-store WiFi. As more consumers use phones in stores, free WiFi becomes essential to help them complete their shopper missions.

**TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE IN STORE**

- 50%: In-store kiosks for customers
- 27%: Staff with mobile devices
- 17%: Both in-store kiosks and staff with devices
- 6%: No technology in store
John Lewis has utilised technology in its stores particularly well. It was one of two retailers that both installed self-service web kiosks and equipped staff with tablets.

When our researcher asked a member of staff about an out-of-stock item, they were taken to a nearby kiosk (pictured) and guided through ordering online to collect in store the next day.

Our researcher experienced a similar high level of service at The White Company, and was shown a increased range of available products on a staff member’s tablet.

Lakeland was less successful as the web kiosk it had installed was either not working or switched off.
Fulfilment execution is one area that can make or break how seamlessly customers perceive a shopping experience has been.

We wanted to understand benchmarks for delivery service choice, as well as how the best retailers support the end-to-end click-and-collect experience.

As the starting point for a click-and-collect order will be the site, we were surprised that 33% of retailers offered click-and-collect yet didn’t promote it on their homepage or in a header banner across their site.

Click-and-collect services get products to customers twice as quickly as standard home delivery, shaving 1.6 days off the average time, according to Kurt Salmon research. So for shoppers on a mission it’s worth signposting if click-and-collect services allow them to access goods more quickly than home delivery.
Research by BookingBug shows 47% of UK consumers now sometimes or often use click-and-collect services. With the option clearly popular, we wanted to examine how customers coming in to collect an order were treated in stores.

37% of the retailers had a designated click-and-collect desk, and 33% of retailers provide signposting to where orders could be collected in stores.

Matalan (shown), John Lewis and House of Fraser all succeeded with signage directing customers from the front of store to the click-and-collect area.

In Next, ground floor signage (shown) directed customers to a first floor collections area, but the lack of signs or obvious click-and-collect desk on that floor made for a disjointed experience.
With few retailers keen to grow their store portfolios in the current climate, they have partnered to expand their physical presence for fulfilment purposes.

Working with partners like Collect+, Doddle and Hermes, 44% of retailers provided their customers with collection and/or returns options.

Home delivery services are also a differentiator for some, particularly those who offer premium services such as same-day or next-day evening slots (see graph on next page). Although all retailers offered next day delivery, 23% did not deliver over the weekend.

Argos was the stand-out leader when it came to fulfilment. Many of its products are available for same-day delivery, seven days a week, with a selection of four time slots throughout the day.
% of retailers offering a range of delivery options

- Next Day: 100%
- Weekend: 75%
- Nominated Day: 50%
- Specified time slot: 40%
- Same day delivery: 10%
Consumers use websites for in-depth product research, with an average of 13.6 pages viewed per visit to retail sites, according to Hitwise. So it’s important that sites inspire as well as convert.

We considered a customer journey where we were visiting a site for the first time on desktop and mobile. Our research showed many retailers were successful in defining their omnichannel propositions in the header or homepage on their desktop site, yet many didn’t provide the same information on their mobile site.

Hitwise data tells us that 52% of total retail visits were made from mobile devices in December 2016. With this in mind, retailers must consider that first impressions increasingly come from what’s seen on the mobile site.

Blogs and editorial content provide clear opportunities for retailers to inspire. 90% of retailers had a blog or editorial content and all but one of those linked to relevant product pages from their content.

The more sophisticated blogs link to content bundles that display the products featured within the blog content, as described overleaf.
Of all the retailers we researched, Oasis had the most sophisticated blog when it came to making content shoppable.

As an example, one post featured dancers from Pineapple Dance studio (top screenshot) and readers are encouraged to follow a link and shop each dancer’s look.

From there, customers are taken to a curated product bundle (bottom screenshot) that lets customers browse the collection and quickly place items in their basket.

This journey from inspirational, research content to shoppable content feels seamless.
Although many of the retailers we studied had apps that either mimicked the mobile site or included functionality to directly support in-store shopping, a small selection of retailers opted for more ambitious designs that are content-led.

Halfords’ Autocentre app syncs up with your car monitoring your driving safety and efficiency, and even notifies your chosen Autocentre if your car develops a fault.

The Boots Eye Test app (shown) features simple eye tests you can conduct with your device, and lets you book an opticians appointment based upon your results.

These apps not only add value to the customers that download them, but also link to online and offline sales channels.
The role of customer service has increased alongside the number of sales channels that retailers offer.

Queries and complaints may be directed to staff via telephone, email, live chat or social media.

Research carried out by eDigital Research reveals that live chat, email and social media receive high satisfaction rates, with queries via live chat seeing the highest of all. 73% of users claim to be either satisfied or very satisfied by their most recent live chat experience.

To research this area effectively, we worked on the principle that online customers want their questions to be answered as quickly as possible.

We used live chat to make simple queries; and also sent email enquiries to each retailer by email, or the contact form where no email address was provided.

All but one of the query responses that we had when testing live chat services were helpful. However, the same wasn’t true when we asked posed questions via email.

37% of retailers provide a live chat service on their website

57% of retailers send an automatic reply confirming they have received an email enquiry

63% of retailers have dedicated customer service accounts on Twitter
Best practice dictates that retailers should respond to email enquiries within 24 hours; and Forrester data reveals that 41% of consumers expect a reply within six hours.

Despite this, our research revealed that response times varied dramatically from retailer to retailer.

Maplin and Debenhams provided the best customer service. Both featuring helpful live chat functions on their websites and replied to email enquiries within one hour.

Ann Summers, Pets at Home, Robert Dyas, Hotel Chocolat and River Island were less successful. These retailers did not offer working live chat on their site or send a response to our email enquiries.
In an omnichannel world, offline marketing can drive customers online, and online marketing (particularly search marketing) can be used to drive traffic to stores.

So we wanted to understand whether retailers were consistent with their online and offline marketing; and whether they only promoted certain sales channels through each type of marketing used.

H Samuel, Currys PC World and Argos were particularly effective at cross-channel marketing. All highlighted their multiple sales channels available across print media, broadcast and YouTube ads.

However, not all retailers provide a call to action for their site in their advertising, including this example from Goldsmiths.
The most effective email marketing we received was personal, imaginative and reiterated the multiple online and offline channels available to customers.

Many of the savviest retailers included store locators or click and collect information in the emails. Matalan included codes for redeeming promotions online and vouchers with barcodes to redeem in stores.

53% of the retailers who we researched sent a basket abandonment email to remind customers of items left behind.

Ann Summers sent a particularly effective basket abandonment email (shown) that retained its brand identity and recognisable tone of voice.
Amazon is consistently the most visited ecommerce site in the UK, with eBay in second place, according to IMRG.

The high volumes of traffic that these sites enjoy means that retailers have explored marketplaces as alternative sales channels.

So we checked which retailers were selling on which marketplaces, and whether they had created a branded presence to ensure some continuity between their different channels.

Our research revealed that 37% of the 30 retailers were selling products on Amazon. However, 40% of retailers had branded products listed on the marketplace that were being sold by other sellers.

It’s possible to create branded landing pages on Amazon, eBay and Zalando. All the retailers we found selling on eBay and Zalando had such pages, but not all retailers had created a branded environment for Amazon (see graph on the next page).

The most sophisticated of these pages mimic a retailer’s homepage. They display the fulfilment proposition, maintain the retailer’s product information architecture with similar categories and ensure brand continuity. We show an example of Halfords’ branded presence on page 31.
% of retailers selling through alternative online channels

- eBay: [Yellow bar] % of retailers selling on marketplace, [Dark bar] % of retailers with branded page
- Amazon: [Yellow bar] above 30%, [Dark bar] below 10%
- ASOS: [Yellow bar] around 20%, [Dark bar] around 10%
- Zalando: [Yellow bar] around 10%, [Dark bar] around 15%
Halfords’ has a particularly strong branded eBay presence.

The continuity across its eBay shop (top picture), desktop site (bottom picture) and mobile site helps to boost brand awareness; and inspires confidence that the customer is shopping with the retailer.

The branded eBay pages also gives Halfords the opportunity to reaffirm its fulfilment proposition.
**Search** - Utilise Google My Business to ensure locations, phone numbers and opening hours are correct when customers search for you.

**Mobile site** - All phone numbers and email addresses on your mobile site should be set to click-to-call or click-to-email. This is a basic hygiene factor.

**Stock checker** - A store stock checker on your product pages assists customers to convert in your stores. Warn if the data isn’t in real time.

**Content** – To maximise the benefit of blog or editorial content, include Buy Buttons and consider creating landing pages where consumers can purchase a bundle of featured products such as a “Shop The Look” page.

**Marketplaces** – If you sell on marketplaces, create a branded microsite to maximise brand awareness and set out your fulfilment proposition.

**New services**– Both e-receipts and Live Chat have seen adoption rates rise quickly in the past couple of years. If customer service is an important aspect of your proposition, investigate whether they would provide an ROI for you.
**Click & Collect** – Plot your click-and-collect journey and the information provided at each stage. An explanation of where to collect in store in the confirmation email is no replacement for clear in-store signage.

**Web promotion in store** – If your site provides the best advert for your stores, then stores should be the best advert for your site; particularly if your range is larger online. Customers don’t care how you attribute sales.

**In-store technology** – Head office mandates for the use of handheld devices should be backed up by mystery shopping to ensure they are used correctly, and additional advice and training can be given to store staff where required.

**Printed material** – Although large printed catalogues have fallen out of favour, 14 of 30 retailers offered some type of printed brochure/leaflet for store customers to take away. These act as a reminder to customers who have researched in-store but intend to complete their transaction online.

**Apps** – Functionality to support in-store visits or your loyalty scheme will make consumers more likely to download and keep your app on their phone.
Practicology is a strategic multichannel consultancy founded in 2009 with offices in London, Sydney, Melbourne and Hong Kong.

Our mission is to help our B2C and B2B clients around the world to solve their digital and omnichannel challenges; ultimately to sell more, and build profitable relationships with their clients.

The brands we work with include American Eagle Outfitters, Aurum Holdings, Domino’s, Dreams, Hunter Boots, Mamas & Papas, New Look, Pandora, Rapha, Reckitt Benckiser, Skechers, TM Lewin and Wiggle.

For retailers or brands seeking assistance with the customer experience they deliver we can offer both strategic and more practical hands-on support. Our services include: strategy development; organisational transformation and change; expert interim digital resources; CX and UX reviews as well as digital marketing effectiveness assessments.

For more information please contact us at hello@practicology.com, call us on +44 (0)20 7323 0539 or see www.practicology.com