



DIMENSION REPORT

Brand Engagement: September 2016

In partnership with our Dimension Sponsor



A Performance Dimension
Report as part of IREU 500 2016
InternetRetailing's Europe
Top500 Retailers, 2016



www.internetretailing.net/IREU

“Being able to personalise and target our customers’ preferences keeps them coming back. Our conversion rates are 50 times higher.”

Lucy Fernandez

Ecommerce Executive

Closet.
LONDON

The Bronto Marketing Platform is the ultimate solution for retailers to drive revenue through email and cross-channel marketing. With Bronto, it’s easy for the Drapers Young Fashion Brand of the Year 2015 to analyse, target and reach their audience with highly-tailored, personalised messages that get noticed, generate clicks and orders.

Read the full success story: bronto.co.uk/closet-london



From the editor-in-chief

WELCOME TO OUR first IREU Top500 Performance Dimension Report, which places brand engagement in the context of the European Economic Area, plus Switzerland. In it, we're looking at how retailers that trade in this area first raise awareness of their brand and then go on to develop relationships with existing and potential customers through search, email marketing and social media.

At heart, brand engagement is a two-way process that enables retailers both to communicate and to listen, to explain, and to learn. That task is inevitably more complex in a European market of 32 countries and 26 official languages. We've set ourselves the challenge of mapping and understanding the practical approaches that leading retailers take when they raise awareness of their brand in important European markets, and then go on to talk to potential and existing shoppers via a range of channels.

We look at how easy merchants make it for shoppers to ask them a question or tell them what they think, whether it's a complaint or praise – and at how engaging and responsive they are in return. All of this plays, in turn, an important role in raising awareness of the brand as it expands beyond its domestic market in order to grow sales in this diverse market.

This report is the latest iteration in a research programme that started by identifying the leading Top500 UK multichannel and ecommerce retailers, and then moved to analyse their performance through six performance dimensions: strategy and innovation, merchandising, brand engagement, operations and logistics, mobile and crosschannel and the customer. We're now taking that approach to Europe, where we aim to learn from the hard data produced by our research team, working in partnership with InternetRetailing Knowledge Partners, how brands and traders successfully extend their business reach in order to work at the kind of scale that spans a continent. At the same time we aim to identify and share the lessons that can be learned from that experience. For us, this seems a daunting and yet fascinating challenge. It's one we're looking forward to taking on, and we hope that our readers will share our interest in these findings.

We're always want to hear what our readers think – do share your thoughts.

Ian Jindal
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Editors' comment

FOR OUR FIRST IREU Top500 Performance Dimension Report, we're looking at an aspect of retailing where the art of the sell meets raw numbers. Building Brand Engagement within ecommerce and multichannel retail is about first communicating with customers and then measuring the effectiveness of that communication by tracking responsiveness. At the end of the day, do customers have an ongoing relationship with the brand?

This is tough to determine in a home territory, where retail staff are steeped in the local culture. And it's even tougher looking abroad, for although the UK and the Republic of Ireland share a language, they are each a distinct market. The same is true for Scotland and England, two nations that are part of the same country. That's why in this Report, we have looked for analytical techniques that work in specific territories.

In our new research feature (page 30), for example, we consider email marketing techniques, looking for the nuances that allow retailers to reach out to customers in the UK, Germany and France. For analysing the numbers (page 12), we look at brand visibility and engagement across a variety of channels. This is research that feeds into our strategic overview (page 8), which deals with territory localisation.

We also look in detail at those IREU Top500 retailers that perform strongly in the Brand Engagement Dimension (page 18). Our lead interview is with Decathlon (page 20) and how it makes "sport accessible to the many" via social media. Reflecting the variety of retailers that make up the IREU Top500, we also look at what other retailers can learn from the success of British clothing retailer Boohoo.com, French tech retailer Fnac, Dutch pureplay Bol.com and German behemoth Otto.

Our 12 approaches that work feature (page 24) offers advice based around best practice in social media, promoting brand visibility and email. For emerging practice (page 29), we look at recent research conducted by Adobe on social media driving web traffic for brands.

We've found this a fascinating area to research and, as editors and writers, we look forward to broadening our knowledge of the European market when we compile more Dimension Reports in the future.

We'd like to thank all the Knowledge Partners who have contributed their expertise and insights for this Dimension Report. We welcome your thoughts on new areas of research as we add to our primary data and analysis. Please email: jonathan@internetretailing.net and chloe@internetretailing.net

Jonathan Wright and Chloe Rigby, Editors

Contents

IREU Top500 Brand Engagement 2016

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- 06** Partners' perspective
- 08** Strategic overview
- 12** Analysing the numbers
- 16** The IREU Top500
- 18** Case studies and lead interview
- 24** 12 approaches that work
- 29** Emerging practice
- 30** New research
- 34** Conclusion

Know your customer in order to grow your business

Steven Ledgerwood, UK managing director at Emarsys, on why it pays to understand what your customers actually want out of our increasingly multichannel world



What are the challenges of raising brand awareness in a multichannel world and what benefits can doing this successfully bring?

The challenges facing today's marketers are diverse. Basic segmentation techniques and automated messages are not enough any more. Competition is fierce and customers want a seamless shopping experience that satisfies their expectation of speed, efficiency and personalisation.

Customers' shopping habits are constantly evolving and retailers are under pressure to offer a dynamic shopping experience across multiple devices and channels.

Marketers already have the tools to capture the attention of buyers, but success is often hidden in a huge amount of data that needs converting into actionable intelligence. Once uncovered, this customer insight can be used to create engagement strategies adapted to each stage of the customer shopping cycle – essentially, these are messages that reach the consumer at the right moment on the right device and channel.

While this may seem overwhelming to put into practice, the good news is that marketing automation platforms have evolved alongside these more nuanced consumer behavioural changes. With predictive marketing, marketing teams can go a step further and build a unified customer profile across every channel. The end result is

the production of engaging, relevant and meaningful content.

The main business benefits are a significant competitive edge, increased customer loyalty and larger average order values.

What is your advice to retailers looking to develop stronger relationships with both new and existing customers?

Too often, people are bombarded with marketing messages with no meaning or connection to who they are as an individual.

If you want a stronger relationship with customers, start treating them like people and not as leads, cookies, target quotas or a source of revenue. Just like you would with your friends, try to know them, understand their needs, preferences and desires. Shape your strategies with this information and speak their language.

Just as a picture paints a thousand words, a meaningful, engaging message can bring countless loyal customers who, in time, could become strong brand advocates.

How can social media feed into this to support ongoing efforts?

Social media has become an integral part of marketing but if these channels are handled incorrectly, a brand's public image can be seriously damaged in a very short time.

To create the best experience for your customers, your social media strategy needs to be in sync with

other channels and campaigns. A smart social approach will increase the overall impact and ROI of your marketing efforts impressively. It's in the name – be social!

Is there one top tip that you'd give to retailers who are looking to prioritise strong customer relationships and engagement?

In today's omni-channel, mobile-centric industry, keeping customers engaged across every channel and device is crucial. Use data smartly. Put customer intelligence at the heart of every campaign. Constantly optimise. Never stop refining your approaches based on what your most recent data is telling you. 🇧🇪

About Emarsys

Emarsys is a leading global provider of marketing automation software and the first marketing cloud for retail and ecommerce. The Emarsys B2C Marketing Cloud enables true, one-to-one interactions between marketers and consumers across all channels – building loyalty, enriching the customer journey and increasing revenues. Machine learning and data science fuels customer intelligence in an intuitive, cloud-based platform. [emarsys.com](https://www.emarsys.com)



Retailer's top commerce marketing tactics unveiled

Saima Alibhai, practice manager – professional services at Bronto Software, explores three ways to engage customers and increase revenue

ARE YOU TAKING advantage of the most effective tactics for reaching your customers? As you start planning for 2017, look at how you can make your commerce marketing programmes more successful.

Email is one of the most effective ways to reach your target audience and can enhance the entire customer lifecycle, from convincing a shopper to buy to maintaining the conversation after the first purchase and identifying opportunities to encourage customers to buy again. It's no surprise that the Direct Marketing Association found that ROI from email rose from £24.93 in 2014 to £38 in 2015.

But a 'spray and pray' approach to email misses a lot of opportunities. To succeed, you need ways to engage customers to drive higher conversion rates. Three email tactics – segmentation, welcome series and cart recovery – do just that. Let's take a look at each in more detail...

Segmentation

Messages tailored to each customer convert at higher rates. Segmenting your database allows you to deliver the most relevant content and use every touch point as an opportunity to offer additional value. A brand that's using segmentation successfully is womenswear brand Closet London. By leveraging customer information such as preferences and purchase history in emails, the retailer becomes, in effect, a personal stylist. For example,

shoppers who have bought bodycon style dresses will receive emails suggesting similar types of clothing. The success speaks for itself – the conversion rate of those tailored emails is 50 times higher than Closet's average marketing message.

Welcome series


Roll out the welcome mat! A welcome series is a very focused message series that introduces shoppers to your product offering, tells them why they should care about your business and hopefully inspires them to make their first purchase. A great example is Swedish sports apparel brand Björn Borg. The retailer sends a three-part email series to welcome new subscribers, convey the brand's "active and attractive" messaging and make them part of the Björn Borg tribe. The click rate is 232% higher, conversion is up 21% and revenue is 217% higher than their standard marketing email.

Cart recovery

Abandoned baskets can be a source of frustration for commerce marketers but they're also full of potential. Shoppers who have gone to the trouble of selecting items and putting them in their basket are just a step away from buying. London-based footwear brand Hudson Shoes is generating significant revenue by bringing shoppers back to the products they left in their basket. These highly-effective messages generate 22% of Hudson's total annual

revenue from email, with engagement twice as high and conversion rates four times that of their newsletter.

Always innovate

Revenue opportunities continue to grow as technology becomes more sophisticated. When it comes to measuring the success of your marketing, the best benchmarks are your own trends over time. No one knows your business as well as you do. But it's also nice to see where opportunities lie. So if you are not yet using these three tactics, consider moving them to the top of your list of options to test in 2017. You will be in a better position to increase sales and encourage customers to return. 

About Bronto Software

Bronto Software, a NetSuite (NYSE: N) company, provides a cloud-based commerce marketing automation platform to mid-market and enterprise organisations worldwide. It has a client roster of leading brands, including Vivienne Westwood, notonthehighstreet.com, Björn Borg, Joseph Joseph and Oak Furniture Land. bronto.co.uk



Talk to customers

Retailers that lead the way in European brand engagement invest in finding new ways to reach existing and potential customers, writes **Chloe Rigby**

RETAILERS AT THE forefront of European ecommerce are working out how to start and develop conversations with consumers in other countries as they push towards growing domestic and cross-border sales in a market that's set to reach €500bn in value this year.

They're engaging with consumers through events, blogs and email marketing campaigns, and they're amplifying these messages at scale with the adept use of social media.

In recent years, European consumers have developed an appetite for buying online from overseas retailers. As fulfilment has become easier and faster, retailers have moved to localise their online offerings. European brands from L'Oréal to Clarins, and retailers including Decathlon, Otto Group, Zara and H&M, now operate international ecommerce platforms with websites that are localised for markets across Europe. These sites let shoppers browse in a language of their choosing, pay in local currencies and use familiar payment methods. Leaders in the IREU Top500 Brand Engagement Performance Dimension go still further, talking to shoppers through localised email campaigns, in their native language and on the social media platforms they prefer.

This InternetRetailing research measures localisation through indicators, such as whether retailers have country-specific customer service channels, social media offerings aimed at specific territories and the number of languages and currencies that are offered. The clear leaders that emerge are those retailers that tailor messages to specific markets, initiate and then sustain conversations with consumers, and do so across multiple, closely linked channels.

Decathlon, for example, communicates with shoppers in their own languages and across the communications channel that is most relevant for each market. In the UK, says Decathlon UK's PR and conversations manager Kieran O'Shea, social media channels such as Twitter are particularly important since the sports equipment retailer has a relatively small number of UK stores – at the time of writing it had 26. In its domestic market of France, by contrast, it had 290 and is more likely to use social media to promote store-based services such as click and collect, engaging with customers through this more frequented channel.

Setting the context

This InternetRetailing Dimension Report comes at a time when ecommerce is growing across the continent. Ecommerce Europe's 2016 *European B2C Ecommerce Report* predicted that turnover from ecommerce would grow to €500bn this year, from €455.3bn last year. In 2015, it suggested, 16% of people in the 28 countries of the European Union bought goods or services from other countries in the region, 33% up on a year previously. Customers were attracted, the report found, by competitive prices, and a wider range of goods and services.

That's supported by research from Bronto Software that suggests 80% of online shoppers in the UK – Europe's most

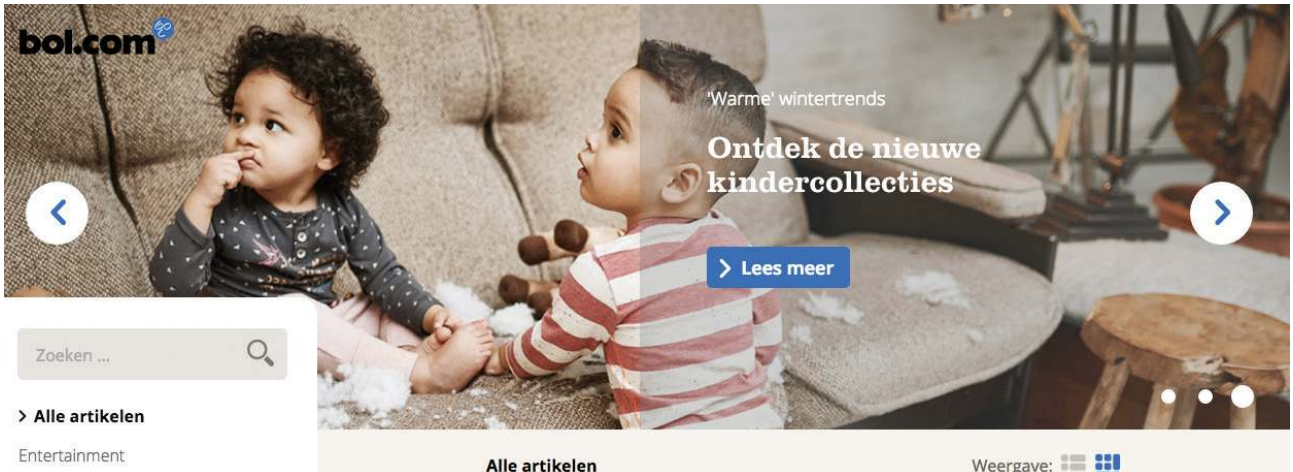


Image credit: bol.com

Bol.com's engaging content updated daily encourages customers to return to the site often

mature ecommerce market – would now consider buying from a retailer outside the country, and that 44% have already done so. Indeed, finds the *Where we buy: consumer attitudes on global ecommerce* report, 39% are shopping across borders at least once a month. Six out of 10 (62%) of those that buy across borders say they do so in order to find unique products while 50% are searching for better prices.

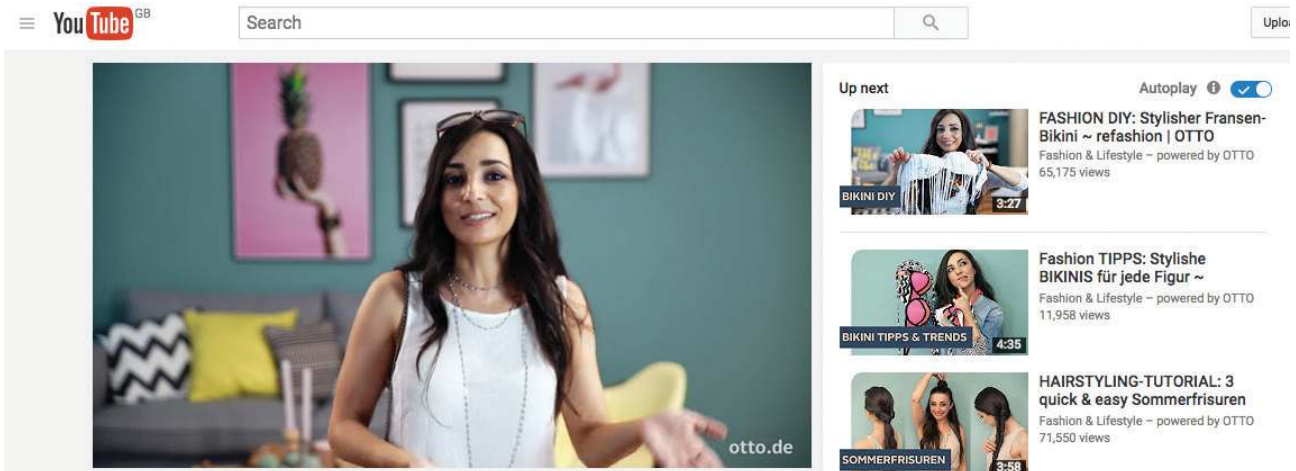
Engaging across channels

Leading retailers meet this willingness to buy by making it increasingly easy for shoppers to do so. Brand engagement is, at heart, all about communicating with customers. So a shopper who can recognise a retailer is more likely to trust and buy from the retailer. At the same time, being recognised also makes retailers more visible in search. “To be a visible brand in Europe,” says Martin Shaw, senior researcher at InternetRetailing, “retailers need to localise and focus on the channels most appropriate to the different territories in which they operate.” Word of mouth from friends and peers remains as important as it always was but today, the reach of these personal recommendations is amplified through social media.

Each year, French electronics and hobby retailer Fnac attracts thousands to its free music festival, Festival Fnac Live, an event that’s amplified through third-party websites with news and images, as well as through Fnac’s own channels.

German fashion-to-homewares retailer Otto shares its stylists’ advice at scale through YouTube videos that reach many more people than any individual could ever speak to in store. An Otto DIY styling video on copying Rihanna’s look has had more than 2,000 views on YouTube, while a guide to pimping a bikini has had more than 65,000 views.

The social media effect is enhanced still further when retailers talk to shoppers in markets beyond their own. In Europe, traders selling in markets with common languages – such as France and Switzerland, or Switzerland, Germany and Austria – can most easily operate beyond their own borders. Those selling in English may benefit from the widespread knowledge of the language, though it’s worth noting that Boohoo.com, a UK retailer that scores highly in this area, enables its shoppers to interact with it in four country-specific languages, French, Dutch, German and Spanish.



Otto uses YouTube to spread stylist advice globally

Image credit: Otto / YouTube

Raising awareness

Social media activity can also serve to raise the profile of a brand in ways that have positive effects on brand awareness. Being well known raises the probability that a brand is visible in search results, something we've measured for this research through search visibility. Well known retailer Amazon, for example, stands out in search visibility across much of the EEA. In the UK, it features in 262m search results a month when the average for a UK Top500 retailer is 3.4m. IREU Top500 retailers were seen in an average of 7m Google searches and had a 35% chance of being seen in the results of a relevant search. By investing in a social media presence, or putting resources into an on-site blog, retailers can help to improve their position. The blog at Dutch online department store Bol.com, for example, is very active and has strong imagery that helps to bring the site to life. Updated daily, it features competitions, discounts and a range of buying guides. Inspirational photography helps to bring the site to life.

As we see in the analysing the numbers feature (page 12), this activity can be particularly useful for retailers that enjoy some kind of niche. For by ranking highly for niche terms, it's likely that a retailer will outperform general traders on those terms.

Better email performance

Brands can very successfully develop initial customer contacts and purchases when they sign them up to receive regular emails. Research conducted by InternetRetailing Knowledge Partner Return Path (see page 30) suggests that customer attitudes towards emails can vary significantly between different markets. It may therefore be worth considering differentiating the subject or time of day that emails are sent between different European countries. The study covered the UK, Germany and France and its findings included the suggestion that German recipients are more likely to read a marketing email in the evening, while UK read rates are highest between 6am and noon, reflecting the fact that in the UK, retail audiences tend to be using a smartphone. In France, it's likely

Only those retailers that connect at a deeper level will make lasting connections

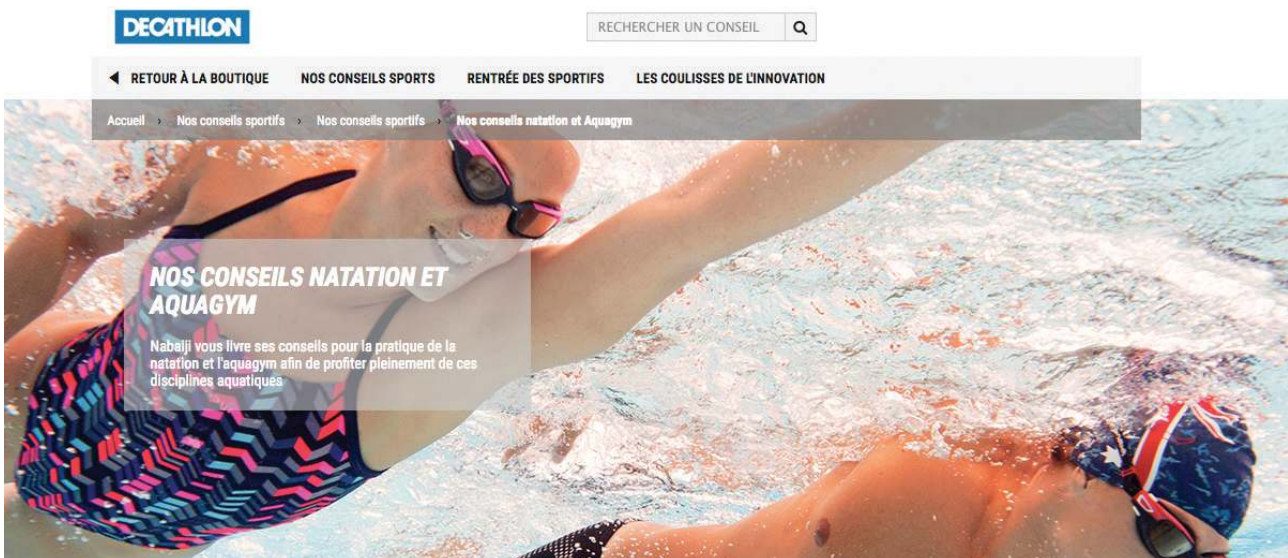
that cultural differences feed into the fact that recipients are more likely to check their emails over breakfast before heading to work or school, which both generally start at a later time than in Germany.

Meanwhile, in both Germany and the UK, emails are more likely to be read on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sunday – but not on a Saturday. Opposite effects are seen in France.

The study also found that leading UK retailer Waitrose enjoys average read rates of 37.8%, some 77% higher than the retail average of 21.3%. It sees exceptionally high levels of engagement from the gardening themed emails it often sends out on a Sunday. This, says Return Path, reflects a “Sunday supplements” approach among UK shoppers, who have more time to review offers and take on longer-term planning.

In conclusion

We seem to be living through a period in which customers are becoming more eager to engage with new and interesting brands, regardless of whether they come from the same country or not. This starts to open up an enormous opportunity for European retailers to establish new digital trade routes through the wider European Economic Area, which is home to more than half a billion potential consumers. More retailers are investing in that possibility, launching more local language websites that enable shoppers to browse and pay in familiar ways. This research suggests that only those retailers that connect at a deeper and more powerful level will make lasting connections. 🇫🇷



Decathlon varies its engagement with customers based on the most popular channel in each country

Engaging customers across Europe

Polina Modenova explains how InternetRetailing researchers approached the task of understanding how Europe's leading retailers engage with customers

RETAILERS THAT ARE highly visible to shoppers when they search, and enable customers to engage with them across a variety of channels most effectively, stand out from the competition in this IREU Top500 Brand Engagement Performance Dimension Report. Merchants that are already well known often stand out in search visibility, while those that most effectively enable communication across diverse channels are recognised in other parts of the research. These are retailers that use approaches from social media and blogs to live chat in order to develop two-way relationships with shoppers. This has a beneficial effect: by raising brand awareness in this way, traders go on to benefit through improved search visibility.

Our approach

We worked with InternetRetailing Knowledge Partner OneHydra to measure search visibility, assessing how likely a retailer is to be seen by a shopper searching using terms relevant to that retailer. This research focused predominantly on UK retailers, since local laws prevent similar insights, even in aggregate, across much of the European Economic Area (EEA).

We analysed the effectiveness of direct marketing activity through our partnership with InternetRetailing Knowledge Partner Return Path. We looked at how likely shoppers were to read, delete or mark emails as spam, focusing on 25 retailers in the UK, Germany and France. These results were used to fine-tune the ranking of those retailers that we analysed, without affecting the overall position of others.

Finally, we assessed retailers' effectiveness in communicating around the EEA with shoppers across a variety of channels by measuring their presence and activities on 11 social media networks: Facebook, Flickr, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, Twitter, Vimeo, VKontakte and YouTube. We asked whether they had a blog and whether customers could get in touch via phone, email and live chat.

What the Top500 do: brand visibility

Retailers that are well known are more likely to be seen in a Google search. That makes it hard for less visible retailers to become more widely seen. Appealing to a niche demographic – ranking for important keywords and out-competing or equalling general retailers – gives a natural advantage in this area.

Amazon dominates search visibility across much of the EEA. In the UK, for example, Amazon featured on average, in 263m search results between December 2015 and March 2016, while the UK Top500's average is just 3.4m. But brands that put resources into engaging with customers through a blog and through social media channels can influence the conversation while boosting visibility.

The IREU Top500 were seen in an average of 7m Google searches, and on average, enjoyed a 35% likelihood of being seen in a search.

Channels to the customer

The communication channels used by the Top500 to engage with their customers. Showing, with the flags, the country where a media type is the most prevalent among the Top500 and, with the percentage, the fraction of the Top500 retailers that use the channel in any member state.

Communication channel	Most prevalent in this country	% of IREU 500
Facebook	 Belgium	100
Twitter	 Netherlands	100
YouTube	 Poland	54
Instagram	 Netherlands	38
Google+	 Italy	37
Pinterest	 Netherlands	29
Live chat	 Sweden	14
Email (not including submission form)	 United Kingdom	11
Blog	 United Kingdom	8
LinkedIn	 Portugal	6



What the Top500 do: email

Analysis of customers' responses to the direct marketing emails that retailers sent them found an average 22% read rate in the UK, France and Germany – the three largest countries for ecommerce and multichannel retailing. On average, 10% of emails were deleted without reading. UK shoppers read a quarter (25%) of emails and were the least likely to mark them as spam. Customers from France deleted 13.7% of emails without reading them – the highest proportion in the study.

What the Top500 do: social media

All retailers in the IREU Top500 had Facebook and Twitter handles. More than half (54%) supported YouTube, followed by Instagram and Google+. Traders were least likely to use LinkedIn, supported by just 6% of the Top500.

Research showed that nearly 60% of retailers only had one country-specific Facebook handle. But those that had more than one were most likely to offer local language pages for English, German and French-speaking followers.

Overall, 16% of IREU Top500 retailers offered 'switch region' functionality on Facebook. They included most prominently Danish, Italian and Spanish businesses.

The Facebook 'shop now' call-to-action was very prominent on IREU Top500 merchants' pages: nearly 80% of retailers supported this feature. Those in the Netherlands, Croatia, Spain and Germany were most likely to flag up this feature: 85% of Dutch retailers offered this functionality.

Just over half of IREU Top500 traders offered links between their social media channels. Among them were retailers in Denmark, the UK, Greece and Spain. Sixty per cent of Danish retailers offered links to other retailer-operate social media.

Retailers with only one Facebook page were less likely to offer functionality such as links to other social networks and the 'shop now' call-to-action. ▶

Live chat is a rare feature in this research, appearing on just 14% of websites

IREU Top500 retailers on average received just over 2m page Likes and saw an average 5,552 people taking part in active conversations. Estonian customers seemed to be more likely to Like a retailer on Facebook: retailers with Estonian Facebook handles averaged 8m Likes. But UK retailers had the largest average number of people talking on Facebook, with 7,796 people in active conversations on the platform.

Leading the way

Boohoo.com's Facebook pages enabled customers to switch region in order to interact with the brand in French, Dutch, German and Spanish, as well as English. Links to other social networks included Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram. The fast fashion retailer also featured a 'shop now' call to action.


French sports retailer Decathlon encouraged shoppers to talk about the brand by providing ten social media channels. It offered 13 country-specific handles with respective languages. It invited viewers to buy through a 'shop now' call to action that was available on all but one country-specific Facebook page – Polish. Links to other social networks were available on five country-specific pages on the site. The highest number of Likes was seen on its Spanish Facebook page – 2.3m – followed by Italy and France. Decathlon supported nine country-specific Twitter handles, with its Spanish handle having an impressive 377,000 followers.

French electronics and hobbies retailer Fnac offered six communication channels to customers. Facebook and Twitter was available in four country-specific languages. Its French Facebook page enjoyed the highest

number of Likes, followed by Portuguese and Spanish. Its most-followed Twitter handle was Spanish.

Leading Netherlands retailer Bol.com was present on five social media networks and enabled shoppers to get in touch through three other customer service channels, such as phone and email. It had 584,480 Likes on Facebook and 8.6m views on Google+.

German retailer Otto has six social media networks and offers three customer services channels, including live chat. This is a rare feature in this research, appearing on just 14% of IREU Top500 websites.

Fashion, furniture and technology retailer Otto supports Austrian and Hungarian websites with dedicated Facebook pages. All feature a 'shop now' call-to-action and provide links to other social media sites. The most popular was the German Facebook page. YouTube was supported in Germany and Austria, with Google+ available only in Germany, with 105,082 followers and 22m views. Otto achieved a 9.3% read rate for its direct marketing email campaigns, with none marked as spam. BonPrix, part of the Otto Group, featured in the Top100 of this Dimension. Its 21 country specific websites linked to 16 unique Facebook pages and eight Twitter handles. 

IREU 500 Brand Engagement Dimension

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**The Top100 retailers of the IREU 2016 Brand Engagement Dimension**

Share your thoughts on #IREU500 with @etail

Brand Engagement Top50

Aktiesport	eBay	Miss Etam
Allegro	El Corte Ingles	Morgan
Allopneus.com	Electro Depot	New Look
Amazon	Empik.com	Orchestra
Asos	Eroski	Phone House
Bever	Fnac	Pimkie
The Body Shop	Galeria Kaufhof	Prenatal
Bol.com	H&M	Public.gr
BonPrix	IKEA	Rue du Commerce
Boohoo.com	Intreza.nl	Tesco
Bristol	JYSK	Vero Moda
Camaieu	Kiabi	Weltbild.at
Carphone Warehouse	La Redoute	Worten
Cultura-Socultur	Lidl	Xenos
Debenhams	M&S	Zalando
Decathlon	Media Markt	Zeeman
Disney Store	Media World	

Brand Engagement Top100

Alcampo.es	Clas Ohlson	Kasa	Otto
Apotek1	Conforama	Kijkshop.nl	Roller.de
Argos	Czc.cz	Komplett	Sainsbury's
Aubert	Delhaize.be	Kruidvat	Saturn
Auchandrive.fr	Dixons	Lapeyre	Scapino
Bauhaus	eMAG	Leen Bakker	Spar
BCC	Euronics	LeroyMerlin	Sport Zone
Blokker.	Expert	Materiel.net	SportsDirect.com
Boots	Game	Mio	TK Maxx
Bottega Verde	Görtz	Monoprix	Toys Я Us
Boulangier	Hunkemöller	Nespresso	Unieuro
Castorama	Intersport	Next	
Christ	Karwei	Office	

Congratulations to the IREU Top500, 2016



This is our 2016 ranking of the Top500 in Europe, based upon each retailer's performance across our six Performance Dimensions: Strategy & Innovation, The Customer, Operations & Logistics, Merchandising, Brand Engagement, and Mobile & Cross-channel.

Our Elite retailers are statistically ahead of all others and they represent the pinnacle of European multichannel retailing. Congratulations to Apple, Bon Prix, Decathlon, H&M, Next and Zara.



Alza
Amazon
Argos
Asda

The Body Shop
Boots
Carrefour
Currys
Darty
Deichmann
Euronics

IKEA
Intersport
John Lewis
Lidl
M&S
Media Markt
Nike

Otto
Sainsbury's
Saturn
Screwfix
SportsDirect.com
Tesco
Zalando



Asos
Auchan
Bershka

Coop
Debenhams
Dorothy Perkins
eBay
Fnac
Halfords

Homebase
House of Fraser
Kiabi
Leroy Merlin
Mango
Massimo Dutti

Mothercare
New Look
PC World
Pimkie



Accessorize
Albert Heijn
Alternate
B&Q
Bol.com
Boohoo.com
Boulanger
C&A

Carphone Warehouse
Clarks
Conrad
Disney Store
Douglas
Dunelm
eMAG
Empik.com
Ernsting's Family
Eroski
Esprit
Expert
F&F
Hema

Hollister
Hunkemöller
Jack & Jones
JD Sports
La Redoute
Matalan
Migros
Monoprix
OBI
Office
Phone House
Prenatal
Promod
Pull & Bear

River Island
s.Oliver
Stradivarius
Superdrug
Swatch
Tchibo
Thalia
TK Maxx
Topman
Topshop
Toys R Us
Unieuro
Wallis
Weltbild.at



Adidas
Auchandrive.fr
A.S. Adventure
Bauhaus
Blokker
Camaieu
Castorama
Claire's

Clas Ohlson
Conforama
Delhaize.be
E-shop.gr
E.Leclerc
Eduscho
El Corte Ingles
Evans
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Hornbach

JYSK
Konzum
Kruidvat
Lindex
Lloyds Pharmacy
Majestic Wine
Matras
Media World
Mein dm
Miss Selfridge
Oasis
Pandora
Quiz
Rossmann

Samsung
Schuh
Simply Be
Smyths
Spar
Staples
Swarovski
Toolstation
United Colors of Benetton
Vero Moda
Waitrose
WHSmith
Wilko.com
Yours Womenswear



Aktiesport
Allegro
Ann Summers
Apotek1
ATS Euromaster
Aubert
A.T.U.
Bata
Bathstore
Billa
Blue Inc
Bose
Bottega Verde
Brantano
Brico
Burberry
Burton
Cache Cache
Christ
D-Mail
Dänisches Bettenlager

Dia
Early Learning Centre
Electro Depot
Elkjop
Etam
Evans Cycles
Ex Libris
Footasylum
Forever 21
Galeria Kaufhof
Galeries Lafayette
Game
GAP
Gemo
Go Outdoors
Goldsmiths
Google Play
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Kik
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Lapeyre
Leen Bakker
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Dreams
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Dustin
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The Entertainer
Ernest Jones

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Fust
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The Works
XXXL
Zazzle



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AKI
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Albert
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AllSaints
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DeLicom
Devred 1902
DFS

Dixons
Dr.Max
Dress-for-Less
e-Jumbo
Easy Buy World
Ecco
The Edinburgh
Woolen Mill
Boozt.com
Euro Car Parts
Everything5pounds.com
Fashion Days
Fashion ID
Feelunique.com
Flanco
Fossil
France Loisirs
G-Sport
G-Star Raw
Gastrax
Gall & Gall
Grazia Shop
Guess
Habitat
Hervis
Jacques Vert
JouéClub
Just Eat

Kenzo
King Jouet
Kjell & Company
Kotsovolos
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LaFeltrinelli
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Merlin
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Mimovrste
Mindfactory.de
Mister Good Deal
Monica Vinader
Monki
Moonpig
Mr Porter
Myprotein
MyTrendyPhone
Nature & Découvertes
Neonet
NetOnNet
Oscaro
Overclockers UK
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Taobao
TechnoMarket

Thansen.dk
Thomas Sabo
Thuisbezorgd.nl
Ticketmaster
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Tom Tailor
Topachat.com
Trainline
Trespas
Vanden Borre
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Boohoo.com: engaging to expand

BOOHOO.COM IS SUCCESSFULLY engaging new and existing customers in the UK and around Europe as it expands internationally. Its strategy is focused on building customer lifetime value in a business that, in its latest financial year to 29 February 2016, saw more than 4m shoppers buy. In that year, it reported turnover of £195m – 40% up on the previous year – while pre-tax profits of £15.7m were 42% up. At the time, joint chief executives Mahmud Kamani and Carol Kane said that active customer numbers, order frequency and conversion had all increased as the company worked towards boosting customer lifetime value. “By refining the mix of promotional and marketing expenditure in each of our key markets, we have achieved growth ahead of our plans,” they said.

The Manchester-based fast fashion business has local, responsive websites for eight European countries as well as, further afield, North America and Australasia. “Our young, social customer base spends significant amounts of time developing connections with their interest groups,” it said in those results – explaining the brand’s focus on social media. InternetRetailing research shows that of the nine customer communication channels that Boohoo.com supports, seven are social media networks. Boohoo, says researchers, has chosen generic customer communications that can be used by customers around the world. A switch region function on Facebook and area-specific feeds on Twitter mean that customers can interact with the brand in French, Dutch, German and Spanish. It performs particularly well on Twitter, where it had more than 447,000 followers at the time of the research. It has strong visibility in Google search, with an average reach rate of 54%.

This reflects Boohoo’s strategy of supporting its UK and European websites through active engagement on social media and email, and through marketing that engages with the wider world. In the UK, for example, it has run a student ambassador programme in universities, while in France, it has sponsored reality TV series *Secret Story*. It also works with local bloggers and

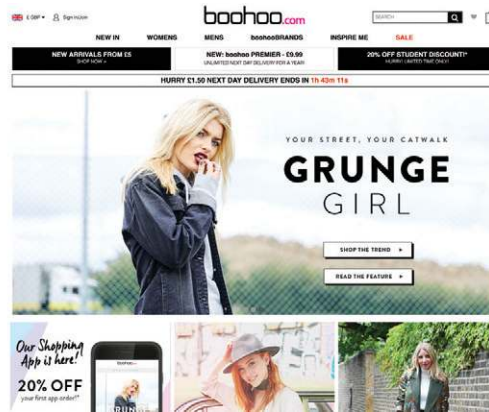


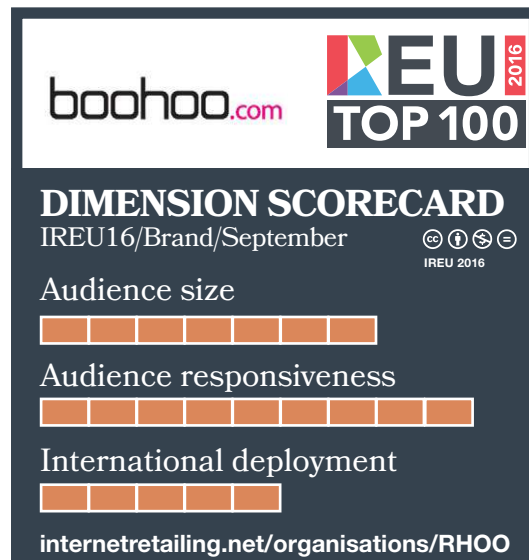
Image credit: Boohoo.com

personalities whose significant social media followings can help to promote the brand.

Within its latest full-year results, Boohoo stated that its focus is on “creating communities to put the customer’s voice at the centre of each campaign using social media feeds within our content hub Stylefix”. An improved customer contact strategy sees a focus on engaging and rewarding shoppers. Push messaging around promotions, offers and trends comes through its iPhone and Android apps. That’s a highly relevant communication channel for Boohoo.com, which sees more than 66% of shopping sessions take place over mobile devices.

This fast fashion retailer’s engagement strategy makes it well-placed to expand its brand across Europe. 🇬🇧

Social media is key to fast fashion retailer Boohoo’s plans for expansion



Fnac: in-depth engagement

FNAC SETS OUT to create a real depth of engagement with the customers it serves across six European markets. It informs and entertains them in a variety of ways, from the free Fnac music festival to a range of product guides on YouTube.

The high-tech electronics-to-hobbies retail chain has dedicated local language websites that operate alongside stores to serve its customers in France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland and the principality of Monaco. Beyond the European Economic Area (EEA), Fnac has taken its bricks-and-clicks approach to Morocco and Brazil.

InternetRetailing research shows that within the EEA, plus Switzerland, the retailer offers six communication channels to its customers. It puts the emphasis on speaking to shoppers in their own language and its Facebook and Twitter feeds are in four languages. Uptake varies between markets: on Facebook the highest page Likes are in the French market, followed by Portuguese and Spanish, but Fnac had the most Twitter followers in the Spanish market.

The retailer looks both online and offline to engage its customers. The Fnac loyalty card offers perks that include a range of online deals and a magazine. Festival Fnac Live took place in Paris in July and featured bands including Balthazar and Thylacine. Music videos from the event have subsequently populated its varied YouTube channel, alongside celebrity interviews, such as with All Blacks veteran Dan Carter talking about his autobiography. The channel also features product guides that aim to help shoppers as they make buying decisions.

Fnac used its French Facebook page to unveil the shortlist for its literature prize: Prix du Roman Fnac, while images on its Twitter feed include the presentation of the top prize. Its Instagram feed features inspirational images from around the world, its Pinterest site has pinnable images for groups as diverse

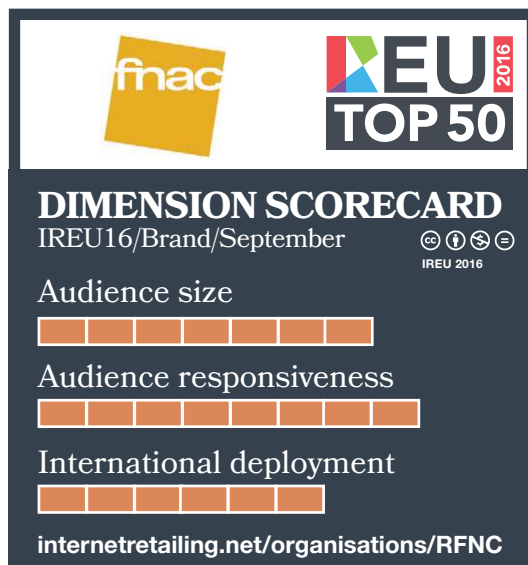


Image credit: Fnac

as Lego fans to games, and its Google+ page has videos, images and discussions. This September sees the first Forum Fnac Livres, a literary event that will feature authors including Jonathan Franzen and will be part of a calendar full of cultural events.

It's clear that Fnac is delivering on its aim to not only engage its shoppers but also entertain them. Over the years, it's built up a range of events. Now it's using social media to broadcast and extend the reach of those events in new ways and to new audiences across Europe.

High-tech retailer Fnac engages with its audience through a range of literary and music events



Decathlon: communicating sports to the family market

The French retailer tries to talk to customers across different channels, says its UK PR and conversations manager Kieran O'Shea. **Chloe Rigby** hears more

DECATHLON'S MOTTO IS "making sport accessible to the many" and in the UK, that's the remit of PR and conversations manager Kieran O'Shea. He's tasked with communicating the ins and outs of more than 70 sports for which shoppers can equip themselves for at Decathlon.

"We were once challenged on social media by a customer who asked if we could name the 70 sports that we sell," he says. "I was happy to list them all." In-store, the main departments are cycling, hiking, running and fitness but each has many divisions within it. Fitness, for example, includes karate, gymnastics and street dancing, while hiking includes camping and climbing. Those departments also frame the retailer's focus on the content that it produces in order to engage its audience, whether that's on its own blog, on the mum, family and sports bloggers that it works with, or on a wide range of social media channels.

InternetRetailing research shows that Decathlon, which has a home market in France, talks to its customers over 10 social media channels. On Facebook, it has 13 country-specific handles, using the local language for each. Its biggest Facebook following is in Spain where, at the time of research, it had 2.3m Likes. That's followed by the Italian and French pages. On Twitter, it has nine country-specific feeds and again, its Spanish following is the largest, at 377,000.

In the UK, O'Shea's focus is primarily on young families who enjoy sport together, alongside other key demographics such as couples who go camping, surf or take part in specific sports. "We work via a variety of different channels in order to reach them," he says. Social media and the blog are elements of that work, while the retailer also invests in organic and paid search to promote different sports to different groups. Key to its work, says O'Shea, is staying focused. "We go in-depth with our retail marketing so that we



Image credit: Decathlon

can talk to the right customers with the right offers at the right time. You see many ads on Facebook that you know aren't relevant to you – someone out there is paying for that to reach you but it's not for you. The last thing I want to do is pay to reach someone who's not interested. I avoid that by going in-depth in my targeting and making sure that what I'm serving to customers is what they want – so I'm not bombarding them with information they're going to find useless."

UK Focus

In the UK, O'Shea's focus is on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. "Twitter is more customer service, especially around online, chasing orders and making complaints," says O'Shea. "But it's also the one where we get the most amount of praise." Facebook is for distributing content and teaching readers about different sports in order to direct people to the website, while Instagram and YouTube are for rich content around Decathlon's brands, covering areas

One of Decathlon's key demographics is couples who like to go camping

"The last thing we want to do is pay to reach someone who's not interested"

from how to guides to inspirational videos, and how to take part in each sport.

Decathlon’s channels are similar in other markets, although, notes O’Shea, Google+ is more widely used in other parts of Europe than it is in the UK.


“For 2016, the two main things we’re driving forward are the specific targeted campaigns across different channels and the SEO, which is a valuable asset for us. It’s massively increasing the visits to the website organically. That’s mainly through content and outreach through my work with PR and bloggers. Outreach is very strong at the moment and links back are benefiting us.”

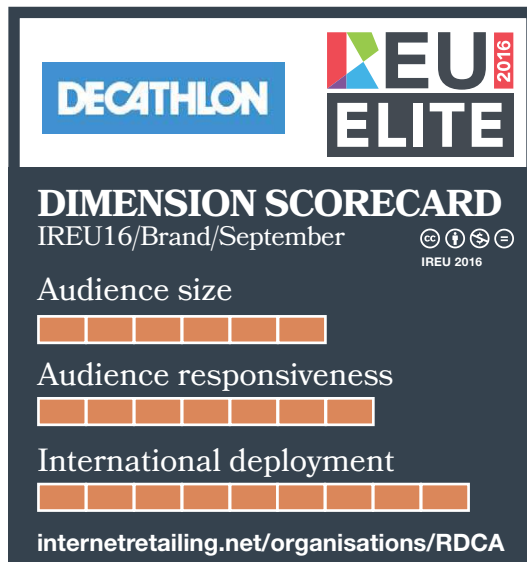
In the UK market, social and online help Decathlon to extend brand awareness. At the time of writing, the retailer had 26 stores in this market, although it plans to open more. By contrast, it has 290 stores in its home market of France. Nonetheless, says O’Shea, “I have more followers on Twitter than they do.” That’s to do, he says, with social media attitudes in France coupled with the fact that the retailer’s stores are its primary channel in that market. “Twitter is more popular in the UK than in France,” he notes. “The French tend to use other channels, and mainly their stores, since that’s the place they get the most amount of visits – they promote click and collect to their online shoppers.”

O’Shea also believes that UK shoppers are more likely to turn to the channel for service. “We’re finding that people take to social media because they get a response quicker,” he says. “You’re not left on the phone with cheesy music and put on hold. You just have the ease of asking the question on Twitter.”

Sports also provide a good way to engage via email. Shoppers who sign up to the Decathlon loyalty programme can opt to receive regular emails. “Specific sports do well,” says O’Shea. “Anyone who buys a bike, for example, has the option of a Decathlon service, and they receive emails six and 12 months later for a free service or a workshop.

They’re more likely to come back to the store for the workshop on their bike.”

When InternetRetailing asks O’Shea for his advice on brand engagement in the EEA context, he has one main recommendation – “Make sure you say the right thing to the right person. It’s about being as detailed as you can in the targets that you use.” 



Decathlon shoppers can sign up to receive sport-specific emails



Bol.com: using social media to reach out to customers



Image credit: Bol.com

Bol.com's promotions include running its own children's festival

DUTCH RETAILER BOL.COM gets close to customers in the Netherlands and Belgium through a highly active roster of social media accounts that operate alongside its own blog.

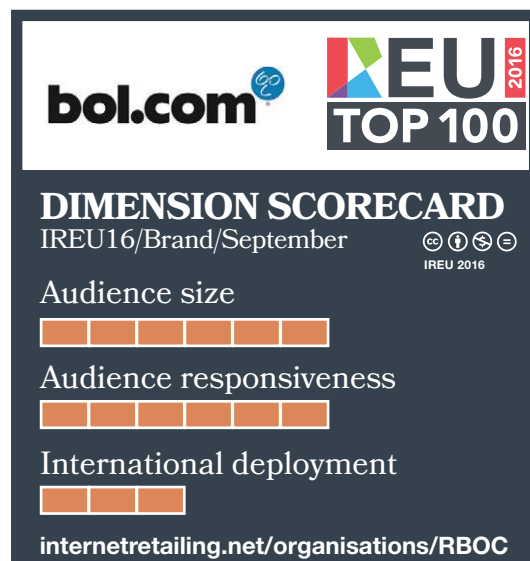
The online retailer sells goods ranging from electronics and books to toys and homewares. It talks to its customers via a presence on five of the social media networks that InternetRetailing research assesses. Shoppers can also reach the trader through phone, email and by live chat, giving them a wide choice of ways to ask questions or to make a complaint. Its mobile app, featuring fingerprint sign in, also enables customers to find new and convenient ways to shop.

Bol.com is particularly strong on Google+, where researchers found it had 8.6m views through the platform. There, Bol.com interest groups include books, gadgets, film and TV. Posts relate to subjects as diverse as new film releases and the latest gaming consoles and mobile phones, to interviews with authors and news of the latest deals. The retailer's Google+ presence has feeds dedicated both to the Netherlands and to Belgium.

The retailer has more than half a million Facebook Likes on content that includes reviews, news-related images and videos of author interviews, travel information, film previews and information on the augmented reality phenomenon *Pokémon Go*. The page also links to its Pinterest and Instagram presences. Bol.com primarily uses Pinterest to gather together products around themes such as student life, children, furnishings, and baby and child, while its Instagram feed is dedicated to inspirational images that fit around subjects such as food, sporting events, concerts and more.

All of these link into its Twitter feed and into the Bol blog, which has news of the retailer positioned around lifestyle, children, home and living and technology angles. This is a place to come when looking for Bol-related offers and competitions. One example of this is the chance to winning tickets to a Bol.com Children's Festival, scheduled to be held in September.

All in all this is a highly active and engaging presence across a variety of social channels, where the online retailer can develop connections and relationships with existing and potential customers. 🇳🇱



Otto: making it easy for shoppers to get in touch

IT COULDN'T BE easier to get in touch with German retailer Otto, which extends its reach across German, Austrian and Hungarian websites and Facebook pages. Shoppers can phone – with a free callback facility – email, or use live chat to get in touch. That last capability of live chat really stands out: this is a relatively uncommon feature in this index, with only 14% of IREU Top500 retailers offering the function. A 'my account' function enables shoppers to log in and check their online activity, while shoppers can make their own wishlist. There's even a dedicated link for shoppers who want to offer praise or criticism of products or service.

It seems that shoppers are also happy to hear from the retailer, which sells clothing, homewares and toys. Some 9.3% of its emails were read, Return Path analysis showed, with none of them marked as spam. Perhaps that's because shoppers signing up for Otto newsletters are clear about what they're going to receive and they must proactively sign up for them – before doing so, they're informed that the mailings contain "trends, deals, coupons, promotions and offers".




Otto puts a great deal of emphasis on its social media presence

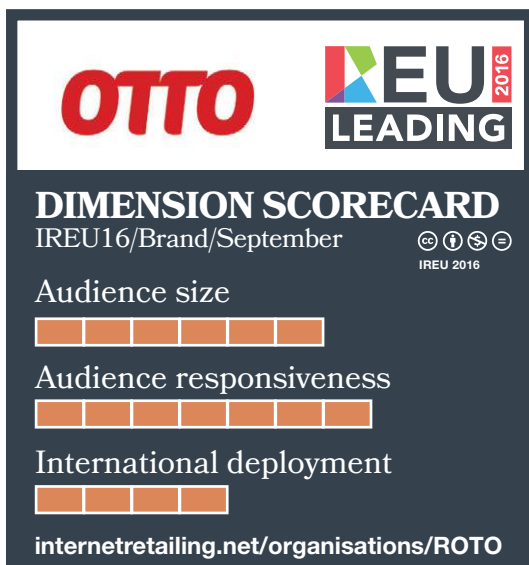
Image credit: Otto / Facebook

Otto's social media accounts are extensive and very active. It has a presence on Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Videos on its YouTube channel, supported for both its Austrian and German sites, are dedicated to style advice and DIY guides, such as #howtogetthelookrihanna, or a how to guide for destroying your own jeans.

Twitter features images and graphics, ranging from research into bikini style preferences to information about Dog Day and the latest line-ups from the Bundesliga football league. This channel is also where videos around sourcing are shared, such as one showing how its cotton is made in Africa.

Facebook offers Otto customers another place to go for fashion advice and styling videos. Shoppers are engaged through the opportunity to vote on alternate outfits. The page also offers 'shop now' functions and a link to other social media sites. The most liked site was the German Facebook page. Google+ is available for the German website, with 105,082 followers and 22m views.

Parent company the Otto Group also includes the BonPrix brand, which is also in the Top100 for brand engagement. This brand supports 21 country-specific websites with 16 unique Facebook pages and eight Twitter handles. 



12 approaches that work

Promoting your brand across borders can be challenging – especially without stores on the high street to provide a physical presence. Hardly surprising then, that many of our Top 50 in this Dimension are well established retailers, both in their home countries and internationally

Social

1 How much are you Liked?

A retailer bragging about how many followers it has on Twitter or Likes on Facebook is all very well but does that number really suggest the retailer is doing well or not? The average number of Facebook Likes for our IREU500 retailers was just over 2.4m – so boasting that you have 1m or so Likes may not be a great recommendation. Retailers can boost Facebook scores by encouraging shoppers with good content, meaningful promotions or access to additional services.

2 Match media to the market

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube may be regarded as de rigueur by many of our IREU500 retailers, while the leading players also add such networks as Instagram, Pinterest or Google+, as well as links to Apple Store and Google Play to collect their apps. Not all may be relevant for customers but retailers should be sure to include those customers are most likely to use. That can be challenging if a target market is at the younger end of the age spectrum, where preferences for what is cool and what is not can change suddenly and significantly. When moving to new geographies, it may also mean adding a raft of other networks: QZone, with 600 million users, may be vital for the Chinese market, for example. Some retailers also add links in their blogs to the list of social media icons on websites, but a presence on other micro-blogging sites could offer better brand engagement in some geographies, such as using Sina Weibo in China.

Boost your Facebook score by encouraging shoppers with good content

3 Make it easy and obvious

Accessing a site via Facebook rather than typing the website URL will be the preferred option for many, so it's important to make it as quick and easy as possible to buy. Of the IREU500 retailers, a little more than half (57%) have a click-through to 'shop now' from Facebook. Use a message appropriate to your customer base to flag that the item is available to buy – as Boohoo.com puts it: "Shop 'em all here." Even fewer (27%) make it easy for Facebook visitors to switch geographic region. In a global marketplace, a potential customer may well find a Facebook page in the brand's home language. Making it obvious that they can switch to a more relevant national site could improve brand engagement rankings.

4 Focus on imagery

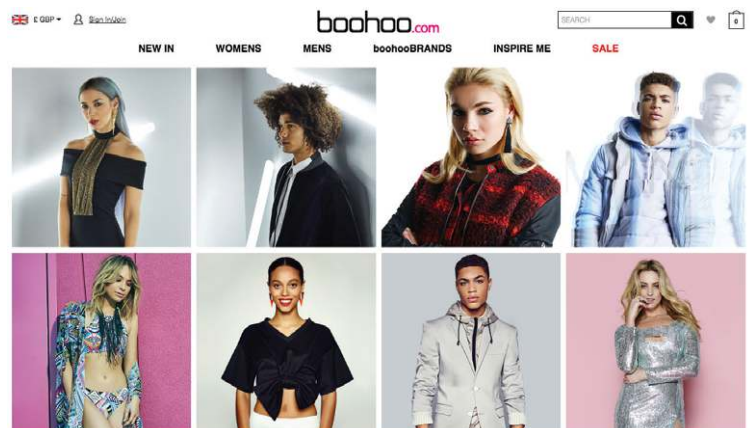
While Facebook and Twitter provide plenty of opportunity for comments and news, consumers – especially younger ones – are more interested in images and video.

According to a Forrester survey last year, YouTube, Whatsapp, Vine and Snapchat are all regarded by today's teenagers as rather more cool than Facebook. Newer networks, such as Kik and Periscope also focus on video. Allowing customers to post Instagram or Pinterest images of themselves wearing or using your products is a common enough social media tactic, but with the sort of six-second video clips available on Vine proving rather more popular with some age groups, customers may soon be looking for rather more exciting imagery.

Brand visibility

5 Spread the word

Having the right keywords, links and SEO tools might improve brand visibility, but what about other channels? Boohoo.com has posters on the London Underground not only showing its latest fashions but also promoting its next-day delivery services. As well as via its own website, Boohoo's range is sold by third-party retailers in the UK – including Next and Asos – and it has also run pop-up shops in New York, Los Angeles and Paris. Customers are encouraged to interact via Twitter, with their posts – and the company's replies – providing a constant information stream on its 'contact us' page, as well as having an 'official customer service page' on Twitter. Not surprising, then, that Boohoo is in first place for brand engagement. On the downside, it doesn't offer a customer service phone line but since it is targeting the young fast fashion sector, perhaps this isn't too surprising.



Boohoo.com goes out of its way to promote its brand across different channels

6 Speaking the right language

In a global marketplace, having websites in the relevant language for each marketplace would seem essential. But with English as an almost universal second language in many geographies, there are exceptions. With 1,000 stores in 30 countries, Decathlon runs separate websites in almost all of them. While the European ones and its Chinese site are translated into the relevant languages, its Thai and Indian sites remain in English. Boohoo also has five non-English versions of its website – German, French, Dutch, Italian and Spanish – as well as converting into 12 currencies in addition to sterling. Its international sales now account for some 36% of turnover.

Pimkie, which sells in the UK via Asos, has sites in seven European languages but not in English, while Vera Moda's parent, the Danish Bestseller Group, with stores in 30 countries, offers national websites in only 17 of them. At the other end of the scale, companies such as Xenos, Arkiesport, Empik of Eroski only appear to offer a website in their home languages.

If retailers do offer alternative language websites, it's important to make it obvious with a pull-down menu of flags and currencies, as at Boohoo. One can never assume that just because geolocation systems put a particular IP address in a certain geography that this is the home or native language of the person viewing the site. El Corte Inglés has a neat solution: it helpfully flashes up a "visit our .eu website and shop in your language and currency" and then has a pop-up allowing users to select language (English, French or Spanish) and the countries it serves other than Spain – Ireland, UK, Netherlands and France. Should you be a Spaniard living in the Netherlands, you can have the convenience of native language plus local delivery details and pricing.

7 Use a fan club

Brand advocates can do more than simply post positive reviews of products or send Snapchat images of their purchases to friends and family – they can personally advertise a brand. Or at least that is the approach adopted by Dutch value clothing retailer Zeeman.

Along with its pull-down menus for women's, men's, children's, or baby clothing is 'Zeeman Fanshop' which offers T-shirts, sweatshirts, jogging pants and assorted underwear all in the company's blue and yellow house colours and emblazoned with its distinctive logo. The true fan can, for €2.99, acquire a bright blue and yellow Zeeman T-shirt or, for €1.99, a pair of branded flip flops.

The screenshot shows the Zeeman Fanshop page. At the top, the Zeeman logo is prominent in blue and yellow. Below it, there's a navigation bar with categories like Home, Dames, Heren, Baby, Kinderen, Wonen, Huis-uit, Diversen, Brieven, Zeeman Fanshop, and Opruiming. A search bar and a shopping cart icon are also visible. The main content area features a large yellow banner with the Zeeman Fanshop logo. Below the banner, there's a grid of clothing items, including hoodies, t-shirts, and pants, all in blue and yellow. Each item has a price tag, such as 9.99 and 2.99. A filter menu on the left allows users to select sizes (Alle, M, L, XL, XXL, 36, 40, 42, 44, 46, S, XS, 75A, 75B, 80B, 85B, 75C, 80C, 85C, 36/38, 40/42, 44/46, 35/38, 39/42, 43/46, 36/37, 38/39, 40/41).

Zeeman's Fanshop sells wares that promote the company's own brand

8 Highlight stores

Make it easy for customers to find their nearest store, but also make it obvious if you don't have any. Even sites which are associated with major high street names can appear extremely coy about informing visitors. Bol.com, for example, is part of the Ahold Group and sister company Albert Heijn – one of the Netherlands' best-known retailers – provides collection points for Bol.com orders. However, that information is well tucked away on the Bol website. Others are far more upfront about high street availability. Miss Etam has Winkelzoeker as a pull-down on its home page, as does Pimkie for each of its language sites.

Others rather miss the point. The Body Shop's 'find a store' links to a nice map – although enter Amsterdam and it tells users the nearest store is in Lowestoft. The Disney Store locator also takes users to a personalised map using the location information from a PC, but try and find a shop elsewhere in the country and users must enter both place and country. Enter Cork, for example, and you find that the nearest – and presumably only – store in Ireland is in Dublin. The Body Shop does at least provide a full list of its UK stores along with the map. Google 'Boohoo store locator' – in case you thought there just might be a high street outlet somewhere for click and collect – and up comes www.boohoo.com/restofworld/page/storelocator, which takes you to what appears to be a genuine page, yet any attempt to find a location leaves you with a "page not found" message. If retailers have shops, say so. If retailers have a retail partner selling or delivering your lines, make that clear too. But pureplays with no high street presence should make this obvious too.

Email

9 Don't waste the message

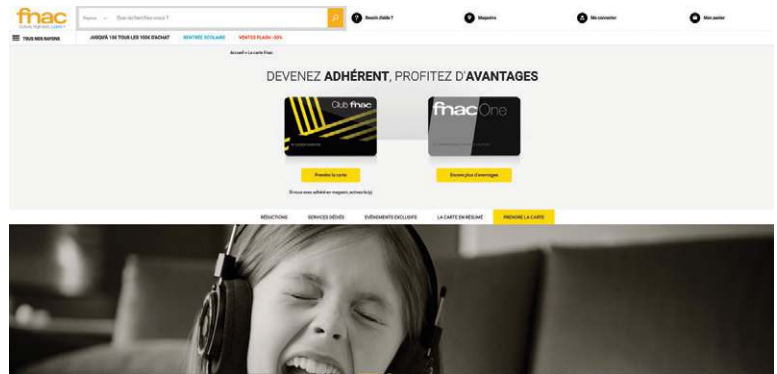
Examination of emails sent by some of the IREU500 companies suggests that just 44% are actually read, while around a third are deleted unread and more than 90% are eventually dismissed as spam by recipients. In many cases, emails are triggered by a purchase and not all sites include an obvious tick box during checkout to opt in or out of promotional emails. Too frequent emails and inappropriate offers will both eventually irritate customers, so make it easy for shoppers to unsubscribe and provide a simple pull-down list of reasons to help marketing departments identify where they may be going wrong.

10 Opt for rich content

Fashion retailers generally appreciate this, with newsletters and online magazines offering style tips and outlining the latest looks. The leading IREU500 sites for brand engagement provide highly visible sign-up forms for a regular newsletter on their home pages. Boohoo asks shoppers to "sign up for all the latest fashion news and exclusive offers" while Pimkie has a similar message inviting visitors to "actus fashion et promotions en avant première". Fnac has an onscreen magazine detailing special offers, book reviews and features about new video games and consumer electronics. Retailers need to identify the key reasons why customers shop with them and then provide these customers with benefits that match if shoppers are going to read, keep and respond to emails. Consumer electronic sites may focus on explaining the latest technology, book shops on author interviews, DIY on seasonal maintenance tips and so on.

11 Move beyond email for customer service

The average number of communication channels used by our IREU500 is just three – typically Facebook, Twitter and an email link for the customer service department. Some sites display a phone number – sometimes toll free – for telephone calls: both Public.gr and Carphone Warehouse put the number prominently in pride of place on their home page. Book retailer weltbild.at gives three different phone numbers – some 24-hour, others available 8:00 to 22:00 for e-books, orders or customer service. Other retailers either keep the phone number so deeply hidden that a shopper will have to search through masses of small print to find it, while some – including Boohoo and Lidl – don't appear to give either a phone number or postal address. Frequently, clicking on 'customer service' will only take users to a contact form for email, but mobile users or those with an urgent problem can find this irritating. New Look offers not only three telephone numbers (for UK, Europe and international) on its customer service page, but also adds a postal address and two live chat options via Facebook and Twitter. Opting for email only may simplify operations for the service department but is unlikely to enhance brand engagement.



Carte Fnac offers immediate benefits, including discounts and free deliveries

Image credit: Fnac

12 Make it obvious what customers are signing up for

For emails to be read and appreciated, they have to deliver value. That can, of course, be discount offers and sites like La Redoute make no secret of what you are signing up to when you provide an email address: "... our Secret Sales... our famous Black Friday Event and Outlet Sales of up to 70% off". Galeria Kaufhof gives a 10% discount coupon to all new newsletter subscribers. Fnac invites shoppers to sign up for Carte Fnac, offering an immediate discount on various products, free delivery of books and various special promotions all clearly listed. Vera Moda offers newcomers to its 'member's club' a €5 discount on their first purchase as well as styling tips, exclusive offers and a "special birthday surprise". But one thing most of these sign-up forms fail to mention is exactly how frequently these various offers, styling tips, or newsletters will be arriving in the customer's mailbox. We all suffer from too many emails, so retailers need to think about how often customers want to be contacted.

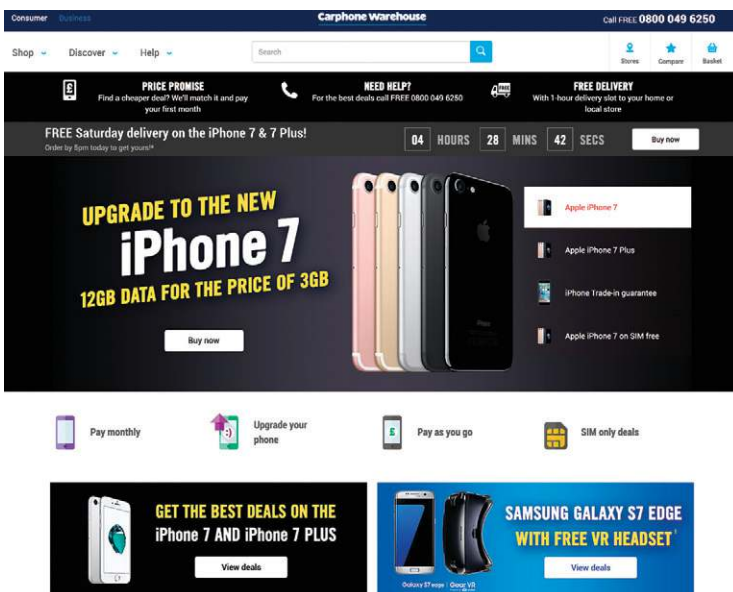


Image credit: Carphone Warehouse

Carphone Warehouse displays its phone number prominently on its homepage

Go social

A recent report by Adobe offers a snapshot of the intersection between brands and social media use in Europe. **Jonathan Wright** reports

HOW SHOULD RETAILERS use the web and social media to enhance the customer experience? It's a question that's tricky enough to answer in terms of just one country, let alone when you start to look all across Europe. Throw in the fact that many retailers target different demographics with different messages and things become even more complex.

In this context, a recent report by Adobe makes fascinating reading. The report focused on how brands (not just retailers), use the web and social media and reveals that Facebook remains the behemoth of the social world, with 89% of European consumers saying they use the service. Of these, 90% said they used Facebook to follow and interact with brands.

This, perhaps, isn't too surprising, but drill down into the data and a far more nuanced picture emerges of how consumers interact with brands via social media. Key findings of the report include:

- Swedes were described as being the most "socially savvy", with a third using Snapchat to engage with brands and 51% of Swedes using Instagram
- UK brands drive the most consumers to their websites through various social media outlets, with an average website traffic rate of 4.6% in 2015. In contrast, the figure for Germany was just 0.54%
- Among millennials, 55% of 18-24 year olds and 38% of 25-34 year olds in Europe are using Instagram. Turning to 18-24 year olds, 72% are following or engaging with a brand on Instagram
- The media and entertainment sector is the most successful at driving traffic to sites, with a traffic rate of 7.6% compared to an industry traffic rate of 1% or less in sectors such as retail, telecommunications or travel

That latter figure is particularly intriguing from a retail perspective. What is it that makes the media and entertainment sector so successful? An educated guess would be that it's a sector that, by its very nature, puts an onus on creating compelling and engaging content.

So could retailers also create better content?

Perhaps, but we would issue words of caution here. The new John Lewis Christmas advert, while it's become a national event, will clearly never generate the buzz of a new James Bond film. Nevertheless, in an era when brands and retailers are experimenting with so-called 'gameification' techniques, content creation is an area worth watching.

Finally, it's worth reflecting on why social media users are still relatively slow to engage with content. Perhaps this is because brands are still insufficiently sophisticated when it comes to working out what content to provide: less than half (45%) of European consumers agree that social media channels are getting better at providing relevant content and advertisements. 🇧🇷

The Adobe research, the second stage of its Europe Best of the Best 2015 Report was based on Adobe Marketing Cloud data and a survey related to the online habits of more than 5,000 consumers across Europe



Image credit: Instagram

Instagram is especially popular amongst younger millennials

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Conclusion


THE IDEA OF engaging with customers all across Europe is, on one level, inherently ridiculous. Customers living within different cities within the same European country – London and Manchester, Marseilles and Paris, Rome and Naples – often have little enough in common, let alone those living in Amsterdam and Athens. Nevertheless, retailing is in key respects about speaking directly to individual customers, without taking personalisation to such a degree that costs escalate and it's difficult or even impossible to make a profit.

One way to view the task of creating brand engagement across different European territories is to see it as being about working out how to balance this tension. That's especially true when you consider that eventually all retailers working at scale look outside home territories for new markets. Think of the way Scandinavian retailers look to expand into Germany, where there are significant cultural similarities, and vice-versa.

Against this backdrop, it's been fascinating to see where lessons learnt from one market are universally applicable across all territories, and where others are specifically local. As we learnt from the research conducted by Knowledge Partner Return Path, even a 'simple' discipline such as email marketing to customers on a database is a case of mixing up best practice, aiming for the general – 'emotional impact' – and the specific – working out what's the best time to contact customers.

There are also nuances here across the type of retailer. A company such as Burberry, which sells itself as a luxury British brand, can arguably afford to ignore certain local conventions. The fact it's *foreign* to other Europeans is part of its appeal and one reason why European customers would want to engage. The same doesn't apply to other more functional retailers looking to expand abroad, at least not to the same extent.

Taking all this together, perhaps the real answer to engaging customers across Europe is, firstly, for a retailer to be clear about its USPs. Think of how Lidl has expanded into Britain and taken on the established supermarkets. It's done so by bearing down on price and, often overlooked, creating well-maintained, fuss-free retail spaces where it's easy for shoppers to find what they want.

The next stage is to think about localisation, and it's here the ecommerce techniques we've discussed in this Dimension Report come into play. Effectively deployed, they enable the IREU Top 500 retailers simultaneously to work at scale and to localise. The key thing to recognise is that retailers need to do both. 



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