

DIMENSION REPORT

BRAND ENGAGEMENT: MARCH 2018

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“These are on-the-go customers who want to be able to get in touch or engage quickly via their phone – because sometimes it’s the only device they own ”

INSIDE

- We name the Top100 UK retailers that stand out for brand engagement
- From email to voice commerce: we set the context for how customers and retailers engage in 2018
- In-depth analysis of how Top50 retailers use social media

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INTRODUCTION



THE WAY THAT retailers communicate with existing and potential customers has changed enormously in recent years. Now that, as our research shows, 98% of Top500 retailers have not only Facebook but also Twitter accounts, enabling customers to get in touch via social media is surely a basic requirement? Retailers at the cutting edge are those enabling

shoppers to use live chat from their mobile phone app, a convenience unthought of just a few years ago. Meanwhile, our research finds, most retailers now enable customers to say exactly what they think of a product that they bought via ratings and reviews. This adds up to a brave new world of transparency: browsers can see both sides of two-way conversations when they're deciding which items to buy, and which retailer or brand to buy from. Running the type of operations that can easily open themselves up to this level of daily scrutiny is a challenge for retailers but it's also an opportunity – to communicate values, beliefs and approaches with an audience that is increasingly receptive and that wants to hear from those that it spends with.

In this IRUK Top500 Brand Engagement Performance Dimension Report, we're looking at what leading UK retailers are doing to give their customers the level of communication that they want. We're analysing what the Top500 are doing as a group to find out how standard practice is evolving in the UK market, while also focusing in on top retailers to understand what makes the difference for those at the cutting edge.

Our aim is that retailers of all sizes can use this report both to benchmark their own approaches and to understand what tools are proving to be the most effective for businesses across the industry. We hope you find it useful.

**Ian Jindal,
Editor-In-Chief**

EDITOR'S COMMENT

THE RAPID EVOLUTION of technology has helped to shape the always-on, connected consumer who expects to be able to contact a retailer quickly and efficiently, at a time and place of their choosing, using the devices they have to hand. Very often, the first available device is the smartphone, which shoppers are now as likely to use at home when watching the TV as they are when out and about on the high street, to meet friends, or on their way to work. This push towards mobile technology has put a fresh emphasis on social media as a way in which retailers can connect with their shoppers. But it's also encouraging new ways of thinking about just how traders and brands can engage with both existing and potential customers in order to win their attention, as well as a share of their disposable income. Voice ordering and live chat are among the key emerging approaches to the challenge, although the basics still remain important. Email and voice calls both play key roles in enabling shoppers to get in touch in the way that is most convenient, at any given moment.

In this IRUK Top500 Brand Engagement report, we're examining how retailers enable their shoppers to engage with them and how they ensure they have the information that they need to hand. Our Strategic overview (page 8) sets the context, while Martin Shaw and Fernando Santos of InternetRetailing's RetailX research division lay out their findings on how retailers perform in this area in two research-focused features, starting with Analysing the numbers on page 12. We also have a focus on social media in this report. On page 32, our New research features a detailed analysis of how brands are using Facebook, while our Emerging practice feature (page 29) takes a look at some standout examples of how retailers are using Pinterest and other social media platforms to their best advantage. Best practice also comes to the fore in the 12 approaches that work feature on page 24. We take a detailed look, too, at the work of Amazon, Footasylum, Holland & Barrett, Pets at Home and Wickes through a series of case studies and profiles.

You'll also find the list of Top100 retailers that stand out in this area in this Dimension report, as well as our overall Top500. We hope you find this Dimension Report useful and we look forward to hearing your feedback on this approach and on any ideas that you have for our future explorations of this subject.

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THE COMMERCE MARKETER'S GUIDE TO BETTER LIST BUILDING

Saima Alibhai, managing principal consultant at Oracle + Bronto, on engaging via email **ORACLE** + Bronto



Email marketing remains one of the most effective ways to reach customers. With more and more consumers checking their inboxes daily, the opportunity to meet customers at this important touchpoint can't be ignored.

The challenge retailers then face is how to consistently grow their subscriber database, and how to maintain subscriber engagement after. Too often the focus is on acquiring the sign-up, and then reverting to a generic batch-and-blast messaging strategy. However, this strategy causes your subscribers to disengage earlier because it's difficult to personalise your emails enough to be truly effective.

So, how do you grow your list size in a way that will help you collect the right customers and keep them engaged?

GROWING YOUR EMAIL SIGN-UPS

When looking to grow your contact database, you need to take a consistent, multi-pronged approach. Include a sign-up above the fold of your homepage or, even better, on all pages of your site. This gives consumers an easy way to sign up, which can be especially important if they link directly to a product page from the web. Limiting the sign-up to only the homepage decreases your ability to secure a new subscriber.

Other tactics you'll want to consider are popups, dropdowns and ribbons. These are all great at being front and centre to new visitors, and are routinely the most effective list-growth tactics. Of course, don't ignore other areas of growth, such as social pages, co-registration partnerships and bricks-and-mortar stores.

Now to address the elephant in the room: Should you offer an incentive for signing up? The answer is – it depends. There is nothing wrong with using incentives to entice new subscribers but be wary of training your customers to wait for discounts before they make purchases. Get creative with your incentives. Try offering a gift with their next purchase, or partner with a cause that is meaningful to your subscribers.

GET PERSONAL

Now that you have acquired new subscribers, it's time to personalise their experience because regardless of the products you sell, personalisation (even on a small scale) can have a lasting impact.

Even if you are using a batch-and-blast email strategy, look for areas where you can maximise personalisation. This could be acquisition source (on-site), email or purchase behaviour. The best part is that this can all be automated, taking a large burden off your team.

MAKE THEM BELIEVERS

You should never look at commerce marketing tactics as acquisition versus retention. It should be a combined strategy. You want to acquire the right customer and then engage them effectively along the way by showing that your brand understands them.

Focus your overall strategy by getting the right message to the right customer at the right time. This is where using segmentation, automation, send frequency and personalisation can help. Remember: one-size-fits-all might work for hats, but it rarely, if ever, works for email.

ABOUT ORACLE + BRONTO

Oracle + Bronto arms high-growth retailers with sophisticated marketing automation to maximise revenue opportunities. The Bronto Marketing Platform powers personalised multichannel content that generates the higher engagement needed for retail success. Keenly focused on the commerce marketer, Bronto continues its long-standing tradition as a leading email marketing provider to the global Internet Retailer Top 1000 and boasts a client roster of leading brands that includes Euro Car Parts, notonthehighstreet.com, Oak Furniture Land, Joseph Joseph and OKA.

For more information, visit bronto.com

THE EMAIL OPPORTUNITY

Komal Helyer, marketing director at Pure360, considers the importance of email and web personalisation in marketing campaigns



It may come as a surprise that not all leading UK retailers use email to engage with their customers. According to the findings of the InternetRetailing Brand Engagement Performance Dimension, 95% count email among their engagement channels. Contrast that with the 98% that use Facebook and Twitter and the 96% that use the phone.

These figures suggest retailers are missing a trick since the potential is huge. Industry results are telling us smart marketers should put more effort into email, the channel where they will reap the biggest rewards. Email is 40 times more effective at acquiring new customers than Facebook or Twitter, according to McKinsey.

The DMA tells us that when it comes to purchases driven by marketing, email has the highest conversion rate (66%), compared to social and other channels. When they crunch the numbers, many find the ROI from email outshines other channels and by using email and web automation solutions, our own customers have seen increased online revenues by an average of 22%. So as a marketer, why wouldn't you invest more time and resource?

Delivered well, email can be an advanced, integrated channel. By using various cross-channel data points to inform messaging, retailers are able to deliver true one-to-one conversations. This intelligent personalisation makes campaigns highly relevant to their recipients, while automation saves time and resources. Campaigns can run in the background, boosting revenue automatically.

Behavioural triggered emails are a form of automated intelligent personalisation and eConsultancy tells us that 74% of marketers say this increases customer engagement. The creative, nuanced and personalised journeys we can create with email and web automations take customer experience to the next level. With smart, real-time recommendations, abandoned basket/browse triggers and repeat purchase campaigns, to name a few, brands are able to strengthen their relationship with customers across email and web, increasing customer lifetime value.

Used well, email is the lifeblood of customer experience, customer lifecycle management and omnichannel

personalisation. But lack of time, resources or investment in the right technology mean that email still remains an untapped resource for many businesses.

Today, the way that consumers want to talk to retailers and brands is changing. They want two-way conversations that are tailored, personalised and cross all channels. Social is doing well because it's a great way for consumers to talk to the brand but email can do this too, to a potentially greater effect. As algorithm updates reduce organic reach, social media is increasingly pay-to-play. It is effectively a rented space. Email and the data you hold on your consumer is not only steadfast, it's also your territory. You own the conversation with your subscribers.

It is important to note that the upcoming GDPR legislation means retailers must now be mindful of consent when sending messages to their customers but the opportunity, by gaining permission, is that they can be even more certain of an engaged audience.

The vast majority of brands and retailers already use email but are they getting as much out of it as they could? Today's marketers have such a sophisticated array of tools and channels at their fingertips, let's not take any of them for granted.

ABOUT PURE360

Our company vision is to redefine email to transform our customers' digital marketing results. Consumers deserve better customer experiences. Too often, brands treat every customer the same. We believe brands of all sizes should be able to deliver personalised, relevant and timely marketing, so we're building the products that help them achieve that. Our goal is to make best-of-breed products that make it easier for marketers to manage the customer lifecycle and improve their customer experience.

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ENGAGING CONNECTED SHOPPERS

What do shoppers expect when they deal with retailers and what they actually get? Chloe Rigby investigates

TODAY'S SHOPPERS ARE better connected than they ever have been, with a level of engagement that retailers are working hard to match. Connected shoppers now expect a greater number of more convenient ways to get in touch and interact with the retailers and brands they buy from. Underlying this is an expectation of ever-increased convenience that enables them to buy in the way that works for them. This expectation, in turn, is prompted by the development of technology.

Some 80% of UK adults now have internet access at home and while this is most widespread among younger adults, it also extends to older generations. More than half (53%) of over-74s are internet users, according to Ofcom's *The Communications Market Report 2017*. In the UK, the report found, adults are more likely to have a smartphone to hand than any other device, since 76% of adults own one – well ahead of the 64% that own a laptop, the 58% that own a tablet and the 29% that own a desktop PC. The concentration of smartphones is highest among younger adults: 96% of those aged between 16 and 24, and the same proportion of those aged between 25 and 34 own one, said Ofcom. Overall, 66% of people use their mobile phone to access the internet, while 18% of adults live in a mobile-only home.

Technology is changing fast and as it does so, it drives changing customer behaviour. These are on-the-go customers who want to be able to get in touch or engage quickly via their phone because quite a lot of the time, it's the only device they own. This may also mean that they want to get in touch via a range of social media, via a phone call or via email.

Retailers and brands are responding to these on-the-go customers, RetailX research shows, by offering a wide choice of channels for them to contact or engage with the brand. The most commonly offered are Facebook and Twitter, both offered by 98% of Top500 retailers, while 96% enable shoppers to get in touch by phone and 95% by email. Indeed, the median Top500 retailers enables shoppers to engage with them via eight channels – from

“ Connected shoppers now expect a greater number of more convenient ways to get in touch and interact with the brands they buy from ”

a web submission form to a blog and other social media platforms. This meets the needs of shoppers who have questions they want answering, from product information to delivery updates. But whatever the approach they prefer, there's little doubt they'll have a better experience if their query is answered promptly and accurately.

This demand to engage is part of a wider, growing appetite for information that is also met as retailers share more information about themselves, through blog posts and social media interaction, and as other customers share their experiences, through product reviews, star ratings or through social forums.



Credit: Ocado Group

Ocado enables shoppers to stock up on groceries via voice commerce

CONSIDERING THE MESSAGE

Shoppers are becoming more choosy about which email messages they'll sign up to receive, data from the DMA's *Consumer Email Tracker of 2017* suggests. The organisation, in a survey with more than 1,000 responses, asked consumers how ready they were to sign up to receive marketing email from brands, shops or sites. They found that while more than half (54%) said they always or often signed up in 2016, that figure had dropped significantly – to 14% – by 2017. While 10% of consumers were signed up to receive 31 or more emails at their personal email addresses, and 2% to that number from work addresses, 74% received no emails at their work addresses and 7% were not signed up to any emails from their home addresses. But 93% of consumers were signed up to at least one marketing email, while the average consumer had signed up to 12. As a result, found the DMA, 78% believed they receive fewer than 10 marketing emails a day. When asked what kind of content they liked to receive, participants answered – in order of popularity – discounts, cited by 63% of respondents, rewards (51%), free gifts (48%), free delivery (46%) and competitions (33%). "The

focus on discounts by the consumer is unsurprising, as receiving the offer for something for free or a discount will always generate interest," said the report. "However, for the businesses involved, making only these types of offer will impact ROI and marketers have regularly reported that these methods are not the best performing." By contrast, its *Marketer Email Tracker* found trustworthiness (39%), competitions (26%) and the offer of exclusive content (23%) were the three most effective approaches. As more companies comply ahead of the May 2018 deadline, with GDPR legislation requiring email marketers to have explicit consent to send messages to individuals, it may prove that retailers find that as their messages go to opted-in recipients, they become more likely to open them.

Looking back at the DMA research, it's also worth noting that in 2017, 46% said a loyalty programme was a good reason to share an email address – up from 30% in 2016.

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

LOYALTY PROGRAMMES

At least 90% of UK adults belong to at least one loyalty programme but, according to new research, only 15% of UK Top500 retailers have such a scheme. That's one of the findings of a recent study, *Retail Loyalty Programmes in the UK 2018*, carried out by Razors Edge Business Intelligence using the IRUK Top500 2017. Its analysis found that 44 Top500 retailers operated 48 loyalty programmes.

The UK, says Razors Edge, is one of the most mature loyalty markets in the world. Nonetheless, its researchers found a lack of differentiation between most programmes, with generic programmes offering benefits such as points on spending, discounts, personalised offers and invitations to exclusive events. "Many UK retailers are making a minimum effort to promote their programmes on their websites," said Hannah Esterhuizen, operations director, Razor's Edge. "And they are doing this in a highly competitive environment." The most widely offered

“We are seeing a shift away from hard benefits to ones that have a more emotional and psychological appeal. We expect this trend to continue”

benefits were discounts, followed by free-of-charge items, points and privilege benefits.

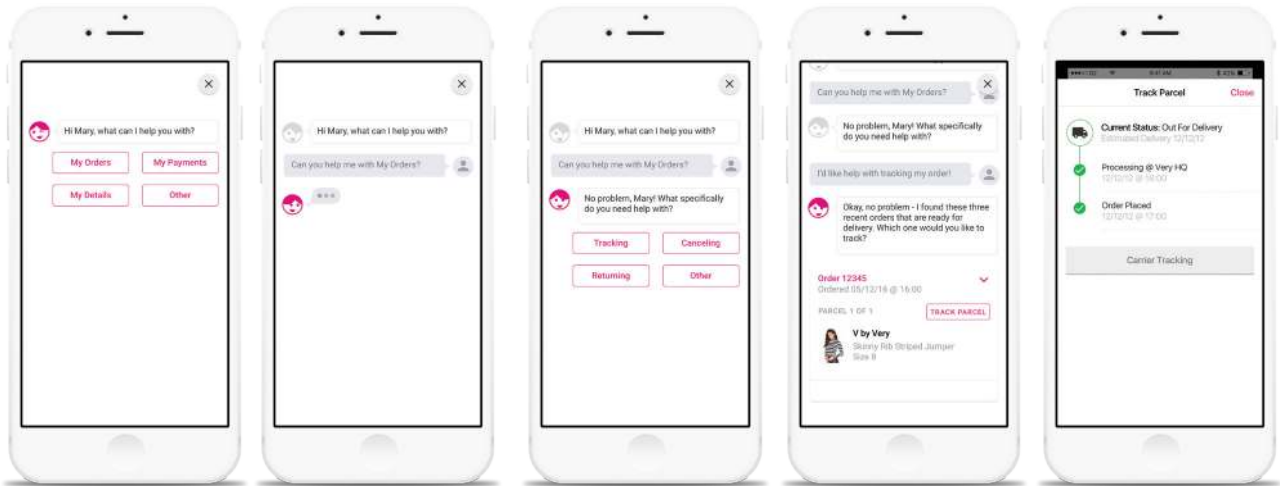
Nonetheless, the Razor's Edge research found some retailers are making a real difference with their programmes by responding to customer demand. Standout benefits included the B&Q Club, which sends digital receipts via email, while myJohn Lewis stores till receipts online in a 'Kitchen Drawer' feature. The Decathlon Card enables holders to return items without a receipt, while the PureHMV points programme offers rewards with scarcity value, such as a signed Cliff Richard calendar. "We are seeing a shift away from hard benefits to ones that have a more emotional and psychological appeal," said Esterhuizen. "We expect this trend to continue for some time to come."

It's notable that relatively few retailers in the IRUK Top500 2018 enable customers to participate in their loyalty programme across channels. RetailX researchers found that just 2% enabled shoppers to set up an account on their mobile app, down from 4% in 2018, 2% enabled shoppers to scan their existing cards from the app, and 6% enabled them to enter details of an existing loyalty card.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The focus on social media in this report reflects a fast-growing interest in this channel from retail marketers. The New Research feature (page 32) notes that 6% of social media pages operated by Top50 retailers feature live chat-type pop-up windows. Meanwhile, shopper marketing agency Savvy reports in its *2018 Shopper Outlook Report* that it had seen a "sharp rise" in the use of call to action buttons on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube posts – enabling shoppers to act when inspired, adding a product to their online basket or getting directions to a store that stocks the product. Savvy predicts more brands will add shopping capabilities to their social media communications in 2018.

Social media is not limited to the platforms specifically measured in this report. Rather, consumers go well beyond these constraints to discuss products that might meet their needs, discussing the pros and cons of items on a range of shared forums. This is area also addressed through the use of product reviews and star ratings, with shoppers keen to find out what others thought before they buy. Retailers are responding: 62% of the Top 500 enabled shoppers to rate products on their main website in 2018, a rise of 12 percentage points from 50% in 2017. A similar number (63%) enabled them to leave reviews, up from 53% in 2017. However, these features were less common on mobile apps, where 26% of the apps available supported reviews. The same percentage supported ratings.



Credit: Shop Direct Group

Machine learning drives the Very assistant's interaction with customers

EMERGING FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT

This year's RetailX research noted that 6% of retailers offered live chat on their mobile app – a figure that suggests this form of engagement is now emerging and may well become more widespread in years to come.

Certainly, the *LiveChat Customer Service Report 2018* found that more customers are now willing to use live chat, with the number of live chats undertaken by growing by 8.29% in 2017, compared to 2016. However, their satisfaction with the medium had fallen slightly, the average customer satisfaction rate decreasing by 2.81% in 2017 to stand at 83.54%.

Szymon Klimczak, chief marketing officer at LiveChat, noted one important trend. "What makes customers the happiest is dealing with an issue in one go, no matter how long it takes," he said. "Tech companies have one of the longest average handle times but because they solve most issues in one touchpoint, they lead the pack when it comes to customer satisfaction." Specifically in retail, the report noted that November and December were the months with the highest number of chats, with the average retailers seeing chat numbers rise by 9.8% in those peak trading months, compared to the rest of the year.

The use of chatbots means that some customers are seeing live chat automated. The Very app features machine learning-powered customer service. Nespresso customers can also get automated updates on their orders and answers to their questions via a chatbot.

Also growing quickly is the use of voice commerce as more shoppers use devices such as the Alexa-powered Amazon Echo, Google Home or Apple HomePod to shop more easily. The Alexa Voice Service has been integrated into cars made by, for example, Toyota and BMW, allowing shoppers to buy from supermarkets including Ocado and Morrisons from their car, while Tesco shoppers can use the Google device to do their shop.

The *Savvy 2018 Outlook Report* suggests that already, 20% of households have a voice assistant, with 58% of this group already having used it to buy something.

Meanwhile, Amazon customers can reorder their key brands from pet food to toilet tissue at the push of a Dash button, and the retailer has also moved beyond human ordering to Internet of Things-style technology. Its Amazon Dash Replenishment Service enables machines such as printers and washing machines to order their own consumables, from ink to laundry liquid.

It seems likely that as retail develops, the ways that traders and brands interact with their customers will evolve quickly, keeping pace with the demands of the now always-connected consumer.

DEVELOP CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Retailers are working across channels to engage with existing and potential shoppers, writes Fernando Santos, research project manager at RetailX

JUST HOW DO leading UK retailers engage with shoppers? That's the question that RetailX researchers looked to answer in the IRUK Top500 Brand Engagement Performance Dimension. They wanted to understand what traders do in order to first start a conversation with existing and potential customers, and then to develop that two-way communication into long-term relationships. By doing so, they hoped to show other retailers what measures work – as well as which are becoming more or less used as time goes on and customer expectations and relationships evolve.

GETTING ATTENTION

The research process started by looking at how many people visited the average IRUK Top500 website and what brought them there. Researchers found that the average Top500 retailer saw an average of 9.8m website visits a year and a median of 2.7m. This is a useful measure of how effectively retailers were engaging with consumers at the time of the research, and how well they had done so in the past. Working with InternetRetailing Knowledge Partner Hitwise, researchers found that search was the most-used route for first visits to a Top500 website. Some 82% of new visits to Top500 websites came from search; the median retailer's figure was 86%. It's clear that most retailers receive a great majority of their new visits from search and as a result, search is the channel by which Top500 traders engage with new and potential customers. Once shoppers have found a site, they tend not to return to it via search. Some 18% of return visits came via this channel, on average; the median figure was 14%. Overall, the average and median Top500 websites saw just over half (55%) of their annual visits come from search.

MULTICHANNEL APPROACHES TO ENGAGEMENT

Choice lies at the heart of the new customer relationship with the retailer. Shoppers now expect that retailers will go beyond offering them one or two ways to get in touch. They want to see the option that they prefer to use. By enabling them to share their opinions, problems, images and praise via a range of channels, retailers are more likely to fulfill their customers' wishes. In return, the data that traders gain through these channels can give them a greater understanding of the people that they serve, how they prefer to engage, as well as potential insights into upcoming consumer trends.

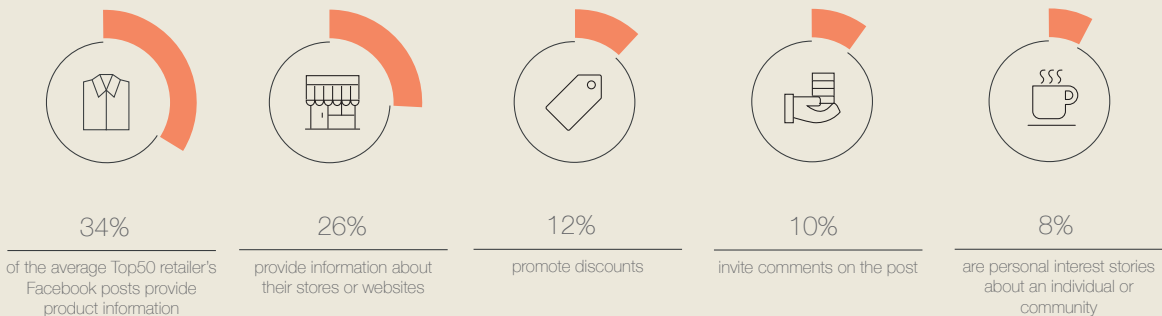
“ There's been a clear move to enable shoppers to share their experiences but, at the same time, a move away from social media ”

Researchers found that Top500 retailers engaged with customers via a median of eight communication channels. Most Top500 retailers had a Facebook page (98%) and a Twitter account (98%), while a majority had a presence on YouTube (92%), Instagram (91%) and Pinterest (87%). Snapchat (22%) remained a minority channel.

The study went further, looking at how Top50 retailers use Facebook (see graphic). It found that retailers most commonly used the platform to post information about products, with 34% of posts on this theme. More than a quarter (26%) of posts were about their stores or websites, while smaller numbers promoted discounts, invited comments or featured personal interest stories about an individual or a local community. This subject is explored further in the New Research feature on page 32.

THE BRAND ENGAGEMENT TOP50 ON FACEBOOK

All Top50 retailers operate a Facebook page and most have a variety of content types. The figures below show what a consumer would see on the average Top50 retailer's Facebook feed. Turn to the New Research section on page 32 for more analysis of this dataset



CC BY NC ND RetailX 2018

THE WEBSITE EXPERIENCE

The research suggests that since last year, there's been a clear move to enable shoppers to share their experiences on the retail website but, at the same time, a move away from social media. More IRUK Top500 retailers enabled shoppers to rate and review products (61% from 53% in 2017) from their websites than did in 2017. In 2018, 62% supported product ratings. That's up from 50% the previous year – a significant 12 percentage point rise. A similar proportion (63%) enabled shoppers to leave reviews – up from a slightly higher base (53%) in 2017.

Fewer retailers appeared to enable shoppers to use social media to share and like products than the previous year. Some 16% enabled visitors to Like a product using their social media account. Again that's down, this time from 24% in 2017. The proportion of retailers that enabled social media sharing fell to 52% from 54% in 2017. This may reflect changing shopper behaviour.

More than a third of retailers (37% from 36%) required shoppers to register before checking out. This measure gives retailers insights into their customers' behaviour but can slow down the checkout experience. More than half (51%) showed obvious promotions on their desktop sites at the time of the research. Retailers were also rated for the visual appeal of the website and the relevance of site search.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

It takes a committed shopper to download a mobile app since there's some effort involved to actively seek it out and the app will take up storage space on their phone. But those who take that step would seem more likely to engage with a retailer over time. Researchers looked at how Top500 retailers enable customers to use their apps to build a longer-term relationship.

They found that of the 265 retailers that had an iOS mobile app, 6% enabled their customers to talk to them via live chat. This feature was measured for the first time this year and will be monitored over time to see if uptake increases.

As with the website (see above), there was a large decline in social sharing on mobile apps – down by 11 percentage points to 33% from 44% – and there were small declines in the number enabling shoppers to leave reviews (26% from 27%) and ratings (26% from 28%) via the app.

Fewer retailers supported loyalty accounts from their mobile apps: the 2% of retailers with mobile apps that enabled shoppers to set up an account on the app halved from 4% in 2017, while 6% of multichannel retailers' apps (down by a third from 9% in 2017) enabled shoppers to enter the details of an existing store loyalty card.

ANALYSING THE NUMBERS

Measured for the first time in 2018, 2% enabled shoppers to scan their cards from the app. These measures reflect how easily customers can merge their offline and online loyalty programmes. Retailers that support this can build a single view of their customer across channels, which is useful for getting to know their shoppers, but it may be that retailers have found little customer interest in such measures. The research also found more Top500 retailers had iOS apps than last year. It may also be that newer apps have fewer features, which are added steadily over time.

Some 2% supported product videos in the app, while 37% offered daily deals.

“ The traders that top this Dimension have turned mobile apps into a communication channel in their own right ”

WHAT LEADING RETAILERS DO

RetailX researchers compiled a list of services and functionalities for each of the top retailers in this Dimension, highlighting those areas where they are most different from the average Top500 retailer. Most of the leading retailers in this Dimension have not moved away from social media sharing, as Top500 retailers have done more widely. The traders that top this Dimension have also turned mobile apps into a communication channel in their own right, featuring notifications and loyalty cards. In doing so, they stand out from the crowd.

Best practice is only rarely achieved in this industry when retailers use tools that aren't being used by others and, more commonly, when they do the same things better than others. In this section, the research team is not describing best practice but rather the practices that distinguish the best from the rest.

Clarks enables its customers to have their say by offering social sharing, as well as product reviews and ratings from its desktop website.

Superdrug also enables social sharing while scoring highly for the level of personalisation on its website and offering daily deals.

Homebase is among the retailers that enables shoppers to leave product reviews and ratings from its mobile app and to share and Like products on social media.

Argos scores well for a mobile app that includes strong personalisation, social media Likes, written product reviews and star ratings.

Wickes enables shoppers using its desktop website and share products via social media, as well as to leave product reviews. It is among the crop of retailers that shows obvious promotions on its website.

Bensons for Beds stands out for bucking the trend with social media: it enables customers to share an item with friends and Like it via social.

Debenhams uses daily deals and promotions to engage with its shoppers. It also enables product Likes.

House of Fraser is among the small minority of retailers that enable its customers to enter their loyalty card details in its mobile app. It also supports a range of social behaviours, including Likes and sharing.

Screwfix performs strongly on mobile, supporting customers to add written product review and give products a star rating. On social, it enables sharing and Likes.

IRUK 500 BRAND ENGAGEMENT DIMENSION

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The Top100 retailers of the IRUK Top500 2018 Brand Engagement Dimension, as measured across dozens of metrics for innovative practice in this area

Share your thoughts on #IRUK500 with @detail

BRAND ENGAGEMENT TOP50

Amazon	Halfords	Peacocks
Argos	Hobbycraft	The Perfume Shop
Asda	Holland & Barrett	Pets at Home
B&Q	Homebase	Post Office Shop
Bensons for Beds	House of Fraser	Ryman
Boots	JD Sports	Samsung
Chain Reaction Cycles	John Lewis	Schuh
Clarks	M&Co	Screwfix
Currys PC World	Machine Mart	SportsDirect.com
Debenhams	Marks & Spencer	Superdrug
Dune London	Matalan	Sweaty Betty
Dunelm	Morrisons	Toys R Us
Early Learning Centre	Mothercare	Waterstones
Evans Cycles	Next	WHSmith
Everything5pounds.com	Ocado	Wickes
Footasylum	Pandora	Wilko
Furniture Village	Paperchase	

BRAND ENGAGEMENT TOP100

AliExpress	Foot Locker	Microsoft
Avon	GAP	Millecs
Bathstore	Getthelabel.com	Mountain Warehouse
Beaverbrooks	H.Samuel	Office
Boden	Hobbs London	Orvis
Carphone Warehouse	Hughes Electrical	Outdoor & Country
Cass Art	Iceland	Pavers
Charles Tyrwhitt	JoJo Maman Bébé	Quiz
The Cotswold Company	Joules	Sainsbury's
Cotton Traders	Kiddicare	Sally
Dr. Martens	Kiehl's	TK Maxx
Dreams	Laithwaite's	Topps Tiles
Ebuyer.com	Laura Ashley	Uniqlo
Ellis Brigham Mountain Sports	Littlewoods	Urban Outfitters
The Entertainer	Lush	Victoria's Secret
Ernest Jones	MajesticWine	Watch Shop
Fitness Superstore	Maplin Electronics	

THE IRUK500

THE ELITE OF 2018: AMAZON, ARGOS, BOOTS, MARKS & SPENCER, SCREWFIX, TESCO

InternetRetailing congratulates all the members of the Top500 in 2018 as leaders in UK multichannel and commerce retailing. This list was put

together by an assessment of retailers' size and performance. For more, see the InternetRetailing 2018 Top500 Report, <http://etail.li/IRUK2018>

Amazon	Elite	Accessorize	Top_100	Andertons Music	Top_150	Adidas	Top_250	Links of London	Top_250
Argos	Elite	American Golf	Top_100	AppliancesDirect	Top_150	Aldo	Top_250	Lipsy	Top_250
Boots	Elite	Ann Summers	Top_100	Bathstore	Top_150	Arco	Top_250	Long Tall Sally	Top_250
Marks & Spencer	Elite	Axminster	Top_100	Blacks	Top_150	Aria Technology	Top_250	Louis Vuitton	Top_250
Screwfix	Elite	Blue Inc	Top_100	Bonmarché	Top_150	Beaverbrooks	Top_250	Lovehoney	Top_250
Tesco	Elite	Chain Reaction Cycles	Top_100	Boux Avenue	Top_150	Bensons for Beds	Top_250	Lush	Top_250
Asda	Leading	Claire's	Top_100	Cath Kidston	Top_150	Blackwell's	Top_250	Mango	Top_250
B&Q	Leading	Cotton Traders	Top_100	Crew Clothing Company	Top_150	Boden	Top_250	Marisota	Top_250
Currys PC World	Leading	Early Learning Centre	Top_100	Decathlon	Top_150	The Body Shop	Top_250	MenKind	Top_250
Debenhams	Leading	eBay	Top_100	Ebuyer.com	Top_150	Boohoo.com	Top_250	Microsoft	Top_250
Dunelm	Leading	Ellis Brigham	Top_100	Euro Car Parts	Top_150	Burberry	Top_250	Mint Velvet	Top_250
Halfords	Leading	The Entertainer	Top_100	Evans	Top_150	Burton	Top_250	Molton Brown	Top_250
Holland & Barrett	Leading	Estée Lauder	Top_100	Fat Face	Top_150	Burton Menswear	Top_250	Mr Porter	Top_250
House of Fraser	Leading	Footasylum	Top_100	Fragrance Direct	Top_150	Cass Art	Top_250	Net-A-Porter	Top_250
John Lewis	Leading	The Fragrance Shop	Top_100	Freemans.com	Top_150	Charles Clinkard	Top_250	The North Face	Top_250
Morrisons	Leading	Goldsmiths	Top_100	Getthelabel.com	Top_150	Charles Tyrwhitt	Top_250	NotOnTheHighStreet.com	Top_250
New Look	Leading	H.Samuel	Top_100	Grattan	Top_150	Clas Ohlson	Top_250	Oliver Bonas	Top_250
Next	Leading	Jacamo	Top_100	Hobbs London	Top_150	Coast	Top_250	Orvis	Top_250
Oasis	Leading	JD Williams	Top_100	Hobbycraft	Top_150	Costco	Top_250	Outdoor & Country	Top_250
Sainsbury's	Leading	Kaleidoscope	Top_100	Home Bargains	Top_150	Cotswold Outdoor	Top_250	Overclockers UK	Top_250
Schuh	Leading	Laura Ashley	Top_100	Hughes Electrical	Top_150	CycleSurgery	Top_250	Pandora	Top_250
Superdrug	Leading	M&Co	Top_100	Jack Wills	Top_150	Deichmann	Top_250	Paperchase	Top_250
Toys R Us	Leading	MAC Cosmetics	Top_100	Jigsaw	Top_150	Disney Store	Top_250	Peacocks	Top_250
Waterstones	Leading	Mamas & Papas	Top_100	JoJo Maman Bébé	Top_150	Dr. Martens	Top_250	Phase Eight	Top_250
Wickes	Leading	Matalan	Top_100	Joules	Top_150	Dreams	Top_250	PrettyLittleThing	Top_250
Ao.com	Top_050	Millets	Top_100	Karen Millen	Top_150	Ernest Jones	Top_250	Reebok	Top_250
Apple	Top_050	Miss Selfridge	Top_100	L'Occitane	Top_150	F. Hinds	Top_250	Robert Dyas	Top_250
Asos	Top_050	Missguided	Top_100	Laithwaite's	Top_150	Feelunique.com	Top_250	Rohan	Top_250
Carphone Warehouse	Top_050	Moss Bros.	Top_100	Lakeland	Top_150	Fitness Superstore	Top_250	Route One	Top_250
Clarks	Top_050	Nisbets	Top_100	Lloyds Pharmacy	Top_150	Foot Locker	Top_250	RS Components	Top_250
Dorothy Perkins	Top_050	Office	Top_100	MajesticWine	Top_150	Foyles	Top_250	Scan	Top_250
Dune London	Top_050	Pets at Home	Top_100	Monsoon	Top_150	French Connection	Top_250	Skatehut.co.uk	Top_250
Evans Cycles	Top_050	Post Office Shop	Top_100	Mountain Warehouse	Top_150	Furniture Village	Top_250	Snow+Rock	Top_250
Game	Top_050	Richer Sounds	Top_100	Nike	Top_150	GAP	Top_250	SoleTrader	Top_250
GO Outdoors	Top_050	Selfridges	Top_100	Pavers	Top_150	Gear4music.com	Top_250	Stella McCartney	Top_250
H&M	Top_050	Shoe Zone	Top_100	Quiz	Top_150	Guitarguitar	Top_250	Surfdome	Top_250
Homebase	Top_050	size?	Top_100	Radley	Top_150	Harrods	Top_250	Swarovski	Top_250
Hotel Chocolat	Top_050	SportsDirect.com	Top_100	Reiss	Top_150	Harvey Nichols	Top_250	Sweaty Betty	Top_250
JD Sports	Top_050	TK Maxx	Top_100	River Island	Top_150	Hollister	Top_250	T.M. Lewin	Top_250
Littlewoods	Top_050	Toolstation	Top_100	Ryman	Top_150	HP	Top_250	Ted Baker	Top_250
Maplin Electronics	Top_050	Topman	Top_100	Samsung	Top_150	Hugo Boss	Top_250	Thorntons	Top_250
Mothercare	Top_050	Topps Tiles	Top_100	Space.NK	Top_150	Iceland	Top_250	USC	Top_250
Ocado	Top_050	Uniqlo	Top_100	Specsavers	Top_150	Ikea	Top_250	Vans	Top_250
The Perfume Shop	Top_050	Urban Outfitters	Top_100	Ugg	Top_150	Interflora	Top_250	Victoria's Secret	Top_250
Simply Be	Top_050	Very	Top_100	Victorian Plumbing	Top_150	Jaeger	Top_250	Warehouse	Top_250
Smyths	Top_050	White Stuff	Top_100	Wallis	Top_150	Jessops	Top_250	Watch Shop	Top_250
Superdry	Top_050	Whittard of Chelsea	Top_100	Wex Photographic	Top_150	Just Eat	Top_250	Whistles	Top_250
Topshop	Top_050	WHSmith	Top_100	The Works	Top_150	Kurt Geiger	Top_250	The White Company	Top_250
Waitrose	Top_050	Wiggle	Top_100	Zalando	Top_150	Lands' End	Top_250	Wynsors World of Shoes	Top_250
Wilko	Top_050	Yours Clothing	Top_100	Zara	Top_150	LaptopsDirect	Top_250	Yankee Candle	Top_250

Abercrombie & Fitch	Top_350	Jones Bootmaker	Top_350	Abel & Cole	Top_500	G-Star Raw	Top_500	Plumbase	Top_500
Agent Provocateur	Top_350	Kiddicare	Top_350	Achica	Top_500	Gabor	Top_500	Polarn O. Pyret	Top_500
Aldi	Top_350	Kiehl's	Top_350	Acne Studios	Top_500	GAK	Top_500	Prada	Top_500
AllSaints	Top_350	Kitbag.com	Top_350	Adobe	Top_500	Garmin	Top_500	Printing.com	Top_500
Anthropologie	Top_350	L.K.Bennett	Top_350	AliExpress	Top_500	GearBest	Top_500	RedBubble	Top_500
Avon	Top_350	La Redoute	Top_350	Armani	Top_500	Glasses Direct	Top_500	Regatta Outdoor Clothing	Top_500
Banana Republic	Top_350	Leekes	Top_350	Asics	Top_500	Google	Top_500	Rich Tone Music	Top_500
Barbour	Top_350	Lego	Top_350	Aspal of London	Top_500	Graze	Top_500	Rokit	Top_500
BonPrix	Top_350	Liberty	Top_350	Asus	Top_500	GroWell	Top_500	Roman Originals	Top_500
The Book People	Top_350	Machine Mart	Top_350	ATS Euromaster	Top_500	Guess	Top_500	The Royal Mint	Top_500
Bose	Top_350	MandM Direct	Top_350	Austin Reed	Top_500	Habitat	Top_500	Samuel Windsor	Top_500
Bravissimo	Top_350	MatchesFashion.com	Top_350	Balenciaga	Top_500	Hamleys	Top_500	ScS	Top_500
Calendar Club	Top_350	Max Spielmann	Top_350	Bang Good	Top_500	Harveys	Top_500	Seasalt Cornwall	Top_500
Card Factory	Top_350	Mobile Fun	Top_350	bareMinerals	Top_500	Hattons	Top_500	SecretSales	Top_500
CarpetRight	Top_350	Mole Valley Farmers	Top_350	Barker & Stonehouse	Top_500	Hawes & Curtis	Top_500	See Tickets	Top_500
Cloggs	Top_350	Monica Vinader	Top_350	Belkin	Top_500	Hawkshead Country Wear	Top_500	Select	Top_500
The Cotswold Company	Top_350	Mulberry	Top_350	Berry Bros. & Rudd	Top_500	The Idle Man	Top_500	Sevenoaks Sound and Vision	Top_500
Countrywide	Top_350	Musto	Top_350	Bershka	Top_500	ITS	Top_500	Sneakersstuff	Top_500
Craghoppers	Top_350	Myprotein	Top_350	Bettys	Top_500	J Crew	Top_500	SportsBikeShop	Top_500
Dell	Top_350	Naked Wines	Top_350	Billabong	Top_500	John Smith's	Top_500	Steam	Top_500
DFS	Top_350	Nespresso	Top_350	Bondara	Top_500	Juno Records	Top_500	Stradivarius	Top_500
Dobbies Garden Centres	Top_350	Novatech	Top_350	Build-A-Bear Workshop	Top_500	Kärcher	Top_500	Superga	Top_500
Dulux Decorator Centres	Top_350	The Outnet	Top_350	Calvin Klein	Top_500	Kenzo	Top_500	Swatch	Top_500
EAST	Top_350	PartyCity	Top_350	Carhartt	Top_500	Lacoste	Top_500	Tate Shop	Top_500
Ecco	Top_350	Paul Smith	Top_350	CeX	Top_500	Levi's	Top_500	Thomann	Top_500
The Edinburgh Woollen Mill	Top_350	Pretty Green	Top_350	Chaos Cards	Top_500	LightInTheBox	Top_500	Timpson	Top_500
Esprit	Top_350	Pull & Bear	Top_350	Christian Louboutin	Top_500	Lindex	Top_500	TomTom	Top_500
Everything5pounds.com	Top_350	Puma	Top_350	Clinique	Top_500	Loaf	Top_500	Toolstop	Top_500
Fashion World	Top_350	QVC	Top_350	The Co-operative Electrical	Top_500	LookFantastic	Top_500	Travis Perkins	Top_500
Figleaves.com	Top_350	Ralph Lauren	Top_350	Converse	Top_500	Lyle & Scott	Top_500	Tredz	Top_500
Firebox	Top_350	The Range	Top_350	COS	Top_500	Made.com	Top_500	Triumph	Top_500
Flannels	Top_350	Rapha	Top_350	Crabtree & Evelyn	Top_500	Mainline Menswear	Top_500	UK Ecig Store	Top_500
Forbidden Planet	Top_350	Russell & Bromley	Top_350	Cromwell	Top_500	Massimo Dutti	Top_500	United Colors of Benetton	Top_500
Forever 21	Top_350	Sally	Top_350	Demon Tweaks	Top_500	Mobile Phones Direct	Top_500	Vape Club	Top_500
Fortnum & Mason	Top_350	Skechers	Top_350	Diesel	Top_500	Monki	Top_500	Versace	Top_500
Fossil	Top_350	Slaters	Top_350	Dior	Top_500	Montblanc	Top_500	Walls and Floors	Top_500
Fred Perry	Top_350	Staples	Top_350	Dover Street Market	Top_500	Moonpig	Top_500	Warren James	Top_500
Games Workshop	Top_350	Sunglass Hut	Top_350	Dunnes Stores	Top_500	Muji	Top_500	Watches of Switzerland	Top_500
Gant	Top_350	Tessuti	Top_350	END.	Top_500	Muscle Food	Top_500	Watchfinder	Top_500
Gucci	Top_350	Thomas Pink	Top_350	Escapade	Top_500	National Trust Shop	Top_500	Wedgwood	Top_500
Hackett	Top_350	Thomas Sabo	Top_350	Farfetch	Top_500	Neptune	Top_500	Weekday	Top_500
Heal's	Top_350	Tiffany & Co.	Top_350	Farrow & Ball	Top_500	New Balance	Top_500	WeirdFish	Top_500
hmv.com	Top_350	TJ Hughes	Top_350	Fendi	Top_500	Offspring	Top_500	Wish	Top_500
Home Essentials	Top_350	Tommy Hilfiger	Top_350	Field & Trek	Top_500	OnePlus	Top_500	Wolf & Badger	Top_500
Hotter	Top_350	Trainline	Top_350	Fired Earth	Top_500	The Original Factory Shop	Top_500	Woodhouse Clothing	Top_500
Jack & Jones	Top_350	Trespass	Top_350	Fitbit	Top_500	Oysho	Top_500	Wyevalle Garden Centres	Top_500
Jacques Vert	Top_350	Tripp	Top_350	FitFlop	Top_500	Pepe Jeans London	Top_500	YvesSaintLaurent	Top_500
Jewson	Top_350	Under Armour	Top_350	Footpatrol	Top_500	Photobox	Top_500	Zavvi	Top_500
Jimmy Choo	Top_350	Viking	Top_350	Fraser Hart	Top_500	Planet Organic	Top_500	Zooplus	Top_500
Joe Browns	Top_350	Wayfair	Top_350	funkypigeon.com	Top_500	Playstation Store	Top_500	& Other Stories	Top_500

PETS AT HOME: MOBILE-POWERED LOYALTY

AT PETS AT Home, the strategic focus is firmly on engaging with the customer via a multichannel approach that brings together stores and online to enable convenient shopping. The retailer gives both existing and potential customers reasons to stay in touch that cross channels – from regularly delivered subscription flea treatments through to services such as the development of in-store vet practices. In half-year results, to October 12, Pets at Home said: “Our group strategy is... centred around encouraging customers to shop with us through more channels and use more services.” Already at that time, it said, around 28% of customer revenues were directed towards its services, both its Vets4Pets practices and its Groom Room salons.

Multichannel services have been boosted through the introduction of in-store tablets – or Pet Pads – that customers can use to share their details and those of their pet, replacing paper forms. The pads use IBM Sales Assist technology to enable staff to give customers more product information and to answer shoppers’ questions.

Loyalty is a key strategy for Pets at Home. The retailer has a steadily expanding VIP club that accounts for a growing proportion of revenue from the site. By January 2018, the club had 3.8m active members - up from 3.7m a year earlier. VIP club members enjoy a 10% discount in store, and can also help to support animals in need when they use their card in a transaction. The VIP Club features prominently on the Pets at Home app; the retailer is among the small minority of Top500 retailers that enable shoppers to log in or sign up to the club via the app, and to keep the VIP club card on their phone. Existing members can scan their membership card from the app in order to add in their details.

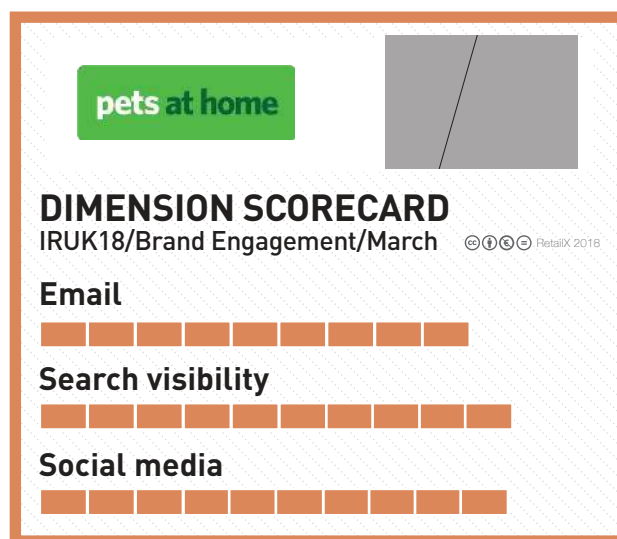
Members of the VIP club used their card in transactions that accounted for 68% of revenue in the 12 weeks to January 2017 (up from 66% in January 2017). This high level of participation enables the retailer to maintain a single view of how most of its customers spend with it, both online and in stores. That in turn should enable consistent service and relevant offers for customers. Certainly it’s an approach that seems to be working for its shoppers and, in turn, for the bottom line. Pets at Home reported revenues of £223.3m in the quarter to January 5, up by 9.6% on the same time last year, including



Image credit: Pets at Home

omnichannel revenues from merchandise sales of £13m, a 77% improvement on the previous year.

Chief executive Ian Kellett said: “We again saw the benefits of our omnichannel capabilities, providing customers with innovative and convenient ways to shop, particularly through order in-store and subscription services. This unique combination of capabilities is brought to life by our store colleagues, who provide the friendly expertise, advice and service that our customers really value.”



WICKES: INSPIRING AND SHARING



WICKES STANDS OUT in the Brand Engagement Dimension for the way it puts information – everything from advice to inspiration – firmly into the customer's hands.

Its website houses ideas to inspire customers about what they could do, alongside videos that show them how to do it. These are also shared and extended via social media platforms, putting the resources where existing and potential customers are browsing. Its Pinterest page, for example, features inspirational images of projects that range from building and maintaining a tree house, for example, to equipping and decorating a home office. This mirrors the platform's role as a search and discovery platform. Meanwhile Wickes' YouTube content features more practical approaches to tasks such as fitting a kitchen sink, wallpapering around sockets and removing and replacing a dishwasher. A range of real-life stories show how customers have embarked on projects from brewing their own beer to designing a games room.

On its Facebook page and Twitter feed, the retailer offers advice through #Wickesipedia alongside seasonal discounts and free design consultations. It's via these pages too that it shares company news and charity fundraising results. Wickes also makes it easy for users to share its products further afield, whether that's product information with friends via social media, or their opinions

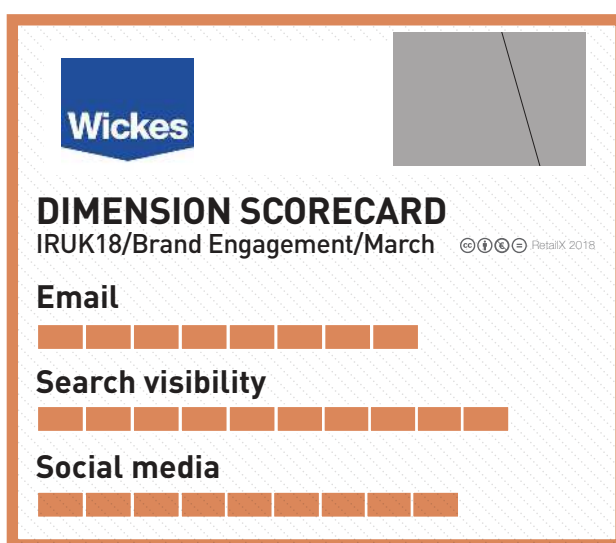
with the wider public through product reviews. It even gives advice on how to write a review, noting that comments are moderated and that content related to delivery and packaging, for example, won't be shared.

It's an overall approach that seems to work for the retailer, which is part of the larger Travis Perkins builders' merchant groups. Along with its sister company Toolstation it forms Travis Perkins' consumer division.

At the bottom line, that division reported sales of £822m in the six months to June 30. That's 7.3% up on the same time in the previous year, while adjusted operating profits of £45m were also up, by 2.3%.

At the time, chief executive John Carter said: "The robust growth and outperformance in our contracts and consumer divisions build on strong customer propositions and successful investments in those businesses."

That growth is perhaps more notable since it comes at a time of sometimes challenging trading conditions. "Trading conditions in our markets continue to be mixed," said Carter, "with consumer discretionary spending under pressure from rising inflation and ongoing uncertainty in the UK economy. We maintain our confidence in the long-term fundamental drivers of our markets, and this underpins our plan to invest in our businesses in order to improve our customer propositions and extend our competitive advantage."



AMAZON: FINDING NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH CUSTOMERS

The veteran online retailer is still setting the standard for customer engagement, writes Chloe Rigby

HOW AMAZON ENGAGES with its customers today very often sets their expectations of other retailers for tomorrow. Shoppers whose early online experience with Amazon led them to expect free delivery are often still loath to pay for fulfilment today. Since Amazon moved onto the Prime subscription scheme, a paid-for customer membership scheme offering benefits that include free delivery, movies and music downloads, millions of shoppers have signed up. In 2017, more new paid members joined the scheme than in any previous year since its launch in 2007. Last year, according to Amazon, also saw more than 5bn items shipped using the service, in countries around the world. The figures speak for themselves and a number of other retailers have, in the last 10 years, launched their own subscription schemes, safe in the knowledge that customers will pay for free delivery. Since what Amazon does can so often set the pace, it seems sensible to consider what the retailer is doing now, in order to see what that may say about the future of customer engagement.

VOICE COMMERCE

Amazon's Alexa Voice Service powers a range of its own devices, from the Echo to the Dot, and also comes installed in range of third-party devices, notably cars made by manufacturers including Toyota and BMW. Customers can use it to control their homes, stream their music and shop online from retailers including Amazon and Ocado. The success of the service outstripped Amazon's own expectations last year and suggests that customers are more than ready for a future in which they speak, rather than type, their online orders.

"Our 2017 projections for Alexa were very optimistic and we far exceeded them," said Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder and CEO, at the time of the online giant's recent fourth-quarter figures. His comments came as the retailer posted sales of \$177.9bn (£126.8bn) in 2017, up 31% on the previous year. Bezos said: "We don't see positive surprises of this magnitude very often — expect us to double down." The scale of Alexa adoption is reflected in the fact

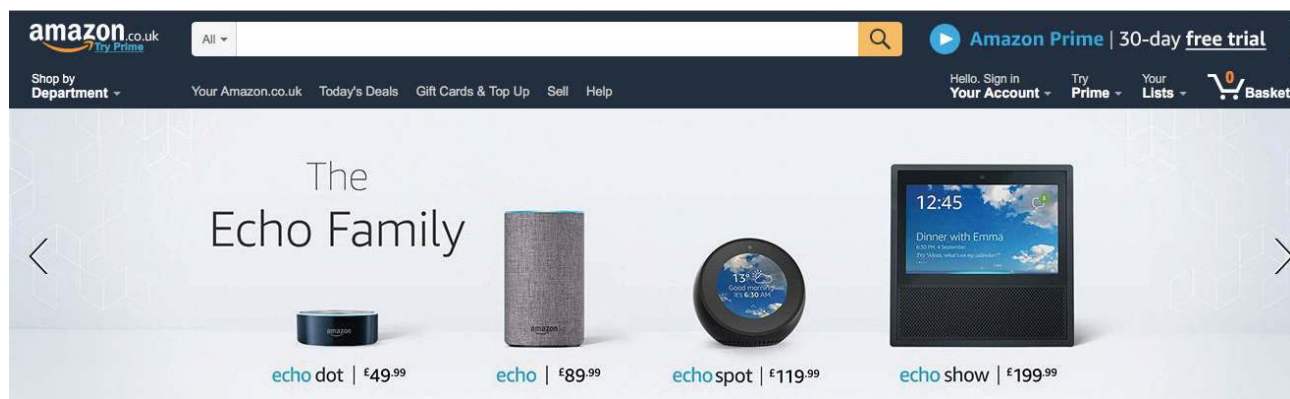


More than 5bn items were shipped through Amazon Prime in 2017

that so many third-parties are now helping to grow the technology. "We've reached an important point where other companies and developers are accelerating adoption of Alexa," said Bezos. "There are now over 30,000 skills from outside developers, customers can control more than 4,000 smart home devices from 1,200 unique brands with Alexa, and we're seeing strong response to our new far-field voice kit for manufacturers."

THROUGH STORES

Famous for being online-only, Amazon has nonetheless made two significant moves into stores lately. It bought natural and organic food store chain, Whole Foods Market, in 2017 and has gone on to launch free two-hour order delivery for Amazon Prime members in parts of the US. At the time, Whole Foods Market chief executive John Mackey emphasised the growing convenience of its service for Prime members. "Together, we have already lowered prices on many items, and this offering makes Prime customers' lives even easier." This emphasis on ease and convenience extends to the new Amazon Go store, now open and running in Seattle. That store does away with the need for customers to check out – rather the goods that they add to their baskets are automatically registered on the Amazon Go app on their mobile phone. The approach



The Alexa Voice Service operates over a growing range of devices

appears aimed as reducing the friction of the in-store shopping experience. But does this suggest that one future of customer engagement is to do away with human interaction as far as possible, even in the store?

INTERNET OF THINGS

There is no human involvement in Amazon's Dash Replenishment Service, which enables connected devices with screens to place their own one-click orders for the consumables they use when supplies run low. Thus a smart printer that is enabled to use the replenishment service can reorder ink automatically and a washing machine can order detergent. The service works, says Amazon, as connected devices measure how much of a refill has been consumed through inputs including infrared, pressure flow, weight and other sensors.

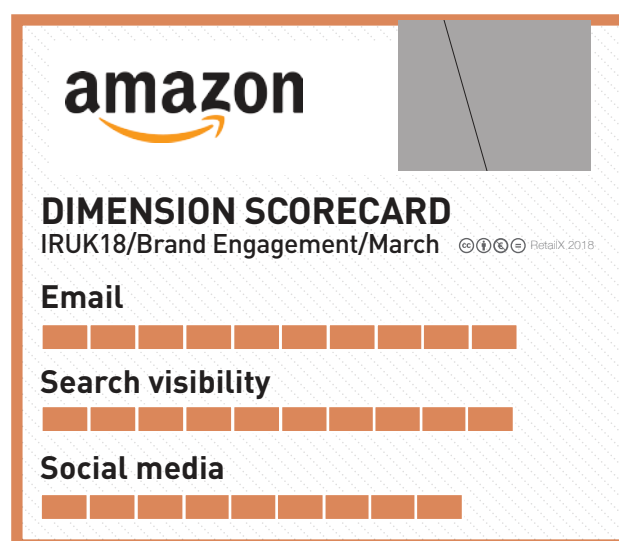
In recent months, a range of new devices has been added to the scheme. Among them is the Kenmore brand, with appliances from a fridge to a washer, dryer, dishwasher and a water softener, all capable of ordering their own supplies. "Most of us inevitably forget to restock the consumables we need – like laundry detergent and dishwasher tabs – until we've run out," said Chris McGugan, general manager, innovation and Kenmore at Sears Holding Corporation. "By integrating Dash Replenishment with our home appliances, we're using innovative technology to automate reordering and make sure our customers always have the supplies they need to keep their homes running smoothly."

Again, Amazon puts the emphasis on the convenience, which it argues is improved if shoppers need to take no action at all in order to buy. "We've all felt the frustration of realising we're out of something we frequently use, so it's no surprise customers are loving the convenience of Dash Replenishment, which makes shopping for every day consumables completely disappear," said Daniel Rausch,

vice president of smart home, Amazon. No doubt many customers will agree. Yet other retailers will no doubt be looking at how they can use the IoT in their own businesses in order to encourage such auto-reordering.

AMAZON SMILE

In one notable approach to engagement, Amazon is appealing to customers' human side – while still emphasising the importance of convenient shopping. When shoppers buy through AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.co.uk) the retailer donates 0.5% of the net purchase price to their nominated charity. The scheme recently expanded to the UK market from the US, where Amazon has already given more than \$69m (£49m) to charities via the scheme. "We think our customers will love the opportunity to support a wide variety of charities up and down the country without having to change the way they shop," said Jessica Blum, UK manager, AmazonSmile.



FOOTASYLUM: FOCUSING ON ITS CORE CUSTOMERS

FOOTASYLUM TAKES A highly focused approach to its customers. Its 'on-trend' footwear ranges, sourced from both established and emerging suppliers, are firmly and predominantly aimed at 16 to 24-year-old shoppers. That's a constituency the retailer targets both online and offline, from the student offers that are flagged across its website, to its blog, its stores, and beyond.

Online, Footasylum is one of the 22% of retailers that enable customers to follow on Snapchat. The social platform, known for its strong millennial following, is among seven social channels that the retailer offers. The others include Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram.

Its The Lowdown blog focuses on street style, sneaker collections and "stuff". At the time of writing, that "stuff" included one blog post marking Chinese New Year of the dog, devoted to "the cutest dogs on Instagram".

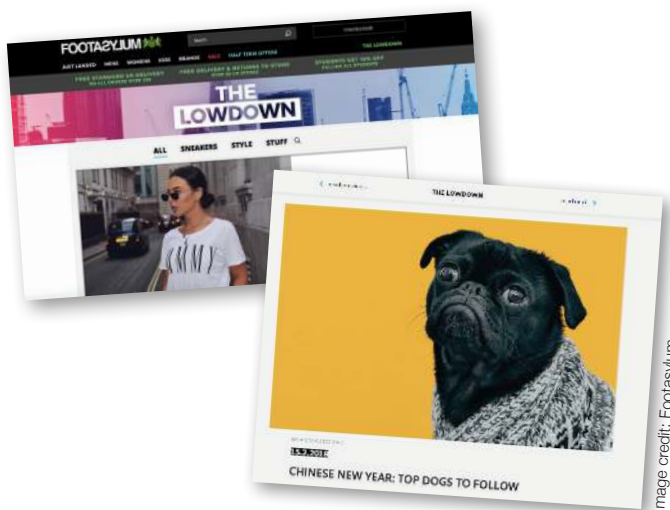
Its stores are fitted out in what the company, writing last October as it notified the London Stock Exchange and potential investors of its flotation plans, described as its "distinctive style, tailored to the local market" and making use of "video, music and photography to create lively and relevant environments for its target 16 to 24-year-old customer base."

Each store varies in order to reflect its local community. The range in each includes brands that have local relevance. This move towards localisation, said Footasylum, was in keeping with its strategy "of catering for different regional demographics".

In that document, it also described its target customers as fashion conscious, less likely to have dependents and more likely to spend on the way they look, especially on clothing and footwear. This age group, it believes, is "more willing to embrace new trends" that may then be picked up by other age groups, and is also "the most prominent user of digital sales channels".

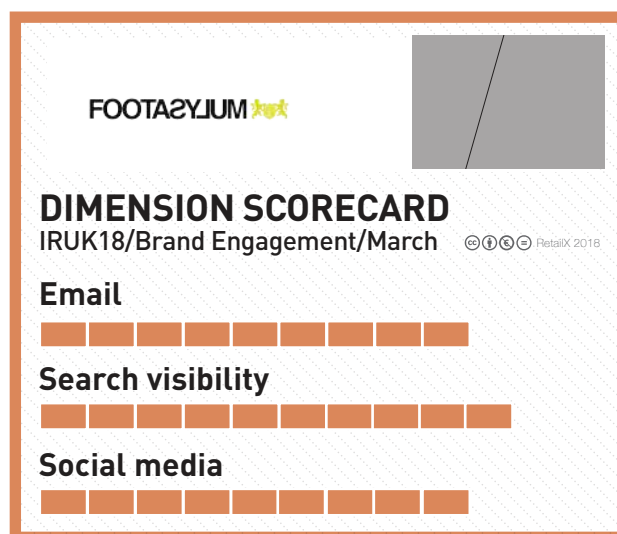
Footasylum segments its customers into six core 'tribes', each with its own "nuanced demographic and regional profile," and including the inner city 'urban' tribe, for example. "An in-depth understanding of these characteristics allows the company to tailor its product range to each 'tribe' appropriately and to protect against a reliance on any one trend," it said at the time of the announcement, last October.

Footasylum also said at that time that it would be



investing in expanding its existing routes to market, in its technology and in its marketing as it looked to "support future growth and optimise its engagement with its customers". It's an approach that seems to be working. It reported sales of £89.8m in the 18 weeks to December 30 2017, 33.4% up on the same time in the previous year.

Footasylum was founded in 2005 by David Makin, who previously co-founded JD Sports. The company is now led by chief executive Clare Nesbitt.



HOLLAND & BARRETT: BRINGING EXPERTISE TO CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

TALKING TO CUSTOMERS is a real focus for multichannel health food retailer Holland & Barrett.

The business trains its staff to take an expert approach to advising shoppers in store. Staff go through its in-house Holland & Barrett Natural Health Academy, on courses that last an average of a year, in order to gain qualifications that equip them to advise customers in-store about products such as dietary supplements. It's an approach that the retailer prides itself on and it's no surprise that it features prominently on its website as well. The site is home to The Health Hub blog, populated with recipes, advice, explanations of different supplements and how eating foods from carrots to golden flax seeds can help to improve health.

One interesting feature is the use of a 'trending' box next to the Health Hub search box. At the time of writing, immunity, vegan and sleep were all featured, pointing shoppers towards information that others were finding useful. The website also promotes the Healthbox scheme, which recommends products based on an interactive consultation, alongside personalised advice.

As well as offering advice and information, the Holland & Barrett website encourages shoppers to get in touch with their feedback through its website. There, the feedback link sits alongside a quick form enabling shoppers to sign up to email messages, and links to engagement channels including Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter.

Online and store engagement are connected through in-store ordering. Shoppers can find out more through digital screens in the shop using an in-store app.

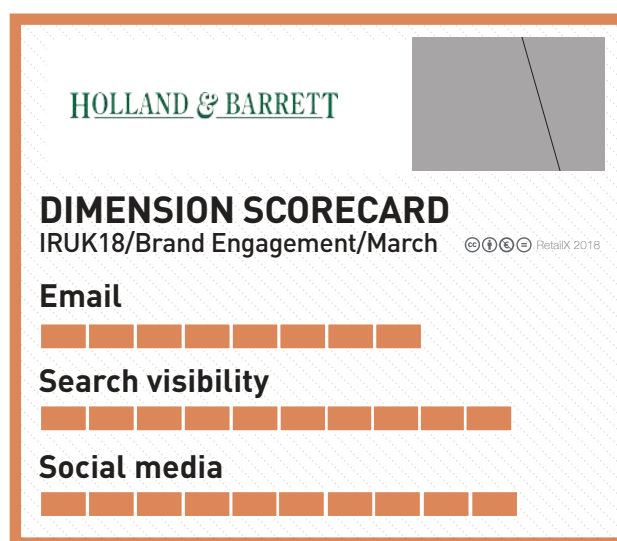
Holland & Barrett's cross-channel loyalty programme, Rewards for Life, enables customers to earn points towards discounts. Shoppers can sign into the scheme via the store's iOS app in order to activate a card, and can also create their loyalty account through the app. The app features a wishlist. Data from the scheme enables Holland & Barrett to understand its customers and their behaviour, enabling it to improve the way it engages with each one of them.

Holland & Barrett, recently bought by L1 Retail, appointed Steve Carson to the role of managing director in January. Carson, who previously worked at Sainsbury's Argos on projects including its digital store concept, its



Image credit: Holland & Barrett

partnership with eBay and the roll out of its hub and spoke delivery network, was hired to the new role with a brief to focus on digital transformation. At the time of his arrival, he said he was excited at the challenge ahead. "Holland & Barrett is a longstanding and admired brand with enormous potential and a clear health and wellbeing proposition that is growing in popularity and relevance around the world," he said.



12 APPROACHES THAT WORK

Leading retailers enhance engagement by encouraging customer interaction and affection for their brand, be that by providing a source of must-have information, loyalty rewards, useful apps or ensuring that the brand's values and image matches those that of its target customers, writes Penelope Ody

1 Provide valued information...

Whether it is styling notes, patterns for the knitters, advice for new mums or DIY instructions, the leading retailers in this Dimension engage customers with content that will appeal to their target market. Such content may take the form of a blog, online magazine, free downloads or 'how to...' videos, but it needs to be relevant and regularly updated. For some market segments, finding the right material can be challenging: Bensons for Beds, for example, has come up with an amusing video on the history of the bed, while for Homebase and B&Q, there is an endless assortment of videos and text-based guides on anything from 'How to repair patches in the lawn' to 'How to fit a splash back'. B&Q also provides a neat online bathroom design tool allowing shoppers to place and rearrange all the necessary fitments in a 3D model of their own bathrooms. Hobbycraft, too, has an enormous selection of 'how-to' ideas and craft tips as well as numerous free downloads, from knitting patterns to cards for children to colour.

2 ...and make it easy to find

Both B&Q and Homebase include 'ideas and advice' in the pull-down menus on their landing page, as does John Lewis with its 'inspiration and advice'. Marks & Spencer has 'Style & Living' accessed from 'Inspire me' in its page headers. It also adds a selection of topics prominently beneath the special offers on its landing page, with click-throughs for daily updates on a range of topics from product news and trend updates to recipes for 'end of January' cocktails (posted very timely on the 30th). Also on the landing page is 'Adventures in Food' with recipes and topical interviews, such as with clean-eating foodie Jasmine Hemsley. All these are very obvious and accessible.

In contrast, while Debenhams puts 'My Beauty Club' among its page headers, its link to 'Our Style Debrief' is way down at the bottom of the landing page with the small print.

Image credit: Hobbycraft



Hobbycraft's website engages with customers via how-to videos



Image credit: Clarks

Clarks shows exactly how buyers rated their shoes

3 Encourage ratings and reviews

For some shoppers, those endless invitations to leave a review can be more of an irritant than a way of delivering brand reinforcement but, fortunately for retailers, such curmudgeons are outnumbered by those who love giving feedback. The number of Top 500 sites providing product ratings was up by 12 percentage points (pp) this year to 62%, while those encouraging reviews increased by 8pp to 61%. For a retailer such as Clarks, with its seasonally changing stock assortment, the number of reviews varies from single digits for the current styles to well over 1,000 for core lines. All are accessible but, fortunately, the product page initially only displays the most recent eight. Shoppers are asked not only to provide a header for their review and a few lines of text but also to answer such questions as the reason for purchase, where they bought their item and whether they'd recommend it or not. Shoppers provide feedback on comfort, quality and style as well as a star rating.

5 Appeal to their better nature

People are often passionate about the environment, concerned about social inequality or generous in their support of good causes. Making your own activities in any of these areas more apparent may not only improve perceptions of your brand, it may also enhance the feel-good factor for shoppers who buy from you. Ocado has a scheme allowing customers to make donations to food banks by simply adding a 'You give. We give' token to their trolleys. Ocado then matches the amount to double the donation and converts the total into food bank groceries. Boots provides pages on its corporate social responsibility activities, from charity fund-raising to its approach to reducing plastic packaging. John Lewis has pages devoted to its numerous community and environmental policies as well as allowing shoppers to download a copy of its Human Rights Report 2016/17. Bensons for Beds runs a scheme encouraging customers to donate their old beds, mattresses and bedroom furniture to raise funds for the British Heart Foundation, while Peacocks raises funds for Cancer Research UK through various activities as well as selling the charity's branded products in its stores.

4 Raise your social media profile

Engaging in social media remains a vital daily activity for many and some 98% of the Top500 retailers have a Facebook page, 98% maintain a Twitter account and 92% have a YouTube channel. Instagram (91%) and Pinterest (87%) are both popular but only around one in five (22%) have so far adopted Snapchat. Having gone to the time and trouble to establish and maintain these social channels, it is perhaps surprising how many retailers hide the information away at the bottom of the landing page along with the small print about customer services and delivery information. Surprisingly few then use their social media data to validate products – only 18% of the Top500, according to RetailX researchers. John Lewis, one of the Top 25, neatly displays the number of Facebook Likes for each of its products on the relevant page as well as providing a click-through to save the item on Pinterest. Others scoring well on this type of social validation include Clarks, Superdrug, Homebase, Wickes and Bensons for Beds.

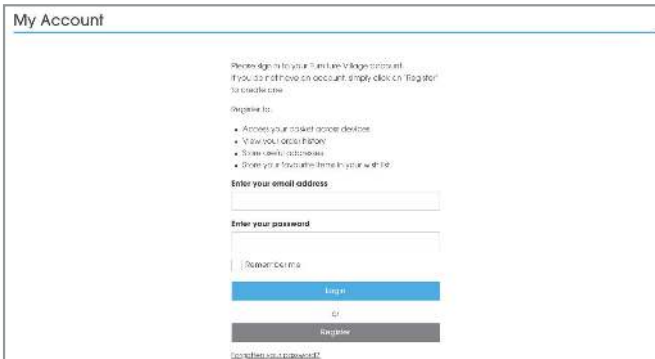


Image credit: Ocado

Ocado appeals to shoppers' charitable instincts

12 APPROACHES THAT WORK

Image credit: Furniture Village



Clicking on Furniture Village's wish list button encourages shoppers to open an account

6 Offer them a wish list

If shoppers care sufficiently about your products to start compiling a wish list then they are certainly committed and well engaged with your brand. John Lewis flags the availability with 'My wish list' top right hand corner on every page. Others, including Pandora and House of Fraser, prefer to put a heart icon there to access the wish list page, which is reasonably obvious. Mothercare takes no chance with both a heart and 'wish list' top right and also provides easy access to declared public wish lists to simplify gift buying. To create a wish list it is necessary to have an account. Some sites assume this is already the case and simply provide a log-in once a shopper has clicked on 'wish list' but Furniture Village takes the opportunity to list the benefits of an account at this stage, informing customers that they'll be able to access their basket across devices, view order history and "store your favourite items in your wish list".

7 Use some imagination

Loyalty cards may be increasingly replaced by loyalty apps but a great many still operate on the 'points for prizes' principle. Understanding what really interests or matters to your customers and capitalising on that, as well as delivering appropriate rewards, is key to successful engagement. Pets at Home, with six million members of its VIP Club, understands this very well. One key benefit of membership is to pay £10 a year to join the 'VIP Find a Pet' service. Club members can send a lost pet alert to Pets at Home and they then alert all local Club members with details of the lost animal – with numerous messages on the website from happy owners reunited with their pets in this way. Paperchase, too, understands its customers. Its invitation to join 'Treat Me' describes it as "Perfect therapy for anyone with a slight Paperchase addiction". There are no points but benefits include a £5 voucher on birthdays, free click and collect, a free regular premium coffee each week and regular surprise "treats". Pandora offers its loyalty club members exclusive jewellery, H&M gives them unlimited free standard delivery as well as click and collect, while M&Co adds a "birthday surprise" and the opportunity to join club "spa trips, holidays and more".



Image credit: Pets at Home

Pets at Home gives loyalty club members benefits they value

8 Newsletter or blog?

Unsolicited emailed newsletters are a bane for some customers, while others welcome a regular update about new styles or seasonal activities. Today, some retailers provide an opportunity to sign up for their newsletter at the checkout, while others – including Clarks and Peacocks – may also provide a low-profile plug at the end-of-page small print. Dune displays a neat banner at the bottom of its landing page with an invitation to “Be the first!” and “Sign up to our newsletter for the latest collections, promotions and news”. Others prefer blogs, sometimes accessed from the header page as with Paperchase’s The Journal Blog or from that list of small print and social media logos at the bottom of the landing page – as with Hobbycraft’s Craft Blog.

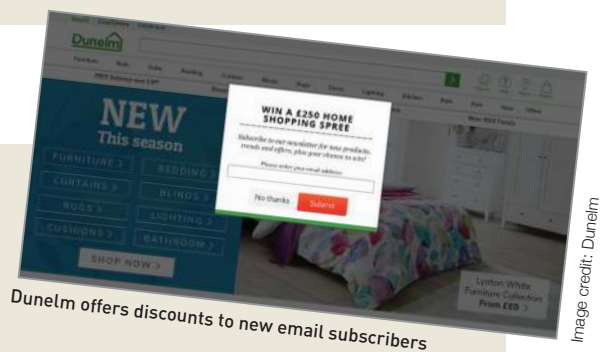
Such blogs vary enormously in content and are often largely promotional. Most are generally very different from the original discussion or information blogs that emerged in the 1990s. They are also not always very topical – in February 2018, M&Co’s most recent blog post was on 21 October 2017, while ‘The Journal Blog’ still featured ideas for making Christmas cards. If you’re going to call it a blog, it really does need to be regularly updated.

9 Watch your apps

Customers will readily download apps but how many ever use them to their full extent? Top500 retailers appear to have cut back on a number of app functions this year, while there has been little change in adoption of new attributes. Very few retailers (only 2% of the Top500) allow customers to sign up for a loyalty account via a mobile app, while still only around a quarter (26%) allow mobile users to post product reviews or ratings that way. However, daily deals via an app have become more popular – now offered by 37% of the Top500. As a brand engagement tool, some of the leading retailers are more interested in content and customer services. Marks & Spencer has a recipe app and another for accessing Sparks accounts and locating stores, while Boots’ allows shoppers to book appointments for pharmacy services or beauty consultations in store, manage prescriptions and arrange photo printing as well as accessing loyalty card information and health-related content. John Lewis helpfully lists its app functions by device – Android, iPhone or iPad – with a raft of functions that include storing electronic receipts, checking stock availability or building up wish lists. It also allows users to “Access your myJohn Lewis card in the app by shaking your phone”.

10 Match promotions to product

Excessive discounting, as every retailer knows, rapidly erodes margin and, given the added cost to serve of home delivery and handling online returns, the likely result can easily end in a profits warning. Rewarding loyal customers with occasional discounts can encourage brand engagement, but should they be offered to all and sundry even before they’ve made a purchase? It clearly works for some – especially if there is a relevant product mix. Land on Furniture Village’s site for the first time and you’re greeted with a large pop-up window offering £25 off the first order in exchange for an email address. At Dunelm, a similar pop-up holds out the carrot of a chance to win a “£250 shopping spree” for signing up to its newsletter – even before you’ve entered the site. Furniture and home furnishings are unlikely to be regular purchases for most people, so there are good arguments for offering a reward and grabbing as much information about potential buyers as soon as possible. However, for retailers in product groups with regular repeat purchases, it may be far better to wait until the checkout and an initial purchase before offering such carrots for any repeat visit.



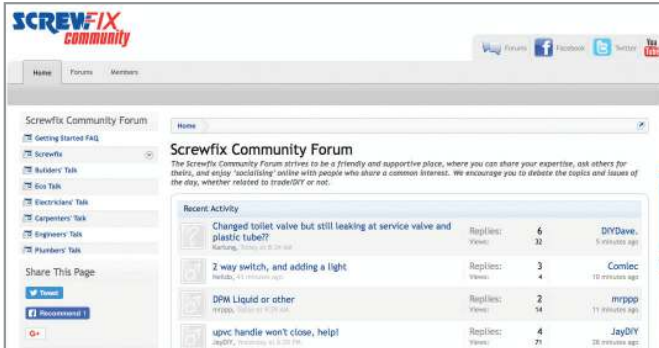
Dunelm offers discounts to new email subscribers

Image credit: Dunelm

12 APPROACHES THAT WORK

11 Involve your customers

Persuading your customers to become brand champions requires not only appropriate products and good service but other reasons for them to trust and recommend your brand or want to interact regularly with your site and stores. For some of the Top 100, providing a source in-depth expert advice is the obvious solution – as with Boots, Mothercare or Pets at Home. Others encourage lively discussion forums where customers can share concerns. Screwfix's Community Forum provides a popular space for both amateurs to ask for help with a building project as well as specialist tradesmen – plumbers, carpenters etc – to share their problems. New posts regularly trigger hundreds of replies within hours. House of Fraser actively encourages customer interaction with 'Your Say', an online customer panel, where shoppers "can share your views about House of Fraser through regular surveys and polls". As a reward, participants are entered in regular prize draws for £250 HoF gift cards.



Screwfix enables website users to pool their expertise

Image credit: Screwfix



Gordon's Gin offers free drinks to delayed commuters

Image credit: Gordon's Gin

12 Think outside the box

Don't confine your brand engagement efforts to website, store or your Facebook page. Gordon's Gin, possibly aiming to raise its profile as artisan gin-makers continue to attract media attention, is offering vouchers for free Gordon's Gin and tonic to commuters suffering from train delays. Using technology from Eagle Eye, 'Yaydelay' uses geo-data to monitor real-time social media spikes that surge when train delays occur. On Fridays between 5pm and 6pm, commuters can check at www.yaydelay.com to see if the level of delays has triggered the offer and then download an online voucher and claim a free G&T at the station's pub. Starting at London Waterloo in February, Gordon's plans to extend the scheme countrywide and commuters are being encouraged to tweet #YayDelay to lobby for their station to be added to the scheme. It is certainly a novel way to raise the profile of your brand, drive traffic to your website, collect contact details of likely customers and deliver a much-needed feel-good factor.

ENGAGING THROUGH IMAGES

Given that 87% of Top500 retailers engage with their audiences via Pinterest, what is the secret to using the platform effectively? Chloe Rigby asks the question

PINTEREST SAYS IT'S not like other social platforms. The thing that makes it different from Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, it claims, is that Pinterest visitors come in order to plan projects for themselves, rather than to engage with others. This is 'me' time, in which visitors turn to it as a "visual discovery engine" rather than a social platform. It's about personal shopping, discovery and experience. During this time, users – who are currently mostly female, although with a fast-growing demographic of male users – are open to seeing the content that retailers and brands share on the site. They're looking for ideas that will enable them to complete a project, one that is more than likely to involve a purchase.

Content on the site takes the form of 'pinned' images and ideas, collected together in noticeboards. More than 80% of that content comes from businesses, according to Pinterest. That's a contrast with sites such as Facebook, where most content is generated by the users themselves. Which posts visitors see when they search is driven both by user curation and by machine-learning: users looking for a sofa will see a range of items that meet their criteria.

One point to consider is that the vast majority (97%) of searches on Pinterest do not use specific brand names – leaving search results open to any brand. Instead, searches may feature the boards put together by any of its 150m users around the world – of whom fewer than half are in Pinterest's home US market. That means a user searching for home decoration ideas will see ideas from all over the world, from Scandinavia to Australia. At the bottom line, says Pinterest, it's about inspiration, wherever it originates.

From the pin, UK users click through to find out more about a product from the website where it was featured. That's different from the US market, where users can buy from the pin. But, says Pinterest, British users like to click through to a retail site to buy. The move also means that retailers and brands can easily analyse which Pinterest posts have brought them the most revenue.

So how do retailers and brands go about reaching people in their decision-making journey on Pinterest? The secret to capturing natural search is to think visual, according to Pinterest. Strong imagery is a key part of ensuring that products catch the eye, storytelling is another. An extended pin might include a picture of a finished living room, but then add in images of the

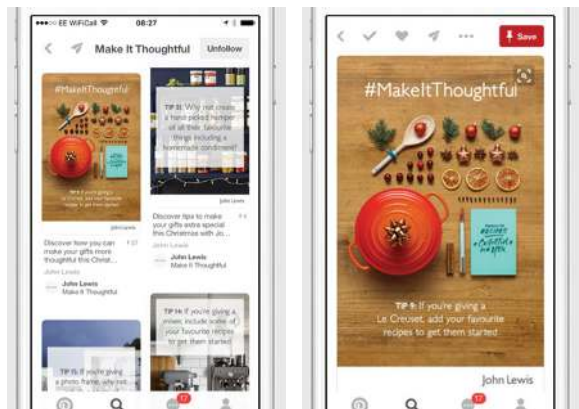
“ Fewer than half of users are in Pinterest's home US market. At the bottom line, it's about inspiration, wherever it originates ”

individual items that make up the total look. However, it's important that the finished board looks like a lifestyle shoot rather than a catalogue. Context is everything.

Promoted pins are also available: according to Pinterest these fit in well with other search-generated results since they look like other pins they see, although marked as promoted pins.

Shoppers can also search for items using the Pinterest Lens – its equivalent of visual search. By photographing a product through this, they can find similar examples on the platform. The lens can also be used to view Pinterest pincodes, the site's equivalent of QR codes.

EMERGING PRACTICE

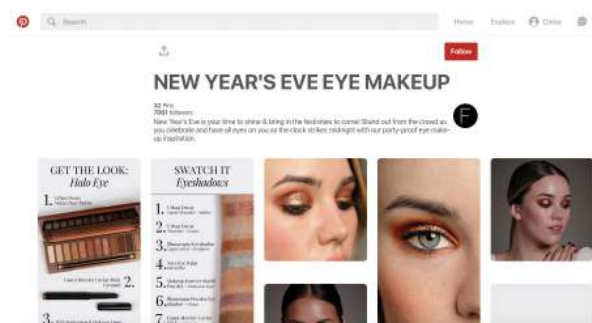


John Lewis used a Pinterest campaign to suggest different gift ideas

HOW TOP500 RETAILERS USE PINTEREST

John Lewis ran a Make it Thoughtful pre-Christmas campaign both on Pinterest and in its stores. Its boards featured ideas that went beyond the straightforward pair of socks for dad. By adding a box with a walking map and a compass to those socks – or some recipes to a casserole dish – the gift became much more thoughtful. In-store, paper pins were featured on the products that featured in the campaign, linking the two together across the digital divide. In a similar way, Anthropologie has used paper pins in its stores to highlight the garments that were most saved on Pinterest.

Online beauty site Feelunique sent out leaflets with a Pinterest pincode to shoppers who bought certain categories of cosmetics. Shoppers who bought a set of eyeshadows, for example, could use the pincode to reach the Feelunique board of eye make-up ideas. Similarly, Cath Kidston shoppers could find out more about bags they saw in-store by using pincodes attached to them to find out more about the range and how it was inspired.

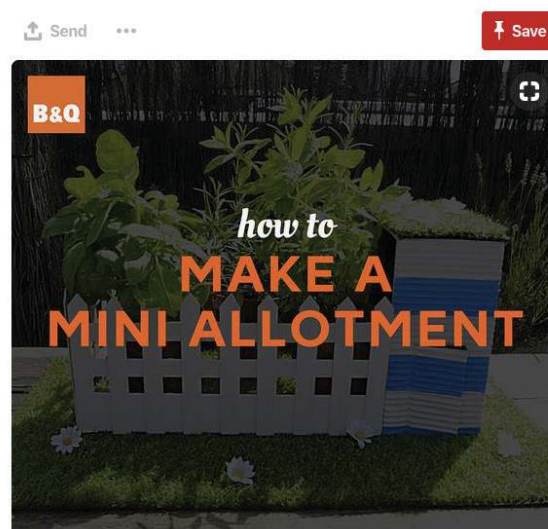


Feelunique used Pinterest pincodes to link offline and online content

“ The secret of capturing natural search is to think visual, according to Pinterest. Strong imagery is a key part, story-telling is another ”

B&Q undercut expectations of the DIY store by putting together a set of artier craft projects that were more likely to appeal to new audiences. Its features on Pinterest include 'how to make a mini allotment' or 'how to make a macrame plant hanger'.

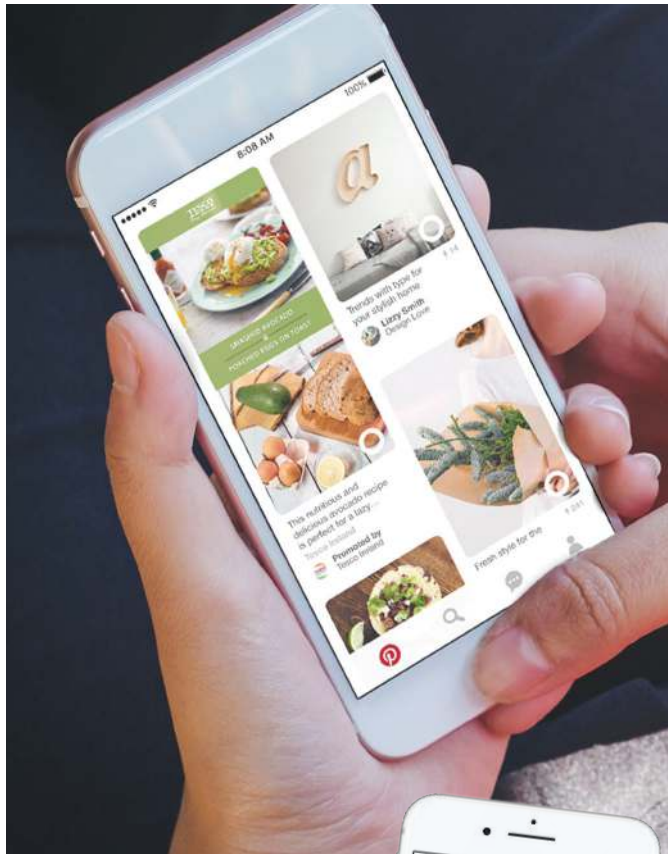
Credit: Pinterest



B&Q took a creative approach to presenting its goods

Tesco is one of a number of supermarkets that have used

Credit: Pinterest



Tesco showed how its food and kitchenware products might fit into customers' lives

the platform to create food- and recipe-related boards. Users can find a recipe that inspires them, then click through to buy the ingredients. Seasonal recipe campaigns and lifestyle shots of kitchen equipment have both featured heavily on Pinterest.



PINTEREST'S TIPS FOR RETAILERS

Think creative

- Use text overlays to tell Pinners why they should consider your product or brand
- Catch Pinners' eyes with lifestyle imagery that reflects current trends
- Include a logo or branded packaging to signify your brand
- Pique interest by showing multiple product shots, or multiple colours of the same product

To reach and maintain an audience via promoted pins...

- Use Pinterest targeting to build Actalike audiences from high value customer segments and exclude your current customers
- Run shopping campaigns to connect their product feed to Pinterest activity
- Use interest targeting to reach the people who are looking for the products and services the brand sells
- In order to nurture those leads, we recommend that retailers use engagement and visitor retargeting to reengage leads and drive them closer to purchase

SOCIAL MEDIA IN PRACTICE

How do retailers use social media from day to day and does this measure up to the best practice that RetailX researchers have identified? Martin Shaw, head of research at RetailX, compares and contrasts

AT THEIR BEST, leading retailers in the Brand Engagement Performance Dimension share stories on social media that resonate with their readers. Readers are interested because these stories are the ones that are worth telling, rather than ones that simply try to sell a product without setting the context for doing so.

Take the post on the next page as an example. Asda reported on its Facebook page about home delivery driver Declan, who photographs the beautiful scenery he passes on his routes across Northern Ireland. The report included Declan's own comments and he has since responded to some of the 189 comments the story has received. Among these comments were some thanking him for his work delivering to housebound customers. The story received 2,500 Likes and 136 shares, so evidently was an effective story that really appealed to customers and resonated with their own experiences. Not only was it about community but it also used some striking images to great effect.

Another strong example of social media use comes from John Lewis. Some 280 Facebook users showed interest in an exclusive in-store event hosted by the retailer in partnership with third-party brands and featuring adventurer and broadcaster Ben Fogle.

These two posts stood out in RetailX research that analysed the content of Facebook posts from leading IRUK

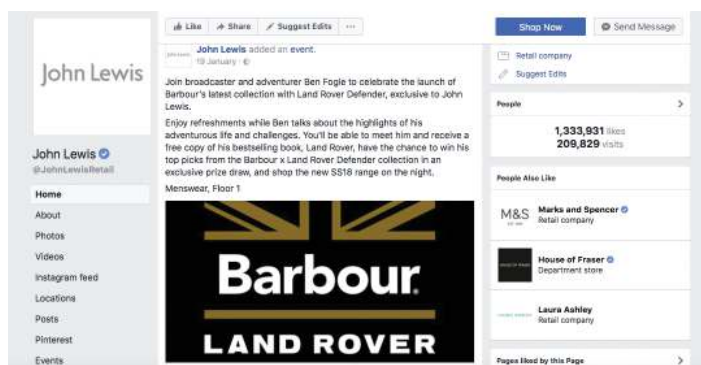
Top500 retailers. They did so because they took social engagement to a level that was the exception rather than the rule in our study.

We took a look at how the Top50 retailers in this Dimension engaged in practice via Facebook. In late January 2018, we analysed the most recent post in each of

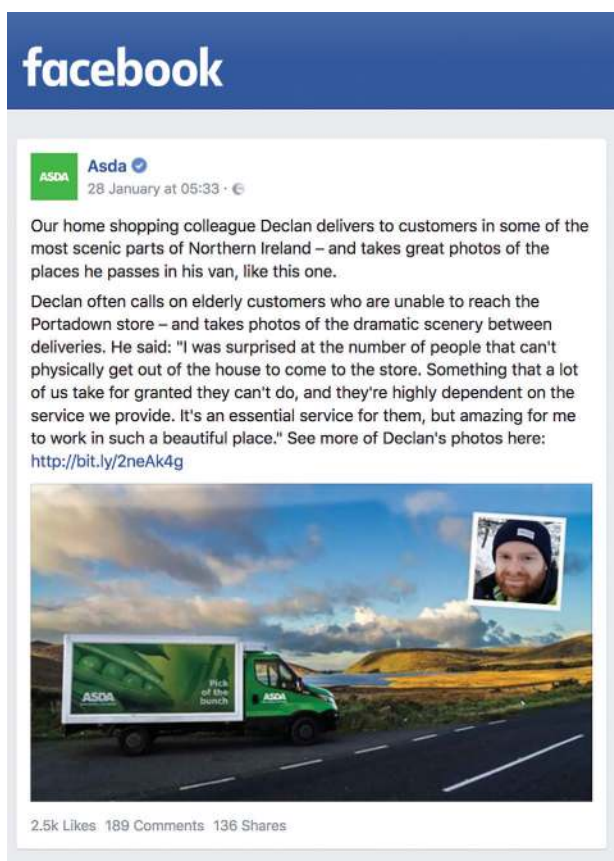
“For every retailer that live broadcasts its pancake-making master class, many more are using content that's little more than product listings”

the 50 feeds. This gave us a snapshot of content that was mostly posted within a two-week period – and it shows a reality of content that's sometimes a world away from more headline-grabbing social engagement.

For every retailer that live broadcasts its pancake-making masterclass or has a live show streamed to Facebook, many more are using content that's little more than product listings. It's important for retailers to put themselves in the consumer's shoes and, while product specifications are important to know, consumers care more about how they will use the product. Effective social media should be telling customers about the occasions they want to dress up for, about how exactly to achieve the job they've bought the product to help or different ways they can use the product that they may not have thought of. That, or simply posts that chime with their own interests, will keep customers coming back.



Events help bring shoppers into store, while retailer and brands alike benefit from cross-promotion



Asda's personal interest story stands out among the Brand Engagement Top50, most of whose posts are simply product listings

WHAT DID THE RESEARCH SHOW?

We analysed the purpose of each post and found that just a small minority (8%) told a personal interest story about an individual or community. Homewares and DIY retailers were most likely to use this approach. By contrast, more than a third (34%) of posts provided product information – an approach that was most commonly found among the same group of homewares and DIY retailers.

Some 12% of the posts analysed promoted discounts or special limited offers. The technique was the most common among health and cosmetics traders.

Promoting an event accounted for 8% of posts and was most common for general retailers, while 10% promoted a new product or product line.

“ Just a small minority of posts (8%) told a personal interest story about an individual or community ”

All allowed viewers to comment on their posts but only a fifth (20%) actively encouraged readers to do so. The most likely to do so were large household name retailers. Perhaps that's because doing so implies an investment in monitoring social comments and feedback that's beyond the resources of smaller traders. Some 8% invited comments or feedback via other channels, for example, by directing people to the blog. Access or usability information about their stores was provided by 6% and was most common for department stores, where information typically covered how to reach the store, or the type of in-store services that were available. Meanwhile, one in five (20%) provided access or usability information about the retailer's websites that went beyond a link. This might include additional services offered on websites, such as personal recommendations.

Finally, 6% of the Top50's Facebook pages used a pop-up window that operated in a similar way to live chat to ask, unsolicited, whether the visitor had a question.

Credit: Facebook

CONCLUSION

IF THERE'S ONE thing this IRUK Top500 Brand Engagement Dimension shows us, it's that there's no longer one key channel that enables retailers to communicate with all their customers. Gone are the days in which retailers simply needed a phone number. Now they face the challenges – and the opportunities – of maintaining a range of channels through which their customers may choose to engage at any point, whether that's reading a review, making a complaint or asking where their delivery is. The challenge of this is finding the resources to make all these channels work. It's not enough to have a Facebook page – content must be regular and recent. But, as we've seen through the pages of this report, it's when brands put in effort to make social channels work for them, and for their customers, that they see the strongest responses.

In a multichannel world, brands are represented at every touchpoint that consumers use. By ensuring their presence is a strong and consistent one, they offer shoppers a more seamless experience. That's as important in engaging customers as it is in the customer journey through the website or in making delivery work.

This report is designed as a tool that retailers can use to benchmark their own performance in brand engagement. We also hope it will serve as inspiration by showing what can be done, and what 'good' looks like.

We're always interested in how we can extend our research and improve the quality of our findings in this area. Is there a new or emerging tool or approach that you consider vital and that we should monitor in future reporting? Get in touch with your ideas and any potential datasets via research@internetretailing.net or tweet @detail with #IRUK500.

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