

E-Commerce Web-Sites Report

Case Study 1: Amazon.co.uk

Arguably the best e-commerce site on the web, amazon.co.uk is a very famous site. It has lead the way for many sites, and online businesses. The criteria are as follows:

- Speed of Page Downloads
- Navigation
- Ease of Use
- Range of Products
- Secure Server

Speed of Page Download

Impressively, amazon.co.uk manages to download entirely in the first three seconds. However, it's American counterpart takes twice as long. Both of these times are acceptable however, as a recent survey has claimed that the average internet user will wait for a maximum of 10 seconds and *then* will press the back button. This time actually reduces as you visit the site more and more as the images are stored on your computer, and so can be re-used. This speed is consistent on every page, even unvisited pages.

Navigation

Amazon has been held up as an example recently, as it's "three clicks to get anywhere" system grew steadily more popular. It's not entirely true, but navigation is still exceptionally easy. A small table down the side reveals all the places, and sub-categories available within that category, while a toolbar at the top makes it easy to flip quickly from books to music, plus underneath is the main sub-categories available.

Ease of Use

Once you have found what you want, and been persuaded by the reviews to buy it, you must click the elusive "Add to Shopping Basket" button, which actually took me some time to find (but maybe that's just me). Click it, and you are taken to a screen where you may save several things up, and buy them at once later, or delete something things from your shopping list, and then see the total. From there it's just a quick click to the "checkout" where you must sign up as a member, or enter your password if you've already shopped there before.

Range of Products

To say that amazon.co.uk has a broad range of products would be the understatement of the year. It sells all that is necessary for life (literally), except for a) food, and b) clothes. In non exaggerated terms, that translates to books, music, dvds, videos, software, games, kids, and auction and even a specialist wares section (zshops).

Secure Server

Amazon.co.uk does have a secure server, but it does not come into play until you have reached the checkout. There, from the point where you enter your password in, is secure. It is a SSL 40 bit, although interestingly, Hotmail has a 128-bit SSL server.

Total

I give amazon.co.uk a 9/10.

Case Study 2:bol.co.uk

One of Amazon's biggest rivals, BOL has failings that make amazon number 1. For example, bol.co.uk doesn't even exist. You have to go to bol.com, then click on the UK flag. That's when you discover that the actual address is www.uk.bol.com. As a result BOL may have lost several customers from type in traffic.

Speed of Page Downloads

The first time I visited the UK home page, it took only 1 second to load, although this is not something to boast about. The page was incomplete, and bits of raw HTML were left lying about. I returned, a few hours later, and while the home page is now ok, a lot of the rest of the site isn't. The complete pages, were not much good either. The quickest out of a random 3 took 9 seconds to load. Far too slow.

Ease of Use

To find a copy of Macromedia Dreamweaver 4 in Amazon (without using the search engine) took about 1-½ minutes. In BOL, I've been searching for the last 10 minutes, and I still haven't found it. Even with the search engine, I still get irrelevant results. Once you've found what you wanted (which is exceedingly difficult), you can either add it to your shopping basket, express checkout it, or add it to your wish list. From then on, it is very similar to amazon.co.uk.

Range of Products

Although their range of products is not quite as extensive as Amazon's, BOL do have a lot to offer, including book, music, dvds, videos, games, software, gifts (a section advertising offers), and My-BOL (an area is basically more advertising, but only on the things you choose).

Secure Server

BOL has the same kind of secure server as amazon, e.g. a 40-bit SSL server. However, unlike amazon.co.uk, there are no boxes up anywhere saying that all information sent in is totally secure.

Total

I give BOL.com a pretty poor 4/10.

Case Study 3: Tesco.co.uk

Tesco is a well-known e-commerce site in the UK. It has a large supermarket equivalent, so people can be sure who they're buying things from.

Speed of Page Download

Travelling to tesco.co.uk will automatically get transferred to tesco.com. This means that going via tesco.co.uk, the page takes a total of five seconds to download, whereas with tesco.com, the page takes a mere two seconds. However, what is lost with download time, is gained in customers from type-in-traffic. All pages appear speedily, and even the most complex pages take no more than three to four seconds to appear.

Ease of Use

Tesco.co.uk is an easy to navigate through site, with its toolbar at the top, with entries to "Home, Shopping, News and Features, Talking Tesco, Register and Sign-In, Help". This is all one big frame at the top of the page, so no matter how far the user scrolls down the page, his navigation options are still open to him. The area you are currently at is in a darker shade of blue, in comparison to the other tabs. There is also a frame at the side of the page, with the same places to go to at the top, plus all the sub-sections available to visit. To find any one particular thing is very easy, although it's not so easy to use if you are a browser.

Range of Products

Tesco seemed to me like a more complete, if not in as much depth as amazon.co.uk. They offer food, clothes, books, music, computer/video games, electrical items, groceries and even flowers! However, there is a down side to all of this. In some of the book's sections for example, next a book there would be a short description such as publisher, date published and so on. Click on more info, and all you get is a larger picture and the same information all over again. However, in their computer section they do provide lengthy descriptions, plus a jargon buster for the people who don't understand the language used. This also covers things like MP3 players and dishwashers!

Secure Server

Tesco claim that they have a SSL secure server in place, but worryingly, there was indication of it running while entering details about a) myself (including address, phone number etc.) and b) while entering my club-card number. This is very worrying, although the help site claims that your details "are completely safe as they travel across the Internet. They also claim that with a Tesco creditcard, you can be sure of shopping anywhere on the net without worrying about security.

Total

I give tesco.co.uk an 8/10.

Case Study 4: Dabs.co.uk

Dabs.co.uk is a computer hardware retailer. They sell everything from PDAs, to Apple Macs. They claim lower prices than their competitors, and have generally been proven to be correct. It being an UK based site, all prices are in pounds.

Speed of Page Downloads

As with Tesco, dabs.co.uk and dabs.com both go towards that same home page. This means that dabs.co.uk takes four seconds to download, although worryingly dabs.com takes seven seconds to download. The pages are generally very fast in downloading and all offer a similar layout.

Navigation

The site is a little cramped up, but the layout is ok. There is a toolbar at the top of every page, with links to the main sections available. On the right is a list of sub-categories, and in the center are images and details of the latest offers available. On the home page the list on the right is replaced with the top ten selling items available, while on the left is a list of the company's brands that are available.

Range of Products

Dab's range of products is actually quite extensive. As well as computer hardware (CD drives, CD-rewriters, etc.), dabs also do PDAs, printers and scanners. A limited amount of software is also available. These software packages are those like OS upgrades, and games that come preinstalled, as well as office packages.

Secure Server

There is no message anywhere about what type of secure server is available, only a page claiming that dabs are very experienced about these sorts of things (they used to be a mail-order firm before the internet came along). However, I did ask them to send me details of the servers that they use. Now I just have to get them to reply to me.

Total

I give dabs.co.uk a 7/10.

Case Study 5: Lastminute.com

It has been thought that lastminute.com sparked off the Internet revolution, after in its first weekend, it was valued at over 1 million pounds.

Speed of Page Downloads

Lastminute.com loads up very quickly (2 seconds on both lastminute.com and co.uk)! The majority of the rest of the pages take a little longer (3-4 seconds), but it is still all very fast. The first thing to load every time a page loads is the toolbar on the side of the page. This is on every single page, and is used for navigation.

Navigation

Navigation is actually very easy. The toolbar at the left-hand side of the page is very useful, as it has several categories listed. Once you click on a category, a list containing all the sub-categories available is shown, without swapping web pages.

Ease of Use

Once you've found what you have wanted on lastminute.com, which extremely easy, you follow through and confirm things like when you want to leave and return. Once you've done that, I don't know what to do next. I can't find a "buy this deal now" type of button anywhere! How do lastminute.com make any money?

Secure Server

I can't seem to find any trace of it simply because I can't find the "buy now" button. However, I did find some details about it. Apparently, "Our secure server software encrypts information, ensuring that Internet transaction stay private and protected. Lastminute.com uses a security protocol called "SSL3"." That's what Lastminute claim anyway, and I can't test it out.

Total

I give Lastminute.com a 6/10.

Best Overall E-Commerce Site

I have chosen Amazon.co.uk as the best overall e-commerce web-site. As you can see above, it does include many things, which the other sites, have forgotten, or not included. For example, little things can make a difference. In all the other sites, secure server information is locked away in the Help pages, whereas with Amazon's site, the words "Your credit card details are 100% safe with us" plastered in the same place on every page does help shoppers remember which online shops they will buy from.

Their web-site also works well, and is constantly fast. I do not get any error messages like I did yesterday with BOL, or incomplete web pages with HTML strewn about everywhere. I have shopped with them before, which proved to be a painless experience. If you're looking for something specific, or just browsing, to see what you can find, Amazon is your kind of shop.

As a runner up, second prize goes to Tesco.co.uk. A very helpful, and easy to use site although it was let down by a lack of a secure server.