

RESEARCH

## Keep Web sites slim in China: report

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*Michael Kors Web site in China*

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Many global brands have Web sites in China that take up to 20 seconds to load, a wait time that inevitably impacts consumer interaction, according to a new report by Catchpoint Systems.

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The "Great Firewall of China" harries Web sites based elsewhere and those that reference servers outside of the country. Oftentimes these references are minor and superfluous, such as an option for Facebook, a site banned in the country, and therefore serve no purpose on any Web site in China.

"It was surprising that even .cn sites that were made for consumption in China were not always performing where they should be performing and they weren't as optimized as they should have been," said Dritan Suljoti, chief product officer at Catchpoint, New York.

"We can totally understand when brands have the same sites for both markets, but, in this case, [the companies] have a different site with mistakes that could have been easily fixed," he said.

"The main culprit is a lot of third party tags. The best thing you can do is keep the page as slim as possible. Just do a very simple analysis of what's being loaded on those pages, and if you have anything that's going to sites that are blocked in China or go outside to

China, take them out."

**Catchpoint Systems'** inaugural "China Web Performance Benchmark Report" studies the Web performance of 50 global brands.

The little things

If a Web site takes more than five seconds to load, a consumer's patience crumbles. If the wait surpasses 10 seconds, not many consumers will stick around. Some brand Web sites in China take more than 20 seconds to fully load, a wait that all but tells consumers to go somewhere else, and hampering a brand's ability to generate ecommerce

Catchpoint Systems used its "Internet backbone monitoring nodes" within China to measure the speeds of 50 global brands.

Michael Kors had the fastest load time, at 3.5 seconds, of all the brands studied. Armani had a load time of just over eight seconds.



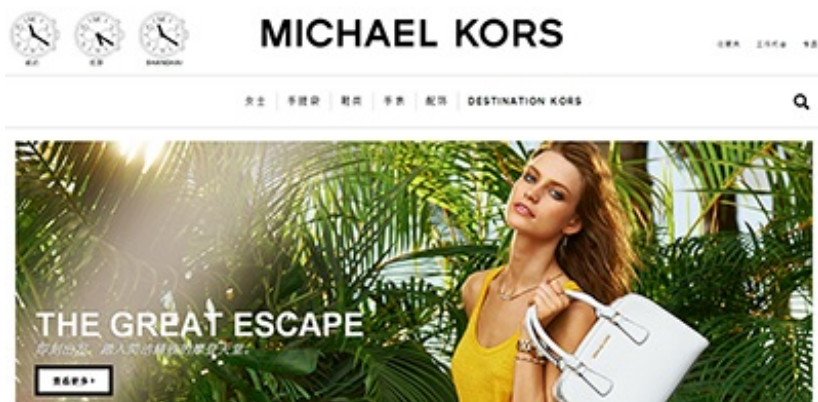
*Armani's China Web site*

Among the laggards, Dior's Web site clocked in at more than 20 seconds. Mr. Suljoti noted that brands often use templates when transferring sites to new markets and do not properly vet all the elements.

"Some of these issues might not have a heavy impact," Mr. Suljoti said. "It's not like the page is completely black.

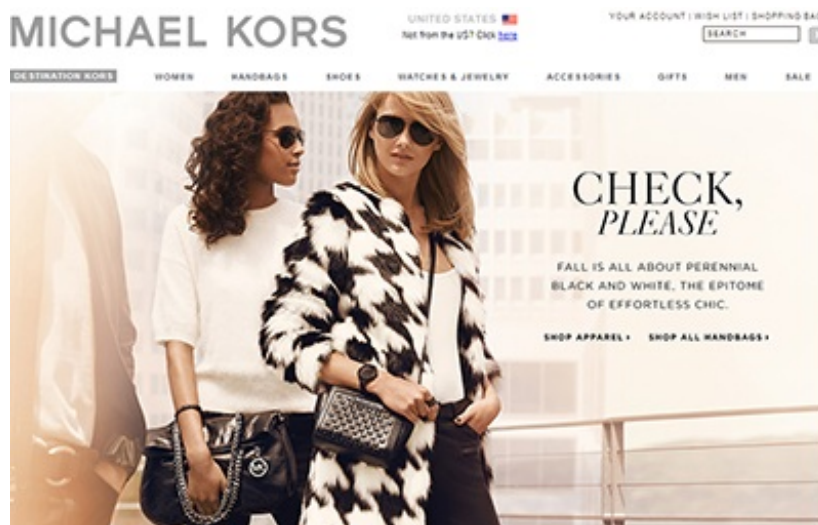
"Sometimes the third party tags simply mean that the spinning wheel is still spinning and some of the interaction isn't happening," he said.

The good news is that brands can remedy this situation with some basic adjustments.



*Michael Kors' China Web site*

Catchpoint Systems first recommends that brands establish IT infrastructure, including content delivery networks and domain name servers, within Mainland China. The truly slow Web sites are likely based on infrastructure outside of China.



### Michael Kors' U.S. Web site

Following this fundamental switch, a number of small changes can be made to accelerate load times.

Third party elements from U.S. sites should be removed. This means that Facebook, Twitter, Google and other references have to go. Third-party elements from any source should be limited.

Next, pare down Web sites as much as possible. Do not heap the content on. Catchpoint Systems found that Chinese versions of sites can be three to four times heavier than their U.S. counterparts, and Internet pipes in China are not as spacious as in the U.S.

The company also determined that many sites use the jQuery Javascript library hosted by Google, which leads to shoddy functionality since Google is banned.

Another common error concerns inadequately compressed files such as images, which can be addressed by properly compressing them.

The final recommendation that Catchpoint Systems makes is to always monitor China's firewall, since new policies are consistently implemented. One day a Web site can be running smoothly, and then suddenly it falters because some element is now blocked.

### Earning sales

The need for a strong digital presence may be greater in China than elsewhere.

A report by Boston Consulting Group explores the online shopping tendencies of Chinese consumers such as a widely-held penchant for researching products at length.

“The Chinese Digital Consumer in a Multichannel World” report explains that the number of Chinese online shoppers is expected to reach 380 million by 2016, which presents brands with huge swaths of potential customers. Any giddiness marketers feel at such a

prospect should be tempered by the fact that only .5 percent of online activity is conducted on brand or company Web sites ([see story](#)).

To pull consumers to brand Web sites, companies must ensure a seamless experience.

"Keep the pages slim," Mr. Suljoti said. "If you keep the pages slim, no matter the connectivity, the page is going to load a lot faster."

Final Take

*Joe McCarthy, staff writer on Luxury Daily, New York*

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