

RETAIL

Online retail routinely sacrifices loading speed for features, potentially losing customers

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FarfetchOS promotional image

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In their efforts to make ecommerce as feature-packed as possible, retailers may be sacrificing a key statistic of the shopping experience: load times.

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A new report from Yottaa and Retail Systems Research (RSR) took a look at the top performing retailers in ecommerce and ranked them based on factors such as loading time, features and other criteria. What they found was that by cramming their online stores with features, many retailers are sacrificing loading speed, which can be a key metric in keeping customers engaged all the way through to completing a transaction.

"For retailers, much of the internal debate over rich online experience vs. fast web performance has focused on either cramming more and more capabilities onto sites, no matter what impact that has on performance, or stripping out functions and features to make sure the site loads fast," said Nikki Baird, managing partner at [Retail Systems Research](#), Miami, FL. "In today's competitive market, retailers cannot afford to make these trade-offs.

"Our report found there is a lot of room for retailers to improve performance and, by doing so, open up new opportunities to make digital channels truly differentiating and engaging at the same time."

Loading speed

It is undeniable that ecommerce is one of the most popular and important forms of commerce in the modern world.

Therefore, it is paramount that retailers are able to get it right. But despite more than a decade of ecommerce prominence, there is still much to be learned about how customers interact with online platforms and the best way to shepherd them from beginning to end of their shopping experience.

One often-overlooked aspect of ecommerce is loading times. RSR claims that ecommerce sites that take longer than three seconds to load risk losing customer interest and having them drop the interaction.



Retailers need to be aware of their load times. Image credit: Saks Fifth Avenue

This may seem like a terribly short amount of time, but consumers are busy and click through pages and sites at lightning speed.

So how does the average retailer stack up to this three-second time limit? Not so good.

The average ecommerce site can average 9.5 seconds on mobile and 16.6 seconds on desktop. Every additional second the customer waits for a screen to load is a potential 7 percent conversion loss.

RSR blames this latency on online retailers jamming their platforms full of unnecessary features and content. While extra features certainly have a place and can help elevate an experience, they also add to the time it takes for a page to load, potentially losing customers who would have otherwise made a purchase.

Luxury retail

The luxury world has a slightly different ecommerce situation than the rest of the retail industry.

While consumers often shop for mass brands on Best Buy, Amazon or Walmart's online stores, only authorized retail partners, such as Net-A-Porter, are able to sell Gucci products online.

This removes competition, but luxury brands still need to negotiate the balance between feature-rich experiences and uncluttered stores.

A good example of a valuable additional ecommerce feature is JD's recent white glove luxury delivery service.

For its JD Luxury Express, the retailer has trained a special team of employees, who will shuttle luxury purchases to consumers' doors in style. Designed to more closely replicate the individualized experience expected from bricks-and-mortar stores, JD's service aims to ensure that luxury products are handled in a manner that reflects the brand ([see story](#)).



JD's white glove delivery service. Image credit: JD

But other brands that have entered the ecommerce space have not been so lucky.

For example, Cond Nast recently shut down its own ecommerce site Style.com due to being unable to manage the balance between editorial and commerce.

While many publishers are entering the ecommerce business as a means to combat falling revenue, this move by Cond Nast suggests that running a commercial site is more difficult than some publications may have expected.

Nevertheless, the fact that Cond Nast is still in the ecommerce game through a partnership with Farfetch suggests that the market for editorialized shopping is still there ([see story](#)).

As online shopping only becomes more popular, retailers will have to keep an eye on their load times in order to avoid losing customers to faster competitors.

"As the trend of closing brick and mortar stores continues, retailers are heavily investing in their online channels to engage shoppers and drive revenue," said Rich Stendardo, CEO of [Yottaa](#), Waltham, MA. "The findings of the latest report from RSR confirm two things. One is that web performance impacts online conversion and the second is that most eCommerce sites today are, to quote the report, disturbingly slow."

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