

## ANALYSIS

Which retailer offers the ultimate mobile-optimised site and what are the elements that make it market-leading? **Jon Severs** investigates

# Mobilising retail

**T**he impact of the smartphone on retail cannot be overstated. Sales generated through mobile are expected to reach £53.6bn by 2024, according to data from Barclays.

While m-commerce is a massive opportunity for retailers, it also poses a challenge. In today's constantly connected world, retailers need to ensure their mobile platforms are optimised for a variety of devices with different functionalities, operating systems and screen sizes.

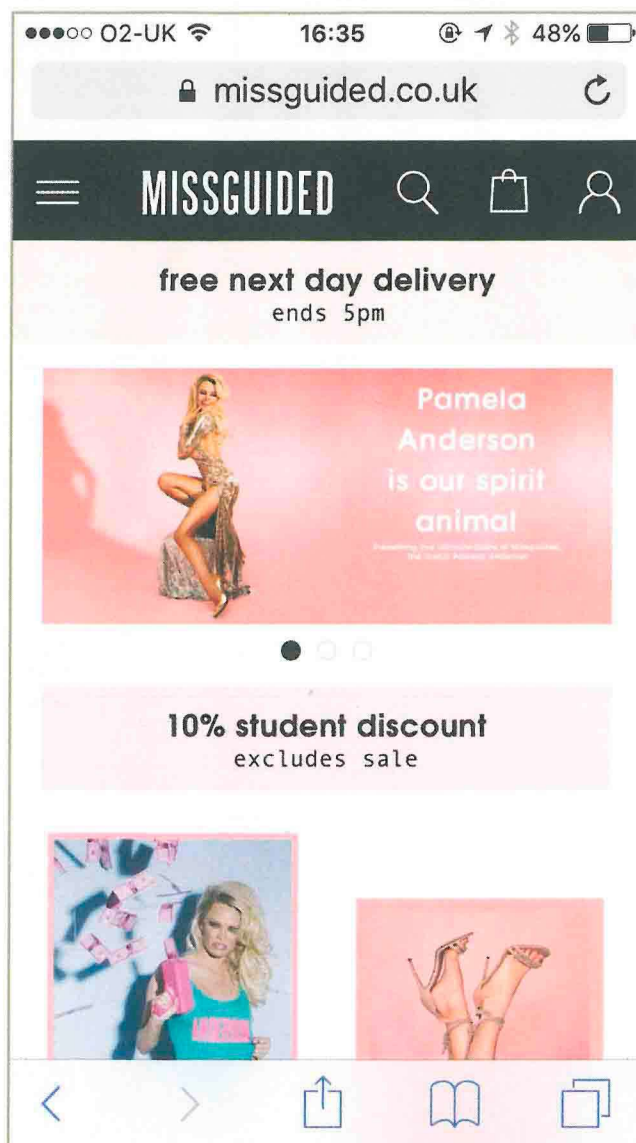
Speed of loading, quick video downloads and faster payment processing are also of upmost importance to convert hits into sales.

Offering an optimised experience on mobile platforms is a challenge retailer Asos is only too familiar with. "Our customers are fashion-forward 20-somethings," explains David William, digital experience director at Asos. "Mobile is pretty much all they know, so our experiences have to be delightful to their thumbs as well as reflect our fashion credibility."

It is a similar story for rival retailer Missguided. "Our core market is fashion-conscious females aged 16 to 35," says Mark Leach, head of ecommerce. "They are confident, socially immersed and digitally savvy."

Leach says 64% of Missguided traffic comes from mobile and emphasises this is 'true' mobile, so does not include tablets. William says the Asos figure is about 60%.

This puts both above the industry average. "A retail average for traffic coming from a mobile device is 51.3%," says Martin Newman, member of the KPMG/Ipsos Retail Think Tank and chief executive of



Practicology. Owing to this volume of traffic, running a mobile-centred operation is not an easy job for any retailer. "It's difficult, but doable," maintains Newman.

"It's not so much about mobile platforms and more about responsive and adaptive design – making the experience work

effectively across all devices and touchpoints.

Obviously mobile is a much smaller screen and therefore you need to think through the calls to action, information architecture and customer journey required to work across all screen sizes."

Those screen sizes are more varied than ever and apps have to be thrown into the mix too.

Both Missguided and Asos say the vast majority of their traffic comes via iOS – for Missguided it is above 80%.

## Ongoing upgrades

"We constantly enhance our mobile products to benefit from the latest mobile features developed by Apple, Google, Facebook etc blended with our unique Asos experience," William explains.

The importance of constant enhancement cannot be overlooked, believes Qasim Akhlaq, managing director of footwear retailer Public Desire. Small barriers to usage can be the difference between making a sale and potentially losing that customer for the foreseeable future.

"It's very important to give customers a seamless journey across any device – mobile, tablet and desktop. If this is not done you run the risk of looking amateur within such a saturated market. For Public Desire this is not an option so we are constantly reviewing our mobile offering for improvements."

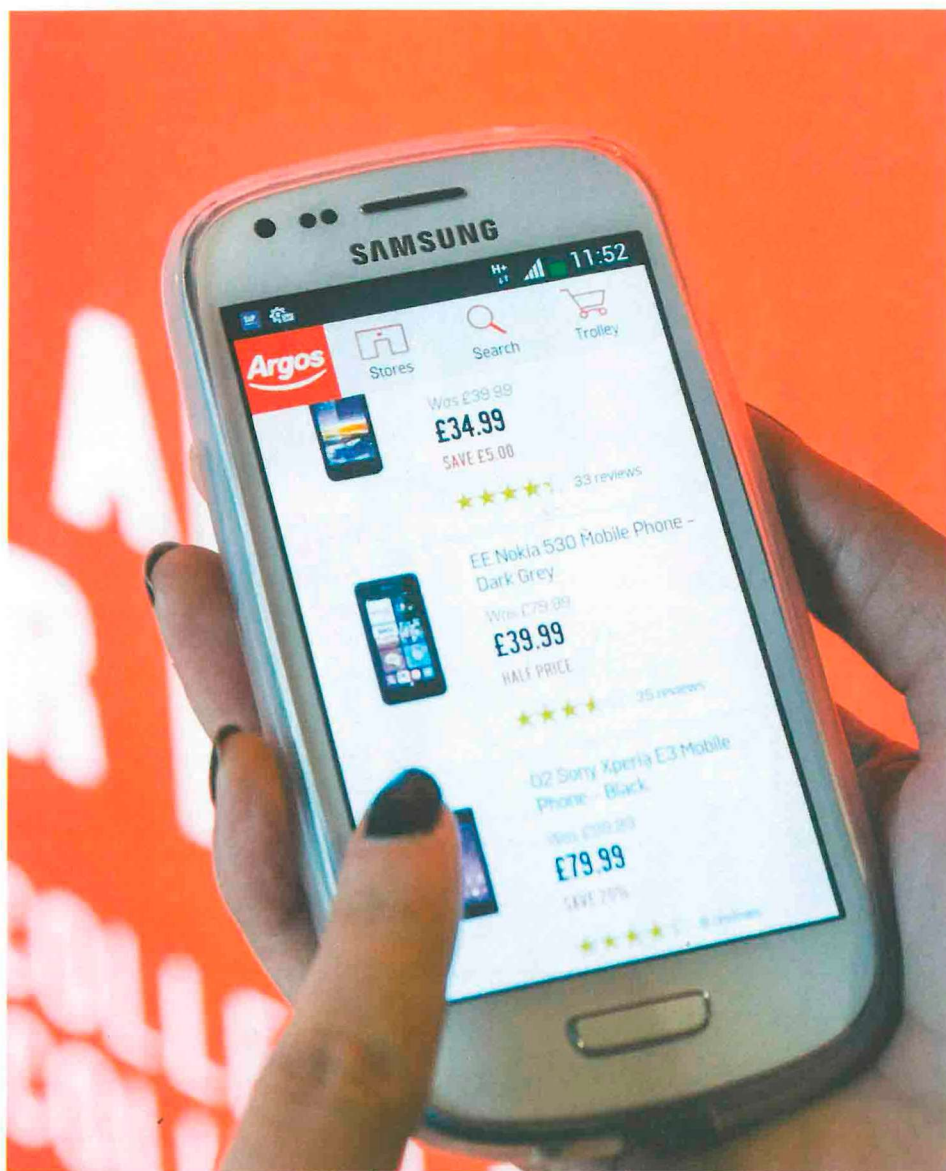
Key among the common issues is load time. With super-fast broadband powering mobiles within wi-fi range and 4G connections on the move, retailers can no longer blame a user's internet connection for their websites sluggishly bringing themselves to life on a browser.

Missguided is well aware of this and has developed some techniques to ensure fast load times. "We utilise a complex network of cloud storage, content delivery networks and caching to try and ensure we can load the page in an acceptable time," says Leach.

"When we cannot get around a performance issue then we look at the priority of how the page loads – as long as the user can interact

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## CASE STUDY **ARGOS**



It's not just companies aimed at 20-somethings that prioritise m-commerce – mobile is a central platform at multichannel retailers such as Argos too.

Mark Steel, digital operations director at Argos, says that in 2015 about 53% of all web traffic came via smartphones and this figure rises to 70% when combined with tablet devices.

"I think it's really important to put yourself in the shoes of the customer and think about the context of the experience on mobile," he says.

"What type of experience are customers looking for on a smaller screen device, what information is important, how can we make the experience frictionless and help them to get what they need?"

Steel (pictured) observes that design is crucial for both engagement and website load times. "We're constantly reviewing the structure and content of our mobile pages to ensure we keep load speeds down to a minimum. We're constantly updating our website – almost daily."

As with fashion retailers, apps are an important feature, too. "Apps are a big part of the mix," says Steel. "We have mobile and tablet apps across both iOS and Android and deliver a significant proportion of our visits and revenue through these channels. Apps work particularly well given our multichannel model."

with the page then you can still be loading content in the background."

Asos takes a similar approach. "[You need to] find the sweet spot between quality and performance," says William. "For example, based on our customer's specific network conditions we can serve variations of our digital assets or we also cache as many elements as possible to reduce the bandwidth utilised while on the go."

But retailers must not compromise on design or be afraid to add interactive or extensive elements, to mitigate potential load times issues.

"Customers told us they wanted to see our clothes on 'ordinary' people so we built 'As seen on me' – which allows customers to upload pictures of themselves wearing Asos clothes and link it to the relevant product pages," says William.

Leach observes that user experience (UX) is crucial to getting the right balance of design and productivity on a website.

"We release look and feel updates every

three weeks – usually a combination of fixes, improvements and tests," he says. "These usually focus on templated areas of the site – product pages, listings pages, checkout."

### App opportunities

With websites still relying heavily on SEO for traffic, many retailers opt for apps – meaning they have a permanent spot on a consumer phone.

However they might not be for everyone, Newman warns.

"Apps are great if you're a brand that has regular interaction and frequency of engagement with your customers. But you need to think through how many apps a customer is likely to download and engage with.

"It can still work for less frequent engagement providing it saves time and offers a better experience than the mobile or desktop site."

Missguided has recently launched an app. Leach says he did not want it to be

"just the same" as the mobile experience.

"So we added new features, interactive elements, loads of UX updates and a slick checkout," he says.

"It's had a fantastic reaction, which has encouraged us to think about how we take this international."

William stresses though, that it is not either/or between browser and app when it comes to mobile.

"Apps are extremely powerful, primarily for existing and engaged customers, giving them a tailored Asos experience in a dedicated application. Mobile web is likely to be the first experience of Asos for a new customer, so we have to get that absolutely right too. We invest and believe in both equally."

And that investment is substantial. Each little development takes time and that, of course, costs money.

Retailers should not try to reinvent the wheel but take advantage of the mobile advances already made.