



INTERNET RETAILING'S "INSPIRATION INDEX" LAUNCHES

Ian Jindal explains the reasoning behind IR's Inspiration Index, and unveils the winners of the first survey.

AT IR TOWERS we're fortunate to be privy to much interesting industry news, statistics and league tables. We also get to see the many awards given to multichannel retailers. Increasingly though we've become bored with awards that tend to favour the large or shiny retailers, while ignoring the fact that a house is built of many bricks.

From our discussions with retailers we know that admiration for a company is seldom uniform, and that the sources of inspiration are to be found in many places. As a result we're focusing on those moments of admiration, enjoyment and - frankly - envy: when we look at another retailer's activities and wish we'd thought of that first, had implemented as well, or have an open regard for a difficult problem elegantly overcome.

INTERNET RETAILING'S INSPIRATION INDEX

Enter, then, the Internet Retailing Inspiration Index - IRII - a place for ecommerce professionals to admit their sources of inspiration, give credit where it's due and an opportunity to look underneath the hood, as it were, of the big, capable companies (who will no doubt still feature prominently).

The IRII will have 6 'dimensions' - each one covered in our magazine - as follows:

1. Moments of brilliance and delight (covered in this issue)
2. Customer experience
3. Operations and IT
4. Merchandising
5. Marketing
6. Strategy

The survey was conducted in conjunction with our research partners eDigitalResearch and they've also helped with analysing the responses. We promoted the IRII in our newsletter and also to the LinkedIn group and we were pleased with the response to the first survey.

We'll work through the dimensions in forthcoming issues, getting a picture of what's inspiring leading

multichannel retailers. We will dedicate our regular site review team to consider not only the winning sites' performance, but also to elaborate upon those inspirational aspects brought to light in the Index.

Towards the end of the year we'll consider an open vote on the overall winner. Perhaps we'll even pop a cork at the fourth annual Internet Retailing conference on 13 October 2009 - but let's see...

MOMENTS OF BRILLIANCE AND DELIGHT

So, where were those sparks of cunning and creativity that drive our imagination and demand emulation?

This was a very difficult starting dimension - not only because it's such a broad canvass but because the IR readership is such a 'tough crowd' - demanding shoppers themselves as well as highly knowledgeable about the tricks of the trade. It was therefore with some surprise that we found the leaders for this dimension to be:

THE 'TOP 15' FOR DIMENSION 1 Moments of brilliance and delight

Rank	Retailer
1	Amazon UK
2	Mydeco
3	John Lewis
4	ASOS
5	Apple Computer
6	easyJet
7	LOVEFiLM
8	Argos
9	Play.com
10	Tesco.com
11	B&Q
12	Littlewoods
13	Fingleaves
14	Boden
15	Zappos

AMAZON

We were surprised by Amazon's top place - it's fashionable to comment upon how 'plain' their site is - but even more so at the dominant margin of victory. Nearly 34% of all respondents chose Amazon as one of their retailers. Even more telling of Amazon's authoritative position was that those who chose Amazon rate the inspiration very highly - and 100% of the supporters said that this level of inspiration was typical of Amazon!

Areas highlighted for praise in the survey were centred on the order experience (smooth, convenient and fast, ease of ordering) and then the ruthless efficiency of the fulfilment. Customer service at Amazon was frequently singled out for praise – along with admiration at the consistency of achieving this level given the business' scale and complexity.

It'll be interesting to see how many of these sentiments boost Amazon's showing in our second (Customer Experience) and third (Operations and IT) surveys...

For now, we've turned their site over to our Review Team and you can see their thoughts in the next section, and of course the eyetracking videos and screen-grabs will be online at www.internetretailing.net/features.

MYDECO

While we at IR Towers are great fans of mydeco.com we were pleasantly surprised that a quarter of the respondents shared our enthusiasm.

Respondent comments were all effusive yet considered: "The 3D design tool is very good, but by bringing all the retailers together, it offers something unique. This company is offering something new for the industry", said one. Another noted "Mydeco has exactly the right combination of well-structured shopping pages, expert guidance and surprisingly easy-to-use room-building software which mean you can play at being an interior designer...and actually succeed! It's a brilliant concept". Our hearts warmed to read this level of enthusiasm – this was the purpose behind our Inspiration Index.

While we remain at all times impartial here at IR Towers, such was the enthusiasm for [mydeco](http://mydeco.com) that we tracked down CEO David Kelly and persuaded him to give us our main interview this issue.

Interestingly 22% of respondents felt that the developments at [mydeco](http://mydeco.com) represented a real step change for the company: this is reflected in David's comments, the continuous R&D activity in their West London HQ and ambitious and broad-reaching plans for ongoing development.

The Customer Experience and Merchandising dimensions have an early favourite, but we're looking to see other retailers giving ideas and inspiration in these categories too.

JOHN LEWIS AND ASOS.COM

The third stand-out favourite of the respondents was John Lewis Direct, with just over a fifth of respondents citing swipe-able insights from one of the longest-established, blue-riband retailers. Some 88% felt that

innovation typified John Lewis' approach so a double compliment for the partnership from our readership.

Key qualities at John Lewis included their famous customer service, with respondents admiring the cross-channel consistency. The site redesign drew praise but the most ardent comments singled out their merchandising approach, especially around product selectivity and generating such good revenues from a relatively limited product range.

ASOS's range and presentation drew many plaudits, with one enthusiastic commentator noting "Zoom capability and the catwalk video, genius! product page layout (delivery, return and review in box) and simplicity of design." – quite a feat to cram so many features onto a page while remaining 'simple', but from such achievement is inspiration drawn!

THE LONGER TAIL

After ASOS there's a bunching of retailers who attract a similar level of diffuse votes. It's interesting to see that Apple featured so highly: even though it's not a traditional retailer its online interface and service design is clearly influencing our readers – as well as changing our customers' expectations of the online experience.

US shoe retailer Zappos.com also featured well, beating many strong UK brands, showing that our readers look globally for inspiration. The main points of wonder were their customer service and – having read Philip Buxton's piece on Social Media in this issue – it's clear that Zappos' service culture is genuinely distinctive and engrained.

Honourable mentions must go to Thomas Cook, Lastminute.com, Comet and British Airways for some inspirations that only just fell short of the 'cut – we'll be keeping an eye on these in our next survey to see if there are going to be some breakthrough opportunities!

NEXT

The next survey will be on Customer Experience and we'll publish the survey link in the IR Newsletter as soon as it's ready. Don't hold back with your thoughts – especially in highlighting examples that may have escaped us so far, or which elucidate interesting aspects of the well-known retailers.

Will Amazon take a two-stage lead? Will one retailer dominate, or will inspiration be drawn more broadly? While we at IR have our own opinions, in the IRII we only get one vote each, and so look forward to learning what's raising the pulse of retail professionals, and which features we're likely to see being emulated in 2009.