

Pick of the clicks

Our biggest online shopping survey yet covers 51 websites across eight categories – from mobiles to toys



Buying online could be the ideal way to find the best gifts at the best prices this Christmas as the high street braces itself for gloom under the shadow of the credit crunch.

Mintel's February 2008 Christmas Shopping Habits survey showed 51% of consumers bought a few or most of their Christmas gifts online last year, up 6% from 2006. With more of you discovering the convenience of shopping from home, we've expanded our online shopping survey to eight categories.

Find out how our members rate the most popular online retailers here and go to www.which.co.uk/onlineretailers for our definitive guide.

Delivering the goods

In our survey of more than 8,000 members, less than one in five of you have experienced problems with online shopping. But delayed deliveries top the list of complaints – not what you need when you're waiting for Christmas gifts.

Members have made Amazon.co.uk, or its US counterpart Amazon.com, their most visited site – hardly surprising, given its enormous product range.

Our survey found that specialist websites are worth a serious look. Sports and leisure shoppers love Wiggle.co.uk, which sells cycling, swimming and athletics gear.

Lingerie website Figleaves.com remains your favourite in the clothing category, while Lizearle.com has topped both our new cosmetics category and our survey overall for user satisfaction.

Price watch

Our members rate electrical retailer 7dayshop.com, Thebookpeople.co.uk and Play.com top for prices.

Many people think that online shopping offers better prices than the high street, so we went out to check what you'll pay for some typical Christmas presents.

Perhaps predictably, online retailers can generally offer you greater savings than the high street – but in some cases we found that shopping around on foot did get you a better deal – find out more in the 'Price watch' section for each category. For retailers with both high-street and online stores, the high-street version is your best bet to avoid a delivery charge.

ONLINE CONVERTS

Arnold and Ann Coulthurst *retired*

Arnold and Ann made their first internet purchase a couple of years ago and they're now converts to online shopping. They buy holidays, wine and health products online, but mostly clothing.

A big draw is choice, particularly in specialised outdoor clothing, as the Coulthursts are keen walkers. 'You can see catalogues online, and they have a much wider range of sizes,' says Arnold. 'Online, something's either in stock or it's not. On the high street you're never sure if they'll have your size.'

'Goods arrive within days, and we love getting parcels – it's like Christmas,' he says. 'You shop in peace and when you get to the checkout, there's no queue.'

Difficulties have cropped up due to size differences between retailers, but returns have been easy despite the fact that some websites charge for them.

Success has come from using trusted retailers. 'We have our favourites – such as Landsend.com, Hawkshead.com and Lakeland.co.uk – and we stick to them,' Arnold says.

MEMBERS' TOP PICKS

CATEGORY	RETAILER
Entertainment 	Abebooks.co.uk
Electricals 	Johnlewis.com
Home and garden 	Johnlewis.com
Toys and games 	Amazon.co.uk Johnlewis.com
Clothes, shoes and accessories 	Figleaves.com
Cosmetics, haircare and toiletries 	Lizearle.com
Mobile phones 	Virginmobile.com
Sport and leisure 	Amazon.co.uk Wiggle.co.uk

Which? online Shopping safely online

There are many simple measures you can take to make sure your online shopping experience is secure, such as what to look out for on your web browser, what payment methods to use and

what rights you have if something goes wrong with your purchase.

See www.which.co.uk/shopsafelyonline for more advice on how to protect yourself when shopping online.



Entertainment Online-only stores are your favourite

OVERALL RESULTS

82% of members bought online in the past six months

MOST VISITED	Amazon.co.uk
FAVOURITE	Abebooks.co.uk
LEAST FAVOURITE	Game.co.uk

Eight in 10 of you buy books, CDs, DVDs and video games online, making it the most popular category in this survey.

It's a tight fight for your favourite entertainment retailer – and all five of the leaders have no high-street stores. Abebooks.co.uk edges just ahead of Play.com to claim the top spot with a score of 89%. This site brings together independent booksellers under one umbrella, so it's a bit different to other retailers. 'Abebooks, as a link between retailers, has never let me down,' commented one member.

The site has many helpful features, such as a 'book sleuth' that helps you search for a book if you've forgotten the title.

Play.com is only just behind with 88%, and it's the only entertainment site to achieve an above average rating for the ease of finding products and for delivery.

None of this category's websites did particularly poorly, but all our lowest scoring websites have a high-street presence. HMV.com and Tesco.com rated poorly for their availability and ordering processes, while our lowest scoring shop – Game.co.uk – received below average



ratings across all our measures.

PRICE WATCH Online was generally cheaper, but high-street stores hit the spot on many gift ideas.

In store, HMV charged £12.99 for the *Sex and the City* film on DVD – £2 less than Play.com. Special offers at many high-street bookstores brought prices down on the new Terry Pratchett novel and Richard Hammond's new book.

But online retailers shone for CD prices – at least £1 cheaper than the cheapest high-street price.

LET THEM ENTERTAIN YOU

Which? customer scores

Abebooks.co.uk	(128)	89%
Play.com	(502)	88%
Amazon.co.uk	(3,425)	86%
Bookdepository.co.uk	(36)	85%
Thebookpeople.co.uk	(85)	82%
Waterstones.com	(78)	79%
CDwow.com	(105)	77%
bbcshop.com	(30)	76%
HMV.com	(181)	74%
Tesco.com	(93)	74%
GAME.co.uk	(38)	71%

Sample size in brackets. See www.which.co.uk/onlineetailers for full results.

Grey's Anatomy Season 3 DVD box set



Cheapest online price	£29.99
Play.com	
Typical high-street price	£35

Toys and games Bag more of a bargain on general sites

OVERALL RESULTS

10% of members bought online in the past six months

MOST VISITED	Amazon.co.uk
FAVOURITE	Amazon.co.uk and Johnlewis.com
LEAST FAVOURITE	Toysrus.co.uk

This category doesn't have a very big following, but it may be good for seeking out that hard-to-find toy this Christmas.

Our shoppers' top choices are Amazon.co.uk and Johnlewis.com, both scoring 83%, with one shopper impressed with



Amazon.co.uk's 'good selection, prices and trouble-free return experience'.

Specialist toys and games website Toysrus.co.uk was bottom of the pile, scoring a mediocre 69%. Both Toysrus.co.uk and Elc.co.uk rated dramatically lower for price than their



competitors in the table. Additionally, Toysrus.co.uk and Argos.co.uk rated poorly for availability.

PRICE WATCH Prices online were typically no more than £5 cheaper than the high street for the toys we looked at – some prices were identical.

Delivery charges may push online costs above the high street. Woolworths charged £59.99 for the Indiana Jones Lego set in-store. The total online price was £4.95 more expensive including delivery.

THE TOY STORY

Which? customer scores

Amazon.co.uk	(287)	83%
Johnlewis.com	(30)	83%
Elc.co.uk	(34)	76%
Argos.co.uk	(85)	73%
Toysrus.co.uk	(30)	69%

Sample size in brackets. See www.which.co.uk/onlineetailers for full results.

Indiana Jones Lego



Cheapest online price	£64.94
Woolworths.co.uk	
Typical high-street price	£70

Clothes, shoes and accessories

Smalls score best, with Figleaves.com still your favourite

OVERALL RESULTS

43% of members bought online in the past six months

MOST VISITED

Marksandspencer.com

FAVOURITE

Figleaves.com

LEAST FAVOURITE

Laredoute.co.uk

Lingerie specialist Figleaves.com is once again top of the online clothing shops, scoring 86%, but Johnlewis.com, Amazon.co.uk and Landsend.com aren't too far behind.

Figleaves.com shoppers can't get enough of the 'large selection', quality delivery service, and the 'excellent' returns process, which sends progress updates by email. 'Figleaves.com is probably the most efficient and friendly online service possible,' one Which? member said.

There's also little change at the lower end of our table, with new entry

Littlewoods.com scoring an average 62% and Laredoute.co.uk once again our bottom retailer in this category, with 55% and below average ratings across all areas except price.

One in 10 of those surveyed told us that they had problems shopping online for clothes, shoes and accessories.

A common issue is difficulty in getting correct sizes. Some websites have attempted to help customers by giving exact measurements for their sizes – for example, Figleaves.com offers



an interactive bra-size calculator.

PRICE WATCH On average, the number of members rating pricing as excellent or good is just 42% – the lowest for any category.

Online retailers clearly trumped the high street when we looked at watches. Prices for both a men's and ladies' watch were at least £25 cheaper online.

DRESSED FOR SUCCESS

Which? customer scores

Figleaves.com	(69)	86%
Johnlewis.com	(55)	83%
Amazon.co.uk or .com	(103)	82%
Landsend.com	(170)	81%
Mandmdirect.com	(39)	76%
Marksandspencer.com	(483)	75%
Boden.co.uk	(128)	74%
Next.co.uk	(131)	73%
Cottontraders.co.uk	(348)	69%
Debenhams.com	(32)	68%
Littlewoods.com	(34)	62%
Laredoute.co.uk	(44)	55%

Sample size in brackets. See www.which.co.uk/online-retailers for full results.

Seiko men's watch



Cheapest online price £132
Precisiontime.co.uk

Typical high-street price £165

Cosmetics, haircare and toiletries

Members favour specialists for best results

It's not one of the most popular categories for online shopping, but those who have made the leap appear to be happy.

Your favourite brand or product specialists over general toiletries retailers, with skincare favourite

Lizearle.com scoring 95% for customer satisfaction –

OVERALL RESULTS

11% of members bought online in the past six months

MOST VISITED

Boots.com

FAVOURITE

Lizearle.com

LEAST FAVOURITE

Tesco.com

the highest score across the entire survey – and a perfect rating for availability.

At the bottom of our table, Tesco.com scores a lacklustre 62%. Its ease of finding products was particularly disappointing at 58%, but Boots.com rated even lower for this, at 54%.

PRICE WATCH While online was cheaper for the popular Davidoff Cool Water Eau de Toilette, it was a different story for Chanel No.5. Every high-street shop we looked at was cheaper than buying this fragrance online once delivery costs were accounted for.

Chanel No.5



Cheapest online price £41.95
Tyrers.co.uk

Typical high-street price £39

SOME BEAUTIFUL RESULTS

Which? customer scores

Lizearle.com	(35)	95%
Fragrance direct.co.uk	(41)	85%
Amazon.co.uk	(38)	85%
Boots.com	(99)	75%
Tesco.com	(60)	62%

Sample size in brackets. See www.which.co.uk/online-retailers for full results.



Mobile phones **Virginmobile.com rings its way to the top**

OVERALL RESULTS

7% of members bought online in the past six months

MOST VISITED	Tesco.com and O2.co.uk
FAVOURITE	Virginmobile.com
LEAST FAVOURITE	Orange.co.uk

Virginmobile.com scores 83% to win the race for the best online retailer for mobile phones. Its delivery service scores highly, and the site's easy-to-read tariff tables and comprehensive phone reviews make it easy to see why members find it simple to use.

Shoppers at Orange.co.uk and Vodafone.co.uk clearly

feel there's room for improvement. Vodafone.co.uk scores 59% while Orange.co.uk's score of 53% is the joint lowest across all the retailers in this report.

Of those who bought mobiles online, 14% had had a problem with their purchase – more than

any other category – with technical problems with the website most common.

PRICE WATCH The high street could generally do you a better deal than our cheapest online store.

On the high street we found a Nokia 6500



Nokia 6500 slide on Orange PAYG

Cheapest online price £159.95
Carphonewarehouse

Typical high-street price £150

slide phone on Orange pay-as-you-go for up to £20 cheaper.



LORDS OF THE RINGS

Which? customer scores

Virginmobile.com	(62)	83%
Tesco.com	(72)	73%
O2.co.uk	(68)	71%
Carphone warehouse.com	(45)	60%
Vodafone.co.uk	(44)	59%
Orange.co.uk	(43)	53%

Sample size in brackets. See www.which.co.uk/onlinetailers for full results.



Electrical goods **Johnlewis.com holds on to first place**

OVERALL RESULTS

53% of members bought online in the past six months

MOST VISITED	Amazon.co.uk
FAVOURITE	Johnlewis.com
LEAST FAVOURITE	PCWorld.co.uk

Electrical goods are popular online – half of you look to the internet when buying appliances and audio-visual gear, and it's the largest online retail sector in terms of sales.

Johnlewis.com holds the top spot for online electrical purchases again, with an excellent score of 90%. Our members think that the site's free delivery service is 'great', and they keep going back for more.

Amazon.co.uk also does well for electrical purchases. Your top website for online prices across our survey – 7dayshop.com – features in the top five for satisfaction here, too.

All the sites owned by the

country's largest electrical retailer, DSG International – Dixon.co.uk, Pixmania.co.uk, Currys.co.uk and PCWorld.co.uk – are at the lower end of our table.

However, DSG's online-only stores – Dixons.co.uk and Pixmania.co.uk – achieve higher scores than those with high-street versions – Currys.co.uk and PCWorld.co.uk.

Despite these findings, the online versions of Currys and PCWorld do considerably better than their high-street counterparts did in our February high street



retailer report (see *Which?*, February 2008, p34).

Faulty items top the list of grievances for the 11% of you who have experienced a problem with online electrical purchases.

PRICE WATCH Our researchers scoured both chain and independent high street retailers, finding a wealth of prices, but their tired feet could not always beat online deals.

A Canon digital camera was at least £20 cheaper online than its nearest high-street rival, while a Pure digital radio was up to £55 cheaper than the typical high street price.

However, the new iPod Nano cost no more on the high street than online.

PLUGGED IN

Which? customer scores

Johnlewis.com	(290)	90%
Amazon.co.uk	(928)	86%
Hughesdirect.co.uk	(69)	85%
Ebuyer.com	(82)	83%
7dayshop.com	(64)	82%
Play.com	(85)	82%
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Dixons.co.uk	(54)	<b>69%</b>
Tesco.com	(64)	<b>68%</b>
Pixmania.co.uk	(44)	<b>66%</b>
Currys.co.uk	(98)	<b>63%</b>
BT.com	(32)	<b>62%</b>
PCWorld.co.uk	(32)	<b>55%</b>

The top and bottom six retailers only. Sample size in brackets. See [www.which.co.uk/onlinetailers](http://www.which.co.uk/onlinetailers) for full results.

### Pure Evoke 3 digital radio



**Cheapest online price £144.94**  
Dixons.co.uk

**Typical high-street price £200**

# Sport and leisure Amazon.co.uk and Wiggle.co.uk in a dead heat

## OVERALL RESULTS

9% of members bought online in the past six months

**MOST VISITED FAVOURITE** Amazon.co.uk  
Wiggle.co.uk and Amazon.co.uk

**LEAST FAVOURITE** Argos.co.uk

Sport and leisure enthusiasts clearly rate Amazon.co.uk and Wiggle.co.uk – both



score 81%. Amazon.co.uk is rated particularly highly for its ordering process, and comes out above Wiggle for prices.

But Wiggle.co.uk customers still love its 'excellent customer relations, excellent website, excellent stock and very good prices'.

Although it's at the bottom

of our table, Argos.co.uk didn't fare too badly, with a score of 71%. However, shoppers are particularly disappointed with its delivery.

Just 9% of our members shop online for sports and leisure goods, so it might not be instantly considered when shopping for Christmas gifts – but just 10% reported a problem with their order.

**PRICE WATCH** For sports and outdoors hobbies, online clearly offers the cheapest deals. Prices were typically at least £9 cheaper even after accounting for delivery.



Women's North Face jacket

**Cheapest online price £55.94**  
Gootdoors.co.uk

**Typical high-street price £70**

## PROVING THEIR FITNESS

### Which? customer scores

Wiggle.co.uk	(40)	81%
Amazon.co.uk	(118)	81%
Argos.co.uk	(34)	71%

Sample size in brackets.  
See [www.which.co.uk/online-retailers](http://www.which.co.uk/online-retailers) for full results.

# Home and garden Johnlewis.com homes in on a comfortable win

## OVERALL RESULTS

27% of members bought online in the past six months

**MOST VISITED FAVOURITE** Amazon.co.uk  
Johnlewis.com

**LEAST FAVOURITE** Homebase.co.uk

Shopping on websites for homewares and furniture was the fastest area of growth in the online retail market last year.

A quarter of our members kitted out their homes and gardens over the internet in the past six months – and looking at the impressive scores of our top online retailers, it's easy to see why.

Johnlewis.com is your favourite click for home and garden goods, with a high score of 90% but, at 89%, Lakeland.co.uk and DIY retailer Screwfix.com are hot on its heels.

Members particularly rate the top three in our table for their prompt delivery service. One said

of Johnlewis.com: 'If it states that an article will be delivered on the following morning – it arrives exactly on time, and is well packed.'

The returns process for our top three home and garden websites are rated particularly highly, and are in our top five websites for returns across the survey. Lakeland.co.uk offers a generous – and unusual – unlimited returns policy on its products, for example.



With a 53% satisfaction score, Homebase.co.uk is your least favourite website for home and garden items, and is the joint least favourite online retailer across the whole survey. It is rated well below average across all our measures, but its range, price and ease of finding products rate particularly poorly.

Shoppers in this category are also some of the most likely to

## HOME SWEET HOME

### Which? customer scores

Johnlewis.com	(208)	90%
Lakeland.co.uk	(190)	89%
Screwfix.com	(138)	89%
Amazon.co.uk	(297)	84%
Marksandspencer.com	(83)	73%
Argos.co.uk	(159)	71%
Tesco.com	(75)	71%
Homebase.co.uk	(31)	53%

Sample size in brackets.  
See [www.which.co.uk/online-retailers](http://www.which.co.uk/online-retailers) for full results.



We found a Bosch power drill in B&Q for £99.98 – much less than the cheapest online price of £130 – although other high-street stores were dearer.

And John Lewis, London, offered a Le Creuset frying pan for a bargain £64. However, other stores let the typical price down again – with most charging around £80.

experience problems with their purchases – delayed delivery and faulty items are the most common issues.

**PRICE WATCH** You can generally find better prices online for home and garden goods, but the odd high-street store throws up a gem.



Le Creuset frying pan

**Cheapest online price £68.98**  
Payscan.co.uk

**Typical high-street price £80**

# Return to sender

## Delivery and returns policies of 27 retailers featured in our survey

Most retailers who responded to our questions give between 21 and 30 days to return goods. The most generous are Elc.co.uk and Lakeland.co.uk – both have no time limit. Many retailers offer extended returns limits for Christmas presents, so check their terms before buying.

Check out our table (right) to see which sites offer the most generous terms.

### Returning to store

You may think if you order from a high-street store's website, they'll let you return an item to one of its shops. But of

the 20 online retailers who also have a high-street presence, six don't allow this.

### All wrapped up

A gift-wrapping service is convenient for time-poor Christmas shoppers, but just six retailers offer this, including Amazon.co.uk, while other retailers, such as Johnlewis.com, offer only a limited service.

Exclusions and restrictions apply, so check with each retailer before buying, or check out [www.which.co.uk/onlineretailers](http://www.which.co.uk/onlineretailers) for a list of exclusions.



### CHOCO-LATE

#### Paul Clark 41, funeral director

Paul likes the convenience of doing his Christmas shopping online, and most things have arrived in time for the big day. However, last year, he ordered a box of Thorntons chocolates for his wife Tracey in plenty of time, but they didn't arrive until New Year's Eve.

Thorntons credited Paul's account and sent him a second box of chocolates as an apology, but Paul says that he'll buy such treats on the high street in future. 'They accepted full responsibility, but it doesn't alter the fact that we didn't get them in time for Christmas,' he says.

### ONLINE STORE RETURNS POLICIES

	FREE DELIVERY	DAYS TO RETURN UNWANTED PRODUCT	FREE RETURNS FOR UNWANTED GOODS?	CAN RETURN TO STORE
AMAZON.CO.UK	more than £15	30	X	n/a
ARGOS.CO.UK	X	30	✓	✓
BOOTS.COM	more than £40	28	✓	✓
COMET.CO.UK	most orders	28	X	✓
CURRYS.CO.UK	more than £150	14	X	✓
DABS.COM	X	7	X	n/a
DEBENHAMS.COM	more than £100	28	✓	✓
DIXONS.CO.UK	X	7	X	n/a
ELC.CO.UK	X	no time limit	✓	✓
FIGLEAVES.COM	more than £300	14	✓	n/a
HMV.COM	all orders	21	X	X
HOMEBASE.CO.UK	X	30	✓	X
HUGHESDIRECT.CO.UK	X	7	X	✓
JOHNLEWIS.COM	all orders	28	✓	✓
LAKELAND.CO.UK	more than £50	no time limit	✓	✓
MARKSANDSPENCER.COM	more than £30	90	✓	✓
NEXT.CO.UK	X	10	X	✓
O2.CO.UK	all orders	14	✓	X
ORANGE.CO.UK	pay as you go only	7	X	X
PCWORLD.CO.UK	more than £150	14	✓	✓
PIXMANIA.CO.UK	X	7	X	n/a
PLAY.COM	all orders	28	X	n/a
SCREWFIX.COM	more than £50	30	✓	✓
VIRGINMOBILE.COM	X	28	✓	X
VODAFONE.CO.UK	all orders	14	✓	X
WATERSTONES.COM	more than £15	21	X	✓
WIGGLE.CO.UK	all orders	21	X	n/a

### OUR RESEARCH

In June and July 2008, we asked 8,380 Which? online panel members how satisfied they were with websites they have used to shop online in the past six months, and how likely they would be to recommend them. We combined these to create the Which? customer scores.

Members also rated websites for ease of finding products, range,

availability, price, ordering process, delivery and returns.

On 22 and 23 September, researchers shopped in three major areas of the country to collect high-street prices for a list of products. We have quoted the typical price found across a range of stores. An online comparison was done on the same days. All online prices include the standard delivery charge.