

Winner – Shop Direct

Shop Direct transforms to reflect changing retail world

With just shy of an average one million visits per day across six digital brands, Shop Direct has become a big player in retail.

What began as a traditional mail order business has transformed to become a powerful and forward-thinking retailer.

It has been a journey that demanded commitment and investment to change old habits. The judges felt it had been done almost consummately amid a challenging climate and Shop Direct's time for recognition has come.

It has been a long journey with notable moments, such as the arrival in 2010 of click-and-collect services for customers.

Since 2012 it has been the job of chief executive Alex Baldock to steer the ship to profitability. In 2012/13 it managed that for the first time in a decade. Then in 2013/14 it delivered a 512% pre-tax profit surge.

Such growth, during such an evolutionary period, singled Shop Direct out from the pack.

The retailer demonstrated the sort of experimentation – and risk – that retailers know is necessary in a formative period, as well as a clear set of goals.

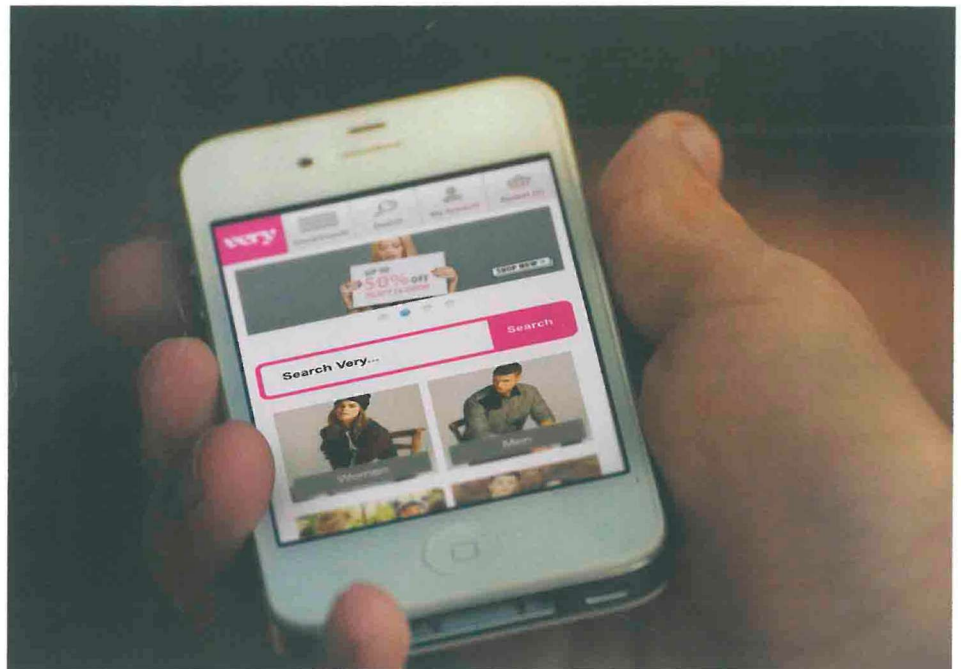
Those fell into three key categories. The first was to bring in more brands – including GHD and River Island – and launch retail brand Very Exclusive during London Fashion Week in February this year.

Another key initiative has been the introduction of a more comprehensive fraud protection package for customers, and an essential contents insurance product.

But the area in which the judges felt Shop Direct had made the most progress was in a drive to make its content more accessible by switching all its websites to a new, more stable platform, and the creation of an innovative 'experience lab', which has been a source of invaluable analytical data.

One judge said: "The way it has innovated and improved the customer experience with things such as the lab is brilliant."

The retailer has delivered a complete redesign of its mobile homepage and products pages, both of which have boosted conversion. It has introduced data-driven persuasive



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Oracle Retail Week Awards judge

messaging to its desktop and mobile sites and, in the period covered by the entry, recorded a record day for online sales.

Switching platforms alone has meant the retailer's various sites now work faster than ever. Homepages download 11% faster, and the gallery pages operate 27% more quickly than before.

The judges were impressed by Shop Direct's decision to go down a difficult, but necessary, path.

"It has been through a massive change and the level of talent is amazing. It is going to give some department stores a really hard time," one said. **BEN COOPER**

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