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For Information Contact:  
Lauren Freedman  
the e-tailing group, inc.  
773-975-7280  
www.e-tailing.com

**Performics and the e-tailing group Pioneering Research Study Identifies Opportunities for Publisher Websites to Generate Increased Commissions through Best-in-Class Website Usability, Merchandising, and Customer Service**

Performics, a leading online marketing services and technology firm, commissioned the e-tailing group to examine the customer experience, content, and merchandising execution on a cross-section of twenty-four publisher websites. The joint goal was to showcase best-in-class tactics and execution while illustrating opportunities for growth that can be cost-effectively adapted by small and large affiliate publishers.

Benchmarks were evaluated relative to four unique publisher sectors: Comparison Shopping, Loyalty & Rewards, Community & Content, and Shopping & Promotions publisher sites. Affiliate marketing is a performance-based channel where web publishers are paid a commission for traffic driven to a merchant site that results in a sale or other valued online action. There are thousands of affiliate sites with different approaches and value propositions but Performics believes that these four categories encompass the core business models of most affiliate web publishers. "Performics is committed to demonstrating the valuable role that publishers play in consumer transactions and to helping the publisher community identify best practices to enhance the overall experience" said Chris Henger, vice president, affiliate marketing at Performics.

"Although publishers have done a good job of securing merchant participation, each sector suggests a very specific experience, which, at first glance is not always clear to the consumer," summarized Lauren Freedman, president of the e-tailing group. "Furthermore, within each sector extensive diversity is apparent with stronger players delivering memorable first impressions and more complete shopping experiences to visitors. Trailing players reveal sites where merchandising tactics are sporadic and leveraging lessons from best-in-class multi-channel merchants would be optimal."

**Sector Findings**

- **Comparison Shopping** sites are big business and their sites reflect significant investments
- **Loyalty & Reward** publishers provide a well-branded approach to their business, making this a clear customer value beginning with the home page
- **Community & Content** sites have a personal touch and likely appeal to a niche group of consumers but overall publishers in this sector are likely to be less sophisticated
- Publishers catering to **Shopping & Promotions** oriented clientele forego a "less is more" approach; often overwhelming shoppers on first impression

<b>SITE EXPERIENCE</b> (1-3; 3 = best)	<b>Comparison Shopping</b>	<b>Loyalty &amp; Rewards</b>	<b>Community &amp; Content</b>	<b>Shopping &amp; Promotions</b>	<b>All Publishers Surveyed</b>
<b>First Site Impression</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>2.42</b>	<b>1.81</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>2.30</b>
<b>Branding</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>2.08</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>2.00</b>
<b>Overall Experience</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>1.83</b>	<b>1.83</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>2.00</b>
<b>Usability</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>2.08</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>2.33</b>	<b>2.30</b>

Ranking site experiences on a 1-3 scale, with 3 being the best reveals the differentials. **Brand** messaging is best executed by comparison shopping publishers who are typically the key players and larger entities in the overall publisher universe. When it comes to shopping, **usability** is paramount, yet only this sector scored perfectly; followed by those with discount strategies.

<b>METRIC</b>	<b>Comparison Shopping</b>	<b>Loyalty &amp; Rewards</b>	<b>Community &amp; Content</b>	<b>Shopping &amp; Promotions</b>	<b>All Publishers Surveyed</b>
<b>Merchant Breadth/Depth</b> (1-3; 3 = most robust)	<b>2.42</b>	<b>2.08</b>	<b>2.20</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>2.30</b>
<b>Publishers Listing Categories</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>92%</b>
<b>- Number of Categories Shown</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>24.3</b>	<b>24.0</b>
<b>Listed Number of Products</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Last Updated Information</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Direct Merchant Access</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>79%</b>

Looking at specific metrics that impact the shopping experience, **merchant breadth/depth** was consistent, averaging 2.30 on a 1-3 scale, with 3 being the most robust across all publishers surveyed. Comparison and Shopping & Promotions sites were even more robust than this average ranking 2.42 and 2.50 respectively.

**Category segmentation** was universally shown on all publisher sites with the exception of community & content; among all publishers surveyed the average number of categories shown was twenty-four.

Surprisingly, only 38% percent of publishers showcased the **number of offers available** by category/merchant, a tactic which establishes voice of authority and adds to customer retention value.

**Currency of website** was minimal with one-third or less of these publishers indicating when their information was last updated, which can be an excellent tool for attracting repeat customers.



Within some segments room for improvement also exists in trying to locate specific offers, as overall only 79 percent of publishers provide **direct merchant access**.

“Through a series of newsletters and events Performics plans to provide affiliate publishers and advertisers with access to more in-depth findings from this study,” explained Henger. “We feel it is important to support our publishers with value-added information that can help them to increase conversion and commissions. Guidelines for improving site experiences, like those in this checklist, are key to that goal.”

### **the e-tailing group’s Checklist to Deliver More Robust Experiences and Increase Revenues from Publisher Websites**

1. Provide a clear brand proposition, including messaging, taglines, and visual execution.
2. Effectively direct the visitor with a clean real estate layout and tactical placement that is intuitive in nature, making the shopping experience easy and efficient to garner a good first impression.
3. Streamline pages for efficiency, avoid over cluttering; optimally employ sort functionality.
4. Keyword search is a must and should be evident on all publisher sites.
5. Consistently deploy traditional merchandising tactics, taking a lesson from best-in-class shopping sites.
6. Tout the number of available merchant offers as it not only emphasizes depth of product but reinforces voice of authority as a key publisher in the space.
7. Make finding a merchant, and merchant offers, simple - remember it’s all about visibility that results in conversion.
8. Let people know how current your site is by showing when it was last updated.
9. Given the “deal” nature of many publisher sites, more effectively leverage promotional tactics.
10. Incorporate ratings/reviews as well as my account type tools like “saved lists” into the experience which bodes well for retention purposes.
11. Import community elements into all sectors as resources permit.
12. Profiling/marketing opportunities exist from visibly displaying sign-up including building a robust communication strategy.
13. Focus on customer service with comprehensive contact information in support of the brand including FAQ areas.
14. Extend delivery channels and international outreach; an up and coming area of focus especially for shopping/discount sites.

**Publishers surveyed:** 24-Hourmall, 247malls, American Advantage, Any Coupons, BradsDeals, Bizrate, Club Mom, Coupon Cabin, Fat Wallet, Flamingo World, Gold Points, Lets Run, Moms View, MSN Shopping, My Points, Nascar, Next Tag, Personal Shopper, Price Grabber, schoolpop, SheFinds, Shopping.com, Upromise, Yahoo!Shopping

**Performics**, the performance-based marketing division of DoubleClick, provides online marketing services and technologies for leading multi-channel marketers by fully integrating the three elements required for performance marketing: hands-on account management, industry expertise and proprietary tracking and reporting technology. For further information contact: Kristin Hall, Director of Marketing, Affiliate, 180 North LaSalle Street, Suite 1100, Chicago, IL 60601; Phone: 312.739.0222; Fax: 312.739.0223; Web: [www.performics.com](http://www.performics.com)

**The e-tailing group, inc.** serves as the multi-channel merchant’s eye, bringing a merchant’s sensibility to evolving the multi-channel shopping experience and actionable merchandising solutions to merchants selling online as well as to enabling technology firms. For more background about this research study or for additional information on the e-tailing group, inc. please contact Lauren Freedman at [lf@e-tailing.com](mailto:lf@e-tailing.com) or visit the e-tailing group website [www.e-tailing.com](http://www.e-tailing.com).