

Sites tackle festive test

RUSH WILL HIGHLIGHT SITE FLAWS

David Neal

Consumers are set to spend a lot more on online shopping this holiday season, but many firms are not ready to cope with the higher demand, according to internet application testing firm SciVisum.

Analyst firm Forrester Research predicts online consumer sales in the UK this Christmas will reach £3bn, while sales across Europe will be worth £9bn, up from £6.25bn last year. But many online retailers will lose business because their sites do not work well and have difficulties such as inadequate shopping cart systems, according to research by SciVisum.

Following a study carried out six months ago, in which SciVisum found many web sites had shortcomings in basic functionality, the company last week warned that few businesses had prepared their

infrastructure for the predicted rush. Indeed it said that at some sites the functionality had worsened.

James Roper, chairman of the Interactive Media in Retail Group (IMRG), a UK industry body for e-commerce, said, "This sector has suffered terribly from underinvestment. The result is pitifully poor online shopping offerings." Roper added that too many firms relied on packaged e-commerce applications, warning, "you cannot just use a standard offer".

But the problems will not only affect firms at Christmas. SciVisum said that the shortcomings of web sites are losing millions of pounds of business each month. It said incorrectly functioning shopping carts were a big problem, and had got worse since the last study.

Deri Jones, chief executive at SciVisum, said that although many retailers do some testing it is rarely



Roper: lack of investment

- Research indicates this Christmas will be the busiest period ever for online retailers in the UK.
- However, a new study suggests many retail sites have shortcomings that mean they will not fully benefit from the increase.
- Malfunctioning shopping carts are a particularly common problem.

comprehensive. "No one does the actual journey that the user will take," he said. "The functionality of the site and the things that fall over from time to time are the hardest things to spot."

Jones said firms should consider testing all areas of their sites to avoid losing custom. Roper said that retailers that give a lot of consideration to their audience and tailor their sites accordingly are more likely to succeed. He singled out Tesco.com as a good example. Last week Tesco said it expected to fulfil an order every two seconds over the Christmas period.

➔ www.imrg.co.uk ➔ www.scivisum.co.uk