



Making it a merry e-Christmas

Online stores must ensure that their software and databases can cope with the busy festive demand, argues **Deri Jones**

» Christmas starting early is good for online stores. It spreads the traffic-peaks out so that systems are less stressed and online shoppers hopefully get a better and faster online experience.

But the danger is that any online store that has not already prepared for the Christmas rush will suffer performance problems and lose customers: research has found that 78 per cent of online shoppers said that frustration with web site performance has led them to turn off their computer, and that the highest spenders are the least tolerant of any glitches.

Christmas is always the busiest time for all retailers. Sadly, Christmas is also the time when many e-tailers let their buyers act as guinea-pigs and only find out how slow or error prone the web store can become when the traffic volumes increase.

Obviously, for online shoppers it is very easy to comparison shop, so the earlier Christmas shopping trend will be offset by the fact that online shoppers will window-shop at more stores. This means that the user journey



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through a web store may shift, with the 'browse for product' percentage increasing well into the 90s, whereas the 'add to basket' or 'check out' journeys will drop as a percentage.

Given that the load on the web site servers and back-end systems is very different for these journey types, it is likely that new bottlenecks in the systems will be exposed by the different mix, causing poor user experience.

A poor online experience when users are putting in credit card details is common, because it is the final stages of the online purchase journey that require the most resources from the online portal software and data-

bases. Many sites can support visitors who are browsing for products, but far fewer can support purchasers.

The root cause of such poor experiences at busy times is often because the marketing and business people at the online store have failed to take on 100 per cent responsibility for user experience and the performance of the site.

However, web rage and lost sales can definitely be minimised if online stores take their user journeys a little more seriously, get load-testing in advance of the Christmas rush and monitor the performance of all the core journeys through the busy season. **CRN**

Deri Jones is chief executive of webtesters at SciVisum.