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E-BUSINESS, INTRANETS AND ONLINE TECHNOLOGY

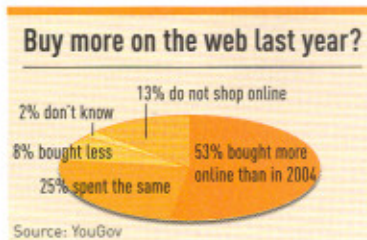
# Shoppers flock online for Xmas

PHIL MUNCASTER

Over a third of Christmas shopping was done over the internet, according to the results of a survey released last week by pollster YouGov. The survey also revealed that 53 percent of shoppers spent more online last year than in 2004.

Teresa Jones of analyst firm Butler Group said the research shows that online shopping is "very significant", and consumers are now more happy to buy online because transaction systems have become more secure. Top of the internet retailers was Amazon, which took nearly 25 percent of the money spent by respondents on music and home entertainment goods.

According to Jones, the company provides a good example of a well-run web site, combining effective site design with reliability and good use of "customer relationship management-type data" to enhance



the shopping experience. High street giant Argos came out top in the electricals market, despite a well-publicised web site outage in mid-December, reportedly due to the "Christmas rush".

Deri Jones, chief executive of web testing specialist SciVisum, said that load testing is vital to ensure web sites are equipped to cope with busy periods such as the run-up to Christmas.

"In our research, the number one reason [for consumers abandoning web sites] was sluggish performance," Jones commented. "If you are following the purchasing journey and during the process

some pages are slower, it can put people off their stride."

Jones said e-traders' web sites should be fast, consistent, contain a good search engine and work with a range of browsers. "There are a lot of things [which web managers] must get right - they should keep it simple because the tiny things can affect consumers' shopping experience," he advised.

Separate research released last week by e-commerce software vendor Actinic showed online businesses reported an average 80 percent increase in turnover for November and December 2005 compared with the same period in 2004.

"Our research shows that retailers must plough time, attention and money into their online service to be successful," said Actinic's Bruce Townsend. "Many companies fall down on delivery. Fulfilling orders is probably the most important thing, especially at Christmas, and Amazon has set the standard."

## Wi-Fi set for Cloud nine

■ Wireless hotspot provider

The Cloud is rolling out extensive access zones across the UK. This spring the company plans to roll out access in nine cities, and it estimates that the service will be within reach of some four million people.

Last week The Cloud announced that in the first phase it will set up wireless zones in Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Nottingham, Oxford, Cambridge and three London boroughs, but other cities will also be added this year.

The hotspots will be supported by hundreds of BT payphones fitted with Wi-Fi kit. The Cloud does not offer services to the public itself, but users of wireless services from BT Openzone, O2, Nintendo or Skype Zones will be able to access its hotspots.

→ [www.thecloud.net](http://www.thecloud.net)