INSIGHTS

Online retail insight: Successful e-commerce strategies

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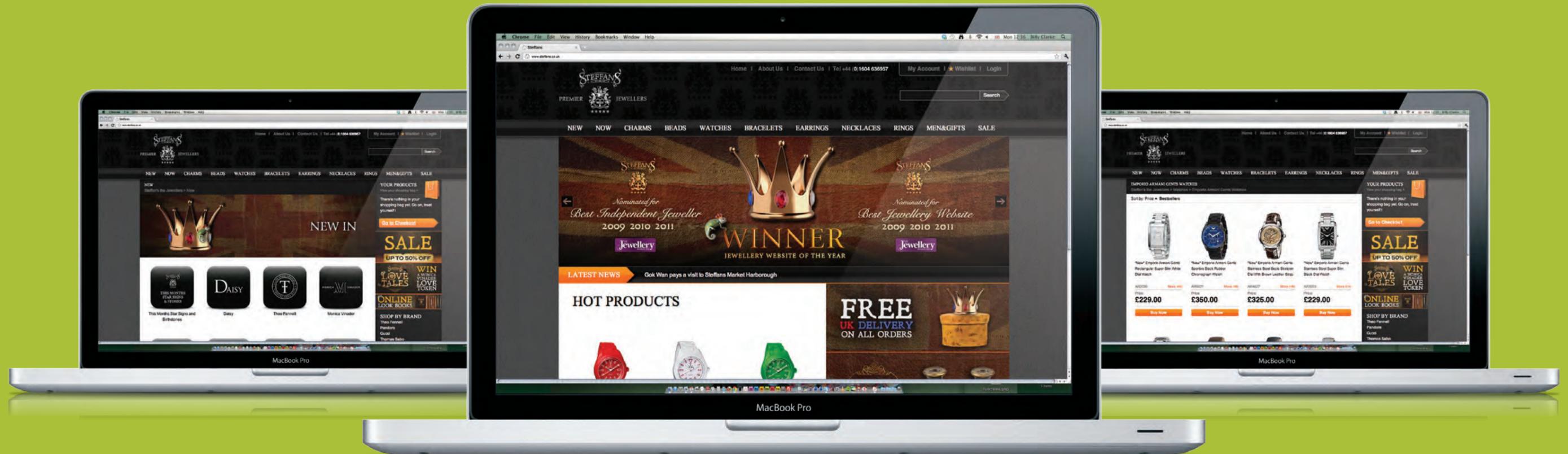
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Steffan's e-commerce homepage - Winner of Jewellery website of the year 2011

We were recently approached by Emap's Online Editor, Kate Donovan, to contribute to a technology focus article for their magazine, Retail Jeweller.

We designed and developed Steffan's the Jewellers website which has been hugely influential within the jewellery world and, according to Kate, 'is one of the most impressive examples of website design and functionality within our industry' (I'm sure she says that to all of the agencies).

With that kind of introduction we couldn't really say no to passing on our thoughts and insights to retailers who are looking to start making real profits from their online business. Here's our response in full and you can find the edited article online: http://www.retail-jeweller.com/multichannel/exclusively-online-interview-with-andrew-wise-of-engine-creative-about-an-effective-online-presence/5022367.article

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Where do you suggest that a jewellery retailer with a bricks and mortar shop starts once they have decided they want a website?

There are a number of things that a high street jewellery retailer needs to consider when they're making that step online. The following points are a good start in helping them to define exactly what they're looking to achieve:

▶ Do you want to sell products online or are you simply going to use your online presence to drive enquiries?

▶ Do you have the resource to manage the update of content on your site and, if you choose, the handling of orders?

▶ Have you got a clear idea of what you expect back from your investment in the short and medium term?

Once a retailer has asked themselves these questions, the next step is to find and speak with creative digital agency that can help them pull together a more defined brief and can put a firm cost to the work required.

A clear and detailed specification document for the website should be agreed before any design or development work takes place so that there is clarity on both sides in terms of deliverables. It's all too common for extras to pop up once development and costs have already been agreed not because they have been hidden but because the project hasn't been properly considered from the onset.

Planning is vital at the early stages and working with people that you are comfortable with is also key as the long term success of the project will be dependent on a strong and open relationship with the technical and creative partners.

What does a company such as Engine Creative offer a retailer in terms of web design and development?

Engine Creative offers everything you would expect from a leading creative digital agency with the added bonus of having an impressive heritage in the retail market. With a client base in the sector that includes Tesco, Next and Office Depot, Engine Creative is working with some of the UK's leading retailers.

We're also working with independent retailers such as Steffan's, delivering impressive results through innovative and robust online solutions and creating a site that is recognised and respected throughout the jewellery industry.

In the end, the work and the results speak for themselves. We also pride ourselves on being a people focused company and, as an independent agency ourselves, we also understand the ins and outs of running a SME efficiently, which is particularly relevant to independent retailers.

What do you think is most important for a jewellery retailer website?

The most important thing for a jewellery retail website to deliver is a user experience that is true to the individual jeweller. For example, our work with Steffan's has been focussed on delivering an experience which reflects and enhances the outstanding service you would expect in store.

The user journey is clear and intuitive, the products are displayed elegantly within the site structure, delivery is free and prompt and we know that users of the site return again and again.

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This type of online presence can only be achieved by working in partnership with the Steffan's team and undertaking ongoing analysis of the site to ensure that it continues to evolve and, in turn, achieve business objectives. Delivering a technical solution which has this type of flexibility is vital to the long term success and profitability of the site.

We have also worked closely with Steffan's technical team to integrate with their existing IT systems and also ensure that the extensive offline marketing they're involved with is part and parcel of the visual aspect of the site. This combination of technical and design skills combined with an honest and open partnership is the real key to a successful retail website.

Do you think all jewellery websites should have a transactional aspect and what are the major challenges around making a jewellery website transactional?

The idea that jewellery websites should have a transactional function is a decision that needs to made before investing into an e-commerce solution and certainly isn't something that is right for all retailers. Engine Creative has developed a range of e-commerce solutions for different clients including Steffan's. Aside from the logistics of deciding on the best e-commerce system to use and most appropriate payment provider, we would advise all retailers to consider how they will manage the process internally and exactly what resource they can dedicate to managing the process. Once the system is in place, the primary concern is to make the transaction process (purchase, payment, checkout) as straightforward as possible with minimal clicks to ensure high purchase rates. This process can (and should) be reviewed and refined on an

ongoing basis using analytical tools such as Google Analytics and customer experience tools such as ClickTale. Automated email processes, exit surveys and multivariate testing techniques are also powerful ways of finding out more about your customers and, in turn, making the user experience as pleasurable as possible.

The technical aspect of developing an e-commerce site can be quite daunting and a big part of our role as a technical partner in any such project is to take our clients with us on the journey and communicate the opportunities and processes clearly and openly.

Do you think the personal touch is increasingly important for retail sites and are they easy to implement?

Any online presence and any marketing communication needs to convey the personality of the brand in question. If, like Steffan's, a distinct personality is important to the success of the brand then this needs to be implemented online every step of the way from the imagery and visual appeal of the site through to the tone of voice used. Users need to feel as though they matter and this needs to be backed up with a personalised experience wherever possible and should also include scope for customers to review and feedback. Giving customers this kind of 'power' is something that needs to be closely monitored and, as with all social media, the opportunity to engage and have a conversation with your customers in this way can be hugely rewarding and a chance to respond to ongoing market research in a way that smaller retailers would previously have found cost prohibitive.

Do you think it is important for websites to be mobile optimised now and how can a retailer do this with their website?

The mobile market is undoubtedly a place where every serious retailer needs to be and the most basic way of doing this is to ensure that the site looks and feels as similar as possible across platforms. This should be a matter of course for any new site in the retail sector. The interesting area for the mobile market is the rise and rise of the app; micro applications with very tightly defined functionality. Users can build up a highly personalised range of apps on their mobile devices that reflects their lifestyle and, with over 7 billion downloads globally from Apple's App Store (other app stores are available), it's a huge opportunity for retailers. With the right products and the right app, a jewellery retailer could make a significant impact in the market.

In what ways do you think we will see retail websites develop/advance over the next 5 to 10 years?

The biggest advancement in retail websites that we can confidently predict will be the move to ever more personalised user experiences. The best retailers are already having an ongoing conversation with their customers across different platforms and technology will continue to offer new and more refined ways of interacting.
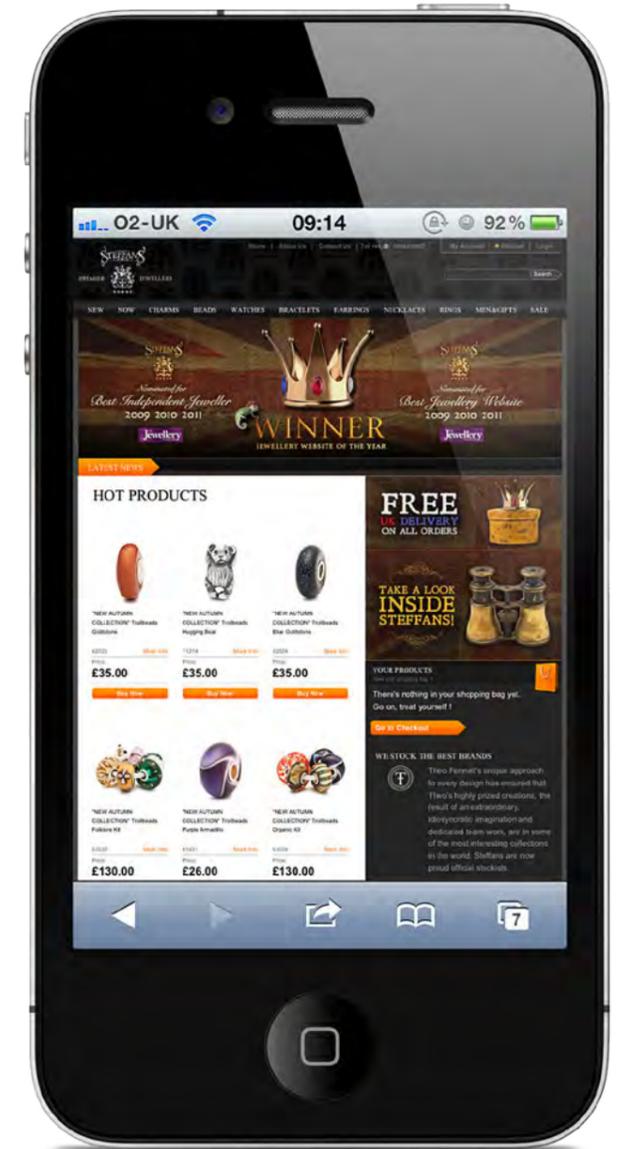
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Thank you for your time.

We can create™