

CHRISTMAS COULD BE BETTER FOR UK E-RETAILERS

UK retailers still struggling to deliver effective online services

A study released today by Parallel Ltd, a UK-based enterprise management company, reveals that a large proportion of UK online retailers are continuing to fail consumers. The findings, based on a three-month study to determine the performance of 51 UK e-tailing sites, revealed that none of the sites remained available for the whole three-month period.

These results are bad news for UK online shoppers – and UK e-tailers - in the run up to Christmas. Research from GartnerG2¹ predicts that European consumers will spend more than their North American counterparts in the fourth quarter of 2002, and that the European e-commerce sector will grow this Christmas by 75 percent compared to the same period in 2001.

Parallel's study shows that UK e-tailers have lower average web site availability compared to the retail banking sector monitored by Parallel in a similar study earlier this year. The average amount of time that retail sites were unavailable during the three-month period was 718 minutes (11 hours and 58 minutes), equating to 48 hours per year.

Download time was another major issue for online retailers. Only 16 per cent of the e-tailers monitored had a homepage that would download in eight seconds or less,

¹ Online Holiday Shopping 2002: Europe Fuels Worldwide Growth - October 2002 (GartnerG2)

which is the recommended maximum time to ensure a good customer experience. On average, home users had to wait more than 20 seconds for the homepage to download.

Page size was also a major hindrance for online consumers, with 67 per cent of e-tailers' sites containing web pages that exceed the recommended 40kB limit. The largest page size recorded was 185kB. The average page size for e-tailers is above the average for FTSE 100 companies monitored by Parallel earlier this year.

As Tim Moore, director at Parallel explains, e-tailers need to address the serious issues of downtime and web page size to capitalise on the revenue opportunities that the Internet offers.

“When you consider the fact that online spending is set to double this year, it seems extraordinary that e-tailers are willing to jeopardise customer satisfaction and revenue by providing web sites that are still non-consumer friendly.”

To view the full report, please go to http://www.nexuswatch.com/flash_news.html

How performance monitoring works

In analysing performance, Parallel used its Nexus Watch web-monitoring service. Nexus Watch employs a unique synchronous polling mechanism that uses two ISPs to determine whether the fault is with the Internet or the system being monitored. The e-tailers were interrogated automatically every few minutes to develop a clear picture of online performance, and the results were collated during a three-month period. Several key criteria emerged that companies should consider when benchmarking their online performance.

Nexus Watch acts as a virtual user, viewing a web site exactly the same way a customer would. It allows companies to instantly tackle downtime and performance issues, hacking and unauthorised postings or e-graffiti.

Nexus Watch requires no installation of software and there is no need to change any internal technology. Nexus Watch can begin to monitor a company's web site immediately from Parallel's Network Intelligence Centre and a company can receive performance alerts within minutes.

About Parallel / Ardentia

Parallel is a dedicated enterprise management solutions provider. It partners with a broad range of vendors including Sun, Cisco, NetScout and HP. Key customers include Alcatel Telecom, Hughes Olivetti Telecom, BT, NextiraOne, Damovo and Vivendi Universal. From January 2007 Ardentia Ltd markets Nexus Watch.

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