

Celebrating the best...

We left no stone unturned in deciding on the winners of the Which? Awards 2008



Now in their second year, the Which? Awards celebrate the best companies and individuals that seek to serve the interests of consumers. We've praised the top brands from the worlds of retail, financial services, car making and catering that have gone the extra mile to help meet the day-to-day needs of customers, delivering products and services worthy of a Which? Award.

Which? researchers used their judgement after poring over surveys and test results to determine the winners – and our members played a vital role. Your feedback on your experiences as a customer helped decide the winners – and how Which? tackles today's consumer challenges.

We've added more categories this year, recognising the importance of airlines and online retail. We've also honoured winners of categories ranging from cars to broadband providers, domestic appliances to financial products, and restaurants to high-street retailers. We've named a consumer champion whose deeds will have a lasting impact on the everyday lives of the public.

Choosing the winners has been challenging – none more so than for Best Current Account. Today's economic climate means that we'll be continually monitoring the winner and all financial service providers – ensuring that they continue to give customers a fair deal.

The Which? Awards are a celebration of good practice and good products that succeed in meeting consumers' expectations. We'll continue to put companies through their paces over the next year, and hope that competition for a Which? Award is even tougher in 2009.

Peter Vicary-Smith

Peter Vicary-Smith
Chief executive of Which?

AUDIOVISUAL

Best audiovisual brand **Panasonic**

Panasonic wins the award for best audiovisual brand for the second time – fighting off tough challenges from Sony and Canon. Panasonic has been awarded more Best Buys than any other manufacturer over the past 12 months, with an impressive 30 Best Buy products across seven different categories, including TVs, DVD recorders, digital cameras and camcorders.

It performed well in our annual survey of reliability (see p30) and customer satisfaction surveys, showing that its products are not only built to last but are also popular with Which? members who own them. With such consistent praise from our expert testers and from Which? members, it's fair to say that if you're in the market for an audiovisual product, you generally won't go too far wrong if you opt for Panasonic.

Panasonic is an innovative company that's among the forerunners with new technology. It was one of the first to introduce image stabilisation on compact digital cameras. This useful feature is now standard on its entire range – Panasonic is the only manufacturer to have done this. It's also the first manufacturer to offer a digital SLR camera with a 'twistable' multi-angle LCD screen.



Panasonic continues to produce plasma and LCD TVs that impress us and that regularly top our ratings for picture quality. The Best Buy Panasonic Viera TX-32LXD700, for example, is a fantastic 32-inch LCD model; its picture has exceptional depth and clarity.

Runners-up Sony and Canon pushed Panasonic hard for the top slot. But although both of them make excellent products and have picked up a hatful of Best Buy awards throughout the year, they couldn't quite match Panasonic's Best Buy strike rate or its impressive reliability and customer satisfaction scores.

Runners-up

- Canon
- Sony

DOMESTIC APPLIANCE

Best domestic appliance brand **Miele**

Miele has won the award for best domestic appliance brand for the second year – with more Best Buys across 10 domestic appliance groups than any other brand.

Which? has tested hundreds of domestic appliances over the past 12 months – Miele's score is unmatched, with a total of 22 Best Buys in 10 of the categories it was tested in. The brand is best on test in seven categories, including washing machines, freezers, vacuum cleaners, washer-dryers, dishwashers, tumble dryers and fridge-freezers.

These results are matched by Miele's innovation. It runs an 'experience centre' – open to the public – that allows users

to try out domestic appliances to help with buying decisions.

Miele's vacuum cleaners offer great value for money: one of its Best Buys is £129, below the average for cylinders. But while its larger appliances are pricier than competitors', the price is worth it for their superior test performance. What's more, its machines are built to last.

Miele also has a superb track record for reliability and recommendation – in our recommendation survey of Which? members (see January, p38) it had a clean sweep of top scores across every category it appeared in. Our reliability survey found that Miele's washing machines, tumble dryers, dishwashers and



cylinder vacuum cleaners achieved the highest reliability scores – with its vacuum cleaners chalking up 97% for reliability.

It's a popular brand with Which? members – 89%

of you would definitely recommend its washing machines to a friend.

Runners-up

- Bosch
- Electrolux Group

CARMAKER

Best carmaker **Mazda**

In a race for the title, Mazda has scooped the coveted honour of best carmaker. Mazda's blend of excellent value for money, reliability and innovation won the day.

There's something for everyone in the Mazda range. It sells cars in six different sectors, and although its models share much with the latest Fords, they fare far better in most

areas. The Mazda3 and MX-5 are comfortable Best Buys – and the Mazda3 stands out from humdrum medium cars. It looks fresh and stylish, despite being older than many popular rivals.

It's been a good year for new launches, too – the all-new Mazda2 supermini and Mazda6 family car have impressed us and are sure to become firm favourites with drivers.

Each would be a strong contender on a shortlist. They do well in our road tests, and safety-wise they are a major step forward for the Japanese carmaker. The Mazda2 scored five stars in Euro NCAP crash tests, and we expect the

Mazda6 to do the same.

Mazda dealers also score above average for customer care for both sales and servicing or repairs in the *Which? Car* survey. Increased choice makes buying a new car harder than ever – there are more than 300 new models on the market, and the competition is tough. Buyers rightly expect a lot from a new car – and a Mazda rarely disappoints.

Runners-up

- Audi
- BMW
- Honda
- Lexus
- Toyota



HIGH-STREET RETAILER

Best high-street retailer **Waitrose**

Waitrose has won the best high-street retailer award, thanks to its excellent customer service and a great range of quality products.

It came top in our satisfaction survey of high-street retailers, beating 76 of the UK's best-known high-street retailers with a customer satisfaction score of 87%.

Our survey of over 10,900 members found that the best retailers do well for customer service, convenience, product quality and availability, and instore experience. Waitrose came top in most areas.

Members said it provided the best customer service, with 75% rating it highly for its knowledgeable, available and helpful staff.

Waitrose was rated as providing the best shopping experience – with products that were easy to find, tidy stores and well-managed queuing times – as well as product quality and availability.

And its stores were rated



highly for the convenience of their locations and their opening times.

We divided retailers into different sectors to see which stores were best for purchases such as groceries and electrical goods.

Waitrose was streets ahead of all other retailers when it came to grocery shopping – and it topped our supermarket league table on nearly every measure.

Runners-up

- John Lewis
- Waterstone's

VALUE-FOR-MONEY RETAILER

Best value-for-money retailer **Lidl**

There's a retail revolution going on, as demonstrated by the success of Lidl, winner of the best value-for-money retailer.

For the second year, some discount supermarkets have outperformed major supermarkets in our annual retailer survey, with Lidl scoring more highly for overall customer satisfaction than the 'big four' supermarkets – Asda, Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Tesco.

Despite great performances by runners-up Aldi and Iceland, Lidl was overall winner in terms of value for money. For pricing, it gained the highest score of all the retailers in our survey, being rated excellent or very good by 79% of shoppers. In the groceries category, Lidl was third only to Waitrose and Marks & Spencer for overall satisfaction, and overall it was joint sixth favourite retailer.

Customers say Lidl's products are excellent value. It may not stock all the brands that you're used to, but, as one



Lidl customer told us: 'If you are willing to experiment, the pricing is excellent.'

Our main criterion for winning included satisfaction with the pricing – crucial in a value-for-money award. Other considerations included satisfaction with the quality of the products offered, and overall satisfaction with the retailer.

Runners-up

- Aldi
- Iceland

BEST ONLINE RETAILER

Best online retailer **Play.com**

Play.com won this year's best online retailer award. Play.com and Abebooks.co.uk were tied at the top with an 89% customer satisfaction score. But Play.com nudged ahead by scoring more positively on key aspects of the online shopping experience – price, ordering process and delivery of goods.

With a third of us shopping online, it's important for internet

retailers to put their efforts into creating a great online service that's easy to use, value for money and quick to deliver.

Our Which? online retailer survey of more than 5,700 members was used to judge which of the top 38 online retailers for electricals, clothing and entertainment stand out in these key areas.

Entertainment online retailers

were ahead of the rest – low price and convenience make them the most developed of all online markets (78% of Which? members have bought books, CDs, DVDs and video games online in the past six months).

Play.com proved unbeatable for ordering process and delivery – and, of the three shortlisted companies, it emerged best for value. It may



have lost out to Abebooks and Amazon on range of goods, but Play.com generally impressed its customers on all fronts.

Runners-up

- Abebooks.com
- Amazon.co.uk

RESTAURANT

Good Food Guide restaurant of the year **Ramsons**

Following an overwhelming response from *Good Food Guide* readers to name the 10 favourite regional restaurants, the *Good Food Guide* team has named the overall restaurant of the year. This year's winner is Chris Johnson's civilised restaurant, Ramsons, in the north-west.

Judges were impressed by Chris's passion and prodigious talent for sourcing prime raw materials from local suppliers or foraged by himself, and also superb Mediterranean produce from Italy. He also nurtures young talent in the kitchen, and is considered a role model

for the industry. He is an evangelist, too, spreading the word on sourcing traceable and seasonal ingredients – an admirable commitment that permeates his Anglo-Italian menu.

All of this comes together in a stylish little restaurant in a pleasant former mill town in the Rossendale valley. The quality of the food, level of service and even the all-Italian wine list would be at home in a restaurant in more urbane surroundings.

Yet it has the warm, welcoming attributes of



a personally run, provincial restaurant – the sort of place you enter as a customer and leave as a friend.

There was strong competition among the finalists, but there was no ignoring the fact that Ramsons is a really extraordinary restaurant.

Winning regional restaurants

- **EAST ENGLAND**
Great House, Lavenham
- **LONDON**
Pied à Terre
- **MIDLANDS**
Perkins, Plumtree
- **NORTH-EAST**
Weaver's Shed, Golcar
- **NORTHERN IRELAND**
Bay Tree, Holywood
- **NORTH-WEST**
Ramsons, Ramsbottom
- **SCOTLAND**
Ee-Usk, Oban
- **SOUTH-EAST**
Hungry Monk, Jevington
- **SOUTH-WEST**
Allium, Fairford
- **WALES**
Fairyhill, Reynoldston



BROADBAND

Best broadband provider **Zen Internet**

Award winner Zen Internet makes the world of broadband as hassle-free as possible.

Zen Internet has been a consistent Which? broadband Best Buy since 2005, and topped the table in our latest survey in November 2007, with an overall customer satisfaction score of 85%. It scored top marks among Which? members for connection speed, customer service, and online and telephone support. It was the only provider on test to get top marks for reliability of connection, and the only one



of our three shortlisted ISPs to offer a one-month contract.

When choosing our winner, we looked closely at the results of our twice-yearly broadband surveys, and assessed the consistency of meeting Which? Best Buy criteria over time.

We also considered its customer service and overall customer satisfaction, value for money, and how reliable its broadband connection is.

Runners-up

- Waitrose
- Utility Warehouse

CONSUMER CHAMPION

Consumer champion of the year **John Fingleton**

John Fingleton, chief executive of the Office of Fair Trading, has achieved much since he joined the organisation in October 2005 – and Which? has seen a positive sea change in the way the OFT has increased its focus on important consumer issues.

Significantly for consumers, he has led the OFT in being more proactive in investigating price-fixing and cartels.

Under John's leadership, the OFT has taken action on a range of alleged price-fixing activities, from dairy products to tobacco and airline tickets.

He has played a vital role in the High Court's recent ruling on 'unfair' bank charges



– an issue that Which? has long campaigned on.

He has also led a period of innovation at the OFT – such as offering financial rewards for whistle-blowers on cartels, and the use of legal tools such as collective redress to benefit consumers.

CREDIT CARD

Best credit card provider John Lewis Partnership

The winner of the 2008 Which? best credit card provider award is the John Lewis Partnership, with its Partnership MasterCard. John Lewis Partnership is a longstanding Best Buy for its 0% balance transfers deal (with a transfer fee of 2% capped at £50). It also offers 0% on purchases for six months.

The popularity of the card led to John Lewis Partnership coming top in our 2007 credit card provider customer satisfaction survey.

John Lewis Partnership had an overall satisfaction score of 87% in our survey, with 71% of cardholders saying that they were very likely to recommend the card provider to a friend.

Our satisfaction survey asked more than 6,000

Which? panel members with credit cards how they rated their card providers in August 2007.

Naming John Lewis Partnership as the winner in this category is a result of our continuous monitoring of the UK credit card market.

Which? analyses more than 240 cards to produce our weekly Best Buy tables online and monthly tables in *Which?* and *Which? Money* magazines.

Runners-up

- Marks & Spencer Money
- Nationwide Building Society



The Partnership card reward scheme is popular. Consumers are awarded one point for every £1 spent at John Lewis, Waitrose and Ocado, and one point for every £2 spent elsewhere. Points are redeemed as vouchers for John Lewis, Waitrose and John Lewis Direct.

CURRENT ACCOUNT

Best current account Cahoot

The 2008 winner Cahoot offers an attractive credit interest rate of 3.65% (3.75% if you don't have a chequebook) with no minimum monthly pay-in and a low authorised overdraft rate of 11.8%. An interest-free overdraft buffer of £100 is appealing.

Which? analysed the current accounts offered by the 25 providers in this sector to produce a leading company.

Strong performance in the annual Which? customer satisfaction survey of current account providers helped decide that Cahoot should win. Early results for 2008 indicate that 71% of customers are very satisfied and 94% would recommend the internet bank, giving an overall score of 82%.

Cahoot regularly appears at the top end of our Best Buy tables for current accounts, and provides excellent customer service.

Which? has given this award to Cahoot, but we are keeping a close eye on the current account sector in general



and the offering from Cahoot in particular.

Several companies have made changes to their accounts in the wake of the High Court ruling against banks on unauthorised overdraft charges, making their products less attractive to consumers.

Cahoot remains a worthy winner in this category, but it was a close call compared with other providers and assumes that the current favourable rates offered to customers by the internet bank will be maintained.

Runners-up

- Nationwide Building Society
- Smile

AIRLINE

Best airline Singapore Airlines

The award for best airline was a close call, with Singapore Airlines pipping India's Jet Airways to the post. Our survey, which formed the basis of the award, covered around 30,000 long- and short-haul flights made by Which? members, and rated a total of 71 airlines (see p40).

Our members awarded Singapore Airlines top marks for

the helpfulness and efficiency of its cabin crew, check-in, the cleanliness and comfort of its aircraft, and in-flight entertainment. The airline also achieved one of the highest ratings for how it dealt with delays of 30 minutes or more.

Airline food isn't well-known for fine culinary delights.

However, Singapore Airlines scored top marks here, proving

that it's possible to serve high-quality food at high altitude.

Singapore Airlines also achieves a high rating when it comes to value for money.

At a time when many airlines are trying to drive down ticket prices by charging separately for 'extras' like hold baggage and food, passengers still

value good old-fashioned service.

Runners-up

- Air New Zealand
- Jet Airways
- Palmar

