SHOPPING SPECIAL

Britain's best & worst shops

Which stores offer the best customer service and great products? Our biggest shopping survey reveals all

tough the current climate is for shops.

As stores struggle to attract our custom, the largest ever Which? shopping survey shows those that offer what you want and those you think need to improve.

In this survey, more than 14,000 Which? members rated 96 shops on everything from products to price; from how helpful staff are to the quality of the shopping environment.

You were full of praise for the excellent customer service offered by Waitrose, John Lewis and Lush.

You were also impressed by the keen prices at budget stores such as Aldi and Lidl.

However, you were scornful of poor standards at other big high-street names with unhelpful staff among complaints. Here are the main findings – full results are at www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores.

Your favourites

Waitrose was the runaway winner for the second year, scoring five stars for products, environment, staff and convenience. It did much less well on price, however. See the full results on p38. Stablemate John Lewis was second, again for the second year in a row. New entry Lush, a toiletries store, came fourth overall. Members say that its enthusiastic staff offer a personal service.

UPDATE

MFI, Woolworths and The Pier which were in this survey have since closed. As we went to press, Zavvi was in administration, but its shops were still trading.

Budget stores climb table

As many of us look to make savings where we can, it's perhaps no surprise that there are a large number of budget stores in the top third of our table. There are clearly areas where a bargain is more important than the quality of a shopping experience.

More of you shop at Aldi, Lidl and Netto for groceries compared with last year. Members praised the quality of food at Aldi and Lidl, even though there's less

	UK RETAILERS	
		CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
1	WAITROSE (283)	84
2	JOHN LEWIS (1,452)	78
3	IND electrical (126) ^a	75
4	LUSH (248)	72
=	IND home or garden (990) ^a	72
6	IND entertainment (212) ^a	71
7	ALDI (320)	70
8	LIDL (289)	69
=	WATERSTONE'S (1,005)	69
10	$\ensuremath{\text{IND}}$ sports and outdoor (256)^a	68
11	MARKS & SPENCER (1,710)	65
=	DUNELM (951)	65
=	ICELAND (396)	65
14	BORDERS (151)	64
=	IND toys and games (521)	64
=	BODY SHOP (144)	64
17	IND toiletries and cosmetics (147) ^a	63
18	IKEA (115)	62
19	EARLY LEARNING CENTRE (650)	61
=	WILKINSON (555)	61
21	IND mobile phone store (171) ^a	60
=	THE PERFUME SHOP (139)	60
23	GAP (160)	59
24	LAURA ASHLEY (277)	58
=	JESSOPS (127)	58
26	CLARKS SHOES (251)	57
=	CO-OP (281)	57
=	WICKES (172)	57
29	ANNE HARVEY (111)	56
=	HAMLEYS (116)	56

choice. Stores such as Dunelm, Iceland, Ikea and Wilkinson, also did well on price.

Nearly three in 10 members use a discount retailer, though 84% do the main shop at one of the big four supermarkets.

Why you like independent shops

There may be a general perception that big names dominate the high streets, but friendly customer service and product knowledge helped independents (shown

YOUR LIFE

UK RETAILERS	
	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
= VIRGIN (206)	56
= MONSOON (253)	56
= BOOKS ETC (144)	56
= DFS (135)	56
35 BOOTS (1047)	55
= TK MAXX (401)	55
= HABITAT (265)	55
38 WALLIS (237)	54
= NEXT (286)	54
= GAME (162)	54
= THE ENTERTAINER (332)	54
42 TESCO (2344)	53
= MOTHERCARE (191)	53
= SAVERS (494)	53
= NETTO (133)	53
= PRINCIPLES (163)	53
= ARGOS (785)	53
= SAINSBURY'S (1998)	53
= MATALAN (447)	53
50 3 (115)	52
= ASDA (1527)	52
= MORRISONS (607)	52
= HALFORDS (141)	52
= WHISTLES (90)	52
= B&Q (1251)	52
= BHS (397)	52
= HOUSE OF FRASER (480)	52
58 CARPHONE WAREHOUSE (139)	51
= PRIMARK (157)	51
60 MILLETS (307)	50

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UK RETAILERS

leaving two of the UK's largest sports shops, JJB and JD Sports, propping up the table for the second year.

Online presence helps

Stores with websites generally did better in our online retailer survey (Nov 08, p22) than here. Currys online store, for example, did substantially better than its highstreet shops. Even top stores like John Lewis do better online.

See the full
results for
all 96 shops
www.which.co.uk/high streetstores
Sileetstores

CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
43
42
42
40
37
36

Sample size in brackets a IND = Local, independent stores.

USING THE TABLES

The customer score shown in the tables combines satisfaction and likelihood to recommend a store.

See p38-42 for sector rankings and category star ratings (except for convenience, which can be found online) for the top and bottom performers.

You can find a full explanation of what we consider under price, product and other categories in 'Our research' on p42.



as Ind in the tables) in four different sectors make the top 10 overall.

Bottom of the pile

Some big shops came in the bottom 10 in our survey, including PC World and WHSmith. Across all the sectors we looked at, the most common complaint was unhelpful and unknowledgeable staff. According to our survey, you react to bad service and unpleasant environments by



'Waitrose is

supermarket

chain in the

choice, high

pleasant and

helpful staff

and virtually

free parking.' Elizabeth

Housden.

Hampshire

country -

excellent

quality,

the best

Groceries As price becomes an increasing concern, more of us are using discount shops The choice, quality and a compromise. You're STORES CATEGORIES

The choice, quality and helpful staff at Waitrose, ensured that it was the runaway winner in this category.

However, there is what one member describes as 'a sting at the till', as you consider the chain to be relatively expensive.

Marks & Spencer also does well in all areas – apart from price. 'Not cheap but you can't fault them on product quality,' said a member.

With an eye to cost, 9% more of you use discount shops compared with last year.

Aldi is (narrowly) your favourite. You praised the decent-quality food, proving that lower prices aren't always a compromise. You're not so keen on the shopping experience in discount stores, but as one member said of Lidl: 'I realise they're selling at good prices so I don't expect the store or staff to be top of the range.'

Iceland also did very well on price.

The big four supermarkets (Asda, Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Tesco) failed to make the top five for the second year, with Sainsbury's performing best. However, 94% of Which? members still use the big four for main or top-up shopping.

Asda (46%) and Somerfield (43%) did particularly poorly.

STORES			CATEGORIES		
		ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF	PRODUCT	PRICE	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
1	WAITROSE (283)	****	****	**	84
2	MARKS & SPENCER (202)	****	*****	**	71
3	ALDI (320)	**	**	****	70
4	LIDL (289)	*	**	*****	69
5	ICELAND (396)	***	***	****	65
6	SAINSBURY'S (1015)	****	****	**	57
7	TESCO (1007)	***	****	****	55
8	MORRISONS (188)	***	***	****	54
9	NETTO (133)	*	*	****	53
10	CO-OP (148)	**	*	**	49
11	ASDA (141)	**	***	****	46
12	SOMERFIELD (204)	**	*	**	43
G	ROCERIES AVERAGE (4,326))			60

Sample size in brackets. See 'Our research' p42 for table notes. See www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores for full results.

Home and garden

Big names struggle to win your hearts



REX FEATURES, ALAMY, JON SANTA CRUZ

GETTY IMAGES,

PHOTOGRAPHY

This is an area where some of the most familiar high-street names did poorly.

MFI and Woolworths originally came bottom in this sector. We excluded their results after the shops closed, due to increased competition and the economic downturn. Other established names including Focus, Homebase, Sainsbury's, Debenhams and Wyevale were also rated as low by Which? members.

The Pier, a chain that members rate highly, has been taken out of the survey after its stores also closed.

This is the second biggest category in our survey with 25 shops rated. John Lewis and independent shops do particularly well for environment, staff and products.

One member called John Lewis their 'favourite store on the planet. If they don't stock it, I don't buy it'.

STORES		CATEGORIES		
	ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF	PRODUCT	PRICE	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
1 JOHN LEWIS (253)	****	****	****	84
2 INDEPENDENTS (990)	*****	*****	***	72
3 DUNELM (951)	***	****	****	65
4 MARKS & SPENCER (460)	****	****	***	64
= WILKINSON (258)	**	**	****	64
6 IKEA (115)	**	****	*****	62
21 TESCO (291)	**	*	****	49
22 DEBENHAMS (188)	***	**	***	48
= WYEVALE (665)	***	***	*	47
= SAINSBURY'S (144)	***	**	****	47
25HOMEBASE (257)	**	**	**	46
26FOCUS (164)	**	**	***	45
HOME AND GARDEN AVERAG				58

Sample size in brackets. There are 26 stores – we show top and bottom six. See 'Our research' p42 for table notes. See www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores for full results.

Electrical Many big shops are poor at helping us to buy often complex products



'In an area where product knowledge is important, I have found Currys Digital very poor. Phil Galtry, Ilkley, West Yorkshire When we buy products such as computers or cameras, we face a bewildering range of choice. But we often get poor help when we shop in big-name stores. Currys, Currys Digital and PC World (all owned by DSG International) are bottom of the table for the second year. You told us that shop

staff at Currys Digital,

which sells audiovisual products, are unhelpful and unknowledgeable and you were critical in every area from product to price. One member said of the retailer that it's 'big, brash and impersonal'.

Argos did very poorly for environment and staff but its keen prices and products pushed it up the table.

Your favourite stores are again John Lewis, independents and the Co-operative group.

John Lewis and your local independent shops were the only ones to score five stars for environment and staff.

Asda's joint fourth place shows that the supermarkets can be aggressive competitors in this area. It scored five stars for price.

STORES		CATEGORIES			
	ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF	PRODUCT	PRICE	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)	
1 JOHN LEWIS (181)	****	*****	****	81	
2 INDEPENDENT (126)	*****	****	****	75	
3 CO-OP (133)	****	****	****	65	
4 JESSOPS (127)	****	****	***	58	
= ASDA (175)	***	**	****	58	
6 ARGOS (175)	*	****	****	54	
10 HOMEBASE (282)	**	**	***	48	
= DEBENHAMS (188)	***	**	***	48	
12 COMET (297)	***	***	***	47	
13 PC WORLD (565)	**	***	**	44	
14 CURRYS (240)	**	**	***	42	
15 CURRYS DIGITAL (182)	**	**	**	40	
ELECTRICALS AVERAGE (3,248)					

Sample size in brackets. There are 15 stores – we show top and bottom six. See 'Our research' p42 for table notes. See www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores for the full results of all categories

Mobile phones

Personal touch wins over pushy sales staff

Tesco was the top pay-as-yougo provider in our May 2008 survey



When Which? members buy a mobile phone, they like the customer service offered by independent shops.

The personal touch and friendly staff that you have found in independents wins favour over the often pushy sales staff that you found at some branches of Vodafone and Phones 4U, the retailers you liked least. Local, independent shops were the only stores to score five stars for their environment and staff. One Which? member said that staff at a branch of Phones 4U they visited seemed more interested in selling specific products than giving customers what they want.

Tesco is ranked highly, with praise for its 'reasonable' prices.

More members (18%) use Carphone Warehouse than anywhere else in this category. However, it's clear that, for Which? members, a mobile phone is only an occasional purchase.

	STORES	C	ATEGORIES		
		ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF	PRODUCT	PRICE	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
1	INDEPENDENTS (171)	*****	***	***	60
2	TESCO (235)	***	***	****	59
3	VIRGIN (206)	****	***	***	56
4	3 (115)	****	***	****	52
5	CARPHONE W'HOUSE (139)	****	***	***	51
6	ORANGE (249)	****	***	**	47
7	T-MOBILE (305)	****	***	**	46
8	02 (201)	***	***	**	45
9	PHONES 4U (195)	***	* *	***	44
=	VODAFONE (276)	***	***	**	44
Μ	MOBILE PHONES AVERAGE (2,092)				

Sample size in brackets. See 'Our research' p42 for table notes. See www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores for full results.

'[Topshop/ Topman] is a cluttered store with too many displays and little room to move.' Which? member



Clothes and accessories

Shopping for clothes should be fun, but some stores make it a frustrating experience

Twice as many Which? members tend to visit Marks & Spencer than any other store. But John Lewis is your favourite shop, beating M&S in every area.

Gap scores highly for staff and environment, and average on price and product. In contrast, one Which? member described shopping in Topshop/Topman as 'a frustrating experience' and we had other comments about how cluttered its premises were. It's your least favourite for clothes and accessories.

Topshop/Topman is owned by Arcadia Group, the UK's largest private clothing retailer. Other shops owned by the group, such as Burton and Dorothy Perkins, fared little better. You gave Dorothy Perkins one star for product, two for environment and staff.

Primark, one of the biggest retailers on the high street, came joint 16th out of 31 shops in this sector. It scored just one star for environment and staff.

Supermarkets didn't fare too badly. Asda, Sainsbury's and Tesco all scored five stars for the price of their clothing ranges.

STORES		CATEGORIES		
	ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF	PRODUCT	PRICE	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
1 JOHN LEWIS (320)	****	****	****	77
2 MARKS & SPENCER (823)	****	****	***	65
3 GAP (160)	****	***	***	59
4 CLARKS SHOES (251)	****	***	***	57
5 ANNE HARVEY (111)	****	***	**	56
= MONSOON (253)	****	***	**	56
26 BARRATTS SHOES (106)	***	**	**	47
27 NEW LOOK (207)	*	*	****	46
= RIVER ISLAND (140)	**	**	**	46
29 BURTON (255)	***	**	**	45
= DOROTHY PERKINS (204)	**	*	**	45
31 TOPSHOP/TOPMAN (135)	**	*	**	43
CLOTHES AVERAGE (6,695)				54

Sample size in brackets. There are 31 stores – we show top and bottom six . See 'Our research' p42 for table notes. See www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores for full results.

Toiletries

Big supermarkets perform poorly

Lush was a main supplier to The Body Shop more than 20 years ago



John Lewis still enjoys the sweet smell of success in cosmetics and toiletries as your favourite shop in this category. However, Lush, famed for its natural ingredients and reduced packaging, is close behind.

Members rave about 'very pleasant and enthusiastic' staff, and 'special' products which include solid shampoo bars and fizzing 'bath bombs'. Others noted the store's strong smell which, a member claims, 'hits you half a street away'. Asda, Tesco, Sainsburys and Superdrug are your least favourites.

One member criticised staff at their local branch of Superdrug as 'offhand'. Another member summed up their Superdrug shopping experience as 'queue, queue, queue'.

Boots is the store you are most likely to visit, but it's only ninth (57%) in terms of how satisfied you are.

It gets four stars for environment, staff and product, but just three for price and convenience.

STORES		CATEGORIES	5	
	ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF	PRODUCT	PRICE	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
1 JOHN LEWIS (148)	*****	*****	****	77
2 LUSH (248)	*****	*****	**	72
3 MARKS & SPENCER (22	25) ★★★★	****	***	64
= BODY SHOP (144)	****	****	**	64
5 INDEPENDENTS (147)	****	***	**	63
6 WILKINSON (137)	**	***	*****	62
11 SAVERS (494)	**	**	*****	53
= MORRISONS (120)	***	***	****	53
13 TESCO (197)	***	***	****	50
14 SAINSBURY'S (208)	***	***	***	49
= ASDA (406)	**	***	****	49
= SUPERDRUG (308)	**	***	****	49
TOILETRIES AVERAGE (4,0)89)			57

Sample size in brackets. There are 16 stores – we show top and bottom six. See 'Our research' p42 for table notes. See www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores for full results.

40 February 2009

Entertainment Independent, local shops lead the way for home entertainment



'Waterstone's is a relaxed place to browse with knowledgeable staff who are happy to help.' Judith Rawle, Farnham For many Which? members, you just can't beat an independent shop for buying books, CDs, DVDs and computer games. Staff tend to take exceptional trouble to advise on products. Second place Waterstone's is frequently described as a great place to browse, with staff often deemed to take an interest. Waterstone's and WHSmith are the most visited stores in this category.

WHSmith came bottom of the table for customer satisfaction.

One Which? member told us: 'I only shop there because my aunt gives me gift tokens – I think they are truly terrible in every way.'

Entertainment is one shopping sector where online stores are impressive competitors.

In our own online retailers survey, the most visited site for Which? members in this area was Amazon.co.uk. Abebooks.co.uk and Play.com were your favourite sites, scoring more than 80%.

	STORES		CATEGORIES		
		ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF	PRODUCT	PRICE	CUSTOMER SCORE (%)
1	INDEPENDENTS (212) ^a	****	****	***	71
2	WATERSTONE'S (1005)	*****	*****	***	69
3	BORDERS (151)	****	****	***	64
4	BOOKS ETC (144)	****	****	***	56
5	GAME (162)	****	****	***	54
6	ASDA (201)	**	**	****	52
7	HMV (411)	***	****	***	50
8	TESCO (118)	**	**	****	49
9	MORRISONS (139)	***	**	***	46
10	ZAVVI (233)	***	****	***	45
11	SAINSBURY'S (124)	**	*	***	44
12	2 WHSMITH (991)	**	**	**	42
EN		1.108)			54

Sample size in brackets. See 'Our research' p42 for table notes. See www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores for full results.

Toys and games

John Lewis is your pick for the kids

This is the first year that we've asked for your views on shopping for toys and games and there were some surprises in what we found.

John Lewis has s its own range f of toys, such as this paint your e own piggy bank.

Ve round. You might expect a specialist store such as Toys R Us to do well. However, the staff and environment let it down. One Which? member said: 'As far as I'm concerned, the only thing that's childfriendly about Toys R Us is the fact that it has toys. An absolute nightmare for us parents.' Other special toy shops did better. The Early Learning

Centre (ELC) was praised by one member for its 'no quibble replacement policy if a product is faulty, no silly demands for original packaging'.

You liked the great range at independent shops, but price was a concern. Big names such as WHSmith, Debenhams and Sainsbury's did badly. Topping the list was John Lewis, making a clean sweep in the areas where it appears

		STORES	CATEGORIES				C
		0					2
			AFF	5		1%	7
			N N N		PRICE	/ERA	1
				2	_	S C	
	1	JOHN LEWIS (258)	*****	*****	****	75	-
	2	INDEPENDENTS (521)	****	****	**	64	
	3	EARLY LEARNING C (650)	****	****	***	61	
	4	HAMLEYS (116)	****	*****	*	56	=w
	5	WILKINSON (160)	**	*	****	55	
Į	6	THE ENTERTAINER (332)	***	****	***	54	
	13	TESCO (126)	**	**	****	48	
	14	TOYS R US (486)	**	****	***	45	-
	=	HOUSE OF FRASER (97)	***	**	*	45	
	16	WHSMITH (175)	**	**	A	43	
	=	DEBENHAMS (123)	**	**	***	43	
	=	SAINSBURY'S (202)	**	*	***	43	
	т	DYS TOTAL (5,473)				53	
Sample size in brackets. There are 18 stores – we show top and bottom six. See 'Our research' p42 for table notes. See www.which.co.uk/highstreessores for full results.							

Sports and leisure Why two of Britain's biggest sports shops fail to impress Which? members

John Lewis tops the table like last year, but local independents are your most regular destination for buying sportswear.

They don't fare badly for your star ratings either – with environment and staff getting five stars, the same score as John Lewis.

Once again, JJB Sports and JD Sports claim the dubious honour of being the bottom two and, like poor performers in other sectors, staff are a key letdown – both score a dismal one star for environment and staff and a mediocre two stars for product.

One member commented on the 'congested' nature of JJB Sports and another complained of 'terrible customer service' at

> ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF

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Sample size in brackets. See 'Our research' p42 for table notes.

See www.which.co.uk/highstreetstores for full results.

STORES

1 JOHN LEWIS (292)

3 ARGOS (142)

4 HALFORDS (141)5 MILLETS (307)

= BLACKS (200)

7 **DEBENHAMS** (107)

9 JJB SPORTS (261)

10 JD SPORTS (167)

8 SPORTSWORLD (166)

SPORTS AVERAGE (2.039)

2 INDEPENDENTS (256)

JD Sports. Sportsworld scored just one star for environment and staff and keeps its low 44% customer score from last year, despite achieving the only five stars for price earned in this category.

PRICE

**

 \star

**

CUSTOMER SCORE (%)

72

68

55

52

50

50

47

44

37

36

52

CATEGORIES

PRODUCT

**

**

**

**

**



'l'm not impressed with the staff [at JD Sports]. They don't seem to care.' Which? member

OUR RESEARCH

In October 2008, we asked 14.036 Which? online panel members to rate their satisfaction with, and likelihood to recommend, shops they use regularly. We combined and weighted the answers to give a customer score out of 100. Based on the answers, we compiled the top 96 high-street stores and top retailers in nine areas. Sample sizes vary were asked about all sectors. We also asked respondents to rate each store on around 20

factors. These were combined to create star ratings: Environment and staff includes how helpful, knowledgeable and available staff were, the ease of finding products, tidiness of stores, store environment and queuing time. For toys and games, it also included how childfriendly the stores are, for groceries only it included shopping trolleys. Product includes quality, range, stock and (for electricals) durability. Price includes regular prices, sales and special offers.

Which? Local

Which? members recommend the best local shops where you live

Fancy trying an independent store but don't know where to begin? Which? Local has thousands of local businesses recommended by members, including many independent retailers, from electrical stores to toy shops. Visit www.whichlocal.co.uk to find out what's highly rated in your area.



Which? online Returning gifts



Were you given a present this Christmas that you don't want? Do you know what your rights are if you want to return it to the shop, or what they might ask you for?

Visit www.which.co.uk/ unwantedgifts to find out about your rights when taking goods back.