

360° news provider overview

An independent evaluation
of the user experience
across channels



webcredible

user experience • research • design • training ●●●

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Introduction

The opportunity

Readership has been declining over the last few years for most national newspapers and although this is an international trend, the US and UK news providers have been hit the hardest¹, with print advertising revenues falling heavily.

The good news however is that, based on the number of downloaded news apps, there has been a large increase in users accessing news content on digital platforms, first using PCs to view standard PC websites, then mobile websites and apps, and now tablets like the iPad².

According to The Office for National Statistics' Internet Access 2010 survey, 51% of Internet users in the UK access or download news content. Mobile Internet use is rising quickly with 31% of UK adults using the Internet on their mobile phones, a 23% increase from 2009³.

News organisations are branching out and experimenting with new digital platforms and commercial models. To ensure they maintain their competitive edge, the user experience will be a key factor in customer satisfaction and loyalty, which could aid the reversal in the downward trend of readership.

About this report

In April 2011, Webcredible investigated the multi-platform experience of 10 of the largest news providers in the UK.

The criteria chosen were a mixture of essential criteria that apply to any digital interface (e.g. relating to navigation and orientation) and criteria that are specifically relevant for content heavy platforms, such as those offered by news providers. In addition, the report evaluates the cross-channel experience by analysing how the platforms are integrated, for example how users are encouraged to access the website to watch a related video when reading the paper version or how personal settings are saved across the different platforms.

Improving the usability of any news platform will increase the success users have in finding and consuming the information they're looking for. Furthermore, a great cross-channel experience is about delivering news content aligned with user needs. Thus, by taking advantage of the different platforms, users can get easy access to a wide palette of news content for a quick update or in-depth reading, whether they are at home, on-the-go or even offline.

Who is this report for?

The report is aimed at anyone involved with news media propositions, including editors, marketing managers, product managers and teams involved in the design and creation of services. The report assumes no prior user experience or technical knowledge.

Methodology

Webcredible analysed four digital platforms; website, mobile-optimised site, iPad and iPhone together with the cross-channel experience offered by 10 of the UK's major news providers in April 2011. The paper version has not been analysed separately but has been included in the cross-channel analysis. Several of the news providers offer apps for Android mobile and tablet devices however these have not been included in this report.

Each of the platforms were evaluated against 5 best practice guidelines and assigned a score of 0-5 for each guideline, with 5 being the maximum. The cross-channel experience was evaluated from 3 best practice guidelines and scored from the same 0-5 scale with 5 being the maximum.

The guidelines against which we benchmarked the four platforms were:

Utilisation of platform

1. Content must be optimised for the platform (i.e. content should be readable on the screen without zooming etc.).
2. Navigation must be optimised for the platform (i.e. buttons should be big enough to tap if on a touch screen device to avoid 'fat finger' problems etc.).
3. Taking advantage of built-in technology (i.e. print option on the website, pinch zoom on iPhone and iPad, location detection etc.).
4. Offline content availability for iPhone and iPad apps.

Content

1. Comprehensiveness of information – the content available on the platform. Is it only news stories or also more in-depth analysis, blogs, comments etc.
2. Use of media like video, podcasts etc.

Navigation

1. Navigation – it must be easy to locate content across the site/app by using the navigation.
2. The Search engine must give clear results (i.e. making it possible to find articles for a specific keyword.)

Functionality

1. Option to view and add comments.
2. Option to customise the experience (i.e. by saving favourite news categories or topics.)

3. Platform personalisation (i.e. the site suggests related topics or articles based on article history or current article.)
4. Option to share via social networking sites.

Design

1. The homepage design should present the different news categories with a clear balance between text and images.
2. The article layout must be clear and easy to read.
3. Images must relate to the surrounding text.
4. Adverts must be integrated in the platform so it does not interrupt the reading experience.

The cross-channel analysis includes the scores of each the platforms, however, there is a need for specific guidelines evaluating how the news providers manage to integrate the experience. The following guidelines are specific for the cross-channel experience analysis:

Business proposition communication

1. The cross-platform benefits must be communicated clearly.
2. Any subscription must be transparent so users know what platforms are included in a potential subscription.

Expand the experience

1. Enable cross-platform follow up by clearly communicating how users can benefit from accessing other platforms for more information (i.e. related video content can be found online when reading the paper version).
2. There should be options to share articles on the most popular social network sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Cross-channel optimisation

1. Integrated customisation features can be retained across platforms via the required login (i.e. favourite content or followed news categories, article history, clippings, portfolios etc.)
2. Consistency of the user interfaces across platforms in order to increase user learnability (if users are familiar with parts of the UI, it is easier for them to learn and use it).

Results

Executive summary

The 10 news providers received the following average scores in total, out of 5:

Company	Website	Mobile Site	iPhone App	iPad App	Average score
The Guardian	X	X	X		3.9
The Financial Times	X	X	X	X	3.6
The Telegraph	X	X	X	X	3.0
The Times	X	X		X	2.9
Metro	X	X	X	X	2.9
Daily Mail	X	X	X		2.6
Daily Mirror	X	X			2.6
The Independent	X	X	X		2.5
Evening Standard	X	X	X	X	2.4
The Sun	X	X		X	2.0
Average Score					2.8

Overall, most of the news providers fulfilled the basic requirements for each of the digital platforms included in the report. Generally, the websites and iPhone apps performed reasonably well but the average score of 2.8 (out of 5) also tells that there is room for improvement for the news providers, in particular for the iPad apps and overall cross-channel integration.

Here are examples of the key findings:

- The Guardian received the highest average mark primarily due to its user friendly website and the well designed iPhone app packed with convenient features. Generally, the Guardian exceeds the other news providers by taking advantage of the different platforms. Moreover, the news provider is among the best when it comes to cross-channel offerings i.e. the physical paper to the online.
- The Sun received the lowest average mark among the news providers due to a poor utilisation of the platforms and low usability in particular for its iPad app and mobile site.
- Generally, the iPhone apps received the highest average score. It is clear that the news providers have managed to take advantage of the platform offering well designed apps, which are easy to use.
- Surprisingly, the iPad apps scored lowest by taking little advantage of the platform and instead we found that several apps are aiming to replicate the experience of reading a physical newspaper. The common design conventions are still weak for the iPad making it difficult for users to familiarise with the apps.
- Finally, the report found that each platform is mostly working independently and thus, there is very limited use of cross-channel integration. Despite requesting users to login in order to use the different platforms, the benefits are few.
- For website and mobile site URLs, please see Appendix A p63
- Please consult the Appendix B on p64 for a full breakdown of scores.

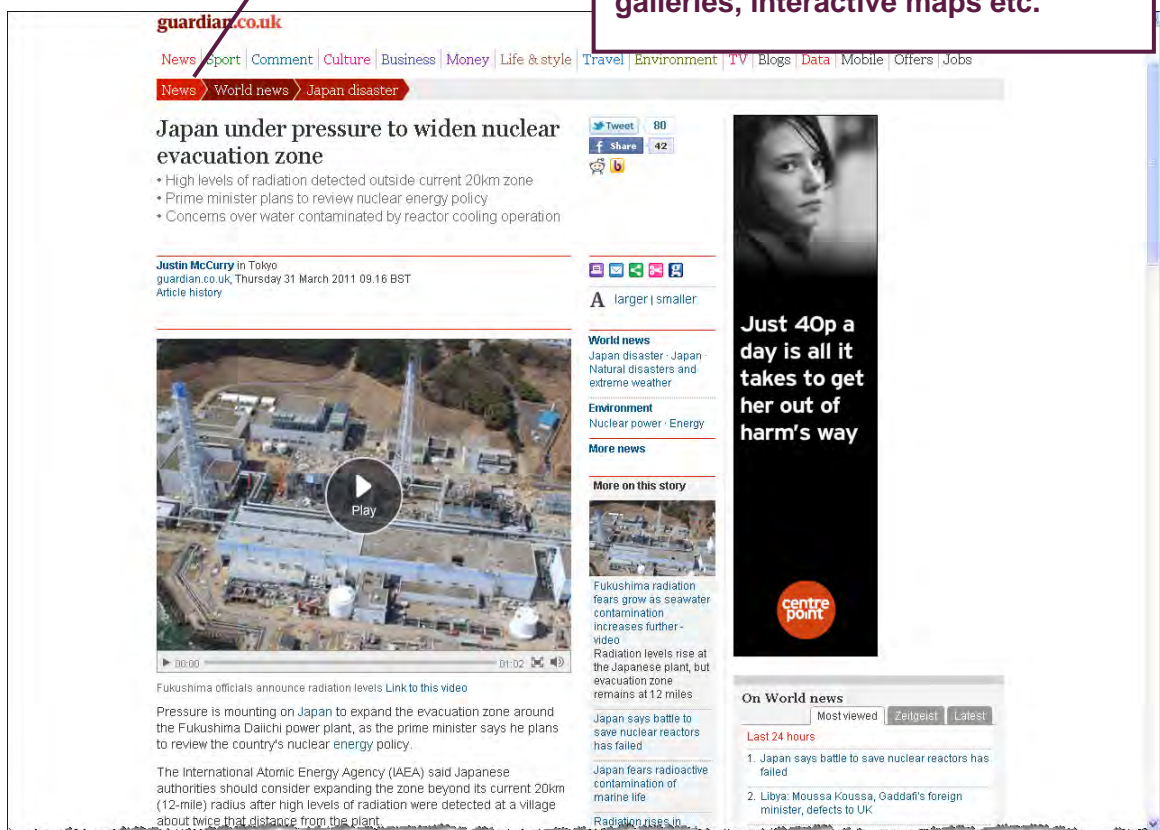
Websites

1. Utilisation of the platform

Average score: 3.0 (out of 5)

Each platform has its strengths and weaknesses. For news providers today, the website is the information hub, an aggregate of the other platforms, where background information, video, image galleries, blogs and reader comments exist together with the time sensitive news stories constantly ticking in. But the web also has limitations i.e. users generally do not like to read long paragraphs of text and the different media must be presented together since users do not look for these features.

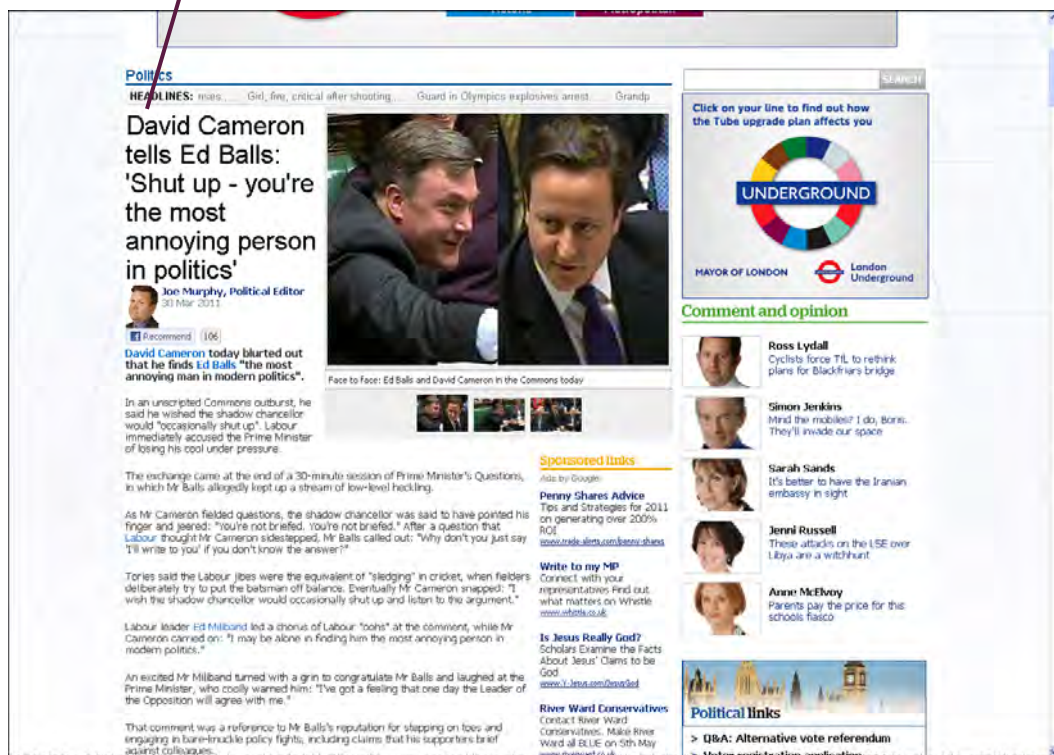
The Guardian website manages to aggregate all the different types of content allowing users to dig deeper in a topic. Many news stories have related media content such as image galleries, interactive maps etc.



The screenshot shows a Guardian article page with the following elements:

- Navigation:** Top menu with categories like News, Sport, Comment, Culture, Business, Money, Life & style, Travel, Environment, TV, Blogs, Data, Mobile, Offers, Jobs. Breadcrumbs: News > World news > Japan disaster.
- Article Title:** "Japan under pressure to widen nuclear evacuation zone".
- Summary:**
 - High levels of radiation detected outside current 20km zone
 - Prime minister plans to review nuclear energy policy
 - Concerns over water contaminated by reactor cooling operation
- Author:** Justin McCurry in Tokyo, dated Thursday 31 March 2011 09:16 BST.
- Media Content:**
 - A video player showing an aerial view of the Fukushima Daiichi power plant with a "Play" button.
 - A large vertical advertisement on the right: "Just 40p a day is all it takes to get her out of harm's way" featuring a woman's face and the "centre point" logo.
- Related Content:**
 - World news:** Japan disaster - Japan - Natural disasters and extreme weather
 - Environment:** Nuclear power - Energy
 - More on this story:**
 - Fukushima radiation fears grow as seawater contamination increases further - video
 - Radiation levels rise at the Japanese plant, but evacuation zone remains at 12 miles
 - Japan says battle to save nuclear reactors has failed
 - Japan fears radioactive contamination of marine life
 - Radiation rises to...
- On World news:** A section with filters for "Most viewed", "Zeitgeist", and "Latest". Under "Last 24 hours":
 1. Japan says battle to save nuclear reactors has failed
 2. Libya: Moussa Koussa, Gaddafi's foreign minister, defects to UK

The Evening Standard only has limited background information and use of media on the website. Moreover, the articles are the same as in the paper version presented as a full page of text with few or no sub-headings (not optimised for the web). This can be problematic since many users do not like to read long paragraphs of text online.

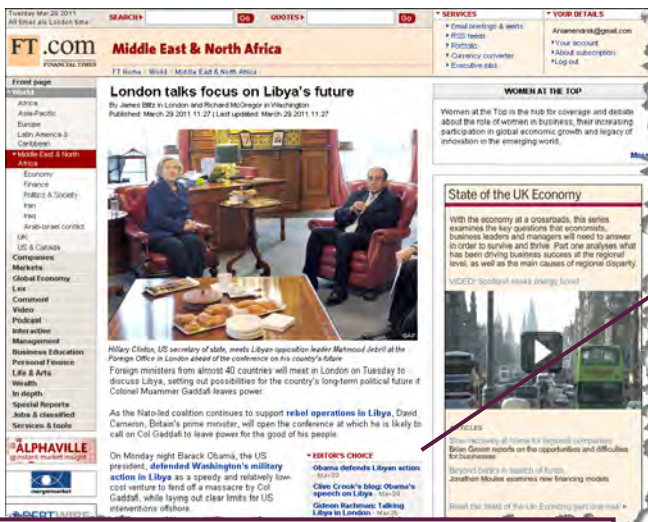


The utilisation of the web differs significantly between the news providers, which is also reflected in the average score 3.0. The free papers, paid for papers and tabloid papers all have different business models and news criteria. It makes sense that the paid for papers rely on providing in-depth content and follow up stories on their websites. The free papers however provide value by publishing a free paper version with brief up-to-date news content, but don't focus on producing in-depth content like the paid for papers. Currently, there is free access to in-depth content on some paid for news providers (The Guardian, The Independent, The Telegraph) websites, so users are likely to go there for the in-depth content as long as it is free.

2. Content

Average score: 2.9 (out of 5)

'Content is king' for the news providers. Although a well-designed user-friendly website is important, it is the news content, which through time has been the area of expertise of the news providers and a key element for them to distinguish themselves from the competitors. In the last decade, the website has functioned as an information hub for the news providers, where users can read the latest articles, search old news content in the articles database, but also get news via other media such as video, podcasts, interactive mini applications etc.



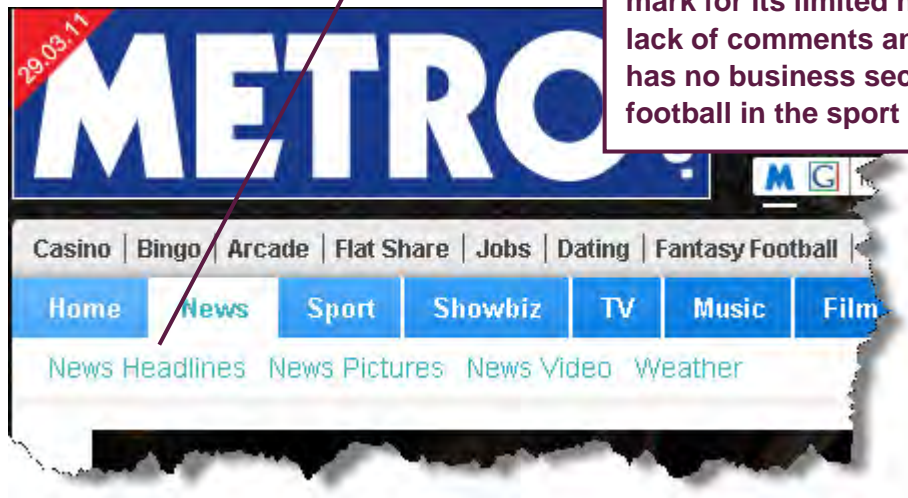
EDITOR'S CHOICE

- Obama defends Libyan action - Mar-29
- Clive Crook's blog: Obama's speech on Libya - Mar-29
- Gideon Rachman: Talking Libya in London - Mar-28
- Qatar boost for Libyan rebel council - Mar-28
- In depth: Libya uprising - Mar-27
- Gideon Rachman: A last hurrah for the west - Mar-28

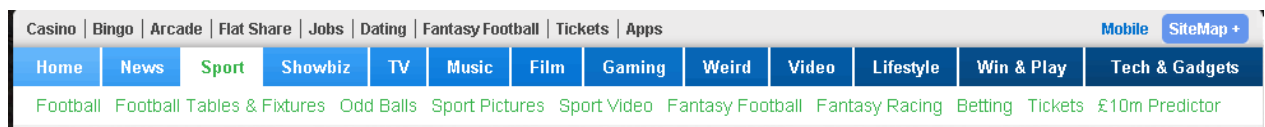
Financial Times scored high for its comprehensiveness of content. Articles have relevant background information or opinions in contextual boxes like the 'Editor's choice' and 'Libya opposition statement'.

Moreover, the Financial Times offers a big palette of in-depth content specifically for its target market i.e. analytical tools for following and analysing financial markets.





The Metro website received the lowest mark for its limited news content and lack of comments and opinions. The site has no business section and only covers football in the sport section.



Ticket sales for TV shows, music, sporting events and betting are integrated parts of the main navigation limiting the number of actual news

With an average score of 2.9 the websites are doing fairly well when it comes to content although the performance varies quite a bit when it comes to content. However it is important to have in mind that the newspapers might have different news criteria and serve different audiences. So, some newspapers focus heavily on in-depth analysis via comments, blogs, opinions etc. whereas others emphasize free brief news updates for the busy reader looking for an overview.

3. Navigation

Average score: 2.7 (out of 5)

Websites of news providers cover a large range of news categories, where users can find updated news content. An efficient navigation with logical categories and sub-categories presented with clear labels is essential to create a good user experience for these content heavy sites. In addition, the sites must have a well-functioning search engine to accommodate users seeking specific content.

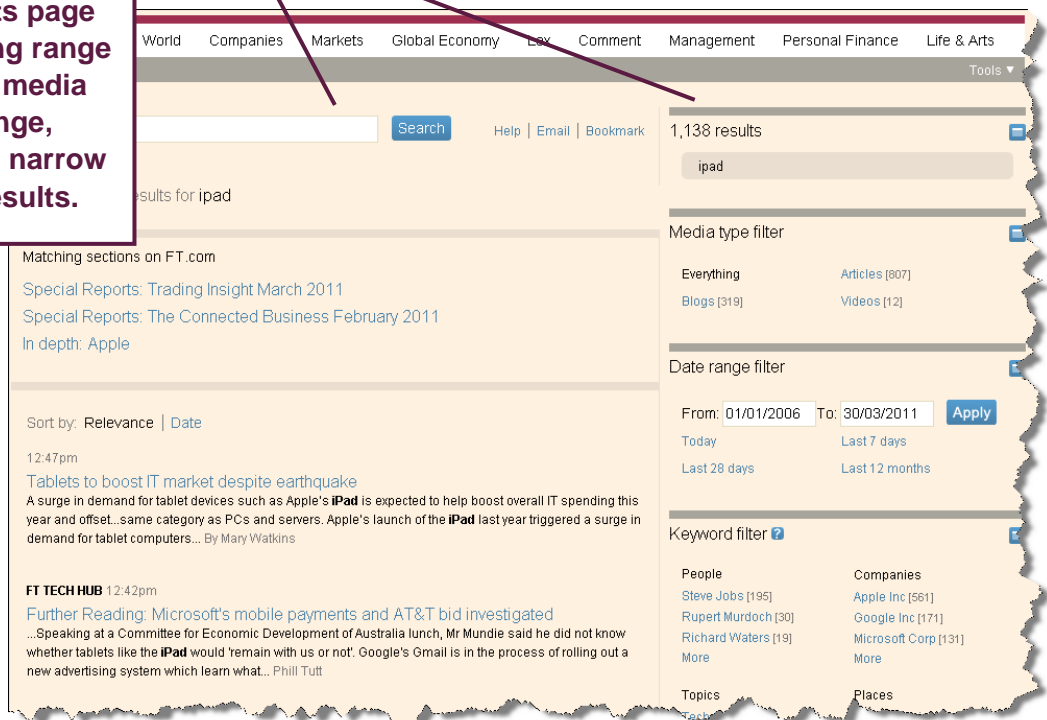
The Telegraph

Search - enhanced by Google

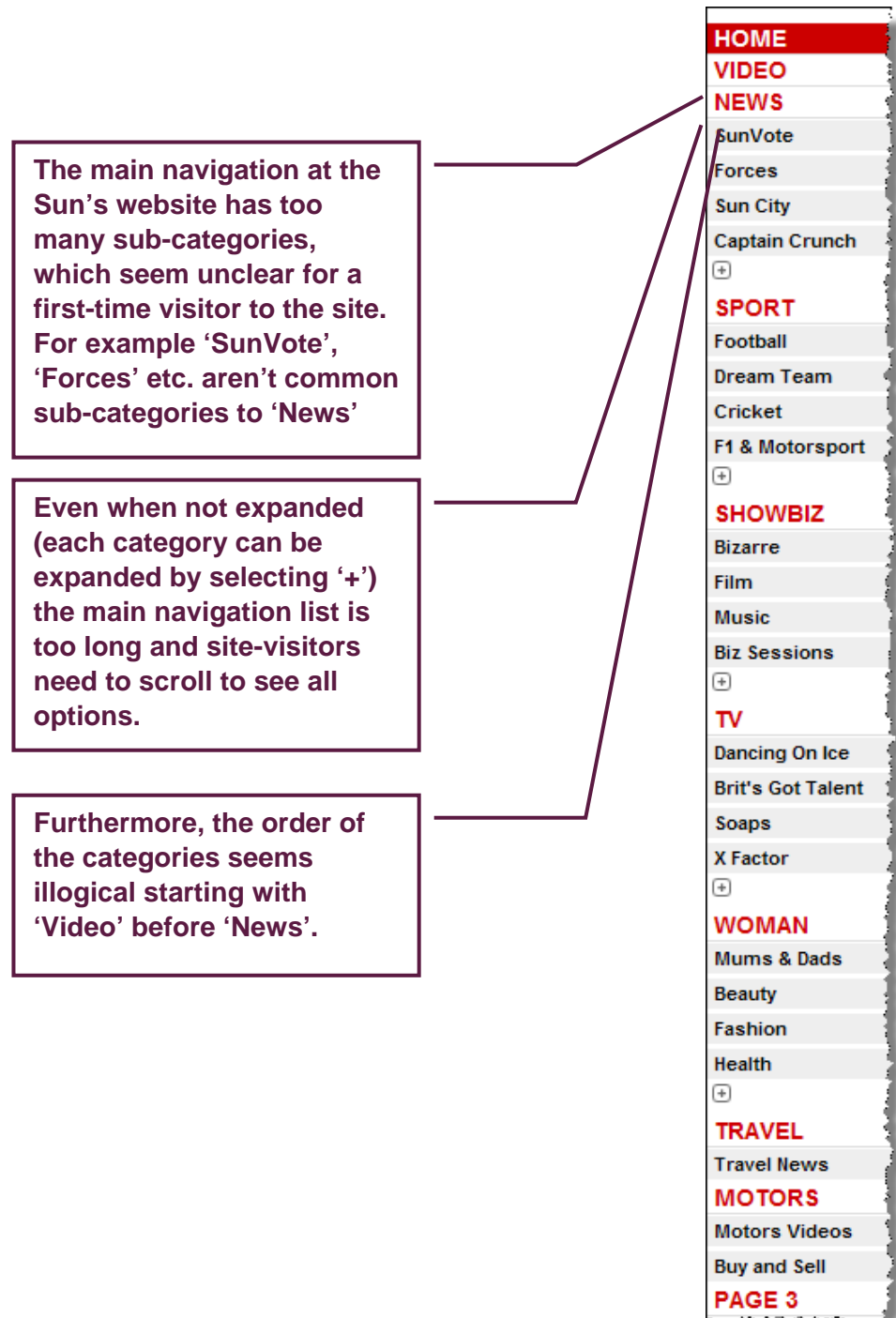
- HOME
 - NEWS
 - SPORT
 - FINANCE
 - COMMENT
 - CULTURE
 - TRAVEL
 - LIFESTYLE
 - FASHION
 - TECHNOLOGY
 - Jobs
 - Dating
 - Offers
- UK
 - World
 - Politics
 - Obituaries
 - Royal Wedding
 - Earth
 - Science
 - Health News
 - Education
 - Celebrities
 - Weird News
 - News Blogs

The Telegraph's main navigation is clearly laid out and has logical news categories and sub-categories making it easy to find relevant content.

The Financial Times scores high for its search results page offering a long range of filters (i.e. media type, date range, keywords) to narrow the search results.



The screenshot shows the Financial Times search results page for the keyword 'ipad'. The page features a navigation bar with categories like World, Companies, Markets, Global Economy, and more. The search results are displayed in a list format, with a 'Sort by' dropdown set to 'Relevance'. On the right side, there are several filter sections: 'Media type filter' (Everything, Blogs, Videos), 'Date range filter' (From: 01/01/2006, To: 30/03/2011), and 'Keyword filter' (People, Companies, Topics, Places). The main content area shows a list of results, including a section titled 'Tablets to boost IT market despite earthquake'.

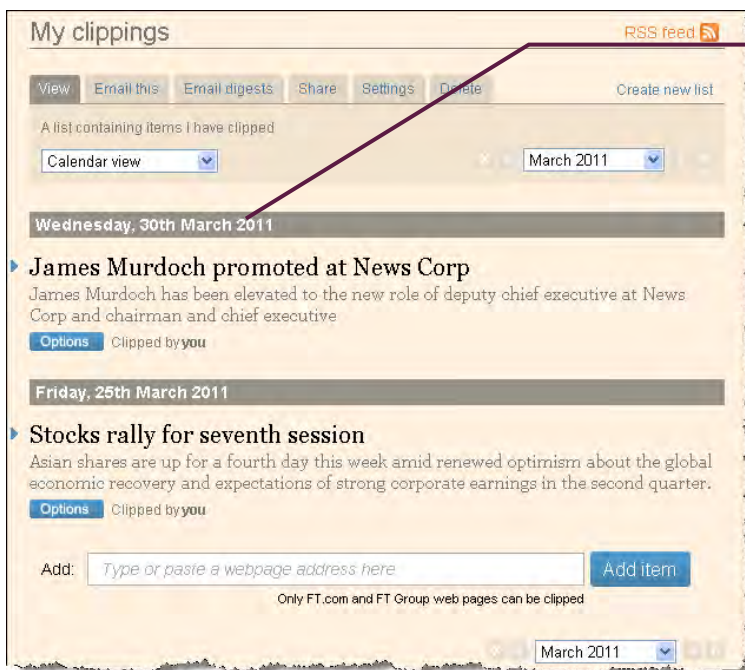


The quality of the navigation varied among the sites. The average score for navigation of 2.7 is below the overall average score indicating that some news providers have not realised the importance of website navigation or perhaps have not tested and implemented it properly. The majority of problems identified are related to persistent main navigation, general consistency in the navigation and labelling.

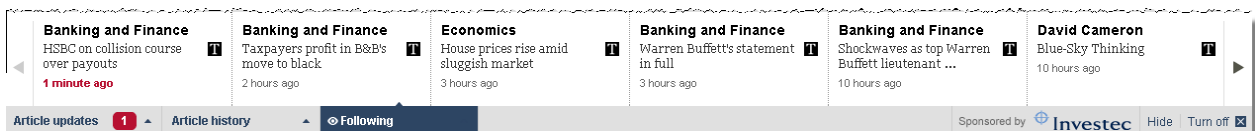
4. Functionality

Average score: 3.5 (out of 5)

News provider websites provide a large range of features including customising the site, reading background information or following specific news categories. We've analysed the types of functionality available.



The Financial Times offers a convenient 'clipping' feature for saving all types of news content (articles, video etc.). The user can add notes and tags to organise the clippings.



The Times is the only site offering a dashboard in the bottom of the browser allowing users to be notified when articles of interest are updated (those articles previously viewed and topics the user is following). The idea is good but it is not always clear what has been updated.

The Guardian received a high score for its personalisation feature displaying useful related content next to each article. This example shows a timeline of the Libya conflict with links to related articles and an interactive timeline. However, the related content is not presented in a consistent way so users may not see it.

More on this story



Allied military assets and main attack sites
As allied missiles rain down on Libyan targets, we look at the military assets in the area and trace the rebel advance, and retreat, as they struggle against pro-Gaddafi forces

Al-Qaida leaders welcome Arab uprisings, says cleric

Libya conflict: reactions around the world

Undisciplined Libyan rebels no match for Gaddafi's forces

👉 Arab spring: an interactive timeline

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17 Mar 2011
[Gaddafi-controlled media wages propaganda war](#)

29 Mar 2011
[Gaddafi issues defiant challenge to Libya conference in London](#)

18 Mar 2011
[Libya calls immediate ceasefire in face of UN resolution- video](#)

Libyan foreign minister flies into London to defect

Article | Video: Koussa defects | Slideshow | Interactive graphic



The Times uses a tab layout for displaying related media. There is a risk is that users may miss this as it is located just on top of the image.

With an average score of 3.5, the websites are doing well for this guideline. It has been considered a minimum to have social networking options and the option for commenting on some or all articles. However, improvements can be made for customisation, for instance of homepage content, clipping options and personalisation as shown in the examples above.

5. Design

Average score: 2.6 (out of 5)

Design is not only about how nice a website looks. A well designed website has a significant impact on findability i.e. by giving prominence to the right sections of the page or by using white space to avoid the site looking too busy. These aspects are crucial for news provider websites, where news content is ticking in every minute. A poorly designed website makes it very difficult for users to get an overview and find content of interest.



All the homepages are busy due to the amount of content, however The Telegraph does a good job keeping the design relatively simple. Furthermore, there is a good balance between news articles, images, blogs and adverts.

The homepage of the Daily Mail is confusing due to very long article titles, poor quality images and the adverts in each side.



The average score of 2.6 tells that the news provider sites are not doing very well when it comes to design. It is a great challenge balancing the large amount of content with elegant design, ensuring it is easy for a user to get an overview of the page.

Mobile sites

1. Utilisation of the platform

Average score: 2.7 (out of 5)

The mobile site is a convenient platform for mobile phones which do not have apps specifically designed for the device (unlike iPhone and Android based phones). The mobile site must take the limitations of screen real estate into consideration and ensure it is functional across mobile browsers. A specific challenge for the news providers mobile sites is to find the right balance of content and functionality for the platform.

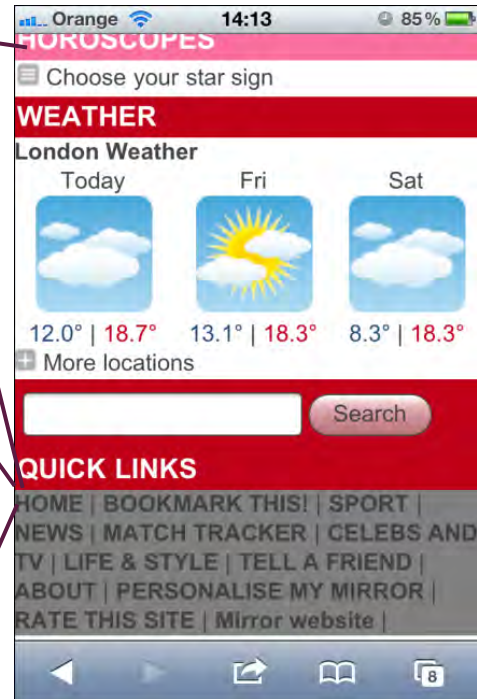
The Guardian mobile site receives a high score for its three tabs for navigating the site; News sections, user defined favourites, and search. The tabs do not take much space and make navigation easy anywhere on the site.



The Daily Mirror mobile site has the main navigation in the footer at the bottom of the screen. This is inconvenient when navigating to another news category and an example of poor utilisation of the limited screen real estate.

The links in the footer sit too close to each other and are not well-designed for tapping with a finger. The user will often have to zoom in order to select the right link. This is problematic on older touch screen devices, where the screen is often not very responsive and zooming is clunky.

Finally, the grey link colour (on grey background) makes it difficult to see the links and is problematic as the grey colour usually indicates inactive links.

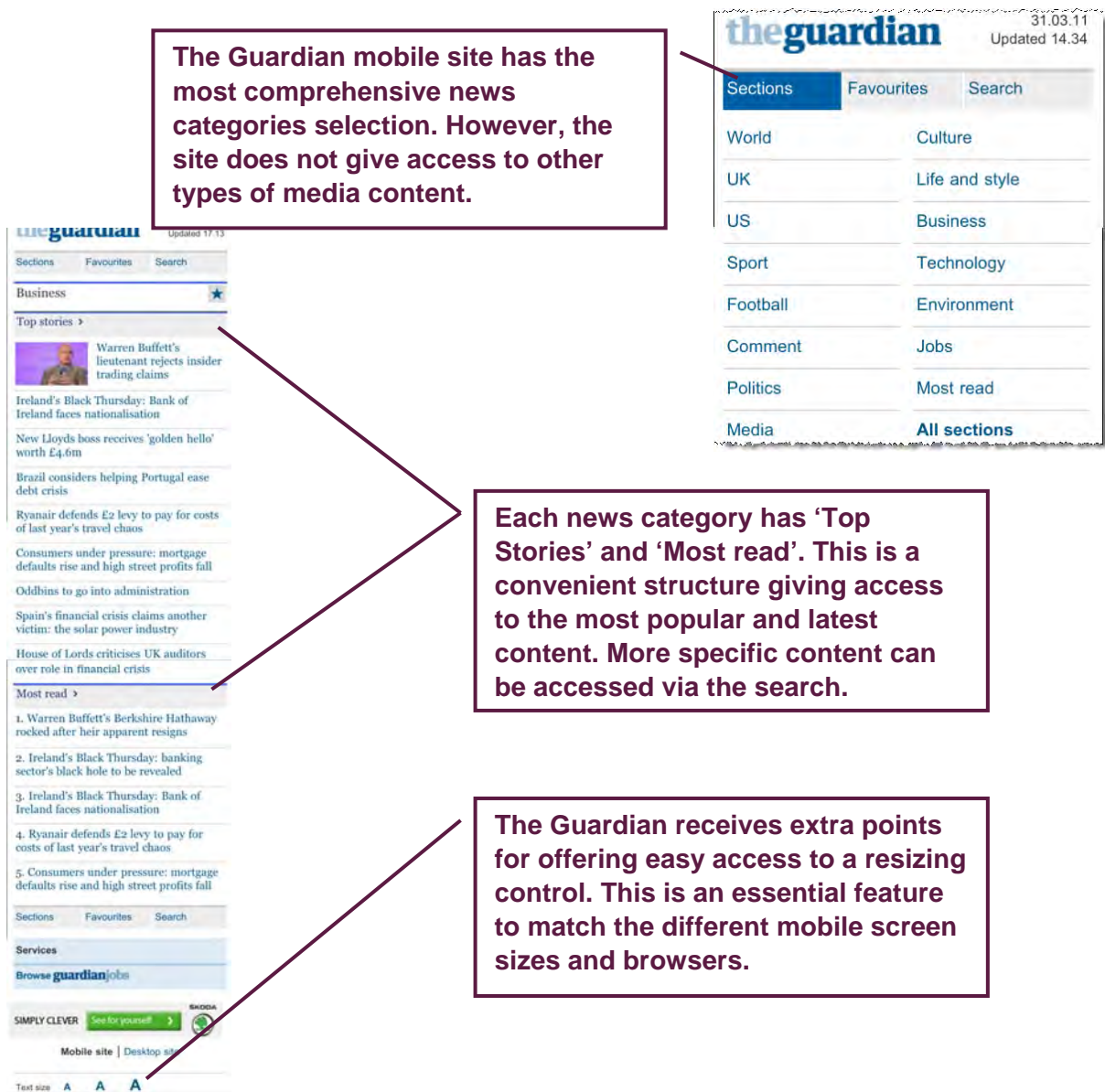


The average score of 2.7 indicates there is room for improvement for the mobile sites of the news providers. Most sites present content well for the screen size, however, several sites have not managed to design a well functioning navigation for the small screen. It has a negative impact on the user experience.

2. Content

Average score: 3.0 (out of 5)

The mobile sites generally contain access to most articles but not always other types of media due to the limitations of navigation within the small screen size. Even without access to media content, it is still important that the priority of content is right giving easy access to the most popular news content. As a minimum a mobile site should give access to the most recent articles via the navigation, however, more content can be made available e.g. via a search engine.



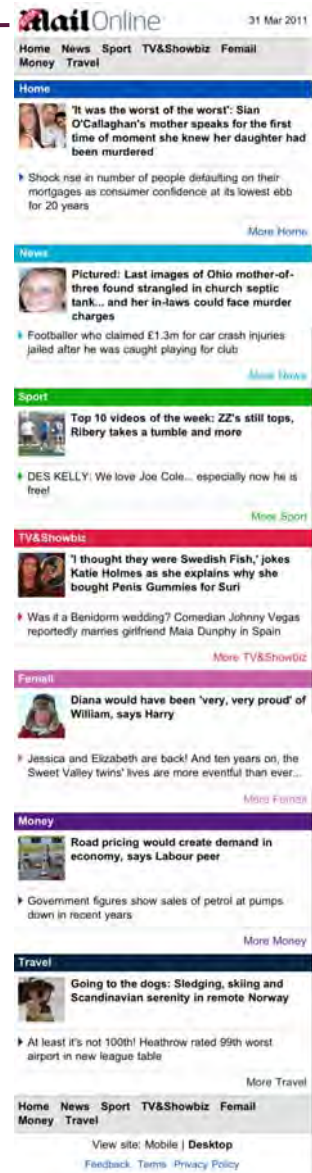
The Guardian mobile site has the most comprehensive news categories selection. However, the site does not give access to other types of media content.

Each news category has 'Top Stories' and 'Most read'. This is a convenient structure giving access to the most popular and latest content. More specific content can be accessed via the search.

The Guardian receives extra points for offering easy access to a resizing control. This is an essential feature to match the different mobile screen sizes and browsers.

The Daily Mail mobile site only offers access to a limited amount of content only sufficient for a quick news update. The mobile site does not have any access to any media other than articles.

The 'News' landing page contains a list of the 10 latest articles and a link to 'World news' but no sub-categories for more news stories.

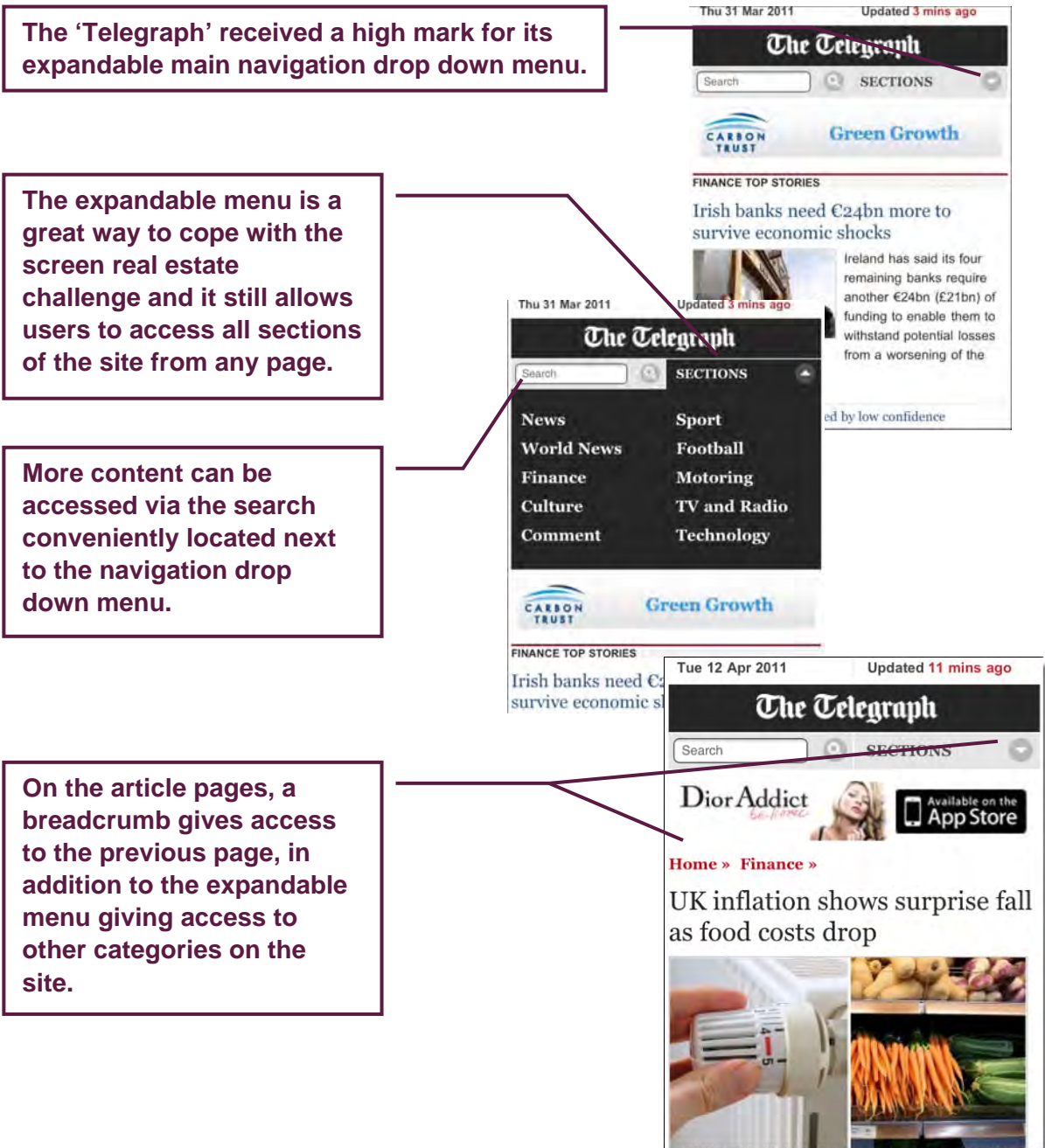


The average of 3.0 indicates that the mobile sites are doing well in terms of content. It seems like several providers have designed a mobile site only with the purpose of giving access to small amount of content and limited or no access to media. This is a good strategy as mobile sites are often accessed on less advanced mobile phones with a small screen size often making it difficult to navigate on a very content heavy site.

3. Navigation

Average score: 2.9 (out of 5)

Navigation can be difficult on mobile sites. Links can be difficult to select and the limited screen real estate can make it difficult to design a well-functioning navigation. Because mobile sites are not designed for one specific mobile device, it should be easy to navigate both on touch screen and devices with a key pad.



The 'Telegraph' received a high mark for its expandable main navigation drop down menu.

The expandable menu is a great way to cope with the screen real estate challenge and it still allows users to access all sections of the site from any page.

More content can be accessed via the search conveniently located next to the navigation drop down menu.

On the article pages, a breadcrumb gives access to the previous page, in addition to the expandable menu giving access to other categories on the site.

The Independent's mobile site received a low score due to the lack of a main navigation. It results in a clunky navigation requiring too many clicks to access different news categories.



Users are left with a breadcrumb, which is not ideal for main navigation. The breadcrumb only allows users to go back to the pages visited previously. Thus, there is no way to access another news category from an article page – users will have to go back to the homepage first.

The footer gives access to other 'Arts & entertainment' categories but not to other sections of the site.

With an average score of 2.9, there is room for improvement of the navigation on the mobile sites. Several of the mobile sites have not managed to design a navigation which works for the limited screen real estate and still makes it easy accessing the different sections. Instead many of the sites suffer from complicated site structures, where it is difficult to figure out what is main and contextual navigation.

4. Functionality

Average score: 2.4 (out of 5)

Mobile sites offer different types of functionality in order to make it easier to re-find articles, read more about a topic or share articles on social network sites. This is useful when using mobile sites on-the-go but also because navigation can be clunky due to the limited screen real estate. Thus, customisation features, i.e. where users can select favourite news categories to be displayed on the homepage can be very beneficial to improve the user experience.

The Guardian gets a high mark for its 'Favourites' function. Users can add news sections as favourites. The favourites can be accessed at any page on the site from the navigation tabs.

Adding and removing the sections to 'Favourites' is intuitive via the star and cross icons.

However, a function for saving specific articles is missing.



The Evening Standard received the lowest marks for very limited functionality. The mobile site does not have any options for customisation, related articles, options for adding or reading comments or for social network sharing.



No features are available on the article page – not even the option to email the article.

Overall, the mobile sites performed below average with a score of 2.4. Most of the mobile sites are kept simple only with the purpose of getting a news update when out and about. However, several mobile sites could improve the user experience significantly by adding functionality for saving or following content or even simple customisation features. It can help users find and re-find relevant content and thereby accommodate the potential problems with navigation, which exist on this platform.

5. Design

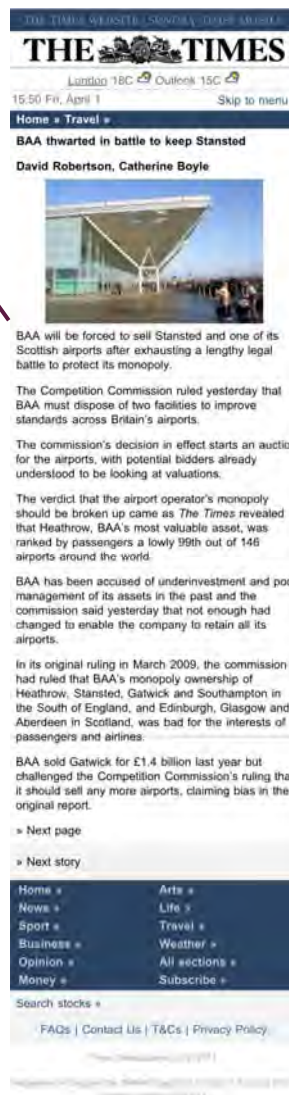
Average score: 3.0 (out of 5)

The design of the mobile sites is a critical element. Like some of the previous guidelines, the limited screen real estate makes it very important that the homepage presents the different news categories, so it is easy to get an overview for the user. In addition, the single article layout and use of adverts are other important elements for this guideline.

The Times' mobile site scores a high mark for its design. Each news category is clearly marked and the homepage has a good balance between text and images.



The article layout is simple most often with an image on the top of the page followed by the article text. There are no ads to confuse the experience.



The Sun receives a low mark for having full screen ads appearing frequently when using the site.



In addition, the homepage of the Sun's mobile site looks confusing and does not provide a good overview of the news stories.



Most of the news provider mobile sites did reasonably well for this guideline. Some sites are kept very simple with few images and text. This can be positive for this particular platform, where too many images can be slow to download on a 3G connection and difficult to view on some devices due to different screen sizes. Apart from the above example, most of the sites manage to integrate adverts so they are not conflicting with a good reading experience.

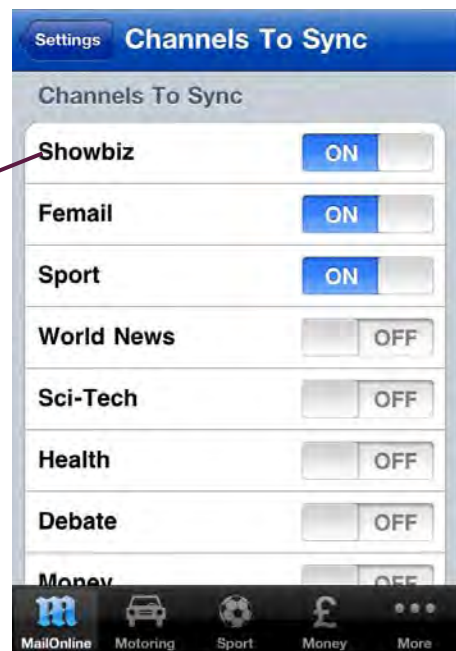
iPhone apps

1. Utilisation of platform

Average score: 3.1 (out of 5)

With the iPhone the news providers have the chance to design apps, which are specifically optimised for the device. This is both relevant with regards to content and navigation but also whether the apps allow offline reading, target information based on location and take advantage of the conventions of the iOS (i.e. clipboard functionality, pinch zoom etc.).

The Daily Mail's iPhone app received a high mark for its utilisation of the platform. Users can select what news categories to sync. This is convenient when out and about using a slow 3G connection to download news content.



The app offers easy access to the website and an image gallery via the bottom navigation so users can choose to view more images when they have a good connection.

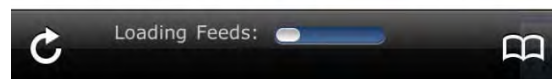


THE INDEPENDENT



The Independent iPhone app does not allow users to select what content to download making the process very slow on a 3g connection.

The grid on the start page allows easy navigation but fails to present the latest news stories so users have to select a category before seeing any content. Other apps (Guardian, Daily Mail, FT) manage to present latest stories and still give access to the news categories on the start page and yet still keeping a clear layout.



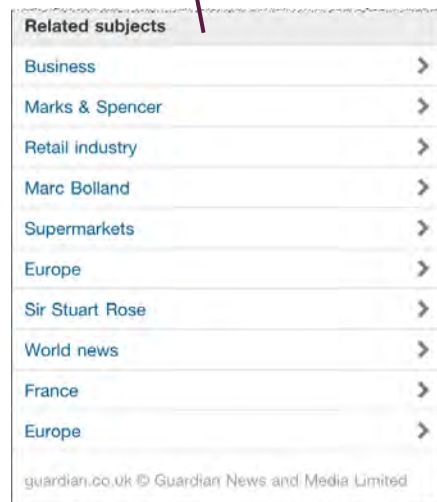
Overall, with an average of 3.1, most of the iPhone apps take advantage of the platform. In particular, the content and navigation are optimised for the device. However, several apps could improve their offline reading experience and offer a specific option to download content. Portability is one of the advantages of the platform and this should be taken into consideration when designing for the iPhone.

2. Content

Average score: 3.1 (out of 5)

With the limited screen real estate, it is important to prioritise the content available from the iPhone app. The apps should give easy access to all the most popular news categories, however the platform is ideal for including other media such as image galleries, shorter videos and podcasts.

The Guardian app has a great variety of content. Related subjects and columnists are listed after an article. It allows users to read additional background information on the topic.



said the French strategy of targeting a major city with stores and covering the rest of the country with a website could be replicated elsewhere. M&S's European operations include stores in Greece, Poland and the Czech Republic. "We will use that blueprint for other countries we might enter."



The app also displays user comments. However, it is not possible to add a comment from the app.

Font re-sizing is important on mobile devices with limited screen real estate and the Guardian app makes it easy to change the font size with controls at the bottom of the screen.



The Financial Times gets extra points for using podcasts as a media for opinion and background information. Podcasts are easy to listen to on-the-go and a good media for background analysis.



The Evening Standard gets a low mark due to limited content. The app only contains news articles and does not have video or podcasts, background information or comments.



Teachers and pupils take on knifeman as girl of 14 is stabbed

1 April 2011 15:38
By Justin Davenport, Crime Editor



A teenage girl was undergoing surgery this afternoon after being stabbed in the neck as she walked to school.

Staff, parents and pupils stepped in to restrain the knifeman after Chloe West, 14, was attacked this morning. Two teenage boys were hurt as they tried to help.

Police said an 18-year-old man was arrested at the scene of the stabbing, near Ridgewood High School in the Wollaton area of Stourbridge, in the West Midlands.

Chloe was taken by air ambulance to Birmingham Children's Hospital suffering several stab wounds. She was said to be having surgery but was stable and not thought to be in a life-threatening condition.

Pupils at the school, in a leafy, affluent area of town, reacted with shock. One 13-year-old said: "I saw people running towards me, then I heard a fight, then somebody told me what had happened."

"He [the alleged attacker] was lying on the floor with blood on his hands. One of my teachers was sitting on him, holding him down."

A schoolboy added: "I heard she was lying on the floor and had blood all over her face. The police turned up very quickly. Another pupil said: "The teachers were shouting at us to get back inside a classroom, any classroom."

Ridgewood High headteacher Clive Nutting said: "Police were called to the school today before 8.50am after one of the pupils was attacked on their way to school. The school is closed for the day and the matter is now in the hands of police."

Chief Inspector Mark Bramwell, of Dudley police, sought to calm parents' fears, saying: "We believe this to be an isolated incident and wish to reassure other pupils and parents that there are no known risks to any other individuals. A man is in custody and will be questioned."

Friends of Chloe posted messages of support on Twitter. Taylor Marshall wrote: "Can we all put my friend Chloe West in your prayers."

Kirsty Willetts added: "Chloe West stabbed today outside school. Praying for her! Come on Chloe! You gotta pull through!"

Overall, the iPhone apps scored above average for this guideline indicated with the score of 3.1. Most apps provide access to news content making them suitable for quick news updates on-the-go without exceeding the expectations. Only a few apps offer access to more in-depth content i.e. via other media.

3. Navigation

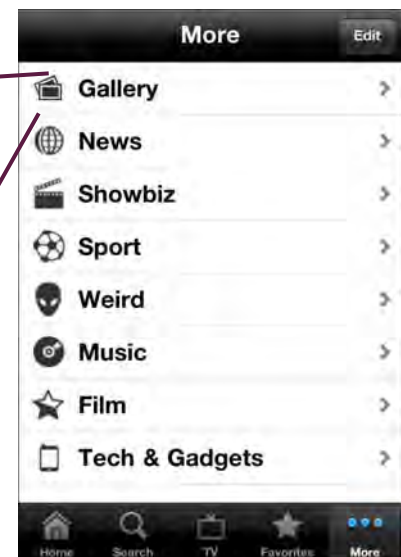
Average score: 3.1 (out of 5)

An intuitive information structure is very important for content heavy news apps with new content ticking in every minute. Moreover, it is essential that content panels are easy to access, the search engine presents clear results and 'back' options are available on every page. Finally, to accommodate the potential problems with limited screen real estate, links and buttons must be easy to tap in order to reduce errors.

The Metro app receives a high mark for its well-functioning navigation. Users can customise the 4 buttons in the bottom of the screen – giving quick access to favourite content or categories.



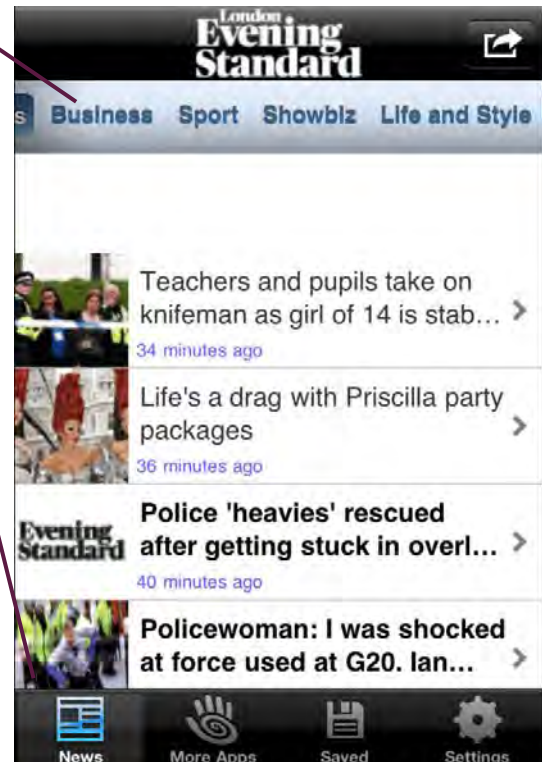
Other news categories, search etc. can be accessed from the 'More' option.



Unfortunately, none of the iPhone apps offer persistent main navigation from article pages. Users can only access another news category by going back to the start page first.

The Evening Standard's app receives a low score for its navigation. The main navigation in the in the top is not optimised for the screen so one option disappears. Horizontal scrolling is needed.

The bottom navigation offers very limited value to the users. It is not customisable and except 'news' and 'Saved' the other options do not give access to news content. 'More apps' presents a list of random games apps and 'Settings' is only to sign in to social media, feedback and support.




The navigation of the iPhone apps performed reasonably well with an average of 3.1. However, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Several apps do not offer access to a contents panel on the article pages, so users need to go back to the homepage to access another news category. Instead many apps rely on sequential navigation via arrows similar to going one page back or ahead when browsing a book. This type of navigation works for books and newspapers but is far from ideal for digital platforms. Here, users expect to navigate to specific content instead of browsing random articles. Instead all news categories should be accessible within a few taps i.e. via an expanding content panel or carousel. Finally, several apps do not have a search engine, which makes it even more difficult to find and re-find articles.

4. Functionality

Average score: 3.1 (out of 5)

The news provider apps are all facing a challenge of providing easy access to relevant content for users with different needs and interests. One way to accommodate this is to include customisation features like ‘add to favourites’ or suggesting related content to make relevant content more accessible to users despite the small screen size. For this guideline, we take a look at some basic functionality for how the apps use various features to make it easier to access content, read and write comments and share via social networking sites.



The screenshot shows the 'trending' section of the Guardian app. It features a 'Back' button, tabs for 'Stories' and 'Subjects', and a list of trending items for the 'Last 24 hours'. The items include 'Spring', 'Photography', 'Theatre', 'Spider-Man: Turn Off...', 'Twitter', 'Samuel Beckett', and 'Games', each with an upward arrow and a rank number. A bottom navigation bar includes 'Home', 'Most viewed', 'Top stories', 'Sport', and 'More'.

The Guardian is the only iPhone app with a trending option for showing the most popular stories and subjects in the last 24 hours.

The app also has other functionalities such as customisation of the navigation bar, bookmarking, personalisation via related topics and articles etc.

The Independent app has very limited functionality. The app has a 'Favourites' function but no sharing via social network and no personalisation (e.g. related articles, background information etc.).



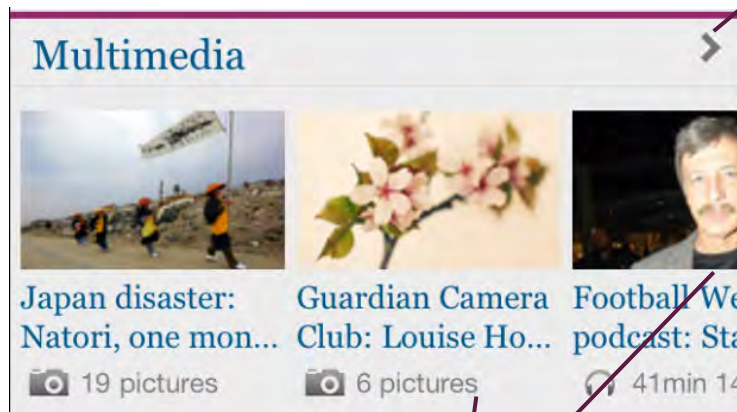
Again with an average of 3.1, the apps performed well for this guideline. Most of the apps have social network sharing and offer some way to customise the homepage making it easier to get an overview of specific content. However, only a few apps have personalisation features like suggesting related articles or topics.

5. Design

Average score: 2.9 (out of 5)

The screen size of the iPhone makes it very important that content is presented clearly. For this guideline, we have taken a look at the homepage, category landing pages and articles pages and how the apps manage to integrate adverts without compromising the user experience.

The start page of the Guardian has a good balance between images and text and conveniently breaks the page into news sections so it is easy to get an overview even on a very long page.

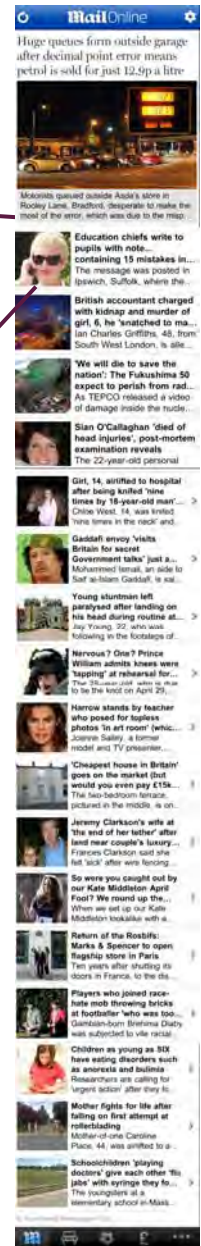


The start page also has a multimedia section, where users can scroll horizontally to access video clips and podcasts. The horizontal scrolling is indicated by only showing half of the third image.



The start page for the Daily Mail app has an inconvenient layout just displaying a long list of news articles.

The page does not separate the articles into news categories making it difficult to scan and find relevant content.



The iPhone apps had an average score of 2.9 and generally perform OK without exceeding expectations. Several apps have no category breakdown on the homepage presenting all news content in one long list making it difficult to scan and find relevant content. Moreover, some apps have a poor balance between images and text either displaying too many images and no text or the other way around. Generally, the apps manage to integrate adverts well without interrupting the reading experience.

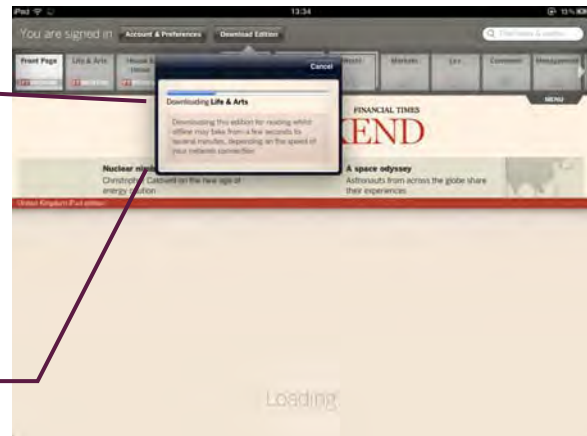
iPad apps

1. Utilisation of platform

Average score: 2.5 (out of 5)

The iPad offers great opportunities by combining the large screen with portability. For this guideline, we have looked for how content and navigation are optimised for the device and how the apps take advantage of built-in technology like location detection.

The Financial Times offers to download the current available online version for offline reading.



This is a better way of using the platform than some other apps offering a download of the paper version, which contains outdated content.

The only difference between the on- and offline version is the text saying 'Downloaded edition'.

DOWNLOADED EDITION

The offline version of the Financial Times has the same design and functionality as the online version. The consistency in design, navigation and functionality makes it easier for users to use both versions.



The on- and offline reading experience differ significantly with the Sun's iPad app and users have to familiarise with two very different interfaces. Especially, offline reading is not optimised for the platform and offers a poor experience.



The offline version is like a scanned paper version. Users have to zoom in order to get a readable text size and images appear very grainy.



The app offers a function for reading the articles in plain text but it's difficult to find.

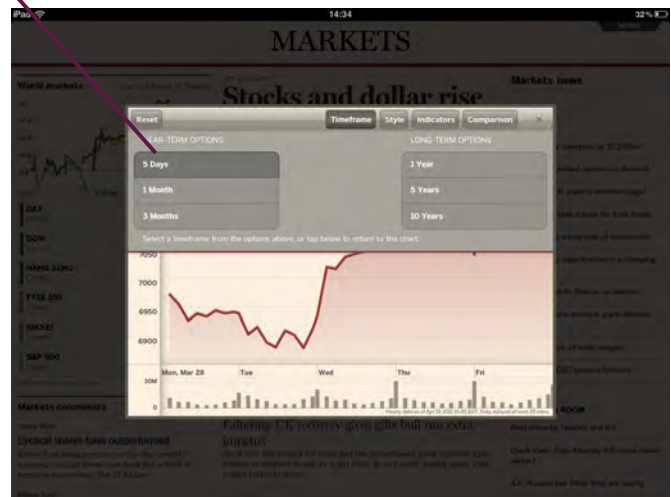
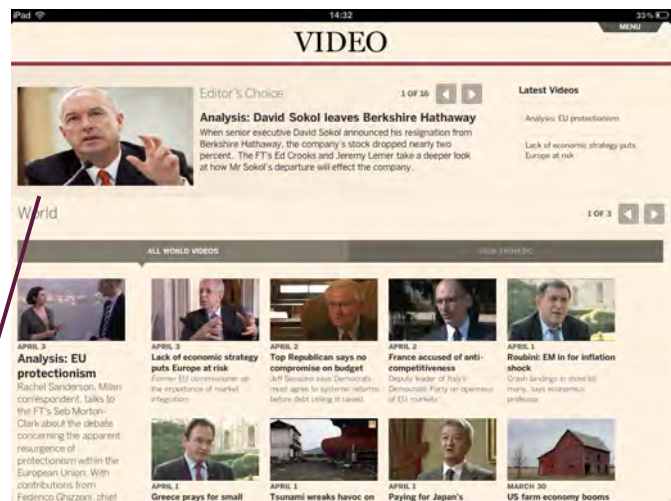
The iPad apps are not doing particularly well for this guideline only scoring 2.5. Several of the apps offer a very clunky offline reading experience, which has a different interface from the online reading. Moreover, the navigation is often not optimised for the device and instead replicating the one for a physical newspaper with sequential browsing between articles instead of using the advantages of a digital platform where all content should be accessible within one or two taps. Overall, the news provider iPad apps fail to adequately take advantage of the platform.

2. Content

Average score: 2.8 (out of 5)

The iPad platform is ideal for both reading articles as well as other media such as video or podcasts. For this guideline, we have taken a look at the comprehensiveness of content and use of media offered by the iPad apps.

The Financial Times app gets a high mark for having a very comprehensive content. Apart from news articles, the app offers videos with analysis and a long range of financial data and tools to analyse the markets.



The iPad app from the Telegraph has very limited content only covering 6 news categories and no breakdown into sub-categories. Moreover, the app does not use any other media than articles.



The comprehensiveness of content for the app is disappointing when taking the content available on its website into consideration.



The score of 2.8 indicates that several apps are not performing well for this guideline. Several apps have very limited news categories and do not give access to media content, which already exist on the website of the news providers. It is a shame because the iPad is ideal for media content like image galleries and videos.

3. Navigation

Average score: 2.5 (out of 5)

Like with the other platforms, a well-functioning navigation is key in order to obtain a great user experience on the iPad. With the large screen, there should be a persistent (available on all pages) global navigation so users can easily navigate to other news categories. It is also important that links and other types of navigation are clearly displayed and easy to tap.



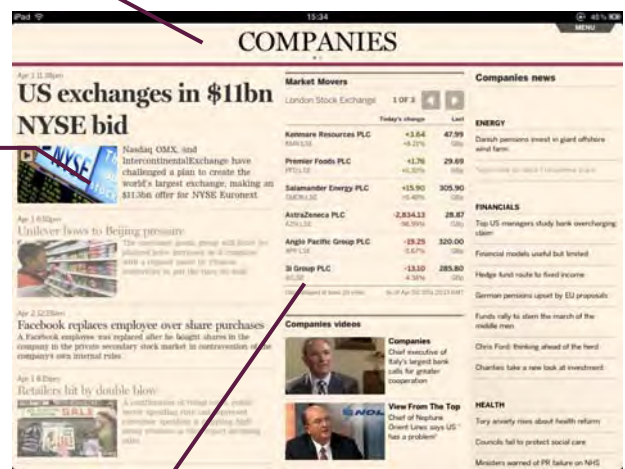
The Telegraph iPad app receives one of the highest marks for its simple navigation via the persistent top navigation bar. The navigation enables users to access any news category from any page without navigating back to the homepage first.

In addition, the app has consistent vertical scrolling on content pages, but lacks an overview of content on the category landing pages.

The Financial Times has the best category landing pages providing easy access to content.

However, the app suffers from inconsistent scrolling. Homepage and landing pages support vertical scrolling whereas articles are scrolled horizontally. It is confusing and seems like the focus has been to replicate the paper version experience instead of optimising for the platform.

Moreover, some graphs and images can be enlarged but there is no indication for what content is clickable and what is not.



The Sun's iPad app scores low for its confusing navigation. Horizontal swipe leads to the top story for each news category (news, sports etc.), whereas vertical scrolling in the left column shows all stories in all categories.

When scrolling down in the left column, this category title changes. It is not prominent and very easy to miss for the users.



When clicking the footer navigation, the left column just scrolls to the category. It is very difficult to get an overview of the news stories due to the presentation. Moreover, each article is only presented with an image and header, which often is not very clear.

Overall, the iPad apps scored low for this guideline. Several apps do not offer persistent global navigation. This is surprising given that the same news providers offer this type of navigation on their iPhone apps, which are much more limited when it comes to screen real estate. Another problem identified is that several apps use a mental model that fits with a paper version with sequential navigation like browsing article pages via horizontal scrolling etc. This is not ideal for the platform. Finally, several apps do not use indicators for scrolling or when images can be enlarged by tapping. Generally, the apps fail to create a navigation which is optimised for the device and instead replicates elements from both iPhone apps and paper version newspapers. This approach does not always work on the iPad.

4. Functionality

Average score: 2.0 (out of 5)

The iPad platform gives great opportunities for including different features. We have taken a look at some of the most popular features like customising the experience, suggesting related content, commenting articles and sharing via social network sites.

The Financial Times once again receives the highest mark for its portfolio function and tools for analysing financial markets. However, the app does not have basic functions such favouriting or commenting on articles – these features are only available on the FT website.



The Evening Standard is the only app enabling users to save articles. This functionality is common in the iPhone apps but ignored in the iPad apps.



The Times' iPad app lacks very basic functionality. It does not offer any customisation features or sharing via social network sites. The app does not even indicate when an article has been read.

Users have to pay for using this app, and apart from the content, it does not offer much.



Again, the iPad apps score a disappointing 2.0 for the functionality guideline. The analysis makes it clear that the news providers have not managed to include even basic functionality in the iPad apps and in some cases the apps are simpler than the iPhone equivalents from the same provider. Although the iPad is still a relatively new platform, the news providers can improve the user experience by including simple functionality.

5. Design

Average score: 3.0 (out of 5)

One of the strengths with the iPad is the screen size. The screen allows users to read articles in almost full size and is ideal for displaying images as an integrated part of an article. For this guideline, we have looked at the design of multi and single article pages, the balance of images and text and how well adverts are integrated.

The Financial Times receives the highest score for its design due to the clear article presentation. Article text is often followed by images and graphs making the stories more interesting to read.

Finally, the app manages to integrate ads in the bottom of a page or on the final page of articles so they do not conflict with the reading experience.

The Evening Standard has a nice article layout with clear text, images and video content. However, the app does not have a homepage presenting all the news content, decreasing its score.



The Times' app gets credit for its clean homepage and article layout for the news content. Unfortunately, full screen adverts appear occasionally on the Times' iPad app disrupting the workflow. As the adverts suddenly pops up while clicking on an article, it is confusing for the user and it is easy to miss the 'close' icon in the top right corner.



The Metro app has a rather busy homepage with articles duplicated in the centre and the news carousel on the top of the page. Moreover, article titles are broken in the left column, resulting in a poor presentation of content. Finally the centre images are in low resolution making them look grainy.



The iPad apps do fairly well for this guideline with an average score of 3.0. Generally, the apps do well for the single article pages, however some apps receive a low score due to confusing homepage design and poor integration of adverts.

Cross-channel experience

Average score: 2.7 (out of 5)

The digital platforms analysed in this report enable users to access news content in a variety of formats in multiple contexts. Many users are still learning to use the different platforms and getting used to accessing news content from these platforms instead of picking up the paper version.

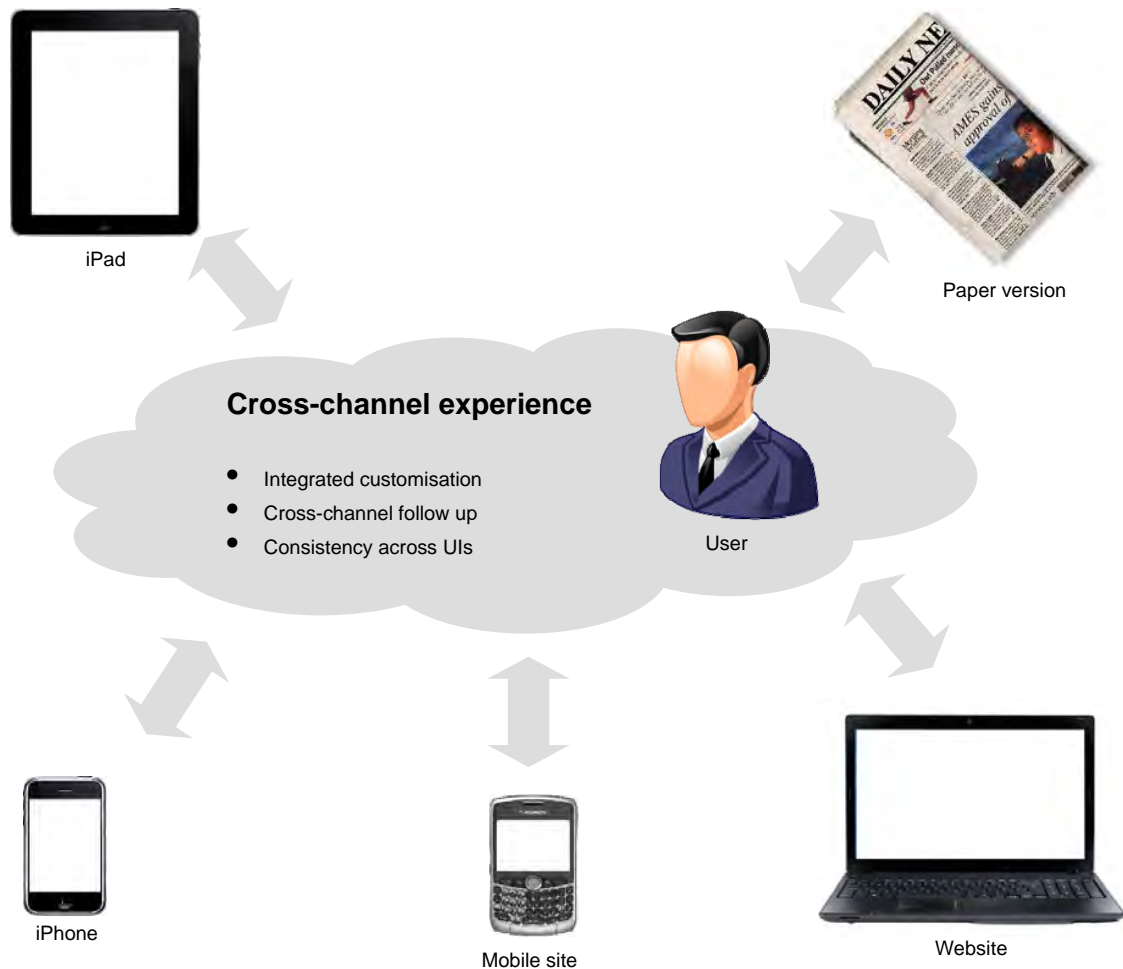
Over time users get access to more digital platforms (i.e. the increasing popularity of tablets and advanced smart phones) and develop stronger preferences for accessing news content on some platforms more than others.

Here, it is important to have in mind that users do not necessarily perceive the iPhone and iPad apps for example from Metro as separate offerings. Instead, users may feel they are interacting with Metro and thus, expecting all touch points to be integrated.

The cross-channel integration is about delivering a consistent experience across multiple platforms in a format, which utilises the individual channel technologies, integrates personal settings and caters for the needs of the users. By catering for user needs, we mean that the news content must suit the context it is delivered within, in other words, news should be brief when on-the-go on a mobile device with a small screen, in-depth news and analysis should be in the paper version, and videos, podcasts and image galleries should be available on the website.

An example of a cross-channel experience would be accessing a related video or view an interactive timeline on the website after reading an article in the paper version. Since cross-channel features are relatively new to many users, clear communication of how to benefit from the multi-platform offerings as well as easy access to content when changing channel are key elements.

The figure below illustrates an integrated cross-channel experience where the platforms complement each other instead of just being individual sources of news content.



Evening Standard

Cross-channel score: 2.3 (out of 5)

The Evening Standard has not put much effort into communicating how users can benefit from the offered cross-channel experience.

The different platforms work independently without any cross-channel integration i.e. for customisation. However, the paper version encourage readers several places to go online to watch other media about the same or a related topic. Like several of the other news providers, the Evening Standard offers a downloadable e-edition from the website, which can be read offline.

The Evening Standard does not offer a ground breaking cross-channel experience, but scores average.

Daily Mail

Cross-channel score: 2.3 (out of 5)

It is hard to find information about the multi-platform offerings from the Daily Mail apart from an advert displayed occasionally on the 'News' landing page on the website. Users seldom pay attention to adverts on the web and are therefore likely to miss this one.

The Daily Mail does not offer any cross-platform functionality (i.e. customisation across platforms) so each platform works independently. However, the iPhone app gives quick access to the website via a prominent link. Finally, the paper version does refer to the website for more background information.

Daily Mirror

Cross-channel score: 2.0 (out of 5)

The Daily Mirror does have a page on their website explaining the benefits of using their mobile site, but the page has more adverts than content. The communication of the cross-channel benefits is weak but since the news provider does not offer iPhone nor iPad apps, there is not much to talk about.

The Telegraph

Cross-channel score: 2.3 (out of 5)

It is not easy to find the page on the website presenting the cross-channel offerings from the Telegraph.

The website offers e-reading offline like several of the other news providers. The iPhone and iPad apps have very limited functionality and no cross-channel integration. The Telegraph does well in the paper version encouraging readers to follow blogs on Twitter or Facebook, and give several references to follow up content (video, image galleries etc.) on the website.

Financial Times

Cross-channel score: 3.3 (out of 5)

The Financial Times has a clear and easy-to-find cross-channel business proposition on the website.

The Financial Times has the most advanced integrated features across channels, where users can create and access portfolios (stocks, companies etc.) on the different platforms

and set alerts for user-defined events. It is also possible to clip articles on the mobile site and access the saved clippings on the website. Unfortunately, the feature is not available from the iPhone and iPad apps and the two apps lack basic features i.e. read comments added on the website.

Another downside with the cross-channel experience is the references to video and other media content in the paper version. The URLs are too generic making it hard to find the specific content and the videos cannot be viewed in the iPhone and iPad browsers.

The Guardian

Cross-channel score: 3.3 (out of 5)

The cross-channel offerings from The Guardian are easy to access on the website and the benefits of using the different platforms are clearly communicated.

The Guardian's iPhone app is the most advanced giving access to all types of media directly from the app, however, there is no integration of features between the different platforms. The paper version does well in referring to blogs, other media like video and image galleries and it is easy to access the content on the website.

An iPad app for the Guardian was not available by the time of writing this report, however it is under development and expected to be launched in the near future.

The Independent

Cross-channel score: 2.7 (out of 5)

The Independent does well in communicating its cross-channel offerings on the website and presents its three mobile apps for Blackberry, Android and iPhone. The page allows users to access the store for downloading the app via a QR code, which is smart if users have got a QR reader app installed on their phone. Unfortunately, the page presenting the apps is difficult to access from the homepage as the only link appears in a rotating banner ad.

There is not much cross-channel integration between the platforms tested in this report (website, iPhone app and mobile site), however, the paper version does refer to access the website for more media content.

Metro

Cross-channel score: 3.0 (out of 5)

Metro does well communicating its cross-channel offerings on the website. Apps and mobile sites are clearly described and the page is easy to access from the homepage.

The iPhone app provides easy access to the full size website, but this feature does not exist in the iPad app, where it would probably be more relevant to access the website due to the larger screen. Generally, the platforms work independently with no integration.

Metro's paper version refers to the website and uses QR codes for users to access a feedback page online. Unfortunately, the scanning of the code is not always easy and it is not clear why the user is taken to the specific page via the QR code.

The Sun

Cross-channel score: 2.3 (out of 5)

The Sun's website generally does not present the benefits of a cross-channel experience.

The iPad app allows users to read a scanned paper version offline. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to read and images are not optimised for the screen.

The paper version refers to the web but only with a generic URL making it hard to access the right content. However, the paper version encourages readers to follow the Sun on Twitter and offers email alerts on specific topics.

The Times

Cross-channel score: 3.7 (out of 5)

For users who do not have a subscription to the Times, the paywall will appear every time they click on an article. Although the paywall does not allow users any content without a paid subscription, the cross-channel offerings are clearly communicated and users can even watch a video to see how the iPad app works.

The iPad app and mobile site do not offer any integrated functionality and both work independently.

However, the Times has the best cross-platform references in the paper version using specific logos to tell if image galleries, videos or interactive graphics are available online.

Conclusion

News providers have always competed on delivering quality content, however, with an increasing number of people accessing news content via digital platforms, the nature of the competition has changed. The competition is no longer only about the content but to a higher extent also about how the content is delivered in the different channels.

The news providers have taken the first steps to go digital, and all except one provider is represented in at least three of the four channels we have evaluated in this report.

Despite the channel representation, the report has shown that the news providers overall do averagely when evaluated from our guidelines, but also that there is clear room for improvement.

There is room for improvement for the news providers can increase their presence on all platforms with the iPad apps receiving the lowest average score among the four platforms.

For the iPad apps, it seems like common design conventions especially for navigation are still under development resulting in low discoverability of controls (i.e. no indicator tells how to navigate) and a difficulty to memorise (no common design conventions across apps).

The problem for the iPad apps can be related to the perception of the platform as an e-reader suitable for reading books, magazines and newspapers. Many of the iPad apps replicate the physical paper version rather than creating an experience which takes advantage of the platform. However, it is likely that as design conventions develop, the problems for the iPad will become ironed out in the future.

Interestingly, the iPhone apps received the highest average score among the four platforms included in the report. One of the strengths with the iPhone apps is the common design conventions, which users have become familiar with over the years. We expect similar conventions will develop for the iPad over time, and it will be interesting to follow in the coming years.

We also evaluated the cross-channel experience offered by each of the news providers. Our analysis showed that the news providers focus more on the individual channels and only pay little attention to the integrated cross-channel experience.

Platform integration and cloud computing is increasing in popularity due to its flexibility. Whether it is 'favourites' in a browser (i.e. Google Chrome), 'recommended products' for a shopping website (i.e. Amazon) or a folder structure in an email client or RSS reader – remembering personal preferences or browsing history across platforms is very convenient due to an increasing need for accessing these applications from multiple platforms.

The same tendency exists for accessing news content, and as we have seen from this report, the news content is already available from multiple platforms. However, the news providers have only adopted elements of the integrated approach so far. It is about taking the experience to the next step.

It will be interesting to see if the news providers adopt a stronger cross-channel focus in the coming years.

The guidelines presented in this report represent just the start to achieving excellent usability and an outstanding cross-channel user experience. The use of guidelines whether it is on the web, a tablet or mobile phone is essential, but they should always be used in conjunction with usability testing on a regular basis. Usability testing involves analysing typical site visitors completing typical tasks on your digital proposition (see www.webcredible.co.uk/testing for more).

For more information on other general usability guidelines that should be conformed to, visit www.webcredible.co.uk/articles or book a place on a Webcredible usability course at www.webcredible.co.uk/training.

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<http://jetlib.com/news/2011/02/04/how-the-ipad-time-shifts-online-reading/>
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www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/iahi0810.pdf

Appendix A: Website and mobile site overview

The iPhone and iPad apps can be downloaded from Apple's App Store.

Company	Website	Mobile Site
The Guardian	www.guardian.co.uk	m.guardian.co.uk
The Financial Times	www.ft.co.uk	m.ft.com
The Telegraph	www.telegraph.co.uk	telegraph.co.uk
The Times	www.thetimes.co.uk	thetimes.mobi
Metro	www.metro.co.uk	m.metro.co.uk
Daily Mail	www.dailymail.co.uk	m.dailymail.co.uk
Daily Mirror	www.mirror.co.uk	m.mirror.co.uk
The Independent	www.theindependent.co.uk	m.independent.co.uk
Evening Standard	www.thisislondon.co.uk	istandard.co.uk
The Sun	www.thesun.co.uk	thesun.mobi

Appendix B: Full results

The full list of websites audited and the score they achieved for each guideline is as follows:

Platform	Evening standard	Daily Mail	Daily Mirror	The Telegraph	Financial Times	The Guardian	The Independent	Metro	The Sun	The Times	Average score
Website	2.4	2.4	2.4	3.6	4.0	3.6	3.0	2.4	2.2	3.4	2.9
Mobile site	2.4	2.2	2.8	3.0	3.4	4.2	2.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.8
iPhone	2.2	3.2	-	3.0	3.2	4.0	2.6	3.4	-	-	3.1
iPad	2.6	-	-	2.4	3.6	-	-	2.8	1.8	2.2	2.6
Cross channel	2.3	2.3	2.0	2.3	3.3	3.3	2.7	3.0	2.3	3.7	2.7
Average score	2.4	2.6	2.6	3.0	3.6	3.9	2.5	2.9	2.0	2.9	2.8

About Webcredible

Webcredible is a user experience consultancy, offering a range of usability, accessibility, design & training services based around your specific requirements:

User-centered design

- Information architecture
- Interaction design

User research

- Usability testing
- Interviews & focus groups
- Persona creation

Accessibility

- Accessibility testing
- Accessible web design

Training & mentoring

- Usability & accessibility courses
- Online copywriting courses
- Web development courses

Webcredible is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and respected user experience consultancies in the UK. Our 200+ research articles and reports have been re-published on 100s of websites and we receive 250,000 visitors to our website each month.

We believe in taking a proactive approach with clients, whilst maintaining a regular open line of communication. We believe that we are being paid for our expertise and as such always take the initiative and offer our recommendations for any course of action. We are:

Focused on client needs – Our aims are to optimise conversion rates for companies and ensure public sector organisations effectively disseminate information.

Passionate – The team here at Webcredible loves what they do and we only recruit staff passionate about usability and accessibility.

Approachable – We're friendly and jargon-free. Consultants, despite being highly educated and experienced, only communicate in a user-friendly manner.

Clients include Airmiles, Asda, BBC, eBay, EDF Energy, Filofax, I Want One Of Those, JD Sports, Laura Ashley, Liz Earle, Lloyds TSB, More Th>n, Sony and T-Mobile.