

THE COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCE INDEX

Reputation did not predict commercial execution.

Ten UK retail sites, scored on a single axis:
whether the digital experience helps the
customer move from arrival to commitment.

INTRODUCTION

Most website rankings answer a different question. Which site looks best. Which brand feels most innovative. Which experience tests cleanest in a usability lab.

The Commercial Experience Index asks a narrower one. Not whether a business makes money, which no external observer can see, but whether the observable experience creates or removes the conditions through which commercial performance has to happen. It is the founding instrument of Barking Cat, a commerce advisory built on a simple discipline: diagnosis before solutions.

Edition One scores ten UK retail sites out of 100. Every score is read from the live site on a single day, and every score traces to something a reader could observe or re-run. The total is a weighted score, so the measures do not carry equal weight and do not simply sum. Two of the seven measures are objective, drawn from real-world field data and front-end structure. The other five are read by an experienced operator against what the site actually does. A competent but ordinary site scores in the fifties; the upper half of the scale is reserved for earned strength.

HOW TO READ THE SCORE

The seven measures that make up each total:

Proposition and Brand Clarity	Is it clear what the brand is, and is the claim proven rather than asserted?
Experience and Merchandising	Can the customer find, browse and decide with ease?
Persuasion and Buyer Journey	Does the journey build desire and remove doubt?
Checkout and Friction	How easy it is to pay, and how much reassurance the customer gets before they do.
Performance	How stable, fast and responsive the page is on mobile. Objective field data.
SEO Readiness	Front-end structural readiness for organic discovery. Objective.
Copy and Voice	Is the writing distinctive and doing genuine brand and conversion work?

THE FINDING

The brands with the biggest reputations were not the brands delivering the best experience.

The two highest scores in Edition One went to two of the least famous names in it. Several of the most celebrated brands sat mid-table and below. What follows is the evidence, measure by measure.

Ten UK retail sites, ranked.

Scored 3 August 2026. The total is out of 100, built from seven weighted measures. The pages that follow read each brand in full.

#	BRAND	TOTAL
1	Finisterre	69
2	AllSaints	67
2	Passenger	67
4	Boden	64
5	Gymshark	61
6	Reiss	59
7	ASOS	58
7	Sweaty Betty	58
9	Tommy Hilfiger	57
10	SKIMS	56

READING THE BANDS

75+	Category-defining. Strong across almost every measure.
70 to 74	Genuinely strong. A high standard throughout.
65 to 69	Very good. A well-built experience with a clear edge in places.
60 to 64	Solid and professionally run, with room to sharpen.
55 to 59	Competent but leaking. A real weakness is present, and often invisible to the brand.
Below 55	Material friction. More than one measure is working against the customer.

The ten, in full.

69_{/100}

1. Finisterre

The strongest brand-and-execution alignment in the review, and the highest score. A B Corp that lives its proposition rather than stating it, through a foundation, factory transparency and a repair-and-resale programme.

Working. The best-merchandised category pages in the set, filtering by named product range, with Quick Buy inline sizing and a Compare tool. The only fully-surfaced payment stack in the review, and joint-best copy.

Not working. A single slow mobile homepage hero image, the one fault between it and the top band, and a benign one: nothing shifts, nothing lags, the page is simply slow to paint.

67_{/100}

2. AllSaints

The famous brand that actually delivers the experience its reputation implies. A defensible proposition, with leather elevated to a top-level position, and a distinctive subculture voice.

Working. The best merchandising of the household names, with Quick Add inline sizing on the grid and a genuine category FAQ, and a fast, stable mobile homepage.

Not working. A homepage that greets acquired traffic with heavy markdown, training a quiet-luxury customer to wait for the sale.

67_{/100}

2. Passenger

Comfortably the least famous name in the review, and one of the most coherent experiences in it. A proven responsible-outdoor proposition, with live impact figures behind the claim.

Working. A well-built, stable mobile experience, sound search foundations, warm consistent copy, and a generous 60-day returns promise. Nothing carries a weak part.

Not working. Merchandising and persuasion are good rather than category-best. Sharper product presentation and stronger prompts to buy are where it can close the gap to Finisterre.

64_{/100}

4. Boden

A well-run British specialist behaving exactly as a healthy mid-market brand should. A clear buy-better-buy-less proposition and a characterful voice.

Working. Competent, brand-appropriate merchandising, solid social proof, and a mature checkout.

Not working. A mobile page that fails on two marginal measures while the origin passes. Solid and professional, in the best sense of unremarkable.

61_{/100}

5. Gymshark

A category-leading brand and content operation, with the best faceted merchandising in the review and the most complete product-rating deployment.

Working. A genuine content-and-community advantage feeding search, and a confident, gym-native voice.

Not working. A mobile interaction delay on the device its young audience lives on, and blanket discounting that reads as outlet behaviour on a flagship category.

59_{/100}

6. Reiss

A premium brand renting a mass-market platform. The tailoring identity is recognisable and the category presentation is clean.

Working. A clean, premium-appropriate checkout.

Not working. The platform imposes the weakest search structure in the set and a failing mobile interaction delay. The positioning is premium; the execution rents someone else's constraints.

58_{/100}

7. ASOS

Genuinely capable engineering serving a proposition it has stopped articulating. Large-catalogue merchandising, a mature checkout, and the strongest search foundation in the review.

Working. The infrastructure is sound where a business of this scale has built it over years.

Not working. The brand idea that built ASOS has decayed to hygiene factors, and its proposition score of 4 reflects it. Sound where the strategy has gone quiet.

58_{/100}

7. Sweaty Betty

The clearest illustration in the review of a single principle: the best words in the world cannot survive a page that physically moves under the customer.

Working. The joint-best copy in the review and a premium, considered proposition, doing real trust-building work.

Not working. A catastrophic mobile experience, the layout shifting and stalling at the exact moment the writing has earned attention.

57_{/100}

9. Tommy Hilfiger

A strong brand asset run competently rather than exceptionally, with value leaking at two specific, fixable points. A globally iconic identity and assured navigation.

Working. A mobile build far better than its type suggests: only the hero paint fails, with perfect layout stability.

Not working. A discount-first homepage that buries the heritage proposition below a fold, and that slow hero image.

56_{/100}

10. SKIMS

The most brand-valuable business in the set running one of the two least stable mobile experiences in it.

Working. A category-defining proposition, genuinely strong intimates merchandising, and sharp, ownable copy.

Not working. The least stable mobile experience in the review, the layout shifting by its full height as the page loads. The brand customers love is not the experience the browser delivers.

What each measure separated.

The ranked table shows where each brand finished. This is why. Each measure below names what it found across the ten, and who came top and bottom on it.

01 Proposition and Brand Clarity

In three seconds, with the sound off, does the site say what the brand is, who it is for, and why it is different?

The brands that proved their positioning beat the brands that only asserted it. Finisterre and SKIMS led: one signals a certified, sustainable outdoor brand from the first screen, the other states a clear commercial idea, solutions for every body, and lives it through inclusive sizing and shade ranges. ASOS sat at the bottom. A business that once owned twenty-something fashion now greets a first-time visitor with a discount banner and no discernible point of view.

Finisterre	8
SKIMS	8
AllSaints	7
Passenger	7
Boden	7
Gymshark	7
Sweaty Betty	7
Reiss	6
Tommy Hilfiger	6
ASOS	4

02 Experience and Merchandising

Can the customer find, browse and decide with ease, and does the merchandising work like a shop rather than a database?

Finisterre stood alone at the top. It merchandises the way a good store does: filter by named product range, add to basket and choose a size without leaving the grid, compare products side by side. Most of the field sat a rung lower, presenting product competently but doing little to guide the choice. Where a grid was a wall of tiles with no editorial hand, the score reflected it.

Finisterre	8
AllSaints	7
Gymshark	7
Passenger	6
Boden	6
Reiss	6
ASOS	6
Sweaty Betty	6
Tommy Hilfiger	6
SKIMS	6

03 Persuasion and Buyer Journey

Does the journey build desire and remove doubt, or does it lean on manufactured urgency?

The brands that reassured outsourced the brands that just discounted. Finisterre led with named customer reviews at the point of decision and a genuine pre-purchase FAQ. Most of the field clustered just behind, with credible social proof and real decision tools. The recurring weakness across the group was over-reliance on blanket promotion, a permanent sale trains the customer to wait rather than to trust.

Finisterre	7
AllSaints	6
Passenger	6
Boden	6
Gymshark	6
Sweaty Betty	6
Reiss	5
ASOS	5
Tommy Hilfiger	5
SKIMS	5

04 Checkout and Friction

How much friction stands between deciding to buy and being able to?

Finisterre led by making its payment options impossible to miss: the full set, including buy-now-pay-later and the express wallets, is visible before the customer even reaches checkout, which removes a moment of doubt for the shopper who needs a particular method. Elsewhere the checkouts were sound but quieter, giving the customer less reassurance up front that their way to pay is there.

Finisterre	6
AllSaints	6
Passenger	6
Boden	6
Gymshark	6
Reiss	6
ASOS	6
Sweaty Betty	5
Tommy Hilfiger	5
SKIMS	5

05 Performance OBJECTIVE

How stable, fast and responsive the page is on a real mobile phone, in the hands of real customers.

This is where reputation and reality parted most sharply. Passenger, the least famous name in the review, delivered the fastest and most stable mobile experience in it. SKIMS and Sweaty Betty, two of the most celebrated, delivered the two worst: pages that lurch and reflow as they load, on the device where most of their customers shop. The dividing line was not heavy technology but disciplined engineering. Tommy Hilfiger runs a heavy build and holds rock-steady; others run similar builds and fall apart.

Passenger	9
AllSaints	8
ASOS	6
Boden	5
Reiss	5
Tommy Hilfiger	5
Finisterre	4
Gymshark	4
Sweaty Betty	2
SKIMS	2

06 SEO Readiness OBJECTIVE

How ready the site is to be found in organic search, before a penny of media is spent.

A close band, split mostly by how the pages are built. The brands whose product content loads as ordinary web pages are the easier for Google to find; the brands that hide it behind extra code make the search engine work harder to see it. Reiss finished lowest, a premium label held back by a platform that buries its content this way. SKIMS lost ground to a basic fault: FAQ links on the UK site point back to US pages.

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07 Copy and Voice

Is the writing distinctive and ownable, or interchangeable fashion-retail filler?

The best writing came from opposite ends of the tonal range. Sweaty Betty sells calm competence in prose that refuses to hype itself; Finisterre runs a named-range system with real character. Both are unmistakably themselves. At the foot, Reiss and ASOS write correctly and forgettably, with no voice a reader would recognise with the logo removed.

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One argument, evidenced ten ways.

The rankings that crown retail websites answer a different question from the one that governs whether a customer completes a purchase. Across these ten brands, the order produced by commercial experience was close to the opposite of the order fame would predict.

The two highest scores went to Finisterre and Passenger, neither a household name, because each built an experience where every part supports the sale. Several of the most celebrated brands in the set, brands an aesthetic ranking would place at the top, sat in the fifties, held there by specific and fixable faults in the experience beneath the brand.

The most useful reading is not the single point of difference between one score and the next. Two brands can share a total and leak in entirely different places. SKIMS and Sweaty Betty both scored in the mid-fifties, one on the strength of a category-defining proposition undercut by an unstable page, the other on the strength of the best copy in the review undercut by the same. The score names the gap; the measures name where it sits.

A digital experience is a system. Excellence in one part of it does not compensate for failure in another, and the customer meets the whole system at once, on a phone, in a few seconds, long before they meet the brand the way its owners imagine it.

The evidence standard is absolute. Observed gets credited. Unobserved does not. Unknown stays unknown.

The Index does not measure commercial performance, and does not claim to. It measures the observable experience through which commercial performance has to happen. It does not include commercial diagnosis, organic search performance, paid media, or the physical-and-digital store estate, which need data beyond the URL and are the territory of a full Barking Cat Review. This is Edition One. The Index will return.

Every brand, every measure.

The complete record. The total is out of 100, built from seven weighted measures. Performance and SEO Readiness are the two objective measures.

#	BRAND	PROP	EXP	PERS	CHECK	PERF	SEO	COPY	TOTAL
1	Finisterre	8	8	7	6	4	7	8	69
2	AllSaints	7	7	6	6	8	7	7	67
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6	Reiss	6	6	5	6	5	5	5	59
7	ASOS	4	6	5	6	6	7	5	58
7	Sweaty Betty	7	6	6	5	2	6	8	58
9	Tommy Hilfiger	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	57
10	SKIMS	8	6	5	5	2	5	7	56

Performance is drawn from real-world mobile field data over the 28 days to 1 August 2026. All other measures read from the live sites on 3 August 2026. Checkout is scored on the observable path only, with no transaction placed.

THE UNCOMFORTABLE READ

“All fur coat and no knickers.”

An old saying, and the shortest summary of what the Index keeps finding: reputation on the surface, the commercial experience underneath telling a different story.

BARKING CAT · DIAGNOSIS BEFORE SOLUTIONS

