

MailOnline: Designing a global success

Project
MailOnline Website Redesign

Category 3
Digital

Sub category 3.1
Website

Client
The Daily Mail Group

Agency
Brand42 Ltd

For Publication



Designing a Global Success: MailOnline grows from No.3 in the UK to No.1 in the world

Brand42 was commissioned by MailOnline to review the visual design, user interface and user experience of its existing website in 2007. The overall objective was simple: to make the MailOnline the UK's number one newspaper website. In-depth user research, extensive testing and feedback, and a thorough overhaul of the information architecture and the online brand proposition, led to a re-launch in May 2008, with the following results:

Audience

Unique browsers (UVs) have increased more than fivefold, from 18.7m in 2008 to 91.6m a month (May 2012, ABCe)

Revenue

Online revenue has rapidly grown from £4.5m in 2008 to £25m in 2012 (DMGT annual reports)

Monthly UK brand advertising has grown 214% from March 2010 to March 2012 (£1.3m) (MailOnline accounts)

Brand awareness and market growth

MailOnline is now the world's most popular online newspaper website, recently overtaking the New York Times and subsequently dominating the US market (Comscore, March 2012)

Confidence in the design has seen the MailOnline roll out a US edition of the website adhering to the original design templates and information architecture set by Brand42.

“Brand42 not only understand the technical requirements and limitations of the medium, but also the fantastic possibilities for user engagement and interaction.” — James Bromley, Managing Director, MailOnline.

18.7
Million in 2008



91.6
Million in 2012
(Monthly Unique Browsers)

Project Overview

Outline of project brief

Brand42 worked intensively with MailOnline to define a brief and to challenge expectations of what could be achieved with the re-launch of the MailOnline website, focusing specifically on the design of the user interface and user experience. Key objectives were as follows

- **Make the website the number one UK news platform**
- **Enhance the user experience, maximising editorial and imagery**
- **Engage with and appeal to a younger, web-savvy audience encouraging interaction and comment**

What arose from this process was a root-and-branch critique of the existing online offer, which was dated, cluttered and word heavy, and lacked a proper hierarchy of content.

Furthermore, research revealed a demographic split was beginning to emerge between print and online; in order to maintain its market position, the Daily Mail urgently needed to appeal to a younger, less traditionally print-focused audience.

Background

Dailymail.co.uk was originally the website for the Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday publications, featuring limited content from those titles. It was, in effect, a digest of the print versions, and as such featured very restricted interactivity such as social functionality and debate. In terms of market share, it was some way behind the then leaders in online newspaper websites, namely the guardian.co.uk and the Times Online.

There were also difficulties to overcome from a production perspective: the existing content management system (CMS) did not work effectively, as it lacked flexibility of content layout, was slow to update, and did not allow the editors to change content quickly and easily.



Before re-design



After re-design

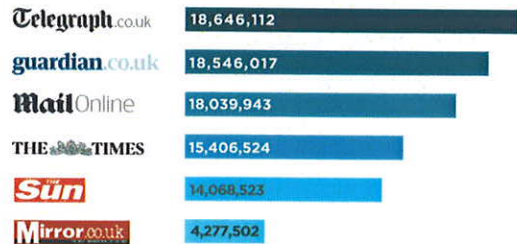
Overview of the market

Print journalism has over the past decade been in a state of flux. Print media has been in a long-term gradual decline, as digital media takes progressively more of both the readers' time and attention, and the advertisers' budgets. In parallel with this development, the average age of newspaper readers has been increasing, as younger consumers defect to online news media.

The challenge for the MailOnline was to reflect the brand attributes and qualities of the print version, while simultaneously creating a distinctive identity for the online presence. The process of design-driven online innovation meant learning to exploit to the maximum the possibilities of Web 2.0 and user engagement through interactivity. In doing so, the Daily Mail can ensure its continued relevance to its existing audience, while at the same time attracting younger readers in a crowded and fast-moving competitive landscape.

The result of the re-launch was that the MailOnline was able within a relatively short space of time to leapfrog the competition and to transform itself into a news site which is now globally recognised as a huge success in terms of market share and user engagement.

Before Launch Statistics



No. of Unique Users
ABCe stats April 2008

News

(Crowded market)



Magazine

(Opportunity)



Outline of the design solution

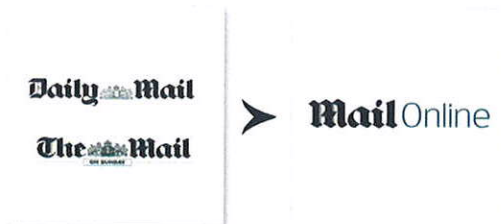
The design solutions developed by our selves, Brand42, in close collaboration with Martin Clarke, Publisher, MailOnline, outlined the following opportunities:

Reaching a younger audience

We defined a new design language to unify the content pages and project a more cohesive brand identity. We accomplished this by combining the Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday, developing the new MailOnline brand. The result retained the heritage of the newspapers' identities while introducing a more contemporary, digital presence.

We tapped in to a younger more web savvy audience; focusing on optimizing the potential use through social media platforms.

We created a clear, colour-coded branding system for each individual channel page, which not only gave the medium a revitalized look but allowed the user to know where they are on the site;



Outline of the design solution

Create a Rich Visual Experience

We created a radically different information architecture, allowing more flexible entry points and journeys through the site (in June 2011, 53% of visits do not arrive at the site via the home page, but rather one of the article pages);

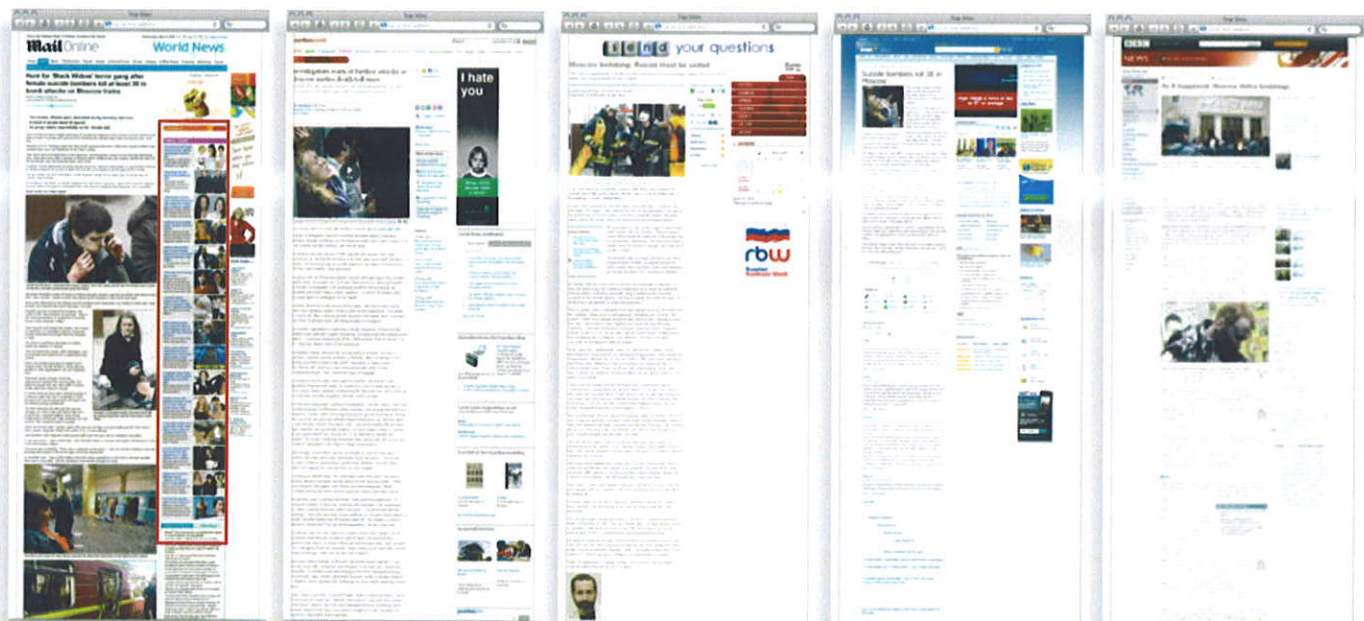
We anticipated higher broadband take-up and used this to increase the visual richness of the site by means of many more and larger images;

We decided to create a new, much more user-friendly, flexible and responsive content management system for the editors and journalists;

We created a set of highly-optimised (SEO) page templates (now numbering over 200) which enable linking of stories and prevent 'dead-end' pages;



How it's Different



MailOnline

guardian.co.uk

telegraph.co.uk

msn.co.uk

bbc.co.uk

Knowledge and Trends

We recognized and utilized the fact that the webpage does not conform to web media rules; e.g. the 'above the fold' myth of prime positioning (some pages now scroll down for a pixel-equivalent measure of several metres);

We created new opportunities for advertising exposure, by removing the advertising initially on the home page (to maintain loyalty with the existing user), but doubling the amount of advertising throughout the rest of the site.

We anticipated higher broadband take-up and used this to increase the visual richness of the site by means of many more and larger images;

Prior to launch, the site was beta tested for two months, allowing time for staff to familiarize themselves with the new structure and content management system, as well as inviting the general public to comment. By analysing the site using real time 'heat-mapping', findings showed that users continued scrolling and engaging in content all the way down the page – so the page template was lengthened considerably, thus the content was also rearranged in accordance to the testing.

Height of an average
British Male

1.776
metres

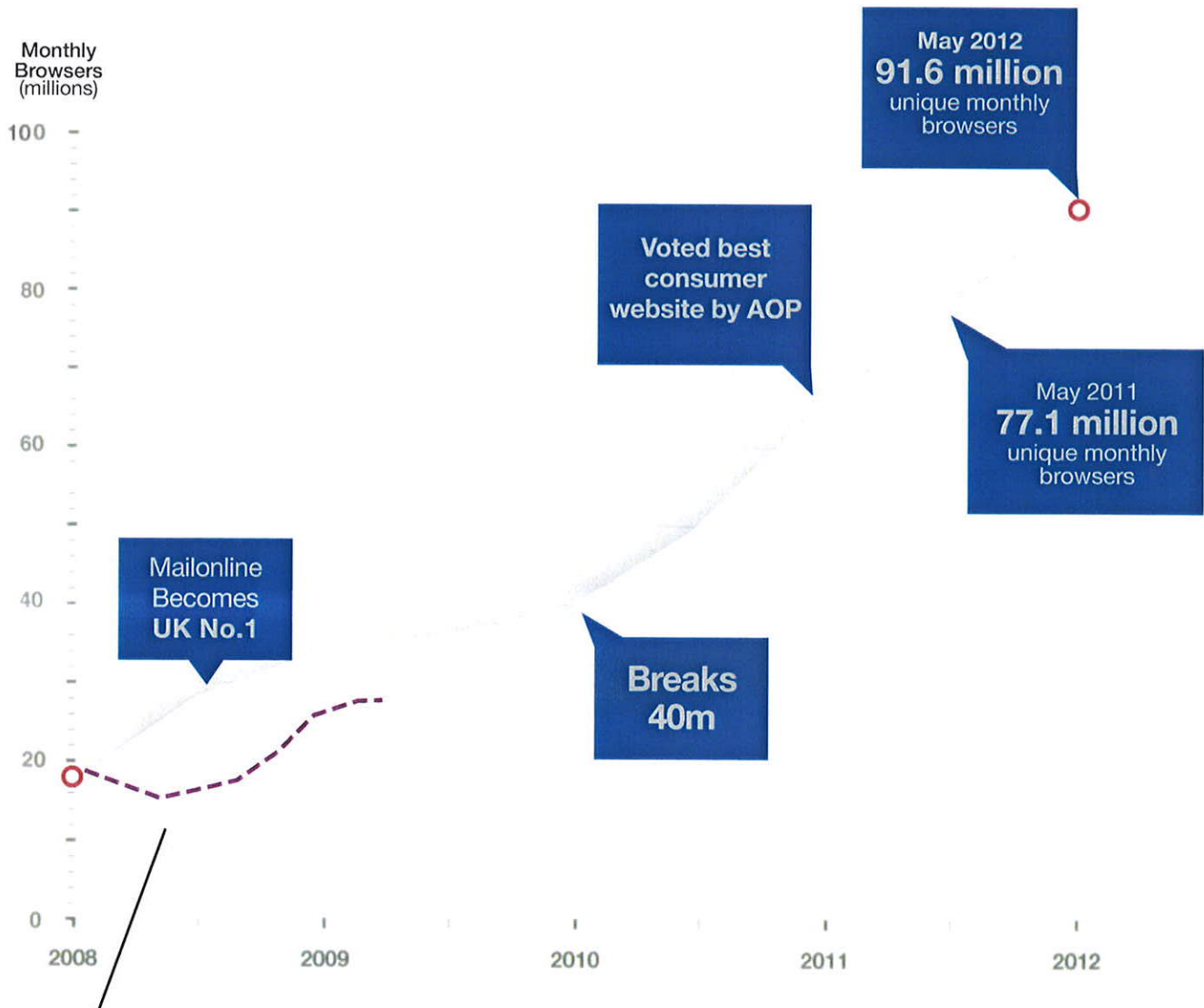


Depth of the
MailOnline
homepage

— 5.16
metres
13.567 pixels

Summary of results

The re-design and re-launch of the Daily Mail website as MailOnline has achieved the client's primary objective of establishing itself as the number one newspaper website in the UK and has now surpassed this by becoming No.1 in the world; it now dominates a range of media categories, being top of the list for unique visitors per month in both the 'TV and Showbiz' and 'Beauty, Fashion and Style' channels, according to comScore (March 2011).



This 'dipped' pattern is what is normally expected after a new site is launched, due to users feeling unfamiliar or not liking the new layout and losing search links.

Summary of results

The re-design and re-launch has met the MailOnline's key objective: to make it the UK's number one newspaper website. This assertion is supported by a wealth of evidence from independent web research and metrics organisations including ABC and comScore



Global Monthly UVs *ComScore Unified Worldwide January 2012*



Summary of results

Unique browsers have increased more than fivefold, from 18.7m to 91.6m a month (May 2012, ABCe)

MailOnline is now the world's most popular online newspaper website, recently overtaking the New York Times subsequently dominating the US market (Comscore, March 2012)

MailOnline now has 34% more regular users than its nearest UK rival, Guardian.co.uk (ABCe)

Average dwell time increased from 3 minutes for the previous site to over 6 minutes in 2011 (ABCe)

Online revenue has rapidly grown to £25m in 2012 (DMGT annual reports). (NY Times ad revenue fell 2.3% to \$48.5m in first quarter 2012, Trinity Mirror revenue fell 1.1% to £34.5m, 2011)

Monthly revenue has grown from £750,000 October 2009 to £2.1m, March 2012 (MailOnline accounts)

Monthly UK brand advertising has grown 214% from March 2010 to March 2012 (£1.3m) (MailOnline accounts)

Rest of the World monthly revenue has increased by 367% from April 2009 to March 2012 (£140,000)

MailOnline's TV & Showbiz channel has a higher reach than any other UK entertainment news including BBC and MSN and its Femail channel dominates all UK Beauty/Fashion sites such as Marieclaire.co.uk and Cosmopolitan.co.uk (Comscore, March 2011)

Many new opportunities for audience engagement and feedback have been established, such as Have your say, debate pages, polls and comment sharing and rating

NB: The difference between monthly UVs for the ComScore and ABCe statistics are due to the fact that ComScore measure their statistics based on unique users aged 15 and over and their browsing patterns. ABCe audits unique users recorded on server data supplied by publishers themselves.

Monthly UK brand
advertising has grown

214%

between March 2010
and March 2012

Online Annual Revenue

£4.5
million 2008



£25
million 2012

What the media says about MailOnline

'Even if you go to it (Mail Online) for the news, your head is pulled across to the Femail Today, celebrity stuff down the side and you just can't resist opening those boxes.'

BBC Radio 4 interview with columnist Stephen Glover and John Burns, NYTimes London Bureau Chief

'There is a panel on the right hand side of the page (packed with salacious celebrity stories) which works extremely hard to entice readers.'

The Drum

'An average Mail Online front page can contain around 260 stories. It uses large pictures (often 636 pixels or more in width), and story headlines are long - often 20 words. It's about making stories more "clickable".'

Stuart Miles, Pocket-Lint

'A series of large images, one below the other, interrupted by a few lines of text, is a successful staple of many MailOnline articles.'

'There are plenty more pictures in the right-hand side column, which is a series of celebrity stories promoted in a few words and an enticing image.'

Brian Wheeler, BBC

FEMAIL TODAY

► A Posh style playdate: Victoria Beckham chaperoned by her little fashionista Romeo... on working away-day to Paris
He loves his fashion!



► Is Beckham Olympics bound? David fails to flash a smile at the airport as he catches an international flight
A surprise U-turn by bosses?



► Breast of friends: Rita Ora poses for a very cheeky snap with two female pals
Joking about in a two piece Wonder Woman bikini



► Action girl Avril Lavigne shows off her figure in a green bikini as she goes snorkelling
Stays in shape by keeping active



► She's not your average tourist! Rihanna explores St Tropez in a bandeau bikini top and white crochet skirt
Headed straight to the shops



► Too tired for loving! Exhausted Little Mix girls would rather sleep than snuggle up to their pop star boyfriends
We believe you Perrie Edwards!



► Bold colour, high waists and plenty of prints: Best of Miami Swim Fashion Week and the bikinis you'll actually want to wear...



► Golden girl! Angela Simmons shows her off curvy figure in a metallic bikini
A day of sun, sea and sand at Miami beach



► 'Just when you think she couldn't possibly get any cuter!' Una Healy posts a pretty picture of her daughter Aoife Belle to Twitter
Redhead like her mum



Other influencing factors

Our design led approach allowed flexible content management for editors/journalists and optimised use, by the consumer, via the various social media platforms.

This meant that the Mail Group has spent nothing on marketing and promotion of the site, preferring to let the readers do it for them.

A combination of debate provoking content, easy-to-find and easy-to-use social networking tools encourages readers to spread content across social network channels and expand audience reach.

The article page design encourages debate which drives social engagement around reader comments which in turn boosts SEO, article rankings and builds brand awareness.

Today the MailOnline comments and discussion boards attract thousands of comments daily and have generated an almost cult-like following of users.

Research resources

ABCe

ComScore

Daily Mail Group internal web analytics

BBC

‘MailOnline breaks just about every web design rule in the book. You don’t have to spend a lot of time working out how the site works, it’s very simple and the traffic figures speak for themselves.’

Internet usability consultant Jakob Nielsen

‘From the start, our programme was very demanding – we work to editorial deadlines, and we needed a design partner that could adapt to our pace.’

Brand42 were able to work with our head of online development and our existing teams to evolve the designs rapidly, and produce prototypes along the way, which are hugely valuable.

They not only understand the technical requirements and limitations of the medium, but also the fantastic possibilities for user engagement and interaction.’

James Bromley, Managing Director,
MailOnline.