

Experience review from Foolproof

Test drive booking online

How car manufacturers
are failing to support customers
online and what to do about it

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1. About Foolproof

Foolproof is an experience design consultancy. We gather consumer insight and help our clients design and deploy more valuable customer experiences in digital channels. Our mission is to find the win-win between what customers want and what businesses want from digital.

We are based in the UK, but busy all over the world. Our clients include famous names from the travel, financial, media, utilities and automotive sectors

2. Summary

Given the importance of the test drive within the new car sales journey, our review of online booking systems raises some worrying questions. Just how serious is the industry about creating a viable multichannel experience? How much damage to brand reputation do poor web experiences create?

Basic usability problems can be found on every manufacturer's online test drive booking system. It's likely that every year these systems push many thousands of frustrated potential customers back into traditional channels for booking. By doing so, they threaten immediate sales as well as creating a long-term drag on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Foolproof evaluated 32 manufacturer test drive booking systems in the UK using 12 principles developed from published best practice and our own user research. From this, the following scored highest:

1. Volkswagen
2. Honda
3. Renault

The lowest scores were for:

30. Alfa Romeo
31. Toyota
32. Smart

But even the brands at the top of our list failed to achieve a consistently high-quality user experience, falling short against a number of our benchmark principles.

In our view, manufacturers have made the mistake of looking only at each other for benchmark standards in user experience. In reality, it is other industries which are developing the standards that consumers are coming to see as the norm. Brands such as Apple and Sainsbury's are raising the bar on how the web should work. Customers don't understand why the automotive industry isn't keeping up.

Our study looks at just one aspect of the digital customer experience. But it is enough to convince us that there is potential for significant competitive advantage for motor brands that engineer an improved user experience.

3. User experience

Foolproof evaluated 32 motor manufacturer websites, looking specifically at the user experience of test drive booking systems in the UK. Evaluation was based on 12 principles developed from published best practice and our own user research (these are listed in the appendix on page 12).

This section explores different aspects of the test drive booking process and looks at common usability problems that are found within it.

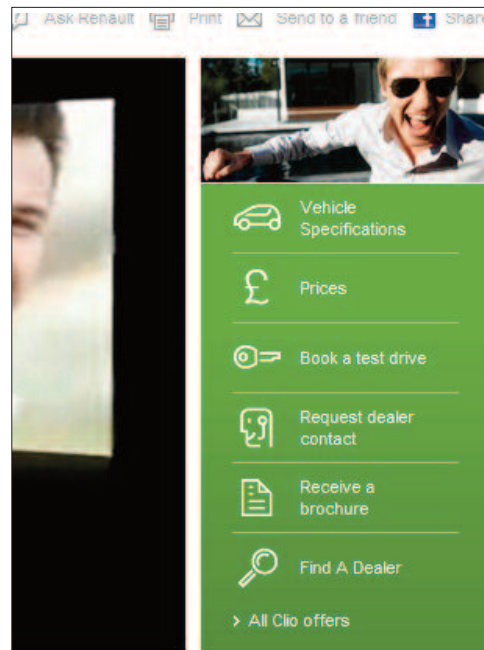
Finding the test drive booking form

Before customers can book a test drive, they must first find the booking function. Few customers, including those that have previously visited manufacturers' websites, are aware that a test drive can be booked online. Low awareness is the first barrier to use.

All manufacturers include a link from their homepage to a test drive booking form. The main navigation is another common location for a link to book a test drive, with three quarters of the websites surveyed featuring a link there.

Less common is a prominent link from individual model pages. This is a more logical location for the user, creating a link between the model they are interested in and the booking function.

Links to test drive booking functionality should be in all three positions described above to maximise awareness and convenience to site visitors.



Renault has a clear call to action on each of its model pages.

Selecting a model

Typically, the first stage of a test drive booking process is to select a model.

Only about a quarter of websites allow for multiple models to be chosen. This can be more difficult to design effectively, but it allows customers greater flexibility, especially when testing cars from manufacturers who have an extensive range.

It also helps to provide images of each car to ensure that customers pick the one they intend to test drive. This is particularly relevant for ranges with similar model names or numbers, such as the Peugeot 308, 3008, 407 and 4007.

If possible, allow customers to pick a specific car to test drive. If this is not technically feasible, allow customers to provide preferences, such as whether the vehicle has automatic or manual transmission.

Manufacturers should avoid allowing customers to specify too much detail if individual models cannot be booked. If the form merely sends a request for a test drive to the dealer, the additional options may raise expectations that the exact model will be available. If it is not, there will be a greater moment of negative impact when the customer visits the dealership and finds that this implied promise has been broken.

Choosing where

Surprisingly, a third of manufacturers don't allow customers to choose at which dealership their test drive will take place. Of those that do offer the option, over 80% provide some form of search to locate dealerships. Manufacturers should provide both of these features.

It should not be assumed that customers will test drive a car at their nearest showroom. Nor should it be assumed that the user knows the location or franchise name of their local dealership.

When searching for a dealership, several alternatives should be given. We also recommend providing the distance from the searched location and a map of the nearest showrooms.

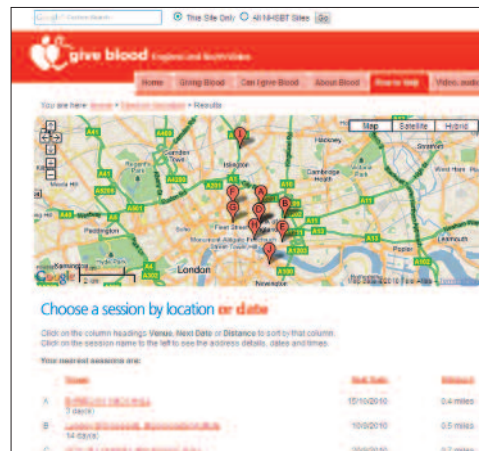
Very few manufacturers currently show dealer locations on a map, an extremely common feature for these kind of locators in other sectors. For instance, the National Blood Service presents users with a map to illustrate their list of nearest centres.

Distance may not always be the sole reason why users pick a location and is often not enough information to base a decision on. Other factors such as proximity to transport links and direction from the searched location can be determined by looking at a map, but are difficult to effectively convey in a standard list.

BMW's very specific request form may deter some users who have not decided which exact model they require.



Mazda is one of the few that shows dealer locations on a map.



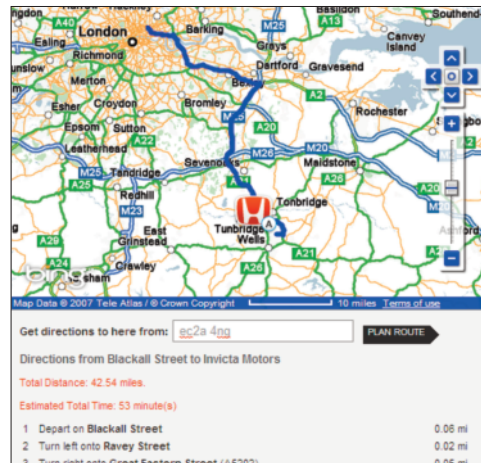
The National Blood Service makes it easy to choose where to book an appointment.

Confirmation

Once a test drive is booked, manufacturers should set clear expectations for what will happen next. Websites should explain how and when the customer will be contacted, if at all.

Of the manufacturers who call or email customers, only four gave a clear timeframe for this, with many simply opting for "soon". We recommend setting a response time expectation of no more than 48 hours. Any longer and customers may opt to simply call the showroom first.

It is common for users to want to print out confirmation screens and to bring them along to a test drive. Manufacturers should present customers with a clear, printable summary of their booking along with any relevant information, such as the address or a map of the chosen dealership, on the confirmation screen.



Honda provides directions to the showroom directly in the confirmation page.

Information about the test drive

On almost all manufacturer websites, there is a lack of practical information about what will happen on the day of the test drive. In our research, customers have expressed confusion about several aspects of test drives, including what they must bring along (driving licence, insurance), who can accompany them (family, friends), where they will be allowed to drive and how long it will last.

Manufacturers must not assume that customers are familiar with the procedure and requirements for test driving a car. A significant number of customers will not have been on a test drive for several years, if at all. Not providing this type of information is one of the main reasons customers will phone a showroom to book a test drive instead of doing so online.

Request response rates

In a separate study¹ conducted by Multi-M/IT, researchers attempted to make more than 2,500 test drive and brochure requests online. The survey found that 63% of test drive requests received no contact within four days and 45% had still not received a reply after two weeks. What is more alarming is that the best performing manufacturer responded to only 57% of requests, while the worst came in at 25%.

If this study accurately reflects the response rate of test drive requests, then this is a significant problem for the industry. If sales leads are being lost in manufacturers' internal processes, then this will seriously undermine the value of online test drive request systems.

When customers request a test drive, a promise is made by the manufacturer to contact them. The implications for customers' perception of, and trust in, a brand may be significant.

¹AM Online, 8 March 2010, <http://www.am-online.com/news/story/ignoring-test-drive-requests-cost-dealers-sales-leads/42901705>

4. Best and worst performing manufacturers

This section gives some commentary on the best and poorest performing sites in our review.

Best performers

1. **Volkswagen** offers direct booking of test drives for showrooms that support it. Where booking is offered, customers can select a one hour slot in a specific car, the narrowest timeframe of any manufacturer. This follows best practice commonly seen elsewhere in online supermarket delivery booking.

However, there are no prominent calls to action on model pages to prompt people to book a test drive and only one model can be booked at a time. Although it has its share of usability issues, this is the best process we reviewed.

Aug	Thu 05	Fri 06	Sat 07	Sun 08	Mon 09	Tue 10	W
08:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
09:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
10:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
16:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
18:00	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Volkswagen offers time selection in a format that is becoming familiar to web users.

2. **Honda** also allows customers to book a specific car at a chosen time and place. There are links on model pages to test drive booking and the confirmation page is one of the better designed examples we saw, with directions to the dealership on the same screen.

It has several usability issues though, including calls to action appearing below the fold and a two-column form layout that can cause confusion.

3. **Renault** features prominent calls to action on its model pages and allow customers to optionally specify more about the car they are booking. The number of steps to book a test drive and progress through the process is also clearly labelled.

The compact form is functional, but its visual design is poor, especially the dealer selection and calendar. Error messages are rudimentary and its two-column form layout is not ideal.

Worst performers

30. **Alfa Romeo** does not allow customers to pick where or when they would like to test drive a car and its multiple model selection checkboxes also function as radio buttons, contradicting the copy directly above them.

Test drive booking requires gender to be given, although it is not clear why this information is necessary. Alfa Romeo also feature three different presentations of its own brand name in the same page.

31. **Toyota** allows customers to request where and when they would like to test drive a car, but the form's usability could be improved. The visual hierarchy isn't clear, the layout is confusing and mandatory fields are denoted using a non-standard method.

Dealerships are ordered by franchise name rather than location and this can only be cross referenced by navigating to a separate page. It is hard to believe that the world's largest car manufacturer would present such a frustrating customer experience online.

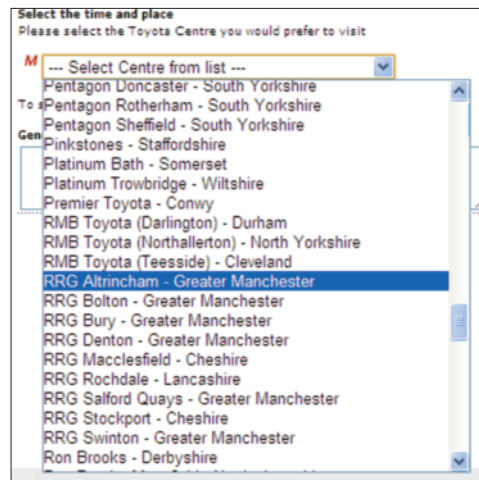
32. **Smart** has an unnecessary landing page before the request form, which provides no useful information. There are many superfluous questions, including the customer's current car registration number and date of birth. How this information is being used is not clear. While such fields are optional, they may make users suspicious of the intended use of such information.



Models of interest*

Giulietta 159 Spider Brera 159 Sportwagon MiTo

Alfa Romeo breaks standard design conventions by using checkboxes as radio buttons.



Select the time and place
Please select the Toyota Centre you would prefer to visit

M --- Select Centre from list ---

To

Gen

- Pentagon Doncaster - South Yorkshire
- Pentagon Rotherham - South Yorkshire
- Pentagon Sheffield - South Yorkshire
- Pinkstones - Staffordshire
- Platinum Bath - Somerset
- Platinum Trowbridge - Wiltshire
- Premier Toyota - Conwy
- RMB Toyota (Darlington) - Durham
- RMB Toyota (Northallerton) - North Yorkshire
- RMB Toyota (Teesside) - Cleveland
- RRG Altrincham - Greater Manchester
- RRG Bolton - Greater Manchester
- RRG Bury - Greater Manchester
- RRG Denton - Greater Manchester
- RRG Macclesfield - Cheshire
- RRG Rochdale - Lancashire
- RRG Salford Quays - Greater Manchester
- RRG Stockport - Cheshire
- RRG Swinton - Greater Manchester
- Ron Brooks - Derbyshire

Toyota assumes that customers already know the name of its dealership.

5. Conclusion

After our review, one key question arises: do automotive brands really want customers to book test drives online?

The answer to this question appears to be no. Most online test drive booking systems have:

- Poor visibility and promotion on sites
- Poor usability
- Requests for seemingly irrelevant personal information
- Poor service support

Commercially, test drive requests are probably more valuable if they follow the traditional person-to-person approach over the phone or during a showroom visit. Dealers are better able to screen and prioritise test drive requests if they can talk directly to the prospect and assess their needs and likelihood to purchase.

And yet manufacturers seem to recognise that online test drive booking is now conventionally accepted as a requirement of their web experience. Every mainstream manufacturer offers test drive booking on their site.

Manufacturers need to progress from this uneasy compromise. Either remove online booking tools or commit their organisations to more fully support them and improve the online user experience.

The manufacturers who commit to the second option have the opportunity to preserve their brand experience and put pressure on competitors who can't keep up.

If you would like to discuss this report in more detail, or if you would like to explore any implications our findings might have for your organisation, please contact Abby Brook-Carter (abby.brook-carter@foolproof.co.uk).

6. Appendix – Design principles

The following criteria were used to evaluate test drive booking systems:

1. Is there a link to test drive booking from the homepage?
2. Is there a link to test drive booking in the main navigation?
3. Is there a link to test drive booking on model pages?
4. Can multiple cars be selected to test drive?
5. Is automatic address lookup, based on postcode, available?
6. Is current vehicle asked for?
7. Is expected purchase date asked for?
8. Are users able to select when a test drive will take place?
9. How precise a time slot is available?
10. Are users able to select where a test drive will take place?
11. Is a dealer search available?
12. Are clear expectations of when the customer will be contacted present?

Key
■ Principle met
■ Principle partially met
■ Principle not met

Manufacturer	Link from homepage?	Link in main navigation?	Link on model page?	Can select multiple cars?	Automatic address lookup?	Current vehicle?	Expected purchase date?	Able to select time/date?	Precision of timeslot	Able to select dealer?	Dealer search?	Expectation of contact time on feedback?
Alfa Romeo	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No		No		Yes
Audi	Yes	Yes, drop down	Yes	No	Yes	Required	Required	Yes	Month	Yes	No	No
BMW	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Optional	Optional	No		Yes	Yes	No
Chevrolet	Yes	No	No	No	No	Optional	Optional	Yes	Half day	Yes	Yes	No
Citroen	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Required	Yes	Half day	No		No
Daihatsu	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Required	Required	No		No		No
Fiat	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No		No		No
Ford	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Required	No		Yes	Yes	No
Honda	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Required	Yes	2 hours	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hyundai	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Optional	Required	No		Yes	Yes	No
Jaguar	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Optional	Required	No		Yes	Yes	No
Jeep	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No		No		No
Kia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Optional	Required	No		No		No
Land Rover	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Required	No		Yes	Yes	No
Lexus	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Optional	Optional	Yes	Half day	Yes	Yes	No
Maserati	No	No	No	No	No	Required	Required	No		No		No
Mazda	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	n/a	No	No	No		Yes	Yes	48 hours
Mercedes-Benz	Yes	Yes, drop down	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No		Yes	Yes	No
Mini	Yes	Yes, drop down	Yes	No	Yes	Optional	Optional	No		Yes	Yes	No
Mitsubishi	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Required	No		Yes	Yes	No
Nissan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Required	No		No		No
Peugeot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	No	No	No		No		No
Renault	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	2 hours	Yes	Yes	No
SEAT	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Optional	Optional	No		Yes	Yes	No
Skoda	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No		Yes	Yes	No
Smart	Yes	Yes, drop down	No	No	Yes	Required	Required	No		Yes	No	No
Subaru	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No		No		No
Suzuki	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No		No		No
Toyota	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Required	No	Yes	Half day	Yes	No	No
Vauxhall	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Required	No		Yes	Yes	No
Volkswagen	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	1 hour	Yes	Yes	Yes
Volvo	Yes	Yes, drop down	Yes	No	No	No	No	No		Yes	No	No