

# Surveys highlights growth of eCommerce

## Firms urged to keep pace with the market

The first Northern Ireland-wide eCommerce survey has revealed that new investment within eCommerce is becoming increasingly important for business in Northern Ireland.

Undertaken by Flint Studios in partnership with corporate law firm A&L Goodbody, the survey was completed by organisations from various sectors including Wholesale and Retail, Construction, Computers and Electronics, Lifestyle and Home, and Fashion and Beauty.

Jeremy Biggerstaff, Managing Director at Flint Studios, a Belfast-based web solutions agency which specialises in results-driven web design, development and digital marketing, said:

“With just over 260 responses to the survey, the results reflect the opinions of businesses of varying sizes across a range of industries.

“This is the first time the current state of the eCommerce industry has been looked at in depth and the findings will assist those al-

ready working within the sector and those looking to incorporate online selling into their business strategy in the near future.

“With consumer behaviour continuing to focus on online buying, it’s really important for both b2c and b2b companies to move with the market and be enabled to sell their products and services online where their customers are. It’s therefore really encouraging to see the level of investment and planning to date in eCommerce solutions. It also shows however that there is plenty of potential for growth for companies who are not already online.”

Additional key findings from the survey include:

Northern Ireland eCommerce is overly reliant on Europe with sales at 96% overall selling mainly into the EU. North America, Australia and Asia deliver some sales to area at 25.24%, 20.39% and 16.5% of online traders respectively

30.1% of respondents have been operating within eCom-

merce for over nine years with almost 50% having operated within the sector for less than four years

Time commitment; investment required; and perceived knowledge deficit were identified as the three biggest barriers to eCommerce growth in Northern Ireland

Future plans for investment in eCommerce are dominated by new marketing tactics, web design & development and data analytics

The survey also identified that whilst there are a number of established players operating within eCommerce in Northern Ireland, it is still a growing sector with 17.48% utilising eCommerce for less than one year.

“Interestingly, many respondents noted the emergence of data analytics as a key tool to be invested in to advance their eCommerce strategy. This is positive to see local companies being smart with the IT data they hold in relation to customer journey, behaviour and preference.

“Whilst online security remained the biggest concern for entrants hoping to go online with over 47% of respondents believing this was a potential threat to their organisations, this dropped significantly with companies actually online.”

Mark Thompson, Corporate Partner at A&L Goodbody, said:

“The findings of this survey shine a light on the local dynamics of what is an increasingly competitive online landscape in Northern Ireland, providing useful context for those operating in the eCommerce space around how their behaviour compares to that of their peers.

“Whilst eCommerce can bring a wealth of opportunities for local companies wishing to sell their products or services online, it can also expose them to some risks. As an international law firm working closely with multinational corporations, both at home and abroad, we regularly encounter phishing cases,



Mark Thompson, Corporate Partner at A&L Goodbody with Jeremy Biggerstaff, Managing Director at Flint Studios

data breaches, fraud and even hacking, for example.

“By seeking the appropriate legal and technical expertise and implementing a few simple steps, however, companies can mitigate against these risks – enabling them to concentrate on maximising the many benefits that eCommerce can bring their businesses.”

Mr Biggerstaff added:

“The survey revealed that a lot of local companies are operating bespoke eCommerce solutions rather than established platforms such as Magento or Umbraco which are very advanced in terms of features and more suitable for a wide range of industries. This was surprising given how expensive bespoke solutions can

be in comparison, especially in the longer term.

“50% of respondents said they were satisfied with the performance of their eCommerce platform which is good but there’s definitely room for improvement. As a supplier of eCommerce solutions, whether that be using existing platforms or with a bespoke solution, the survey has painted a great picture of the industry which will allow us to develop our offering and ensure the market knows that we can help with the gaps in knowledge and expertise.”

To view the full survey report please visit [www.flintstudios.co.uk/ni-e-commerce-survey-2019](http://www.flintstudios.co.uk/ni-e-commerce-survey-2019) or contact the Flint Studios team on 028 9045 5554.