RDG

Online Ticket Sales
Mystery Shopping 2016

Report

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Contact Details
Vivek Thaker
Tel: 01727 735410

E-mail: vivek.thaker@esa-retail.co.uk

Contents

1.   Introduction

This report summarises the results of RDG's 2016 online mystery shopping survey. The sample, which included a total of 400 online ticket purchase transactions, encompassed all of the main TOC and third party ticketing websites, covered all the main types of tickets and was designed to be representative of current national online rail ticket purchase patterns.

All mystery shoppers that purchased a ticket were able to purchase the correct ticket, that is, when marked against the rail fares database, the ticket obtained was the most appropriate for their specific journey and travel scenario. This represents a 6% increase on the accuracy rate recorded in 2015 (94%) and a 3% increase on the same figure for 2014 (97%). As in previous years, strict screening procedures ensured that only mystery shoppers with no prior experience of the online mystery shopping programme were recruited; this is a critical measure taken to ensure the results are representative of the general population and are not subject to any biases caused by familiarity with the methodology of the current mystery programme. It is also worth noting that the mystery shoppers do not "mark their own work" – a different team from ESA, made familiar with the fares system by RDG, assess whether the mystery shoppers were able to find the most appropriate ticket online. The 100% success rate in 2016 suggests that buying tickets from websites is a very reliable option for customers.

The large majority of shoppers were satisfied with both the ease of finding information and the content of this information on ticket types and conditions, in addition to the general clarity of the information shown presented on screen. Those purchasing from Regional Operators' websites expressed the greatest satisfaction with the ease of finding information, with 86% of shoppers stating that they found it easy to find the information they needed versus 73% for the sample as a whole. Regional Operators also had the highest vote of confidence from shoppers, with all mystery shoppers buying from corresponding sites stating they were confident that they had bought the right ticket, without any risk of incurring a penalty.

In terms of satisfaction with the content and clarity of the information itself, Third Party Retailers had the most favourable ratings with a respective 94% and 97% of mystery shoppers using these websites being satisfied with the information on ticket types and conditions and clarity of information, as compared to 88% to 90% for the sample as a whole.

Satisfaction with the user interface of websites was also uniformly high, with the large majority of mystery shoppers indicating they were satisfied with the speed of their website, the level of site security when making their purchase and general ease of use. Interestingly, websites belonging to London and South East Operators tended to be significantly less satisfied on these measures than those belonging to other Operators. Furthermore, while mystery shoppers were generally happy to recommend the website they used to friends or family (with a high average 'recommend' score of 8 out of 10), those who had used London and South East Operator sites (7.5) were slightly less likely to do so than others.

On all measures of satisfaction, mystery shoppers purchasing tickets with a 'Two Together Railcard' appeared to be the least satisfied, although the sample size for these purchases was low, with 18 mystery shoppers buying 'Two Together' tickets. The following bullet points highlight where these ticket types suffered in terms of mystery shopper ratings:

- On 'Ease of Use' of the website, 18% of mystery shoppers buying tickets with a 'Two Together Railcard' said they found it 'Difficult' or 'Very Difficult' to find the information on ticket types and conditions as compared to about 7% for the sample as a whole.

- On 'Satisfaction with instructions', 14% of mystery shoppers buying tickets with a 'Two Together Railcard' said they were dissatisfied versus less than 6% of the sample as a whole.

- Similarly, for 'Recommending the website to friends or family' shoppers buying these ticket types provided a net 'recommend' score of 7.2 out of 10, which was moderate compared to 8.1 for the sample as a whole.

Despite the small sample size, these differences are statistically significant.

The mean transaction time for online purchases was less than 8 minutes, and a typical purchase involved viewing 7 individual web pages. Scenarios involving the purchase of tickets with a 'Senior Railcard' or 'Two Together Railcard' took the longest to complete, with most pages viewed. As expected, specific experience with buying rail tickets from websites correlated negatively with the amount of time it took to make a purchase. The more experienced an online user the mystery shopper was, the less time and number of web pages they would need to view in order to buy their ticket.

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2. Methodology

An annual research programme, designed to measure the accuracy of ticket retailing, has been carried out by ATOC/RDG since 1998. Initially the exercise focused solely on tickets sold at station ticket offices, but telesales and online research was introduced from 2002 and, reflecting changing patterns in purchase behaviour, the telesales channel was replaced by ticket vending machine (TVM) purchases in 2012.

Since 2013 the research, involving a mix of mystery shopping and customer satisfaction surveys, has been conducted by ESA Market Research.

This report focuses on the outcomes of the Online Mystery Shopping exercise.

2.1   Objectives

The key objective of the overall mystery shopping programme is to evaluate the accuracy of rail sector retailing; however, in the case of online (as well as TVM) sales, there is no direct personal involvement on the part of the retailer. For this reason, the exercise sought to determine the success of the mystery shopper, as a representative of the ticket buying public, to correctly navigate the website in order to purchase the correct and best value ticket for their particular travel scenario – the onus for success lying with the online retailer, not the mystery shopper/customer.

2.2   Methodology

The mystery shopping elements of the programme were conducted by mystery shoppers who are representative of the general ticket buying population and have no more knowledge of the railway or its fares than the average member of the public.

In order to ensure that the mystery shoppers did not build up an atypical degree of familiarity with the rail ticket websites, each shopper was able to complete no more than two online purchases.

Mystery shoppers were asked to record whether they felt confident that they had been sold the correct ticket for their given scenario. In addition to this self-evaluation however, the tickets were also 'marked' by ESA staff, fully trained in the use of the rail fares database, therefore providing a more accurate assessment as to whether the most appropriate ticket had been sold for that specific journey and travel scenario.

In addition, the mystery shoppers were asked to provide feedback on the look and feel of the website, any jargon that they encountered and any improvements that they would suggest.

The online mystery shopping fieldwork took place between 18th July and 27th September 2016.

The full questionnaire used in the survey is included as an appendix.

Unless otherwise stated, charts included in the report are based on the total sample of 400.

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2.3 Sample

The sample, which included a total of 400 online transactions, was designed by Line by Line Ltd with the objective of providing a sample of purchase scenarios that reflects the mix of actual online ticket purchases by the general public.

2.3.1 Websites

The sample included Operator websites, plus third party retailers as follows:

Retailer Category	Sample size
TOTAL TOCS	**235**
London and South East Operators	**50**
www.abelliogreateranglia.co.uk	5
www.chilternrailways.co.uk	5
www.londonmidland.com	10
www.southeasternrailway.co.uk	5
www.southernrailway.com	11
www.southwesttrains.co.uk	10
www.thameslinkrailway.com	4
Long Distance Operators	**145**
www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk	15
www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk	15
www.gwr.com	25
www.virgintrains.co.uk	50
www.virgintrainseastcoast.com	40
Regional operators	**40**
www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk	5
www.grandcentralrail.com	5
www.hulltrains.co.uk	5
www.northernrail.org	5
www.scotrail.co.uk	10
www.tpexpress.co.uk	10
Third Party retailers	**165**

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2.3.2 Scenarios

The scenarios used for this Online Mystery Shopping survey were as follows:

No.	Scenario Description	Sample Size
1	Cheapest, Two Weeks Ahead	155
2	Cheapest, Return Same Day	33
3	Cheapest, Single	31
4	Cheapest, Return 1 week later	30
5	First Class	28
6	Senior Railcard	26
7	Travelling with Children	14
8	16-25 Railcard	65
9	Two Together Railcard	18
Total		**400**

Mystery shoppers were further instructed regarding the means of ticket delivery/collection, as follows:

Ticket Delivery/Collection Method	Sample Size
Collected from ticket machine	301
Collected from ticket office	32
Delivered by post	30
Downloaded to print at home	37
Total	**400**

2.3.3 Weighting

Weighting was applied to the survey data to ensure the results were representative of actual 2015-16 patterns in respect of online ticket sale transactions by website and ticket type (scenario). The following results are based on this weighted survey data.

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3.   Detailed Findings

3.1   Length of Transaction

3.1.1 How Long in Total Did Your Ticket Purchase Take?

As per the previous two years, the average time taken for an online ticket purchase was under 10 minutes (7 minutes, 54 seconds) in 2016. Just under a third (32%) of mystery shoppers took less than 5 minutes to complete their purchase, whereas 11% took over 15 minutes.

In 2015, those purchasing via websites of Long Distance operators (LSE) had the shortest transactions times, while Regional Operators and Third Party retailers had the longest. In 2016, mystery shoppers using websites belonging to Regional Operators took the shortest amount of time to buy their ticket, with those buying from LSE websites taking considerably longer.
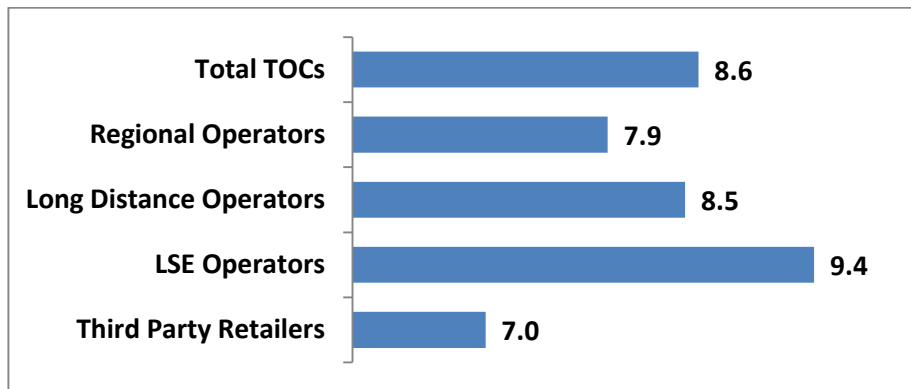

Figure 1 – Mean Transaction Time by Retailer Category

Purchases of 'Single' tickets were considerably quicker than others, although surprisingly the next quickest purchasing time was from shoppers who bought tickets that were for 'Travelling with Children'. Tickets with a 'Senior Railcard' purchase had the longest transaction times.
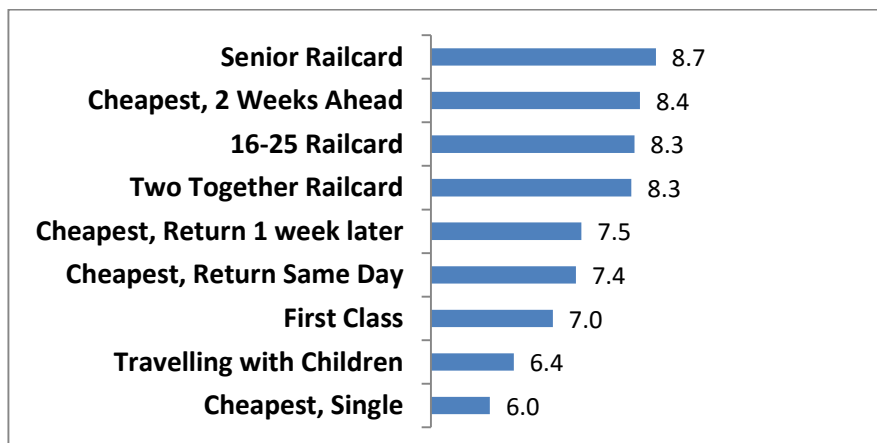

Figure 2 – Transaction Time by Scenario

Those least experienced with rail websites take more than twice as long to complete their transaction as those who are most experienced, i.e. shoppers who buy rail tickets online weekly.
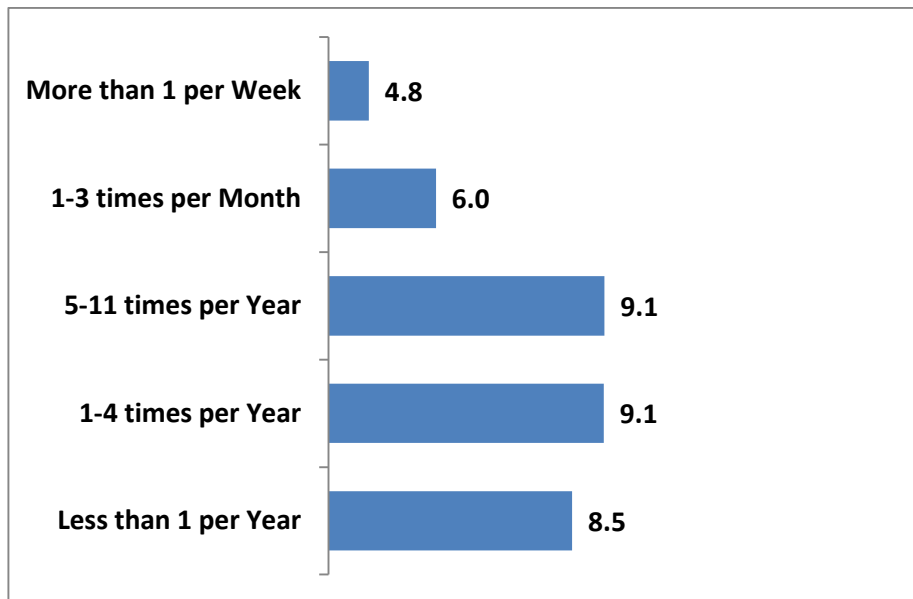

Figure 3 – Transaction Time by Frequency of Buying Rail Tickets Online

3.1.2 How Many Different Web Pages Did You Access to Complete Your Purchase?

Mystery shoppers viewed 7 different webpages, on average, before completing their ticket purchase (6.9 in 2015, 6.8 in 2014).

Consistent with the transaction time results, those purchasing third party retailers had to view the fewest number of webpages to complete their purchase.
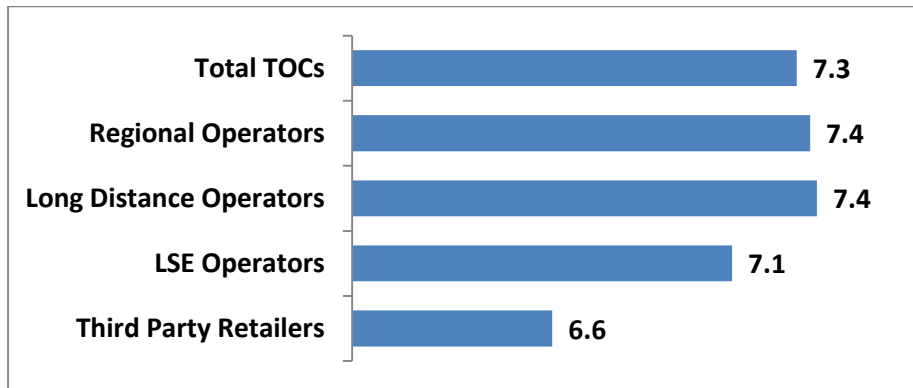
Total TOCs	7.3
Regional Operators	7.4
Long Distance Operators	7.4
LSE Operators	7.1
Third Party Retailers	6.6

Figure 4 – No. of Web Page Views by Retailer Category

Shoppers purchasing tickets with a 'Two Together Railcard' viewed considerably more webpages before finalising their purchase; indicating that this was the most complex online transaction. Those purchasing '16-25 Railcard' tickets, however, viewed the least number of webpages.
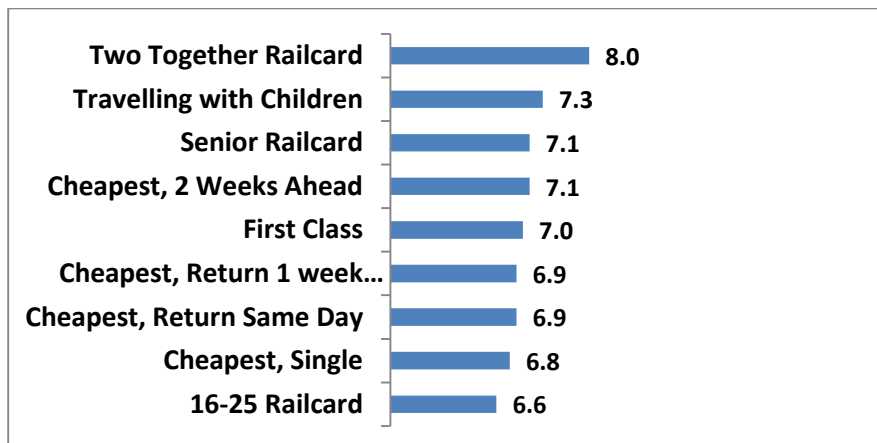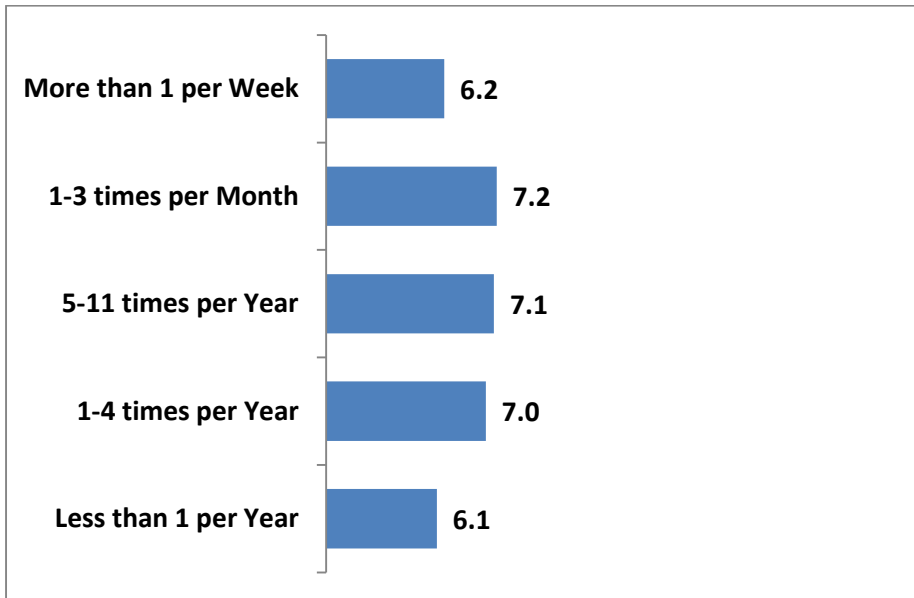
Two Together Railcard	8.0
Travelling with Children	7.3
Senior Railcard	7.1
Cheapest, 2 Weeks Ahead	7.1
First Class	7.0
Cheapest, Return 1 week…	6.9
Cheapest, Return Same Day	6.9
Cheapest, Single	6.8
16-25 Railcard	6.6

Figure 5 – No. of Web Page Views by Scenario

There is a correlation between the number of webpages viewed by shoppers and their experience of purchasing rail tickets online. Those with most experience, i.e. those purchasing rail tickets online more than once a week, were able to purchase in fewer steps, an average of 5 steps versus 7 steps for the sample as a whole.

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Figure 6 – No. of Web Page Views by Frequency of Buying Rail Tickets Online

More than 1 per Week: 6.2
1-3 times per Month: 7.2
5-11 times per Year: 7.1
1-4 times per Year: 7.0
Less than 1 per Year: 6.1

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3.1.3 How Many Times Did You Have to Go Back / Correct an Entry?

Instances of shoppers having to go back a web page or correct an entry were very rare, with the average number of reverting steps being less than 1 (0.5). This mirrored results from 2014 and 2015.

Mystery shoppers using LSE Operators were more likely to go back / correct an entry, with an average number of reverting steps being 1.

In terms of scenario, shoppers buying 'Two Together Railcard' tickets were more likely to take a step back or correct an entry (0.7) while those purchasing 'First Class' tickets were less likely to do so (0.2).

Shoppers that purchased tickets most frequently, i.e. 3 or more times a week, were more likely to complete their purchase without a miss-step.

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3.2   Satisfaction with Online Ticket Purchase

3.2.1 How Easy was it to Find Information about Ticket Types & Conditions?

Almost three-quarters (73%) of mystery shoppers found it 'Easy' or 'Very Easy' to find information about ticket types and conditions. Only 4% of shoppers (5% in 2015) considered it either 'Difficult' or 'Very Difficult' to find information related to ticket types and conditions.

While there was no direct correlation between experience of buying rail tickets online and the ease with which instructions on ticket types and conditions were found, those purchasing tickets more than 3 times a week were more likely to rate 'Easy' or 'Very easy' on this measure.

As in 2015, Regional Operators had a higher proportion of mystery shoppers feeling satisfied with the ease of finding information.
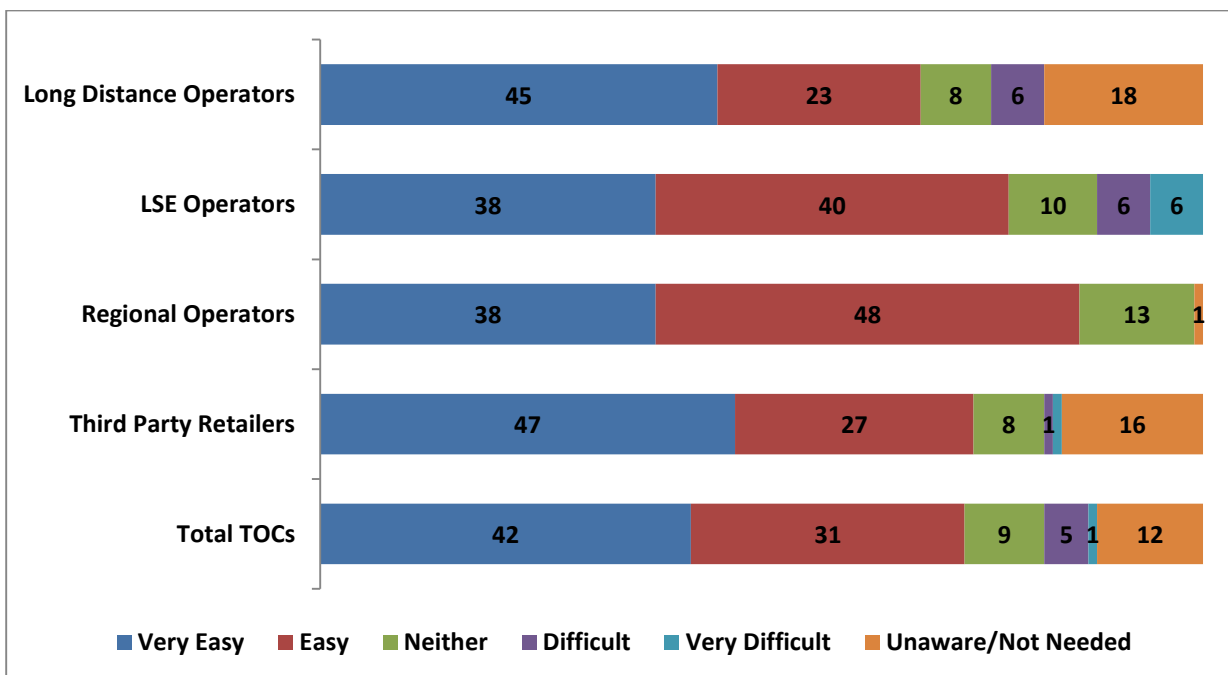

Figure 7 – Ease of Finding Info. On Ticket Types/Conditions by Retailer Category

Those purchasing tickets with a 'Two Together Railcard' had significantly more mystery shoppers stating that they found it difficult to find the information on Ticket Types and Conditions (18%) than those buying other ticket types.
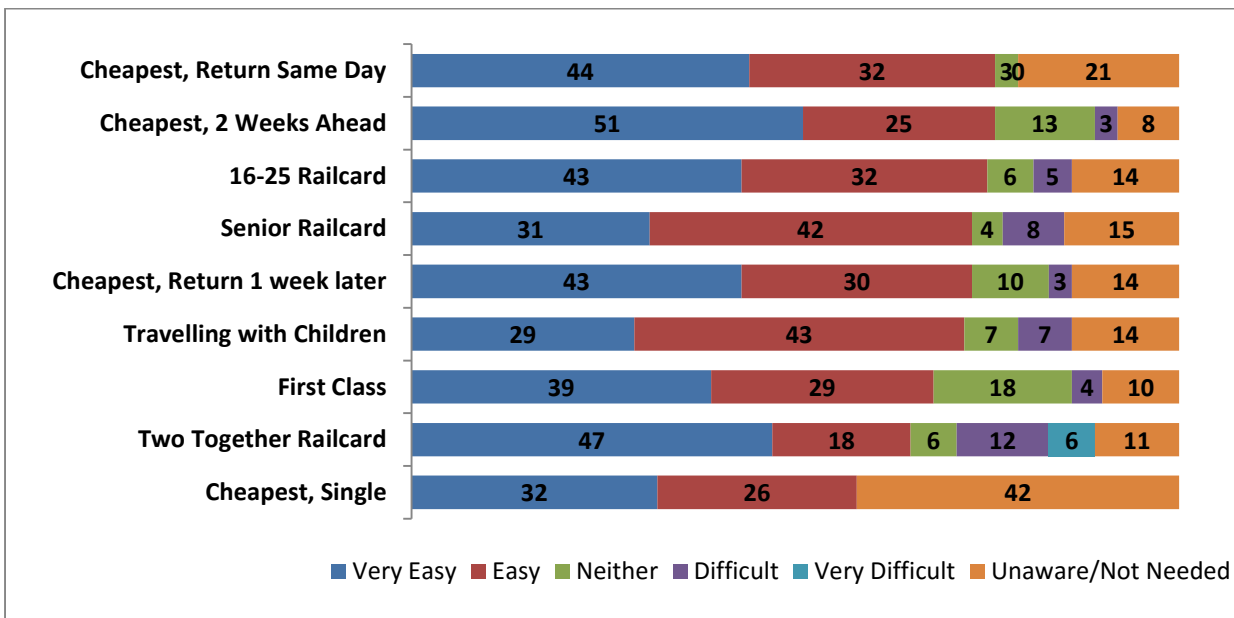
Figure 8 – Ease of Finding Info. On Ticket Types/Conditions by Ticket Type

Shoppers that were dissatisfied largely stated that it was difficult to find information that helped them distinguish between ticket types. The example verbatims below are grouped into sub-themes.

Hard to distinguish between Single and Return tickets

"I was confused on whether I was looking at single or return journey tickets. I had to go back to the previous screen to clarify this, but I still felt somewhat confused."

www.thameslinkrailway.com

"The ticket types kept changing, I wasn't sure if I was buying singles or returns and what the difference was between standard and standard advanced."

www.redspottedhankey.com

Difficult to find a summary of the specified ticket types

(Virgin East Coast and GWR received a number of similar comments from shoppers):-

"The website simply presented a bewildering array of fares at the top and a list of train times at the bottom. Hovering over the fares brought up a box which put a name to them, but it was not at all clear what they meant or the difference between them. It was very confusing."

www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"The web page about the different travel options had ranges of fares displayed but details could only be had when individual fare types were selected. This was a frustrating experience."

www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"At first I did not understand there was lots of information accessible through the pages I viewed, for example, when I held the cursor over the ticket prices. Initially it was difficult to locate information on ticket types and conditions as information was only available about the services one could travel on. It is only upon selecting the service were we then given details about the actual type of ticket and conditions attached. There were no instructions given in this regard."

www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"I had to click the price for each train to find out the ticket type. I was offered the ticket type with and without the railcard when I had only requested tickets with a railcard."

www.gwr.com

"The layout of the ticket choice page was confusing and it was not clear what you needed to click on to be able to choose a ticket, nor where information on ticket types would be located. It was unclear where this information was located."

www.gwr.com

"After going through the whole process to paying, I could not find the railcard confirmation so had to go back to recheck the option. Not clear what the railcard types are, do I add one railcard for a two together option or was I meant to add two, one for each adult?"

www.gwr.com

3.2.2 How Satisfied Were You with the Information about Ticket Types & Conditions?

Just 8% of shoppers were dissatisfied with the information available on the website about ticket types and conditions. This was marginally higher than the 7% observed in 2014 (compared to 3% in 2014).

Third Party Retailers tended to have the highest proportion of satisfied shoppers, with LSE having the fewest, albeit by a small margin.
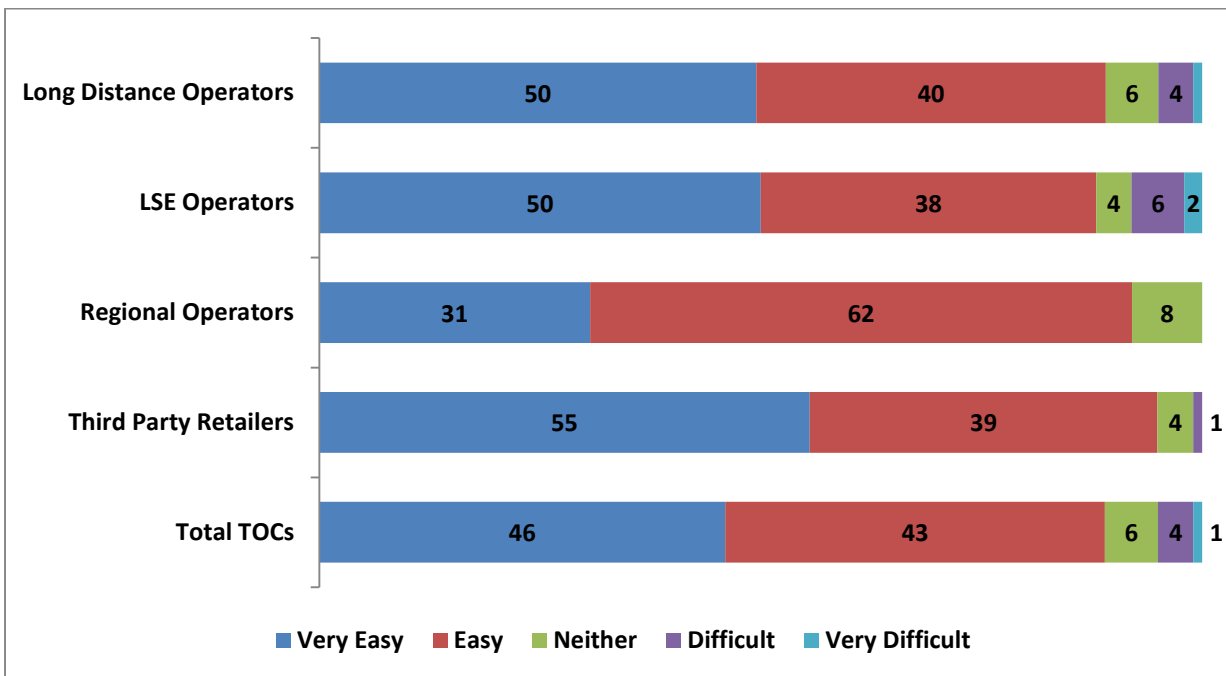
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Figure 9 – Satisfaction with Info. on Ticket Types/Conditions by Retailer Category

All shoppers buying 'Cheapest Single' tickets were satisfied with the instructions on the website regarding ticket types and conditions. Those purchasing tickets with 'Two Together Railcards' applied had significantly more dissatisfied (14%) mystery shoppers than the ticket types as a whole.
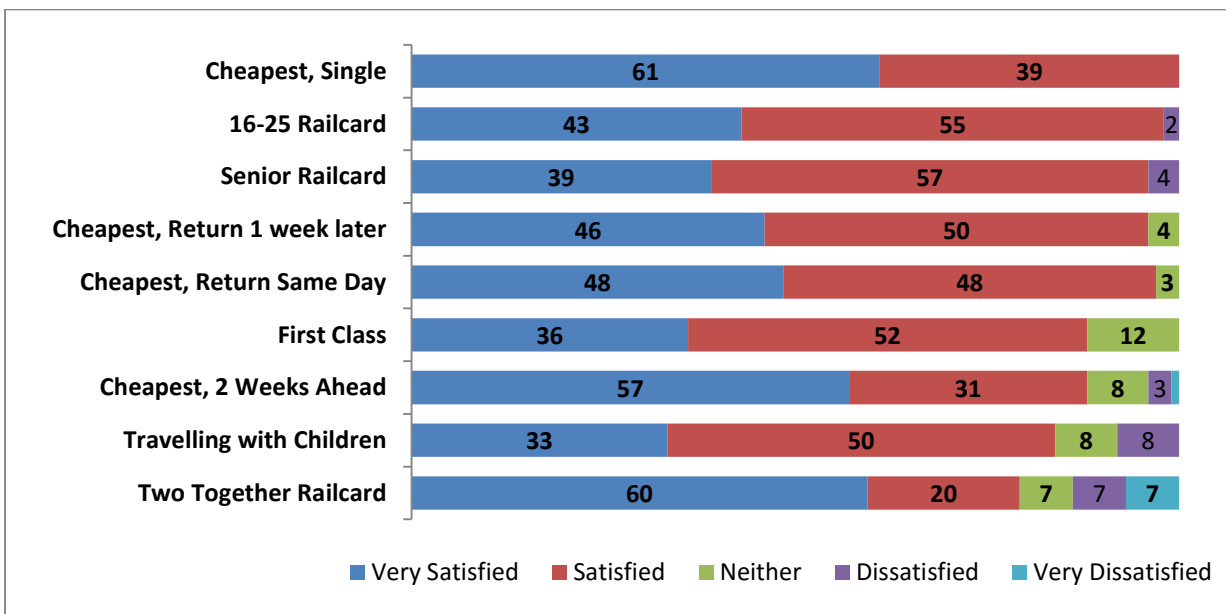

Figure 10 – Satisfaction with Info. on Ticket Types/Conditions by Scenario

As in 2015, there is no clear indication that online shopping experience, or specific experience in purchasing rail tickets online, has a bearing on satisfaction with the information available.

3.2.3 How Satisfied were you with the Clarity of Instructions for using the Website?

Only 2% of online shoppers expressed dissatisfaction with this aspect of their online purchase experience.

Third Party Retailers were regarded more favourably for providing clearer instructions than the other retailers.
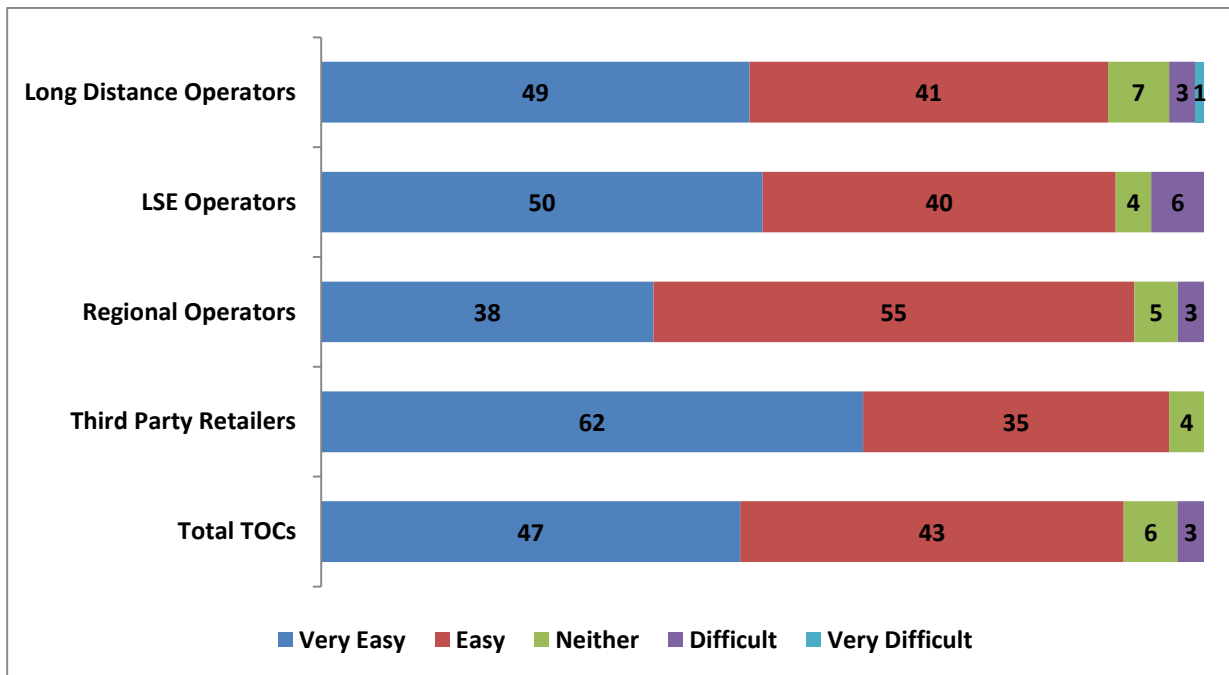

Figure 11 – Satisfaction with Clarity of Instructions by Retailer Category

3.3 The Ticket Purchased

3.3.1 Were You Able to Purchase a Ticket?

Out of the total sample (400 online mystery shops), there were two cases where the shopper was unable to successfully complete a ticket purchase. Two shoppers encountered website crashes, both of the websites belonging to the retailer South West Trains. The supporting verbatims are as follows:

"*The website crashed and so the transaction was voided. I could not figure out the error which prevented me from buying the ticket. Customers should be given more options regarding delivery methods. More information should be provided about the ticket types on offer.*" **www.southwesttrains.co.uk**

"*I got as far as entering my credit card details however there was an error which did not allow me to purchase tickets. I tried, a number of times, to select the cost and received an error message. On one occasion, I managed to input my card details before receiving the same error.*" **www.southwesttrains.co.uk**

3.3.2 How Confident Were You That You Got the Correct Ticket?

Just 1% (3% in 2015) of mystery shoppers expressed a lack of confidence in having obtained the correct ticket for their journey with 70% being 'Very Confident' and a further 27% feeling "Fairly Confident" that their ticket was correct.

Shoppers purchasing tickets from Regional Operators were all confident about having bought the correct ticket.
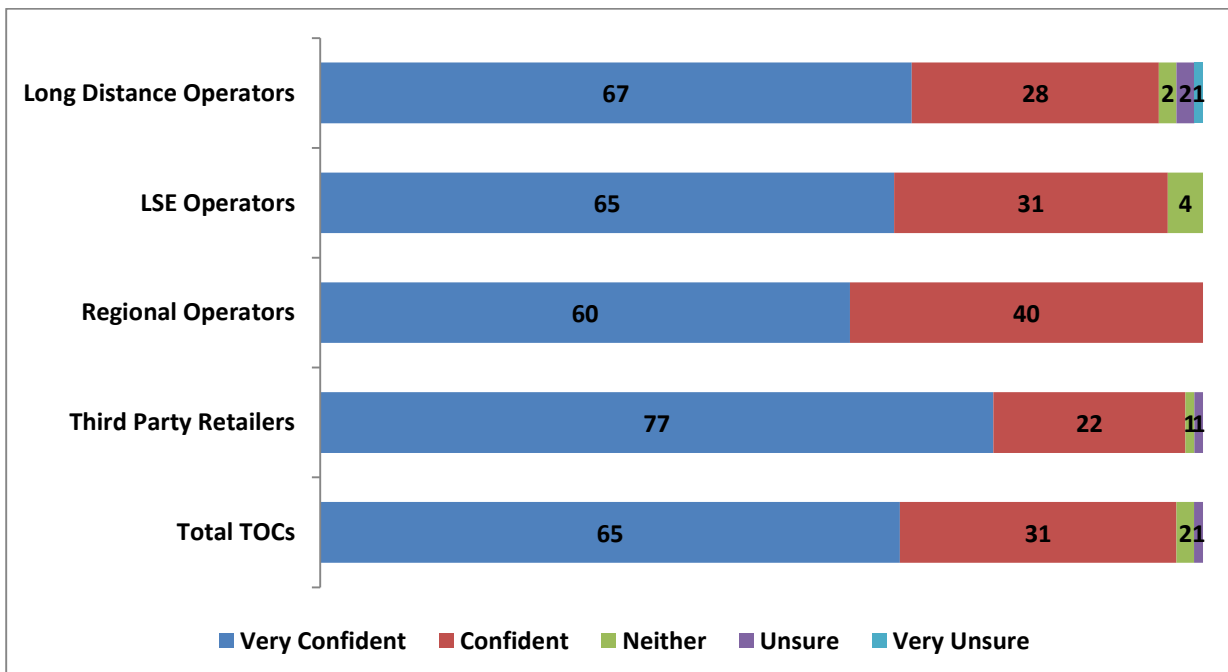

Figure 12 – Confidence in Getting the Correct Ticket by Retailer Category

Confidence ratings were high regardless of scenario, with 90% or more of shoppers, in each case, having rated themselves as being either 'Confident' or 'Very Confident' they had obtained the correct ticket. Almost all shoppers purchasing 'Single' or 'Advance' tickets were confident in their purchase. Those purchasing tickets with a 'Two Together Railcard' applied, again appeared to provide the lowest ratings, in this case of confidence in having bought the correct ticket.
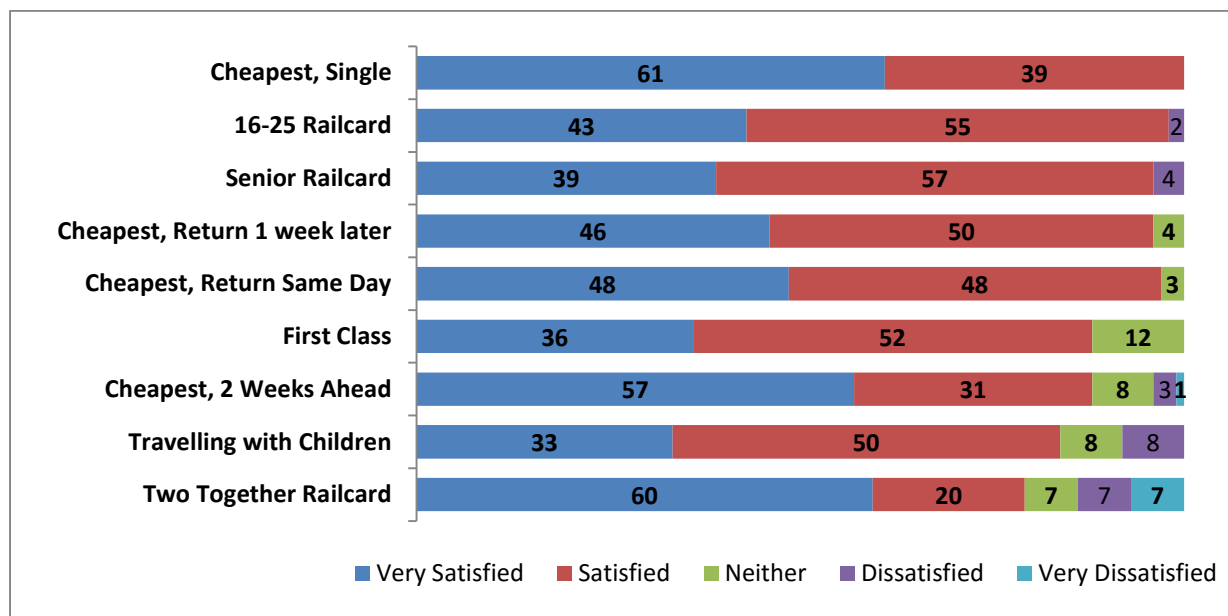

Figure 13 – Confidence in Getting the Correct Ticket by Scenario

As is to be expected, the group of shoppers with the least experience in purchasing rail tickets online had the lowest average confidence levels; 45% (an improvement on 2014 where 28% of this group provided this rating) of this group were "very confident", versus 64% for the overall sample.

3.3.3 Was the Correct Ticket Purchased?

Overall, when marked as correct or incorrect versus the scenario requirements and specific journey details, 100% of all tickets were deemed to be correct (96% in 2015). Given the success rate is perfect in 2016, it is important, for purposes of validity, to note that only new mystery shoppers (i.e. those who have no prior experience of the ATOC/RDG mystery shopping surveys) are recruited year on year to take part in this research. This prevents any one mystery shopper from becoming familiar with the methodology and, moreover, with buying rail tickets from specific online retailers outside of their natural purchasing behaviours.

As it stands, purchasing tickets from online retailers appears to be a very reliable method of transaction for mystery shoppers.

3.4 Opinions of the Websites

3.4.1 How Satisfied Were You with the Following Aspects of the Website?

The large majority of mystery shoppers were satisfied with all aspects of the websites used. However, mean satisfaction scores for website speed, security and ease of use were lower in 2016 than the previous year, with the former having the largest decrease in the current year.
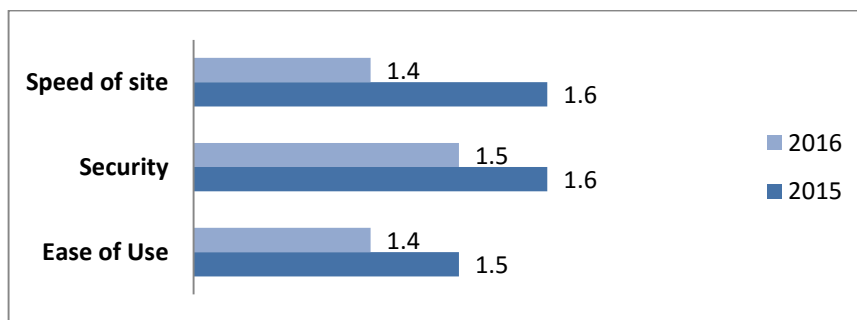
Figure 14 – Satisfaction with Aspects of the Website (Mean Score) – Total Sample

Mean score calculation: Very Satisfied +2, Satisfied +1, Neither 0, Dissatisfied -1, Very Dissatisfied -2

Satisfaction with 'Ease of Use' had the most variance; with London & South East having a considerably lower mean score than both Regional and Long Distance Operators.
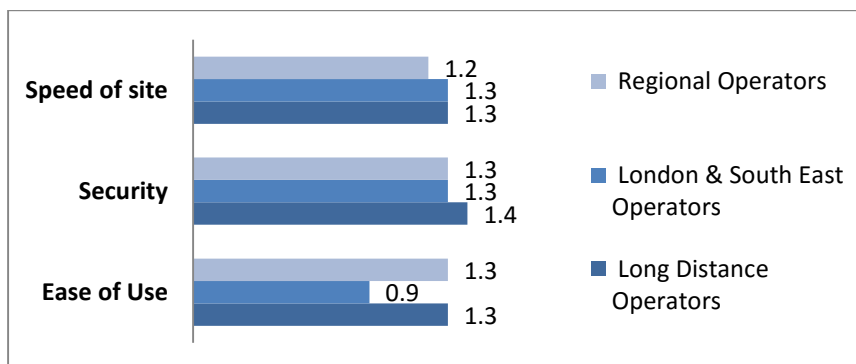
Figure 15 – Satisfaction with Aspects of the Website (Mean Score) – Operator

Mean score calculation: Very Satisfied +2, Satisfied +1, Neither 0, Dissatisfied -1, Very Dissatisfied -2

In addition to the three measures of usability above, shopper's opinions on the appearance and suitability of the websites were also collected. Only a minority of shoppers stated that the website they used had an off-putting appearance, was not appropriate for a rail site or had a format that seemed 'old fashioned'. Giving the small number of such responses, there are no statistically relevant findings that can be drawn from these, but the complaints / verbatims are provided below for insight:

<u>Unwelcoming appearance</u>

"After the initial screen, it was a bit off-putting as there was a lot of white background. Sometimes you had to use the left hand part of the screen and sometimes the smaller right hand part, which was a bit confusing."
www.thetrainline.com

"Beyond the initial screen, the white screens were a bit boring."
www.thetrainline.com

"I was disappointed the word "EXPRESS" overlaid the boxes where one specified the stations. This was off-putting."
www.tpexpress.co.uk

"I was put off because after trying to select my tickets I got an error message saying "An error has occurred, please try again." I was already confused by the array of tickets and this threw me into a bit of a panic. I ended up with two sets of tickets in my basket when I got to the payment screen and had to remove one."
www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"I found the first page off-putting because I was uncertain about where to put details of my proposed return journey."
www.virgintrains.co.uk

"The page for entering journey times looked attractive, but was hard to use in practice and this put me off. Pages included lots of clear space, but involved scrolling down to see the information needed. I would prefer to see and be able to enter all key information at first glance."
www.virgintrains.co.uk

"The home page was too busy with too much going on."
www.abelliogreateranglia.co.uk

"At first, the map of the journey seemed a good idea. However, I found it took up too much of the screen and was inaccurate in being a straight line and thus not indicating which stations the train passed through."
www.londonmidland.com

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"The first page was modern but after that the second and third page looked old fashioned."
www.scotrail.co.uk

"The first couple of pages looked outdated."
www.southeasternrailway.co.uk

"The website was quite dated in appearance."
www.southeasternrailway.co.uk

"Very plain and dull but did show the relevant information."
www.southernrailway.com

"The Website homepage seemed a little cluttered with all the advertising of prices. However the screen where you select the fare to show available trains is very old fashioned and a little frustrating to use."
www.tpexpress.co.uk

"The layout design of the website, the choice of colours and the fact that too much information seemed to have been squeezed in - all of it made this website seem old fashioned and not modern."
www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"Compared to other websites I've seen, it was not as well designed."
www.gwr.com

"The website's colours were muted and sober, and the promotions were displayed in straight-edged boxes of similar sizes, giving it an ordered, but dull look."
www.gwr.com

"(The site's) design could do with updating; it doesn't look like a modern site."
www.gwr.com

Inappropriate for rail ticket selling website

"The first screen was very plain. It was easy to use but the lack of images meant that it could have been for almost anything."
www.raileasy.co.uk

"I would have liked to have seen all the ticket options clearly on one page and the selections I had made as I go along. I would have also liked to select earlier or later times other than those suggested without having to go back to the first screen and amend my search."
www.southwesttrains.co.uk

"As far as I could tell, the front screen had nothing to do with trains. If it just had the image and not the company name, I would have no idea what it was selling."
www.tpexpress.co.uk

"The website was far too busy advertising other things."
www.abelliogreateranglia.co.uk

"The feel given off was of a luxury car website."
www.grandcentralrail.com

*"A simpler design would be more suitable, in my opinion."*
www.londonmidland.com

"Too much scrolling was needed to complete the payments screen."
 www.londonmidland.com

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3.4.2 How Likely Would You Be to Recommend this Website to a Friend?

Mystery shoppers, in the large majority, were happy to recommend their respective websites to a friend or family member, with the average score for the sample being just under 8 out of 10 (7.9) on this measure.

Websites belonging to LSE operators tended to have the lowest 'recommend' ratings.
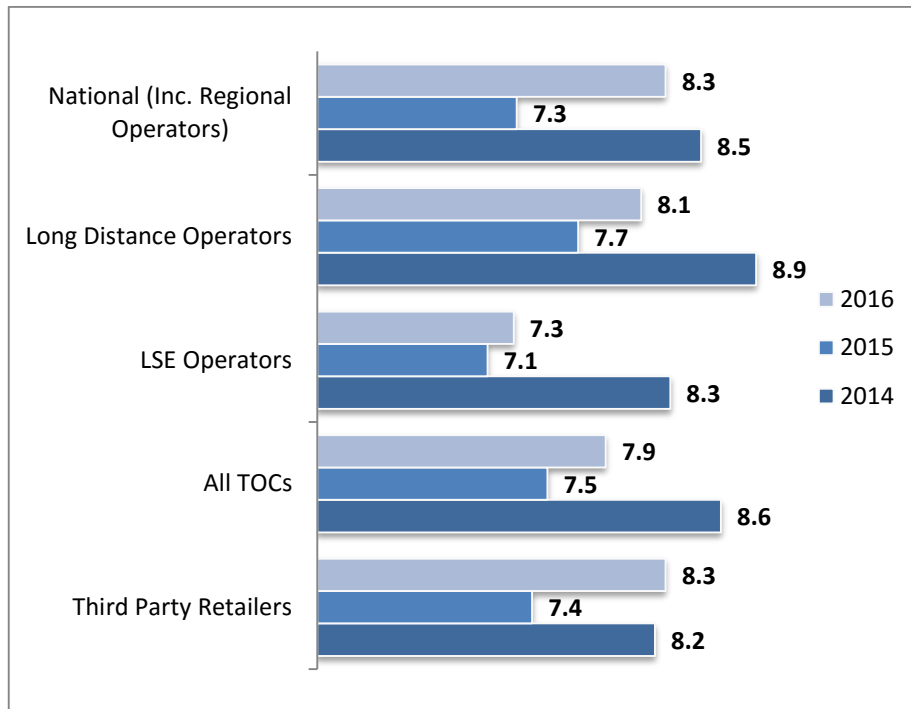
Figure 16 – Likelihood of Recommending Website (Mean Score) – By Retailer Category
Mean score calculation: 0-10 scale, from Extremely Unlikely (0) to Extremely Likely (10)

In line with satisfaction measures previously discussed, mystery shoppers who purchased 'Two Together Railcards' typically provided lower mean scores for recommending their chosen website to a friend or family member. Those purchasing 'First Class' tickets were more likely to recommend the website they used than other groups.
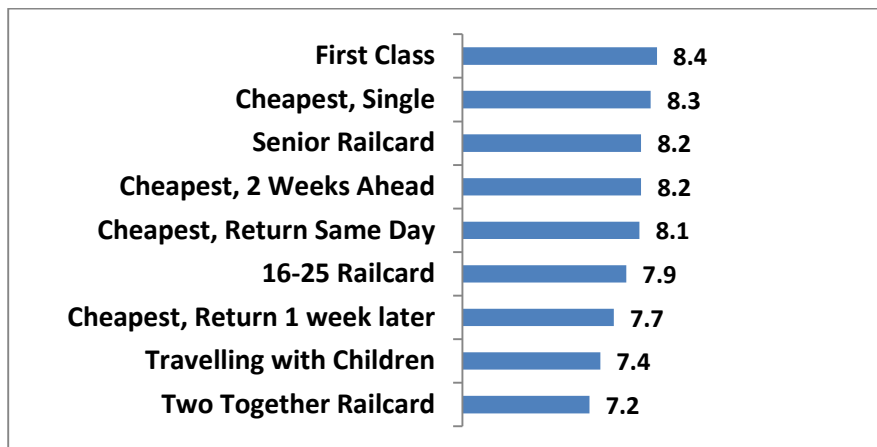
Figure 17 – Likelihood of Recommending Website (Mean Score) – by Scenario

Mean score calculation: 0-10 scale, from Extremely Unlikely (0) to Extremely Likely (10)

3.4.3 How Does this Website Compare with Others Used for Goods & Services?

When comparing the rail ticketing websites with others they had experience of, the mystery shoppers were largely positive. Almost two thirds (63%) of mystery shoppers responded positively (saying their chosen website was "the best", "better than most" or "better than some"), and a further 28% said the website was about the same as others. Only 12% gave a negative answer versus 10% in 2015 and 8% in 2014 (14% 2013); commenting that the site was "worse than some", "worse than most" or "the worst".

Websites belonging to Long Distance Operators received the most enthusiastic responses, and gained significantly higher feedback than those using websites registered to LSE Operators, specifically.
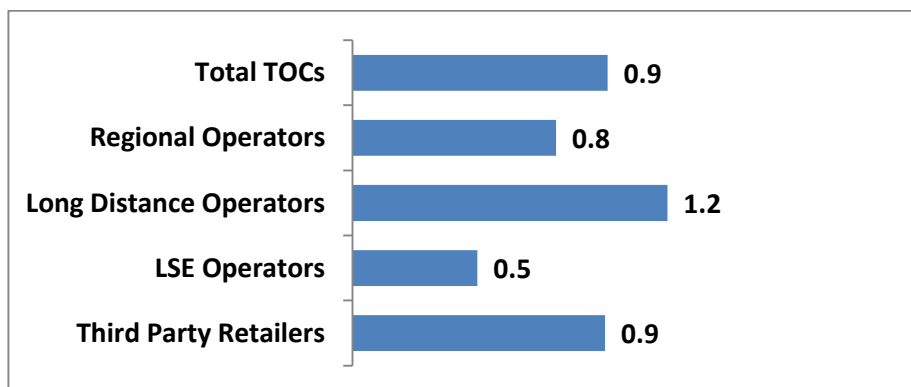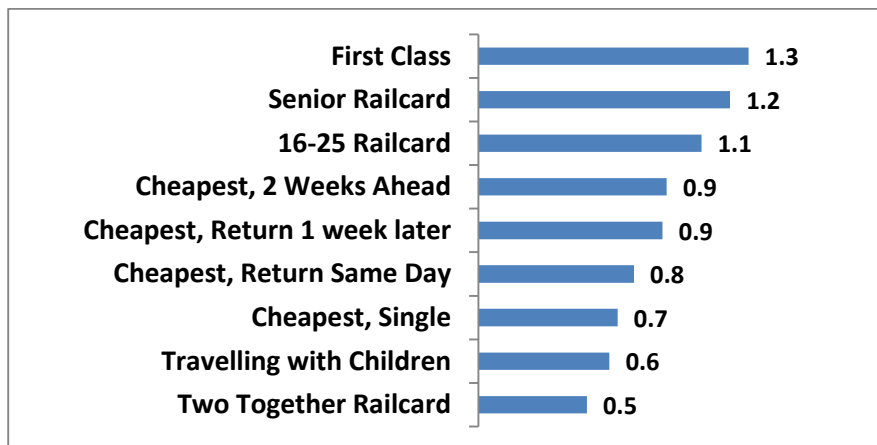

Figure 18 – How Website Compares with Others (Mean Score) by Retailer Category

Mean score calculation: This Website is... The Best +3, Better than Most +2, Better than Some +1, About the Same 0, Worse than Some -1, Worse than Most -2, The Worst -3

There was some indication, though not statistically significant, that those purchasing tickets with a 'Two Together Railcard' applied were least likely to compare their designated website favourably to others. Surprisingly, those purchasing tickets with an added requirement of being

'First Class' or having a 'Senior Railcard' discount applied, were more likely to have formed a favourable opinion of their website compared to others they had used.

Figure 19 – How Website Compares with Others (Mean Score) by Ticket Type

Mean score calculation: This Website is... The Best +3, Better than Most +2, Better than Some +1, About the Same 0, Worse than Some -1, Worse than Most -2, The Worst -3

Those with experience of buying tickets 3 times, or more, per week were found to be significantly more enthusiastic about the website they used than mystery shoppers who bought rail tickets online less than once per month.
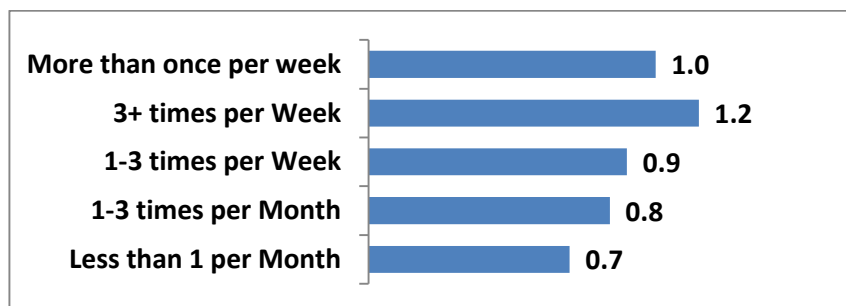
Figure 20 – How Website Compares with Others (Mean Score) by Frequency of Shopping Online

Mean score calculation: This Website is... The Best +3, Better than Most +2, Better than Some +1, About the Same 0, Worse than Some -1, Worse than Most -2, The Worst -3

Interestingly, mystery shoppers who selected to print out their tickets at home provided significantly higher mean scores for how their website compared to others than those who needed to collect their tickets from a specified Ticket Machine or Ticket Office.
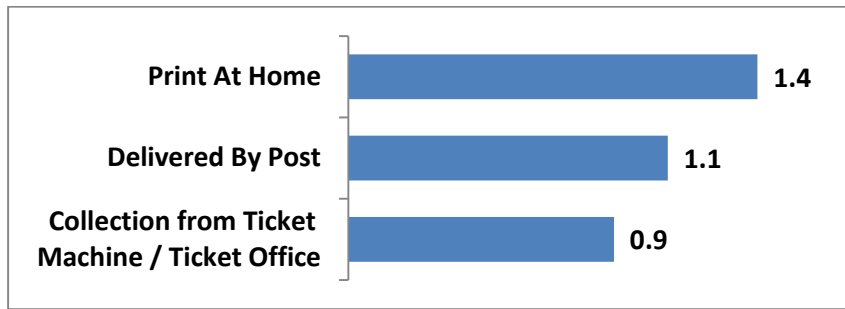
Figure 21 – How Website Compares with Others (Mean Score) by Method of Ticket Collection

Mean score calculation: This Website is... The Best +3, Better than Most +2, Better than Some +1, About the Same 0, Worse than Some -1, Worse than Most -2, The Worst -3

3.5   Receipt of Tickets

3.5.1 Was Your Ticket Available to Collect?

Of those who were to collect their ticket from a Ticket Machine or Ticket Office (333 mystery shoppers), only two stated that their ticket was not available to collect on the day, and both mystery shoppers were attempting to collect Advance fare tickets. The supporting verbatims are as follows:-

"The first time the wrong ticket came out so I had to make a second trip".

www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk

"I was instructed that the tickets would be available to collect after 2.5 hours. I arrived to collect my tickets after 2.5 hours however I was told they were unavailable. I tried several times for the next hour to collect the tickets to no avail. I resorted to speaking to a clerk who, although was unable to explain why I was not able to collect my tickets, was able to give them to me."
www.grandcentralrail.com

3.5.2 How Many Days Did it Take for Your Ticket to Arrive by Post?

In all instances where tickets were delivered to the mystery shopper at home, delivery took place in one or two days, which was found to be in line with shoppers' expectations.

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3.6 Terminology and Suggested Improvements

3.6.1 Was there any Terminology you did not understand?

There were only 6 instances where mystery shoppers felt as though they did not understand terminology presented to them on the website. In the main, these shoppers stated that they had a difficult time differentiating ticket types; specifically, Super Off-Peak and usual off-peak tickets. The mystery shoppers' verbatims are shown below:

"It was not immediately clear what the different ticket types meant."
www.thetrainline.com

"I could not understand why different tickets, each called a "super off peak return", were a different price. I was not sure what a super off peak ticket was."
www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"The difference between the ticket types was not clear as some had very similar sounding names, for example, online super off peak vs super off peak return."
www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"Fares rather than ticket types were displayed. You had to hover over each one to see what it was called. They sounded quite similar and it was difficult to differentiate and select the best option."
www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"Some of the ticket names sounded very similar - online super off peak and super off peak, for example."
www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"There were a lot of "Off Peak Tickets" ranging from Online Off Peak, Super Off Peak, Online Super Off Peak, Off Peak and it seemed very hard to distinguish the difference between them."
www.virgintrainseastcoast.com

"The Difference between Super Off-Peak and Off Peak was hard to grasp whilst booking."
www.virgintrains.co.uk

"As someone who doesn't travel by train often I was unsure about a lot of the different tickets available and making sure I selected the right ones."

www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk

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There was another comment, where the terminology wasn't being questioned per se but the mystery shopper was uncertain about the number of tickets printed, i.e. they found it difficult to distinguish between tickets for travel, and those representing their reservations:

"I did not particularly find anything confusing at first, but when I received my tickets, there were nine separate tickets, all for different things. I did not realise I had asked for reserved seats so looking through all of the tickets was very confusing. So, this is actually what I found most confusing. Also, the final price did surprise me a little, as the train tickets themselves were fine, but, by the time you got to checkout, there had been a £1.00 second class delivery charge added, as well as an £1.50 booking fee. Whilst this is only an extra £2.50 in total, it would have been nice to have all of this information shown on the ticket selection page."

www.thetrainline.com

3.6.2 What was the one main improvement that would make the website more user friendly?

There were a range of suggested improvements from shoppers. Examples of which are grouped under the main themes that emerged below:-

Emailing or printing the tickets at home

"I would have liked to have been able to download and print this ticket and not go and collect it."

www.thetrainline.com

"(I would like) the ability to print your tickets at home or download them to your phone."

www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk

Making shoppers aware of the Booking Fee prior to the end

"It could be made clearer that there will be both a booking fee and a credit card charge."

www.thetrainline.com

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"The fees and charges could be made more transparent before the final payment was due, and they could be reflected on the receipt when the ticket is collected at a station self-service machine."

www.thetrainline.com

Use of filtering for appropriate tickets

"The website was quite straightforward to use, although having selected that I wanted a standard fare on the front screen, I was quite surprised to be presented with both standard and first class options on the next screen."

www.raileasy.co.uk

"I was not sure why the first lot of ticket options did not account for the railcard despite me having specified this earlier. I would want this aspect of the website improved upon."

www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk

Showing all/more prices at once

"All of the prices could have been shown rather than having to click "show more single prices."

www.sxcotrail.co.uk

"The website was clear; however, all ticket prices should be available to see and not required to click on before being able to see more choices."

www.thetrainline.com

Crash

"The website crashed quite often, and therefore I had to make several attempts until I was able to buy a ticket. If this happened less, that would be ideal."

www.southwesttrains.co.uk

"The website did not seem to be very secure as it crashed when I wanted to get to the payment stage."

www.southwesttrains.co.uk

Registering

"The website could introduce a guest purchase option, so a customer could purchase a ticket without creating an account, which would save time and effort when booking a ticket."

www.abelliogreateranglia.co.uk

"An improvement would be to be able to buy without having to register."

www.chilternrailways.co.uk

4. Appendix - Questionnaire

Train Ticket Mystery Shopping 2014 S16 Online	
Location:	
Date of Assessment:	
Time of Assessment:	
Visit Information	
Q3. Please confirm the website address you used to purchase your ticket?	
Q4a. What time did you start your online transaction?	
Q4b. What time did you complete your ticket purchase?	
Q5. How long in total did your ticket purchase take (Including queuing)?	
Using Online Shop	
Q6. In total, how many different web pages (screens) did you need to click on/view in order to complete your ticket purchase?	
Q7. How many times did you have to go back to a previous screen or correct an entry?	
Satisfaction with the WEBSITE	
Q8. How easy was it to find information on the website about ticket types and conditions?	( ) Very Easy ( ) Easy ( ) Neither Easy or Difficult ( ) Difficult ( ) Very Difficult ( ) I was unaware there was any information about ticket types and conditions on the ticket machine ( ) I was aware but I did not need this information
Q9. How satisfied were you with the information about ticket types and conditions on the Website?	( ) Very satisfied ( ) Satisfied ( ) Neither ( ) Dissatisfied ( ) Very Dissatisfied
Q10. Why were you not satisfied with the information about ticket types and conditions?	
Q11. How satisfied were you with the clarity of instructions for using the website?	( ) Very satisfied ( ) Satisfied ( ) Neither ( ) Dissatisfied ( ) Very Dissatisfied
Q12. Why were you not satisfied with the clarity of instructions for using the Website?	
Q13a. Were you able to purchase a ticket?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Q13b. If you were unable to purchase a ticket, please explain why this was.	
Q14a. How confident were you that you got the correct ticket?	( ) Very confident ( ) Fairly confident ( ) Neither ( ) Fairly unsure ( ) Very unsure
Q14b. Why were you not confident that you got the correct ticket?	

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How satisfied were you with the following aspects of the website and your ticket purchasing transaction?	
Q15a. Ease of use	( ) Very satisfied ( ) Satisfied ( ) Neither ( ) Dissatisfied ( ) Very Dissatisfied
Q15c. Security	( ) Very satisfied ( ) Satisfied ( ) Neither ( ) Dissatisfied ( ) Very Dissatisfied
Q15d. Speed of site	( ) Very satisfied ( ) Satisfied ( ) Neither ( ) Dissatisfied ( ) Very Dissatisfied
Please indicate what you thought of the website in terms of design and style	
15ei) Was the website welcoming?	( ) Welcoming ( ) Off putting
15eii) Did the website have a contemporary layout?	( ) Modern ( ) Old Fashioned
15eiii) Was the website design appropriate for a Rail Service?	( ) Appropriate for a Rail site ( ) Inappropriate for a Rail site
Q16. Based on this transaction, how likely would you be to recommend this website to a friend?	( ) 1 ( ) 2 ( ) 3 ( ) 4 ( ) 5 ( ) 6 ( ) 7 ( ) 8 ( ) 9 ( ) 10
Q17. Please provide any other information you would like to give about your transaction which has not been covered in the questionnaire in the space below.	
Q18. How often do you personally shop online for goods and services?	( ) More than 3 times a week ( ) 1 to 3 times per week ( ) 1 to 3 times per month ( ) 5 to 11 times per year ( ) 1 to 4 times per year ( ) Less than once per year ( ) Never
Q19. How often do you personally buy rail tickets online?	( ) More than 3 times a week ( ) 1 to 3 times per week ( ) 1 to 3 times per month ( ) 5 to 11 times per year ( ) 1 to 4 times per year ( ) Less than once per year ( ) Never

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Q20. How does this website compare with other websites you have used which sell goods and services?	( ) This website is the best ( ) This website is better than most ( ) This website is better than some ( ) This website is about the same as other websites ( ) This website is worse than some ( ) This website is worse than most ( ) This website is the worst ( ) Don't know
Your Ticket Choice	
21a) What ticket did you ask for? Please enter the times and date of travel you requested on the website.	
21b) Please state what ticket choices you were asked to choose from on screen and attach a screenshot of these to this survey.	
1. 21c) Please state what ticket/s you chose from this list.	
21d) Ticket type purchased online	
Ticket Details	
Q21. Ticket Type	
Q22. Ticket number of first ticket (outward journey)	
Q23. Ticket number of second ticket (return journey)	
Q24. Ticket price	
Q25. Second ticket price	
Q26. Station leaving from	
Q27. Station going to	
Q28. Via which station(s)/route	
Q29. How did you receive your ticket?	( ) Collected from ticket machine ( ) Collected from ticket office ( ) Delivered by post ( ) Downloaded to print at home
Q30. Was your ticket available to collect?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Q31. If no, please explain what happened.	
Q32. How many days did your ticket take to arrive by post?	[ ] N/A
Q33. Was this in line with your expectation, based on the information on the website?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Q34. If no, why not?	
Q35. Did you have any problems downloading the ticket to print at home?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Q36. If yes, what problems did you have?	
Please enter the amount spent on Postage sending this ticket back	
If valid, please enter the amount of any credit charge expense incurred	[ ] N/A
Overall Comments	
Q37. Was there any terminology you did not understand?	( ) Yes ( ) No
Q38. What was the main improvement that could make ticket buying on the website more user friendly, efficient and clear?	

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