

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the top left, a portion of a silver keyboard is visible. Below it is a white computer mouse. To the right of the keyboard are three small paper shopping bags in blue, orange, and yellow. In the center-right is a small metal shopping cart with yellow handles. In the bottom right corner, a portion of a red plastic shopping basket is visible. A blue square logo with the text 'think TRIBE' is overlaid on the top left of the image.

think
TRIBE

Are you ready for peak?
Ensuring your digital estate
is in peak readiness



Peak readiness

If we've learned anything over the years of helping top brands to optimise their online performance, it's that it pays to keep pace with emerging ecommerce trends if you don't want to be left behind.

Our experience shows that being well prepared for peak traffic events makes sound business sense: being caught unawares not only results in lost sales in the short-term but also risks impacting long-standing retail relationships as committed customers redraw their brand loyalties.

It also shows that no shopping trend – no matter how established – is immune to change.





A moving target

Once upon a time, online peak shopping periods were nothing if not predictable – witness the ramping up of demand for electronics and other big-ticket items on Black Friday or for summer holiday bookings on Boxing Day.

More recently, we began to detect a shift in the distribution of peak patterns. Although key events – like Christmas – still herald a widespread increase in retail spending, other, more mercurial trends, often as a result of media or celebrity activity, are also triggering random traffic spikes.

With customer-led ecommerce subverting the landmarks of the traditional shopping calendar, second-guessing peak trading periods suddenly became trickier.



Retail shock

Then COVID-19 hit and the world changed.

The coronavirus pandemic decimated bricks-and-mortar trading and sparked an unprecedented shift towards online spending. With more people than ever switching to low-contact shopping methods – even those from previously under-represented demographics – retailers have been forced to optimise their online operations in order to match customers' demands.

In the context of a nationwide lockdown, familiar trading conditions were suspended, supply chains disrupted, and consumer expectations modified accordingly. As normality returns, the lockdown legacy is one of increased dependence on online products and services – industry experts predict that a quarter of the UK's population will make a permanent switch to online shopping.

All of which means greater pressure on brands to formulate an always-on strategy when it comes to website availability and resilience.

How can you ensure your business is prepared to optimise performance, turning an unexpected global event into an opportunity to build your brand into a more responsive, customer-focused operation, fit for a new era?



What brands want

For most online businesses, the need to optimise every customer interaction remains key. With footfall on the high street predicted to be subdued for the foreseeable future, digital will be the main area of focus for some time to come.

Traffic peaks – whether planned for or not – offer businesses the opportunity to capture a fresh audience. In our experience, shoppers often use these occasions to explore new retailers and try out new brands. The lockdown has provided endless openings for brands to shine – take online greetings card sellers or purveyors of cook-at-home cuisine boxes, for example.

Savvy retailers will use this as an opportunity to showcase their offering and to demonstrate just how slick, friction-free and convenient its ecommerce solution is. Once you've picked, personalised and posted a birthday card with just a few mouse clicks (and been rewarded with a swift and efficient service) you might never step inside a stationery shop again.

Get it wrong, of course, and the converse is true – if they have a bad experience, customers are less likely to give you a second, let alone third or fourth chance.





Pushing for change

There's little doubt that in the rush to implement rapid updates, some website's functionality has been impaired, having a knock-on effect on the customer experience (CX). It's difficult to see how this could have been entirely avoided, given the pace of change in recent months.

While limited functionality is accepted by customers in the short term, a persistently 'buggy' site will serve to erode faith over time. Product shortages may well be tolerated for a while, especially if they are reflected across any given sector (flour or handwash, for instance). But if journeys are interrupted or transactions botched due to technical glitches, brands will risk not only revenues but the customer loyalty they're trying so hard to win.

It's crucial to prioritise testing protocols that closely match real customer journeys – especially when it comes to mobile performance. This is extra-important if your CX relies heavily on third-party integrations that could impact functionality when your site is under a high load. Only by testing journeys from the customer's perspective will you ensure stable performance during peak traffic conditions.





Optimising your resources

Many businesses will be struggling to cover the bases from a personnel point of view. As tech teams are already stretched by the need to respond to increased demand, at the same time conforming to more restrictive working practices, it makes sense to outsource some tasks to expert external providers.

Collaborating with specialists like thinkTribe will not only free your teams to prioritise their workloads but will also provide a realistic, customer-centric load testing and web monitoring programme that's engineered to deliver immediate, actionable results. Outsourcing specific tasks offers quicker returns with a reduced business commitment, while significantly improving the CX and smoothing the path for increased sales.



Squaring up to new challenges

Brands will face a variety of commercial challenges in the coming months and years which will necessitate a finely tuned strategic approach to web management.

- Shopping behaviours have changed for good – new traffic profiles need to be realistic.
- Some businesses have been trading at peak since the start of lockdown, demonstrating the importance of web stability and scalability.
- Established traffic-management tactics, such as virtual queuing systems, offer a handy stopgap in a peak crisis but won't meet customer expectations forever. Alternative approaches, including increasing site capacity or removing bottlenecks, may be required - or even preferable.
- Marketing's response will have to be agile enough to target a range of traffic profiles populating websites at different and more unpredictable times.
- Higher digital engagement has triggered a proliferation of media influencers who are also driving spikes in traffic, a trend that's likely to continue.
- Brands will increasingly need to tap into technical expertise and commission bespoke solutions that address unique business needs.

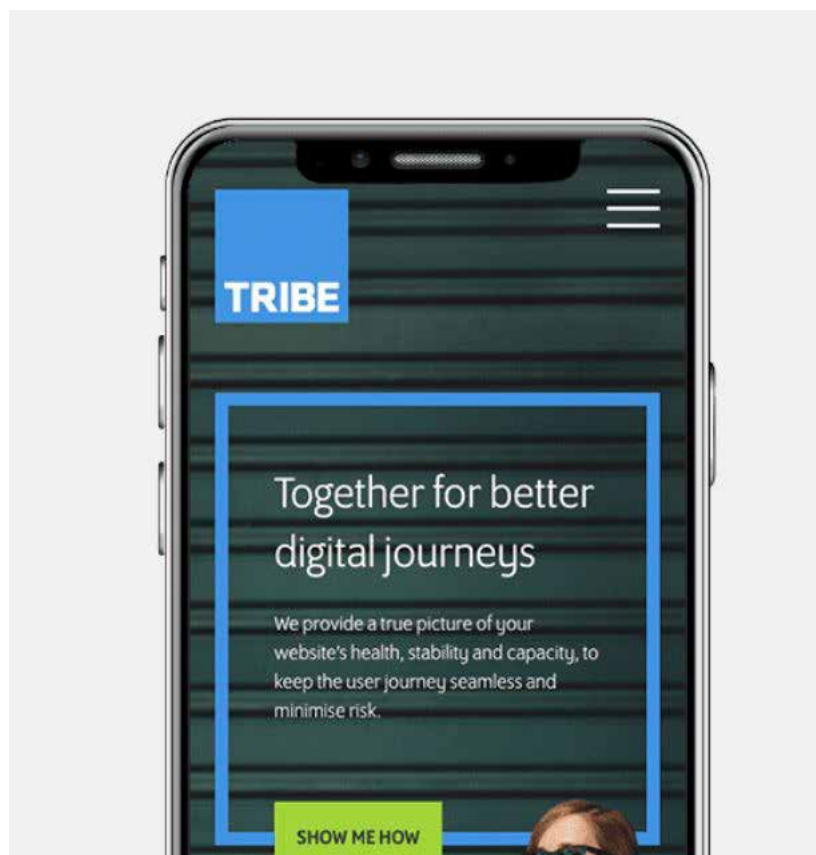




thinkTribe can help

thinkTribe can offer the benefit of 15 years' worth of experience gained working with the UK's largest brands. Our managed load testing and synthetic website monitoring services provide actionable insights based on real customer journeys, freeing your technical team to focus on delivering the best UX.

- Fully managed, cloud-based service run by experts
- Bespoke journeys designed to meet business needs
- Realistic journeys reveal a unique customer perspective





About thinkTribe

Our portfolio of “dynamic user journey” based synthetic monitoring and load testing services enable business wide understanding of the impact of online performance on user experience and the bottom line.

With over 10 years performance testing experience, helping clients such as Debenhams, Boden, Joules and Dixons to maximise user experience and protect their brand, our highly experienced team of test professionals help clients implement monitoring programmes and proactively oversee testing; automatically updating journeys as a website changes, highlighting performance issues and helping clients quickly pinpoint root causes - saving time and money.



To find out how thinkTribe can help you implement the best monitoring or load testing programme to suit your organisation please contact us on 01227 768276 or visit our website at www.thinktribe.com

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Together for better digital journeys