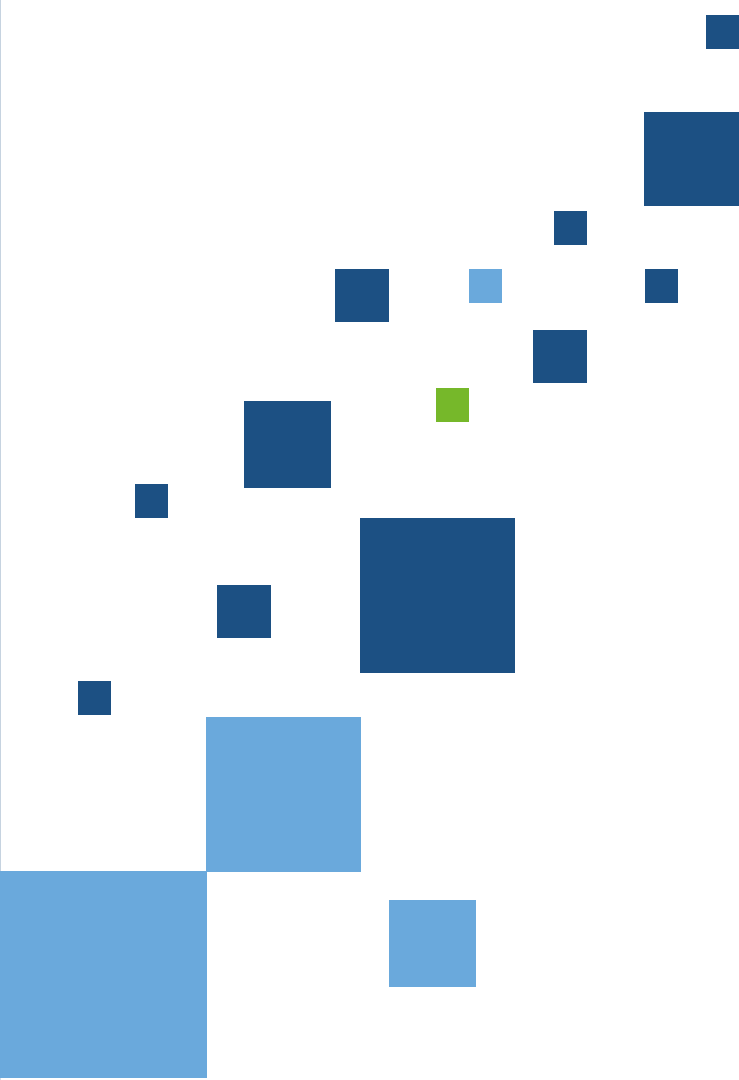




BRIDGING THE GAP
BETWEEN EXPECTATION
AND EXPERIENCE

.....
PRICE COMPARISON WEBSITES
AND THE CASE FOR LIVE CHAT





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Introduction

Price comparison websites have changed consumer behaviour. Their popularity and usage has seen a steady surge over the course of the last fifteen years, shaping the way web users make purchase decisions and providing consumers with that powerfully compelling boon: better choices, quicker

As the first point of contact when selecting a new policy, PCWs hold a uniquely influential position. By conveniently displaying an array of deals at the click of a mouse and aggregating data simply and legibly, PCWs have the power to sway where consumers spend. However, with that level of influence comes accountability.

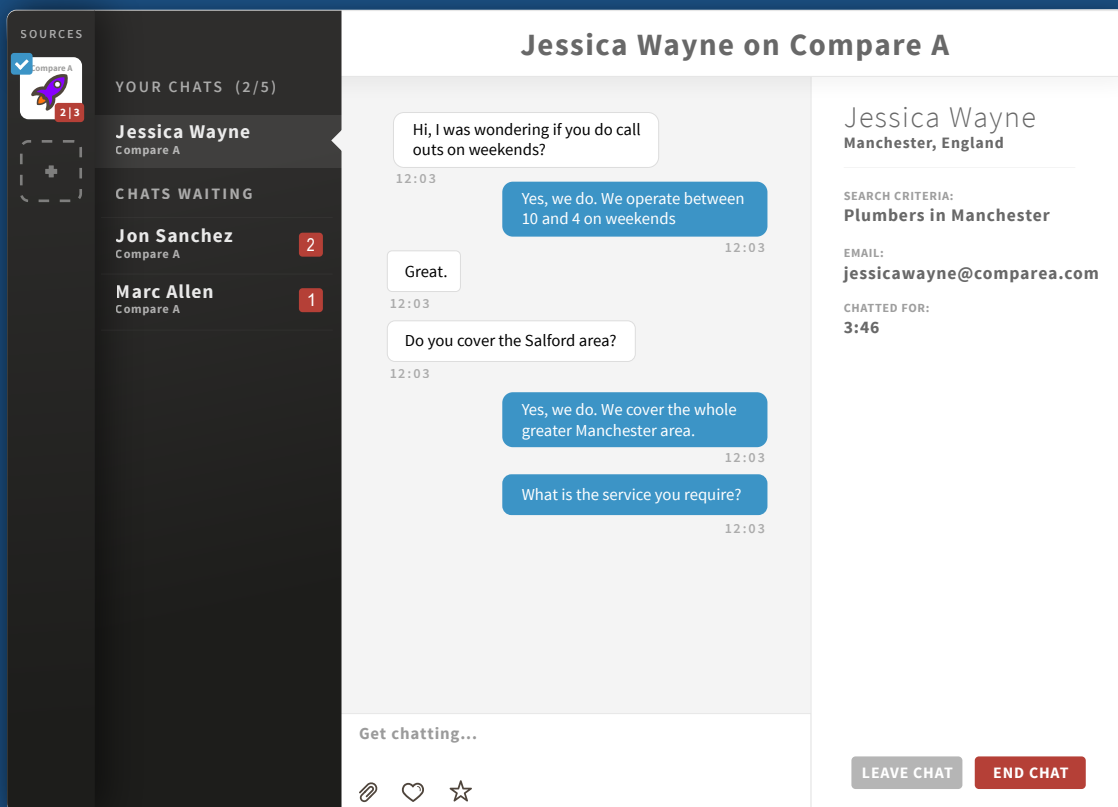
Simply put, price comparison websites must live up to the trust that users place in them. Consumers come to a PCW with the primary goal of finding the best deal; a deal that fulfils all their requirements whilst offering good value for money. Yet, for a number of reasons, this expectation does not always match with the consumer's online experience.

This white paper examines consumer attitudes and adoption of price comparison websites, focusing on the

issues that drive a gap between expectation and experience. Namely, it investigates the core problems that users face in their search for clarity, quality, and reliability in the comparison of deals.

To bridge that gap, this white paper builds the case for live chat software adoption. By adding an independent live chat solution, price comparison websites can connect consumers with competing providers — without the consumer having to leave the comparison page they're browsing, without them having to launch separate windows, without them having to chase several contacts separately and elsewhere.

There is no question of the value that PCWs add to the purchase process. When it comes to meeting consumer expectations, though, it is also clear that there is room for improvement. In embracing engagement innovation, price comparison websites can create a seamless journey from expectation to experience; offering a comparison service that is accessible, manageable, and, perhaps most importantly, entirely transparent.





1



.....
An overwhelming
experience

Focusing on the consumer's first impressions when navigating price comparison results, and the challenges faced by PCWs in striking the right balance between information and accessibility.

A false start

One of the key advantages of PCWs is that they quickly collate a large volume of offers. Ironically, that advantage is also a major experience impairment. In sharing so much information with consumers with such speed, price comparison websites create an overwhelming experience that leaves users feeling flooded.

A consumer study found that PCW users are confused by the volume of information shown coupled with the number of variables involved. After inputting their details and seeing the results offered, consumers find the plethora of information presented to them to be difficult to digest, and are often unsure of where to begin.

Although consumers are getting what they want and need, they're not necessarily getting it in a palatable format. In actuality, price comparison websites turn the mountainous

task of comparing multiple offerings into small, manageable molehills. But for the browsing consumer, that sheer wall of information springing from their initial search can seem just as inaccessible; just as daunting to tackle.

Filter friction

There are multiple options available to consumers to help them drill down into their search results. Users can apply filters and adjust their criteria to cherry-pick from the best relevant deals, helping to reduce and refine the results they see.

However, research highlights that these filters do not always hit the mark. Few PCW users, for example, use or even notice filter options, finding them to be eclipsed by competing page content such as search results and headline prices.

Unsure how their results are being qualified, obscurity clouds the user's experience.

Even when filters are applied, consumers still report confusion; claiming that after categorising based on key criteria, results are inconsistent. This, in turn, causes frustration, with users feeling that there is little option to customise and personalise their searches.

Further friction is formed by rankings. When navigating a price comparison website, consumers are uncertain what criteria is used in default ranking selection, and report a lack of clarity. Unsure how their results are being qualified, obscurity clouds the user's experience.

Reluctance to progress

Overwhelmed with the volume of information on offer, and either indifferent or unimpressed with filter options, consumers do not find themselves primed for progression. According to user feedback, PCW users are concerned that selecting a policy becomes difficult if information is interrogated – thereby defeating the object of using the service to make quick, easy comparisons.

When it comes to their results, consumers do not know what to do next. They are aware that they need to delve deeper into each policy to decide whether it truly meets their needs, but lack confidence that this will be an easy process.

This reluctance is exacerbated by user experience problems. Consumers have reported that the way in which quotes are presented make a meaningful or accurate comparison of policies difficult. They are on a comparison website, but find comparing past a basic surface level to be problematic.

Muddled impressions

Combined, these factors lead to a somewhat muddled first impression for price comparison website users. Not only are they inundated with information, they are unsure how to best sift and to use this information. As one surveyed consumer puts it:

“

Although it's a comparison website you can only compare [policies] to a certain extent. You might think 'That is a good price for that and that, but then that one is a good price for that and that'. I end up baffling myself and [the PCW] ends up baffling me with numbers and a lack of information. Too much information is a bad thing, but not enough is also a bad thing.

**Female, 20-30 years, Cardiff,
Home Insurance**

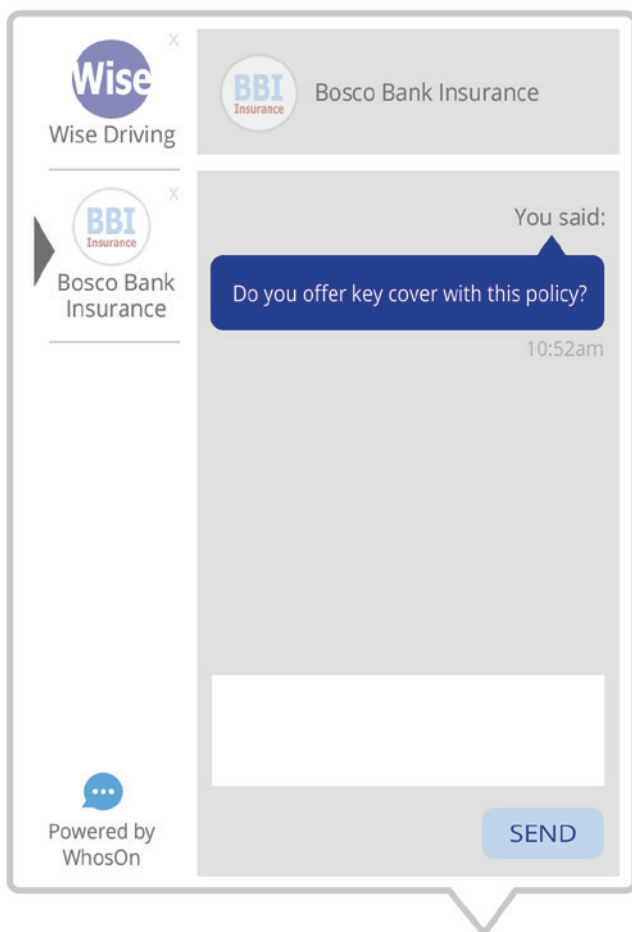
In the struggle between providing a comprehensive comparison service that covers all criteria, and providing a swift, simple solution that makes a complex task lightweight, striking the right balance is a challenge. Information cannot be compromised for ease of use; but nor can the service lose its core USP of simplification.

PCWS, then, are stuck in an eternal battle. To offer their consumers value they must provide all information, but in doing so they create an overwhelming first impression that creates disparity between expectation and experience.

The case for live chat

A live chat software integration into the results section of a price comparison website could alleviate this struggle, making the wealth of information available instantly more accessible and easy to interrogate.

To achieve this, the live chat solution would not connect consumers to the price comparison website. Indeed, the PCW would remain an impartial middle-man in this process. Instead, the live chat software would act as a bridge between the consumer and the competing vendors, allowing them to simply click and chat to all providers of interest from a single window. (See the illustrations below.)



The benefits for the consumer

For the consumer, this offers immediate access into each individual policy, without the disruption of leaving the results page and visiting multiple different vendor sites. By adding a chat button alongside each policy in the search results, users have a clear entry point into the solid wall of information before them. This reduces the overwhelming first impression created, as well as resolving the problem of progression confusion.

When consumers can interrogate all policies from the same page, from a single window, with live responses from each individual vendor, the PCW becomes the only place the user need look. Any uncertainty over filters, rankings, or individual policy detail can be resolved on the spot, by the representatives best placed to help.

From the angle of balancing information with ease of use, the addition of live chat means that no compromise needs to be made. Users are getting as much information as ever, but have a cohesive, unified avenue to explore policies.

The benefits for the price comparison website

For the price comparison website, the benefits are equally rich. A common consumer concern is that PCWs are not neutral and unbiased, and give greater emphasis to vendors who pay for prominence — even if that vendor's offering is not the best value or best match against needs. By adding live chat software to search results, PCWs can demonstrate a clear dedication to transparency.

The implementation of chat helps lessen mistrust in rankings, as it reduces any perceived hierarchical bias. With every vendor equally reachable, the price comparison website further establishes its impartiality. It cannot be said to be unfairly favouring any one brand when each competitor's advisors are so easily and centrally available.

Of course, this helps the PCW restore its reputation as a fair third party. It is going the extra mile to connect consumers with vendors, creating a simple, streamlined experience that better matches the user's expectations. In doing so, the PCW becomes a one-stop shop; removing the user's need to click elsewhere.

2



The decision making problem



Exploring the consumer's activity as they progress toward decision making, and assessing the various price comparison website problems that lead to a repeat process of poor user choices.

Blinkered by price

Consumers have a clear end goal in mind when turning to a price comparison website. Namely, their sole aim is to use the PCW to make a strong, well-informed purchase decision. However, that end purpose is not always felt to be achieved – and this is largely due to the feeling of being blinkered by price.

PCW users report that they actively avoid engaging with product options in detail, avoiding specifics such as added extras, fees, and terms and conditions. Instead, consumers focus chiefly on headline price when they see their search results. Rather than clicking inside polices to interrogate in-depth features, users see the prices loaded and become side-tracked by the lowest figure on-page.

Users want to see hard numbers, and naturally focus their attention upon this when presented. Features fall by the

wayside in the face of figures. Unfortunately, the result is that consumers are often not moving forwards with all available information.

Aversion to in-depth comparison

It is not just a focus on price that feeds this decision-making problem; it is also an aversion to exploration. It is the user's very expectations for a price comparison website that create this aversion. Stripping back to user intentions, PCWs exist to simplify the purchase journey and help make the comparison process more manageable.

There is, therefore, an inherent reluctance from consumers to commit additional time and effort onsite. When using a service to simplify, there is little inclination to add complexity. So, after entering all their personal details and

policy requirements, users do not want to take the extra step of comparing the comparisons – they simply want the best deal presented to them with no added effort involved.

This inherent expectation of ease creates a user indolence. Typically, for example, when consumers click through to a policy to see more detail, they report that they would be more inclined to go ahead with the purchase than go back and compare. Evidently, clicking in and out of different policies to investigate is deemed to be messy and time-consuming. In turn, this means that in-depth comparisons are being eschewed due to inaccessibility.

Poor choices

These two factors quite naturally impair consumer decision making. Although PCW users will leave having acquired the lowest cost deal, that does not mean that they leave with the best all-round deal for their needs.

For example, when the cheapest deals were listed on top of search results, users selected those deals 63% of the time – a clear majority. However, when deals were sorted at random, those same low-cost deals were only selected 27% of the time. Such a substantial dip indicates that low cost does not mean high value, and that selecting on price alone leaves consumers bereft of other sought-after benefits.

This focus on price, then, deepens the danger that products are “hollowed out” to the detriment of other factors, such as quality and inclusive add-ons. Since it is not easy for users to compare each policy on an individual, detailed basis, consumers are making poor choices. As one PCW user comments:



You can't always compare [the deals] against each other. You can compare the prices, but you can't compare the policy. I like to know what I am paying for and would like to be able to compare some of the main policy features.

**Female, 20-30 years, Cardiff,
Home Insurance**



The case for live chat

To alleviate this decision-making problem, live chat software could be used as speedy comparison-within-comparison tool. Placing a chat icon alongside each policy offers consumers an easy opportunity to conduct the more in-depth analysis that previously involved too many clicks and too many web windows to be desirable.

With live chat available, PCW users have a clear avenue to compare in-depth policy features quickly. Price would certainly remain a key contributing factor to the decision-making process, but there would be no obstructions to comparing each policy more thoroughly. See the images below for detail:

The benefit for the consumer

As outlined, consumers can make poor purchase decisions when shopping on a price comparison website due to overemphasis on price, and on the perception that detailed comparisons are difficult and overlong. Live chat software, then, would form an invaluable part of the purchase journey.

Firstly, it would reduce the prominence of price. The addition of a live chat option deemphasises the need for consumers to use price as a crutch, subverting the finality of figures. Price ceases to be the definitive, end interrogation in the presence of a prompt in-depth analysis aid.

Ask multiple providers about the same specific question and see when they respond in real-time

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Comparison site" with the URL "http://www.comparisonsite.com". The page displays three loan offers in a grid format. Each offer card includes the provider's logo, a "Will I get accepted for this loan?" link, the APR, monthly repayments, total amount payable, an "APPLY" button, and a "QUESTIONS? CHAT TO US LIVE" button. Below each offer is a "MORE DETAIL >" link and a representative example paragraph.

| Provider | APR | Monthly repayments (over 60 months) | Total amount payable |
|---------------|------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Money Box | 2.8% | £178.64 | £10,718.40 |
| Salsbury Bank | 2.8% | £178.64 | £10,718.40 |
| Great Rate | 2.9% | £179.25 | £10,755.00 |

The addition of a live chat option deemphasises the need for consumers to use price as a crutch, subverting the finality of figures

Secondly, live chat software simplifies, streamlines, and speeds up the process of comparing advanced policy detail side-by-side. Rather than combing through each deal to then return to the central results page, consumers can get further information from multiple vendors simultaneously, with no clicking around. From the same chat window, from the same search results page, policy particulars can be cross-examined. At a glance, they can then be judged on merit.

For the consumer, this reduces the risk of making an ill-advised snap decision based primarily on price. It makes the option to explore policies easier, and dispels the aversion to interrogate information. In terms of experience matching expectation, live chat software better enables consumers to achieve their aim of quickly making comparisons that lead to smart purchases.

The benefit for the PCW

Price comparison websites are tasked with being fair, clear, and accurate. If consumers are making poor decisions based on online experience issues, they will inevitably feel cheated rather than satisfied – despite the reduced time and effort the PCW has afforded them.

In taking steps to help the end user make a more informed buy, then, the PCW reduces any blame that could potentially be placed on its service. Consequently, the risk of coming under fire for unfair result representation is reduced.

By adding live chat software, the PCW visibly commits to clarity. It acknowledges the decision-making issues presented by experience setbacks, and takes the initiative in resolving them. In doing so, the PCW takes leaps forwards in the ongoing struggle to verify transparency and neutrality.

By adding live chat software, the PCW visibly commits to clarity.

3



.....
A lack of
confidence



An investigation of consumer confidence in price comparison websites, focusing on lack of loyalty, obstructive web layering and the user's hesitant approach to commitment via click.

Switching sites

There is a paradox in the way that consumers use price comparison websites. Despite turning to a PCW to eliminate the need to conduct several separate searches and comparisons, users still typically conduct their search over multiple comparison services; thereby nullifying their original intent.

According to a consumer behaviour study, the price comparison process most often takes place over time and involves multiple PCWs, as well as multiple instances of going direct to vendors or calling providers to check details. Generally, consumers appear to use at least two sites before reaching a final purchase decision; with just 16% using one site, 57% using two to three, and 26% more, before buying.

Evidently, with site switching so prevalent, price comparison websites are not offering a service that is deemed to be fully comprehensive. Rather than being the only, all-encompassing aggregator that consumers need use, the PCW in itself becomes something that must be compared against competitors. Once more, this drives a gap between expectation and experience; adding steps to a service designed to streamline.

Commitment hesitance

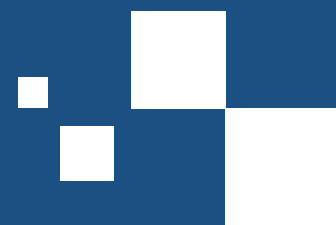
The fact that consumers use multiple price comparison websites indicates one of two things: a lack of information, or a lack of faith. In either instance, the user has insufficient confidence to go ahead and make a purchase decision during the research session.

Consumers, then, are cautious about comparison commitment. Their hesitation to commit to a purchase from a single price comparison website is, according to a survey, centred on shortcomings in website experience, inconsistencies in the way search results are displayed, and a lack of clarity in terms of what is covered. There is a fundamental flaw in the way users perceive PCWs, creating concerns about site progression.

In fact, many survey participants stated that they were reluctant to click on anything that they felt would commit them to next steps – let alone a purchase. It would seem that price comparison websites are primarily used as a benchmarking, rather than a buying, tool. Consumers test the waters on a PCW, but lack the trust to commit to further clicks.



As helpful as price comparison websites are in collating deals, they add layers between consumers and vendors



The need for a direct connection

On a plain and simple level, consumers desire a direct path to purchase. Namely, they desire direct access to a real employee, and a direct way to buy. As helpful as price comparison websites are in collating deals, they add layers between consumers and vendors; layers that inhibit this immediate, direct level of access.

Studies show that a key reason why non-users don't employ PCWs is a preference for making purchases in a way that feels more direct. Just under a quarter (23%) of non-users say their reason for foregoing price comparison websites is because they prefer to talk to a company rep in person.

Only by talking to a vendor do consumers feel they can get all available information and move forward with confidence. This consumer, for example, comments:

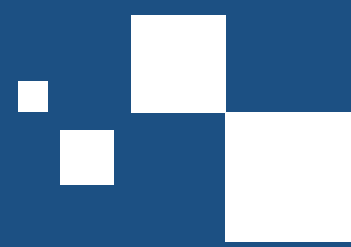


I think the [price comparison] sites do a pretty good job, but I'm not sure how much I trust the actual information – some things that the providers want to hide. They give you basic information about prices, trying to compare like with like, but quite often what I can get out of them isn't like what I have got at the moment.

Male, 50-60 years, London, Motor Insurance



A live chat solution acts as both reassurance and resource



To get the details required to purchase, users feel the need to speak directly with a real person. It is ultimately this level of guidance and support that wins their trust and that finally removes the reluctance to commit.

The case for live chat

It is clear that consumers lack confidence in price comparison websites. More often than not, a single PCW search is not sufficient to make a purchase, and users hesitate due to trust issues and a lack of direct, one-on-one support. In this, live chat software becomes instrumental.

The addition of live chat software gives users the direct path to providers that they demand, extending an offer of pre-sales support that would otherwise be unavailable. The presence of live assistance establishes an early level of trust that assuages concerns, and prevents site-hopping.

Importantly, a live chat solution acts as both reassurance and resource. Its implementation makes the price comparison website a fair and open marketplace; with consumers introduced to relevant deals by a handy tour guide and afforded the opportunity to speak to vendors separately but simultaneously.

Send direct links to specific products to help reassure the customer and speed up the purchase process



No problem, you can use this link to increase the amount and purchase straight away:
[Direct url in here]

Questions?
Live chat available

CU Chat Live help

You said:
I cant find the link to increase the excess amount to £200?
10:52am

CU Bank Insurance said:
No problem, you can use this link to increase the amount and purchase straight away:
[Direct url in here]
10:53am

The benefit for the consumer

The consumer wants a simple, pain free journey, with as much continuity between PCW and vendor as possible. The ability to chat live to vendors from the price comparison website grants this, removing those layers that previously obstructed the user journey.

The improvement in ease of journey, however, is slight in comparison to the confidence boon that live chat software instils. If not a lifeline, live chat provides a compass in a sea of information. It allows consumers to navigate policies quickly and assertively, moving forward where they might once have faltered and providing the means to keep to a straight course.

Users have a direct connection to a vendor available, which solves two user experience problems at once: boosting the trust that was previously lacking and eliminating the former need to disrupt purchase paths by clicking from site to site. In bridging the void between visitor and vendor, PCWs bridge the void between experience and expectation.

The benefit for the PCW

A hesitant user means a lacking site. So, in this instance, the addition of live chat serves as a fundamental website fix. It increases consumer confidence in the price comparison website, which in turn increases PCW usage, utility, and, resultantly, revenue. Simply, improved website performance means improved profits.

By adding live chat software, the PCW lowers the likelihood of losing visitors to competitors. Its results page becomes 'sticky'; a place to linger rather than look and leave. Not only will more consumers use the service, they will spend more time onsite – resulting in stronger brand awareness, brand appreciation and brand loyalty for the PCW.

Of course, increased confidence also helps price comparison websites to address their core problem of winning consumer trust. In a mutually beneficial process, live chat software users get a better experience and the PCW gets a better reputation.

If not a lifeline, live chat provides a compass in a sea of information



4



The need for support



Analysing the shortcomings of existing user help available on price comparison websites, and the experience impediments that leave users feeling both unsupported and unempowered.

Help function failure

Existing help functions on price comparison websites are flawed. According to a consumer study, few users are aware of, or use the 'help' or 'information' functions on PCWs. In addition, field explanations on PCWs are not felt to be particularly effective, often being too general or lacking the information that consumers actually want.

This lack of information is a common problem, with consumers complaining that there is not always enough, or the right type, of information displayed at the results stage. There is a disparity between the help users want and the help they get; as well as a disparity between the helpfulness of the information the PCW believes they provide, and how helpful the user finds it to be.

All this jarring means one thing: consumers are not getting the help they need when using a price comparison website.

As a service designed to help, the failure to assist users is a blow to the core offering of a PCW, and a further example of experience not living up to expectation.

Early support absence

Typically, the point at which consumers most need support is the search results page. Entering personal details is straightforward enough, and there is a full page of detail from the vendor website after selecting a single policy. In between those two stages, however, the consumer is navigating a saturated zone devoid of help.

Price comparison website users report that it is difficult to accurately do a meaningful comparison of products, due to features and variables. It is only when they commit to next steps and move through to a provider website that

they find the necessary availability of information and help – and this occurs too late into the process.

A certain degree of hand-holding is required to help consumers as they begin their policy to policy comparison. Without it, confusion reigns. Indeed, one user comments:

“

I thought you could just do it in 5 minutes, however now that I have looked into it more it's made me really think. I think things should be clarified a bit so that you get the bigger picture, it's not all as sewn up as you think, it definitely takes more looking into.

Female, 20-30 years, Glasgow, Motor Insurance

Clearly, consumers do not find the clarity they sought early on, and as a result flounder in their first few forays into policy comparison. Though they may get the help they need further down the line, their initial experience is unsupported and unclear.

Lack of empowerment

Data empowers PCW users to decide. Unfortunately, data accessibility is an issue for consumers navigating their search results. Consumers state the need for improved access to information on price comparison websites in order to make educated choices. They also prefer a range of ranking options from their initial search results, with a predilection for sites that provide a choice of one to three settings in addition to ranking by price only.

There is, then, a distinct problem with the presentation and placement of data on price comparison websites; a problem that causes consumers to defer where they expected to act decisively. Without the right level of data, without the right level of early support, users are not in the position of empowerment that they presumed a PCW would afford.

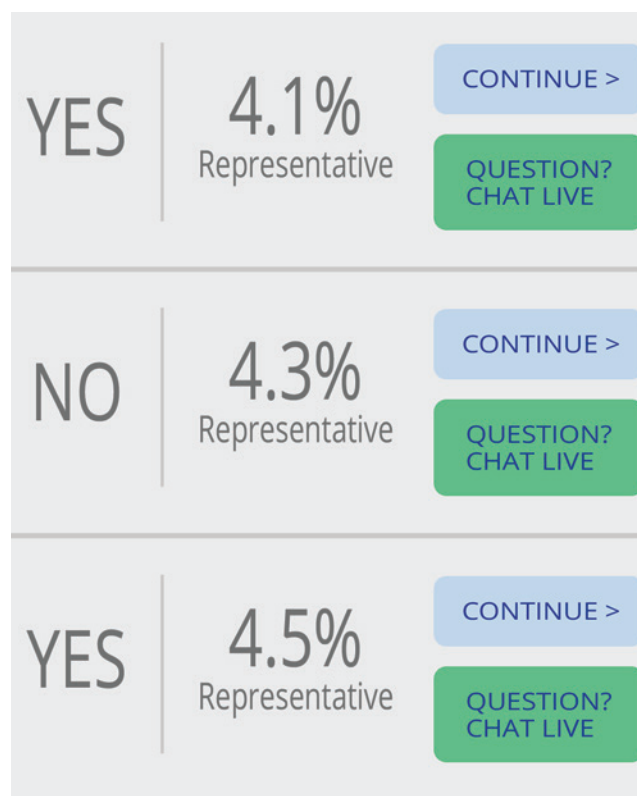
Although price comparison websites offer consumers better choice and access, they do not go far enough. After seeing their search results, the user is better informed but not assured; aware of options but not empowered to choose. For the PCW to be of maximum value, it must bridge this gap and create empowerment through accessibility.

The case for live chat

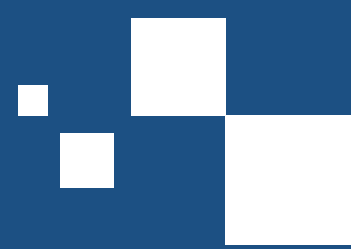
As established, there is a greater need for support on price comparison websites. Existing web help misses the mark, increased information comes too late in the purchase journey, and a data dearth leaves consumers in the dark as to individual policy details.

In each instance, live chat software eliminates the problem. By adding chat functionality, users can ask for help on the exact policy detail for which it is required, and receive information immediately from the relevant vendor(s). Not only do users get relevant support, they get it right where they need it: on the jungle of search results.

Simply, live chat software is the perfect support tool, and a PCW results page is the perfect place to add support.



Live chat software puts the ball in the user's court; allowing them to maintain an aloof, noncommittal position whilst still receiving the advice they need to proceed.



The benefits for the consumer

A price comparison website can be a confusing place for consumers. Early-on in their journey, they lack the right level of support to move forwards decisively and judiciously. With the addition of live chat into a search results page, however, these early stumbling blocks are smoothed over.

Rather than lacking any level of live support until late in the policy selection process, PCW users gain access to a range of supporting reps with answers at the ready. The pressure of clicking through to a vendor website and requesting information is removed. Consumers can collate all the competitor information they need without the hassle and sales-heavy nature of a phone call – using a simple web chat tool that, importantly, does not tie them further to a deal.

In this, consumers have a fair, personalised and prompt platform from which to judge vendors. Live chat software puts the ball in the user's court; allowing them to maintain an aloof, noncommittal position whilst still receiving the advice they need to proceed.

The result is a comparison experience that matches expectations. Alongside a speedy aggregation of suitable

policies, consumers have the means to compare those policies against each other without pressure, without confusion and without disruption. Instead, PCW users benefit from the direct assistance of the various live vendors at the other end of a keyboard.

The benefits for the PCW

In terms of better supporting users, live chat software is a huge benefit to price comparison websites. Firstly and perhaps most importantly, chat comes at no extra cost or resource for the PCW. It is the vendors who provide the additional user help and the additional employee resource; the price comparison website merely facilitates. There is, simply put, nothing to lose and all to gain.

Aside from the previously outlined gains of transparency, clarity, utility and user appreciation, the price comparison website cements its ongoing success by adding live chat software. In a digital-first world where usability is a commodity, anything that can be done to make things simpler is not only a plus but a must. Price comparison websites exist as a service to add value, and therefore only by focusing on outcomes that provide value – such as hosting customer to vendor live chat – can the PCW secure its place as a permanently prosperous resource.





5

Consumer expectations

A compilation of research on consumer expectations in comparison to consumer experience, outlining the areas that are not being met and the implications of those incongruences.

What the consumer wants

Consumers primarily use price comparison websites for price-related reasons. Users indicate that their principal aims are to find the best deal (85%), compare prices for specific products (83%) and save money or reduce costs (79%).

Aside from these price motives, 52% of consumers specify 'getting accurate and reliable information' as one of the three factors that are most important to them when using a price comparison website, with a further 45% saying that it must be easy to use. Nearly a third (31%) also add impartiality of results, while the same proportion want to access a broad range of deals.

From this, it is clear that consumers have a mix of expectations from a price comparison website; they want to compare products from the whole market quickly and easily, and identify the best product for their needs, whilst

also saving time and money. At the same time, they want to take the hard work and messy journeys out of shopping around, building up a clear picture of options in a way at once more accessible and cohesive.

For the price comparison website, this is a tall order. The burden of consumer expectations is a large one to bear; resulting in the need for a multi-purpose website that both aggregates and advises.

What the consumer gets

At present, the consumer is getting the aggregation they need without the necessary accompanying advice. PCW users are getting search results but no support; data but no digestible detail comparison. Though the PCW service is undeniably useful, that does not necessarily translate into ease of use.

Indeed, consumers suggest that price comparison websites are harder to use than first thought and do not always deliver on expectations. Users feel like they are not getting what they want: an actual comparison of like for like products. Rather, they are getting a pool of results that is challenging to initially navigate and then interrogate. This, in turn, is accentuated by the difficulty of accessing exhaustive information summarising how policies work; the (unfulfilled) expectation is for additional detail reviewing the levels of cover or key product features.

Once users have gone on to access this level of detail from a vendor website, they often report a mismatch between search results and policy information. This creates a cocktail of confusion, complemented by commitment hesitation and caution. For all their adoption of price comparison websites, users do not necessarily trust them, and do not always believe rankings to be objective. As a direct knock-on effect, consumers then tend to shop around and take winding, disordered web journeys to make their purchase.

Nor are consumers satisfying their central aim of finding the best purchase possible. As previously outlined, user experience issues lead to an overemphasis on price rather than value, resulting in poor purchase decisions. Simply, consumers are directed to buy cheap but not well.

For users, then, the price comparison website experience misses the mark in many key areas. However, this series of failures still does not refute the value of price comparison websites; rather, it highlights the opportunities for value that lie ahead. In understanding and acting on these opportunities, PCWs can create experiences which successfully match against expectations.

The implications of the disparity

Skin-deep user experience issues aside, there are darker implications of the divergence between experience and expectation. Firstly, for example, price comparison websites do not satisfy the key FCA requirement to be ‘fair, clear, and not misleading.’ PCWs do not always provide clarity regarding their role in the distribution of a product ; leaving consumers unsure as to whether a policy is being given prominence for relevance or for PCW profit. As the FCA puts it:

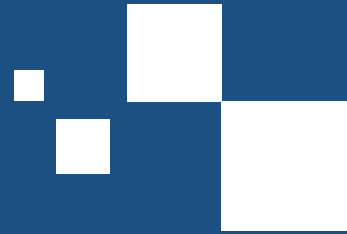


Our review found that [PCWs] were not meeting our requirements in delivering fair and consistent outcomes for consumers. We also found, through our consumer research, that consumers had a number of misconceptions about the services they provided. It is important for consumers to understand that not all products are the same and the cheapest product may not always be the best for their needs.

**Clive Adamson,
FCA director of supervision**

Though the PCW service is undeniably useful, that does not necessarily translate into ease of use.

Simply by enabling an immediate connection between consumer and vendor, the price comparison website steps back from any advisory obligations even as it sets the user up for support.



Not only is there a lack of clarity, there is also a lack of accuracy. Analysis conducted in March 2017 of quotes received across each of the big four price comparison sites revealed that the average price across the top ten quotes can differ significantly from site to site. Further, in a coordinated screening of 352 PCWS websites across the EU, The European Commission and EU consumer protection authorities found that prices were not reliable on 235 websites – a staggering two thirds of the sites checked.

Even the core service of aggregation has been called into question, with a price comparison website study by the Competition and Markets Authority finding that only 11% of customers believe PCWs feature all available suppliers in search results. There are, then, necessary improvements to be made to help consumers get better deals; and work to be done to both increase consumer confidence and enhance competition, regulation and transparency in the PCW sector.

Importantly, problems of this kind are not the stuff of a lightweight website makeover. These are core, compelling issues that must be addressed in order for price comparison websites to pass the scrutiny of formal investigations and meet trading standards.

Live chat as a bridge

The addition of live chat software serves three key purposes: improving the user experience across the board, improving levels of clarity and transparency when it comes to policies and vendors, and meeting regulations regarding fairness and accuracy. In this, live chat software functions as a

bridge between expectation and experience, allowing the price comparison website to tick the boxes that were previously left unchecked.

Firstly, by making live chat to each competing vendor available from a price comparison results page, the PCW puts power at the consumer's fingertips. Namely, chat gives users the power to pursue and compare policy detail, while still keeping providers at arm's length. This satisfies their dual needs for elaboration and accessibility, solving central experience problems in one swift stroke.

At the same time, live chat levels the playing field for providers. It allows them to elucidate their offerings and go beyond the headline price so prominent to PCW users – explaining underlying factors and giving consumers the level of information they need to make a choice. In terms of clarity and transparency, therefore, live chat software is a plain driver of truth. It creates confidence in the reliability of information, whilst ensuring its accuracy.

These factors combined mean that the price comparison website can better meet regulatory standards, living up to the dictate of fairness and non-misleading representation of results. Simply by enabling an immediate connection between consumer and vendor, the price comparison website steps back from any advisory obligations even as it sets the user up for support.

For PCWs, live chat software is not only a bridge between experience and expectation, but also a bridge between regulation and compliance; between utility and indispensability.

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A vision for
the future



A brief look ahead for price comparison websites and their interconnected relationship with live chat software, consumers, and vendors.

Loyalty acquisition

In a landscape where aggregators incorporate consumer-to-vendor live chat software into their search results, the consumer's comparison experience becomes supported and single-point. In online markets, 88% of consumers are less likely to return to a site after a single bad experience. By adding an aid to make comparisons quicker and more comprehensive, then, PCWs can ensure repeat business and win customer loyalty; reducing confusion and therefore reducing the need for consumers to shop direct.

Indeed, even though it is the vendor who will ultimately be providing user assistance, it is the price comparison website that is credited with hosting that assistance. Policy providers will change from year to year, but consumers will remember that they gained the online support they needed from the price comparison website. They are, therefore, more likely to return to it time and again for their

requirements. As well as a live support tool, chat gradually becomes a loyalty acquisition tool for PCWs.

Increased use through usability

Today's consumers demand usability. In itself, usability simply answers the question of whether or not the user can achieve their goal. As a tool that allows PCW users to accomplish their targets immediately and easily onsite, live chat software automatically generates increased usability.

Website interfaces should require the minimum possible level of attention and effort, but at present PCWs are found to be inaccessible and complex. A simple chat button beside each policy reduces the remote feel of each policy, and therefore reduces the user effort required to navigate the service effectively. Where usability increases,

so too does use. In taking steps to improve the consumer's online experience, price comparison websites will benefit from the increased advocacy that comes with increased service appreciation.

A lead on the competition

A value-added initiative with clear benefits, the adoption of live chat software as a policy comparison tool is likely to increase over the course of the next few years. As well as increasing loyalty and usage of price comparison websites through chat, the probability of outstripping the non-adoptive competition offers further advantage.

PCWs that take the early lead in implementing live chat will delight digital shoppers as soon as they see the new functionality available to them. When one PCW can connect the consumer to various vendors immediately and in one place, there is little incentive for the user to visit vendor sites – let alone competitor comparison services that do not offer similar connectivity.

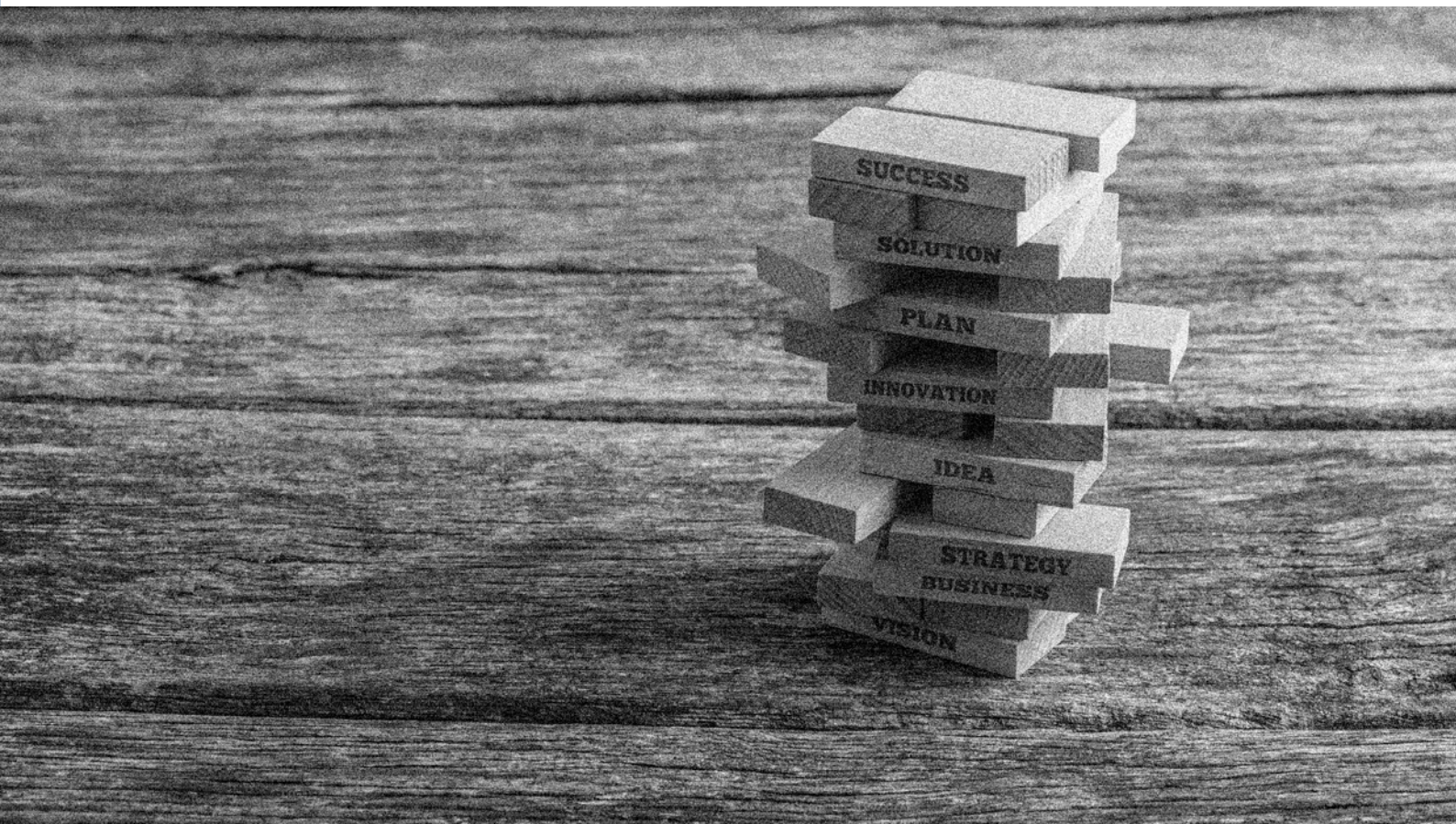
In this, live chat presents an opportunity for the forward-thinking price comparison website to differentiate. As consumers turn their attention to brands that offer a better experience coupled with better support, PCWs that

are slow to adopt new and customer-centric initiatives will rapidly be dropped in the face of superior alternatives.

A fair and open market

Live chat software does not just present boons for the browsing consumer and the price comparison website. For the vendor also, the opportunity to chat live with prospects on a PCW results page is hugely opportune – affording them, as discussed, a level playing field that subverts the finality of headline prices and allows for elaboration.

In turn, this gradually creates a fair comparison marketplace in which factors such as commission and paid prominence do not smear the advantageous service offered. There is still much money to be made on both sides – PCW and vendor alike – but the consumer has greater clarity on policies in a service that is more accessible; more transparent. Over time, then, the comparison market becomes one that is no longer stained by claims of unfairness or inaccuracy. Chat puts all the cards on the table, and makes sure that the deck is fair.



Room for growth

Live chat has the potential to shake-up the price comparison website scene. Initially, the technology will be a two-way chat service that connects users to their vendors of choice. Although capable of routing chats to multiple providers and hosting several sessions at once, all these conversations will take place from a single, convenient window. Technically speaking, this is as complex as the software will be at an initial stage: a simple web messaging system that powers chat only.

As this concept gains traction, however, there is room for future growth. With more people using the service, the software can grow to accommodate more needs. For example, there is no reason that the chat solution could not develop to include some of the more advanced features available in existing contact centre chat solutions, such as real-time language translations, sentiment analysis, in-chat payment options and artificial intelligence applications. These offerings are all about catching customers in the act, and providing highly relevant and highly contextual information to improve their experience over time.

There is no reason that the chat solution could not develop to include some of the more advanced features available in existing contact centre chat solutions, such as real-time language translations



Questions?
Live chat available



Live help

You said:

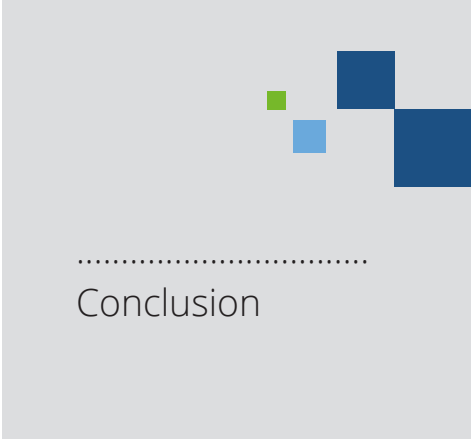
My English is not good. Can i pay in Euro's?

10:52am

Bosco Bank Insurance said:

Oui, vous pouvez. Choisissez simplement l'option à la caisse

10:53am



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Conclusion

Price comparison websites have disrupted consumer shopping, creating a compelling digital offering that eases the struggle of policy selection. In this disruption, however, a fissure has emerged. Growing over time as consumer demand and PCW adoption increases, this fissure has rendered a split between consumer expectation and consumer experience.

Consumers are getting results from price comparison websites, but they are not getting them as slickly or as quickly as imagined. Namely, they suffer from an overwhelming experience, a lack of confidence and a lack of support – all which lead to a difficult and hesitant decision-making process.

As a result of this void, price comparison websites are exposed to a series of business threats. Coming under fire from regulatory bodies and losing consumers to alternate sites, PCWs ultimately have as much to gain as the end user in bridging this gap.

Fortunately, with help from live chat software, the gap can be bridged with speed and ease. The implementation of chat to a price comparison website connects consumers to competing vendors in a click – improving accessibility, transparency and utility in one simple move. By adding live chat, the PCW not only fixes core issues but also future-proofs its service.

In creating this white paper, we have built a clear case for live chat software and its usages in the price comparison space. For PCWs, the next step is to decide whether to be an early innovator or to chase the new chat standard several years after the key players have benefited from its value.

For an early discussion on how our custom-built aggregator chat can meet your needs, get in touch with the Parker Software team today.



About the author

Parker Software is the UK leader in live chat software. Specialising in chat since its conception in 2003, our WhosOn solution has monopolised the British market and has steadily expanded its reach to serve over 10,000 customers in over 100 countries.

Today, we are the proud chat providers to global powers such as Ford, GSK and Worldpay. Our success is based on a solid foundation of expertise, an ongoing commitment to innovation and a reputation for reliability.

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