Culture Wire

substrakt

Benchmark report: Cultural website performance 2025

Comparative analysis of the performance of 87 websites in the cultural sector

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of our annual website benchmark report, analysing the website data of 87 cultural organisations from January to December 2024. Substrakt is fortunate to work with a large number of arts and culture organisations in the UK, mainland Europe and North America. These organisations vary in size and encompass all art forms including theatres, arts centres, dance companies, museums, galleries, opera companies, orchestras and cultural visitor attractions.

For all of these organisations their website is one of their most important touchpoints, and we are often asked what 'good' looks like when it comes to website effectiveness. However, most general benchmarks available online don't specifically address the arts and culture sector. To bridge this gap, last year we launched our first Cultural Website Benchmark Report, analysing data from 76 cultural organisations spanning a large range of art forms.

We received lots of positive feedback about the first report. Many people told us it was helpful to have this comparative data when considering the effectiveness of their own sites. Of course, the most useful data to measure against is your own past datasets, but benchmarks can help you to frame those datasets against the wider context of the sector.

This year we analysed over 140 million user sessions and 3.9 million ticketing transactions, which enabled us to once again identify trends in user behaviour alongside some examples of best practice.

We welcome feedback, suggestions and comments – please contact us **benchmark@substrakt.com**

Methodology

Time-frame

We have analysed web traffic data for the period 1st January 2024 – 31st December 2024.

Cohorts

We have analysed the web traffic data of 87 cultural organisations. This accounted for over 140 million sessions.

These organisations are based across the UK, mainland Europe and North America. They comprise theatres, dance companies, arts centres, museums, galleries, opera companies, orchestras, and heritage organisations. We have included building-based, touring, and festival organisations.

Groupings

We have grouped the organisations involved into three main groups based on website visitor numbers:

- **Small: less than 500,000 sessions**
- **Medium: between 500,000 – 1.5 million sessions**
- **Large: more than 1.5 million sessions**

The 87 organisations that we analysed broke down into those groups as follows:

- **Small: 28 organisations**
- **Medium: 33 organisations**
- **Large: 26 organisations**

In some areas we have excluded results from organisations, for example in the ticketing section we have excluded organisations that don't sell tickets, and in the donations section we have excluded organisations that are not charities and therefore do not take donations.

Throughout this report, we compare data from 2024 to figures in the 2023 benchmark report. However, since additional sites have been included in this year's analysis, some figures may be affected by the expanded dataset. Where the differences are significant, we provide both a like-for-like comparison with last year's original cohort and a separate figure that reflects the full dataset, including the newly added sites. Where notable, we compare the data for UK and North American organisations.

Executive summary

Key findings from this report

Traffic growth

There was a 29% year-on-year increase in website sessions, demonstrating continued audience engagement with arts and cultural institutions post-pandemic. Even when removing the new cohort of sites from the analysis, traffic grew by 11%.

Device usage

Mobile remains the dominant platform, accounting for 69.5% of all website sessions and generating 53.04% of revenue. However, mobile conversion rates remain lower than desktop, with a higher basket abandonment rate.

Acquisition channels

Organic search continues to be the primary driver of website traffic, contributing 44.3% of visits and 40.5% of revenue. Social media remains a low-conversion channel, while email boasts the highest conversion rate at 3.78%.

Commercial performance

Ticket sales increased significantly, with a 17.85% growth in transactions year-on-year excluding new sites, and a 39.28% increase looking at the total cohort for 2024. Membership sales rose by 43.29%, and was particularly strong among smaller organisations, while online donations showed a modest 6.92% increase but a decline in total revenue.

User behaviour & engagement

Event pages are increasingly serving as entry points to websites, reinforcing the need for optimised event-specific landing pages. Engagement rates have significantly improved to 77.05%; some of this significant increase may be at least in part due to changes in how Google Analytics measures this metric. Video engagement remains low, but those who watch tend to finish the content.

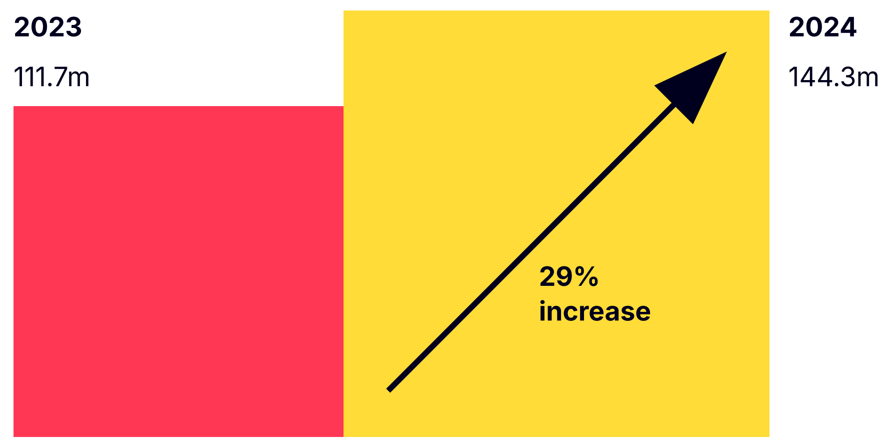
Traffic and device trends

Traffic

Overall there was a positive year-on-year increase in the number of sessions recorded, from 111.7m sessions in 2023 to 144.3m in 2024, an increase of just over 29%.

When we exclude the new cohort of sites from the sample, the session increase is more modest at 11%. However, this data still provides a positive indication that audiences are returning to higher levels of engagement with arts and culture post-pandemic.

Traffic – number of sessions



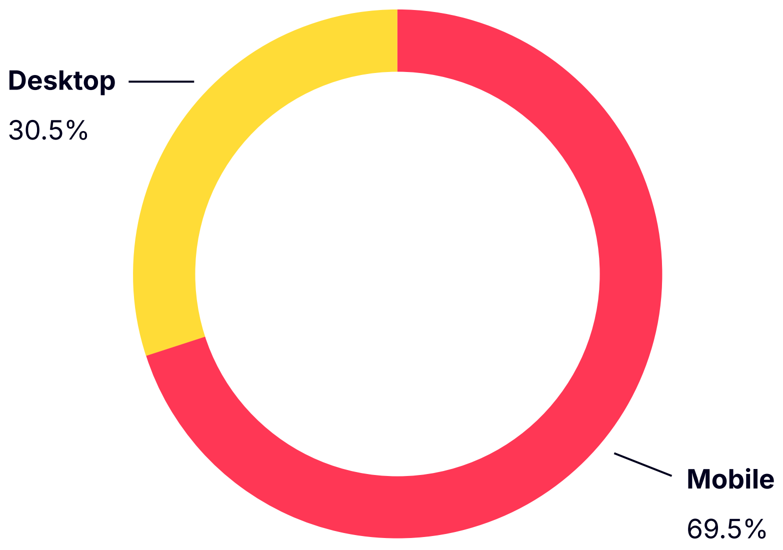
Devices

In last year's report we highlighted the ongoing trend of mobiles being the primary device through which users access websites[1]. This trend continued in 2024, albeit at a slower pace than from 2022 to 2023.

Our analysis showed that in 2024, 69.5% of website sessions took place on a mobile.

The number of sessions taking place on a mobile was slightly higher for UK cultural organisations than for organisations based in North America – 70.6% and 65.9% respectively.

% of traffic by device

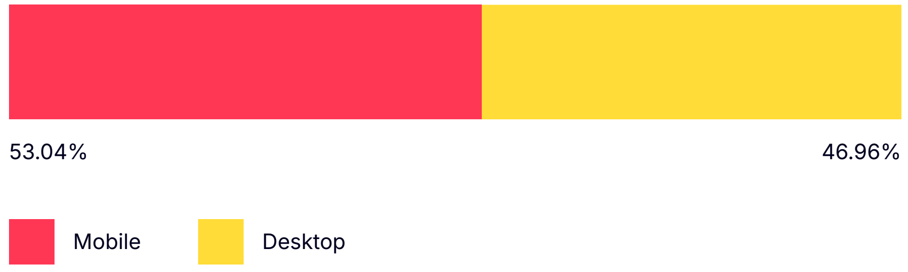


Sessions on mobiles account for a higher overall % of revenue than desktop – 53.04% versus 46.96% and mobile also accounted for a higher number of ticketing transactions and generated more absolute revenue. All of which reminds us of the vital importance of your website being optimised to work effectively on mobiles.

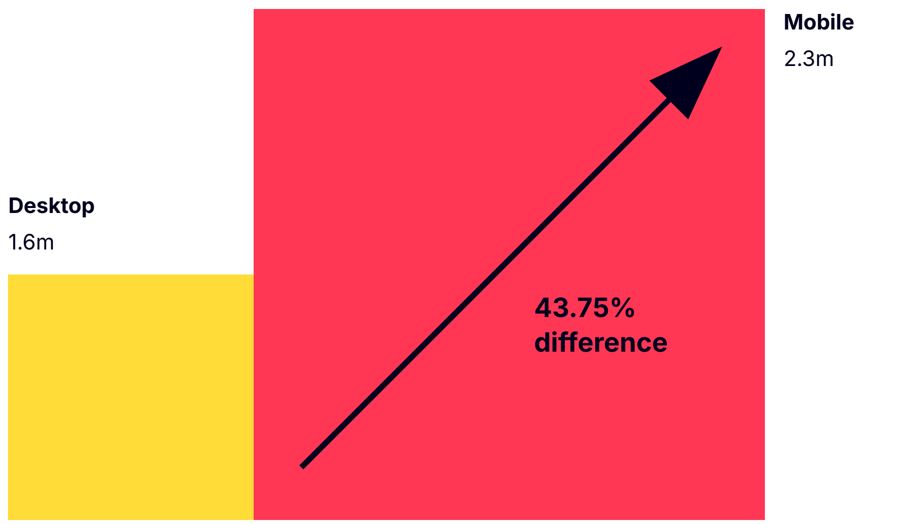
It should be noted that the conversion rate is lower on a mobile (2.24%), compared to a desktop (4.24%). The basket abandonment rate (the percentage of users who started a booking path funnel but did not complete their purchase) is also marginally higher on mobile.

On desktop, the basket abandonment rate is 40.75% compared to 49.49% on mobile. There are likely a few reasons for this, and it is largely unsurprising since it mirrors user behaviour in other sectors. Research carried out by the University of Groningen indicates that consumers frequently use mobile for browsing and switch to desktop to complete transactions[2].

% of revenue by device



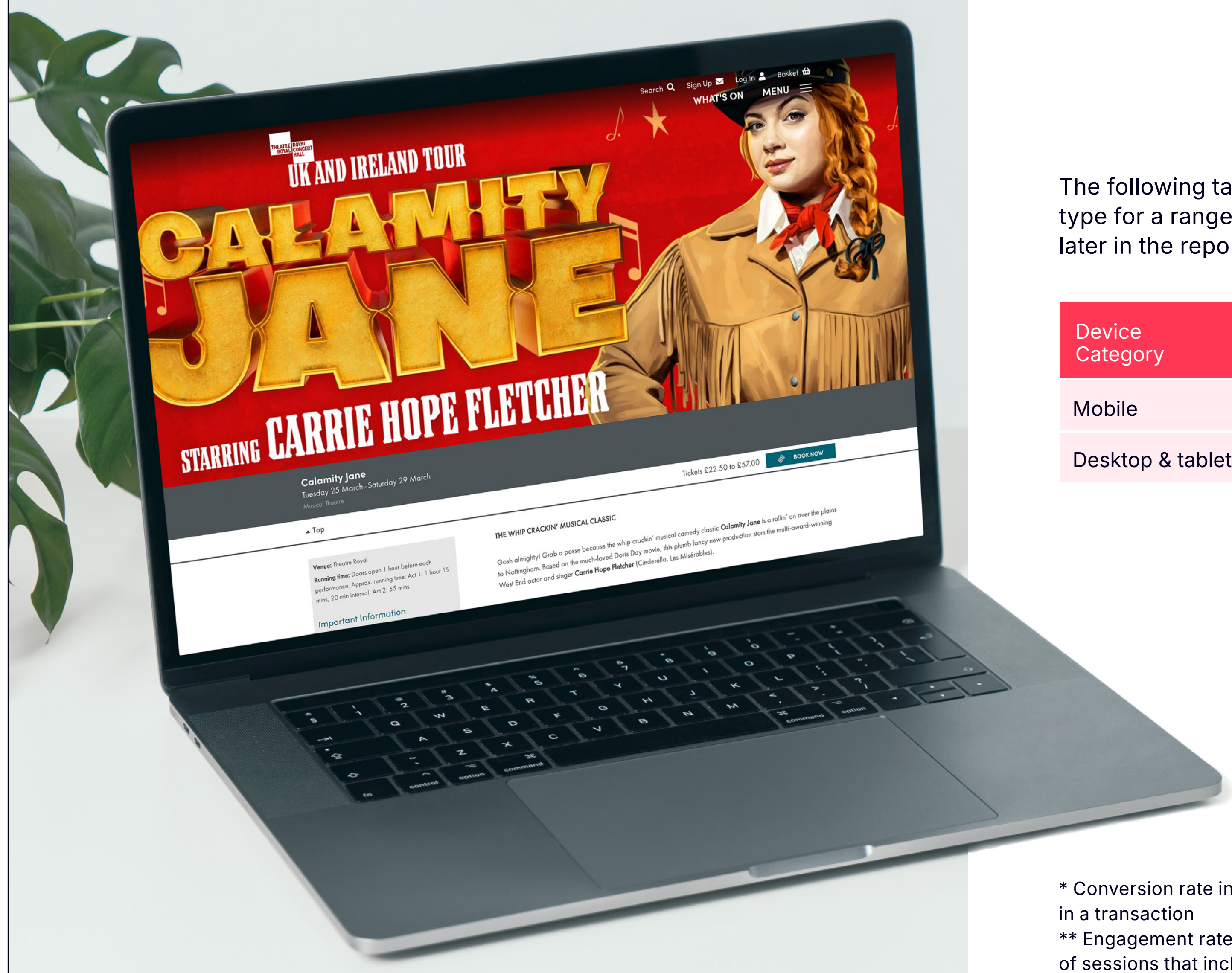
Overall ticketing transactions



1 https://substrakt.com/resources/benchmark-report-2024-cultural-website-performance/

2 https://research.rug.nl/en/publications/device-switching-in-online-purchasing-examining-the-strategic-con

> Desktops are preferred for final purchases particularly when a product is high value. Interestingly, the Groningen research also revealed that consumers familiar with the product category felt more confident making purchases on mobile. This is arguably more likely to be the case in an arts and culture context where audiences can be more self motivated to complete a purchase, for example, for a particular show or event that they want to see.



The following table provides an overview of performance by device type for a range of metrics (more on conversions and engagement later in the report).

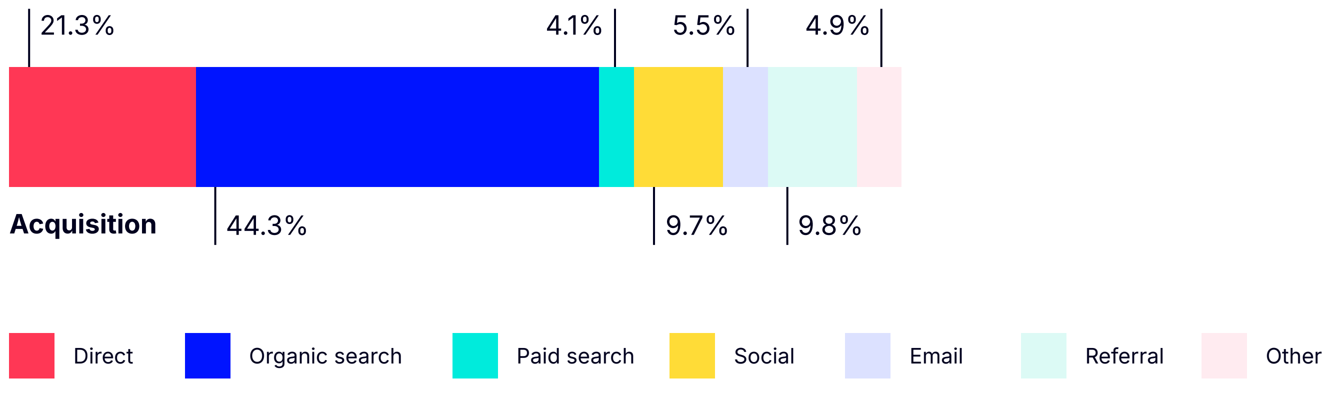
Device Category	% of traffic	Conversion rate*	% of revenue	Engagement rate*
Mobile	69.5%	2.24%	53.04%	75.2%
Desktop & tablet	30.5%	4.24%	46.96%	78.9%

* Conversion rate in this context means the percentage of sessions which resulted in a transaction
** Engagement rate is a Google Analytics metric that here means the percentage of sessions that included a visit to 'engagement-focused pages' (which we have defined as all pages not focused on selling something) and either lasted at least 10 seconds, triggered at least 1 engagement event (such as clicking on a link, or filling out a form) or is a session that has 2 or more page views.

Acquisition channels

Understanding how users are getting to your website has always been vital for marketers to understand. Our analysis helps to add additional context to shed light on the role different digital channels play in sending traffic to arts and culture websites.

Performance by traffic source

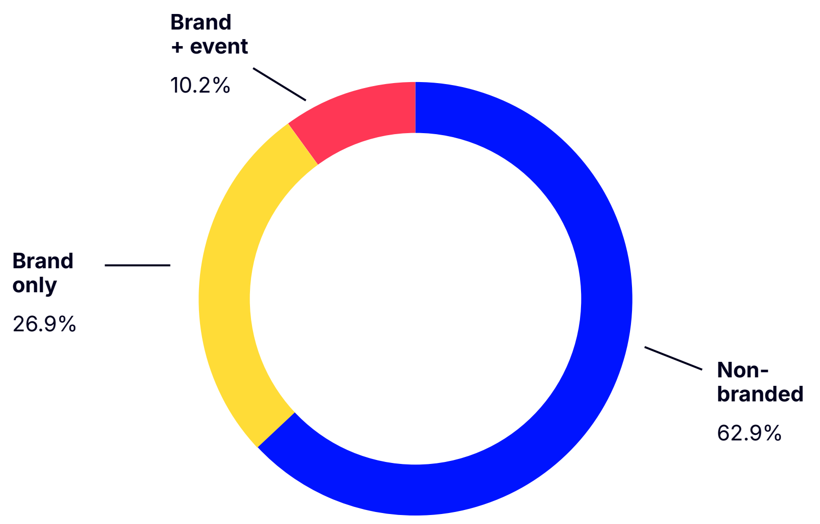


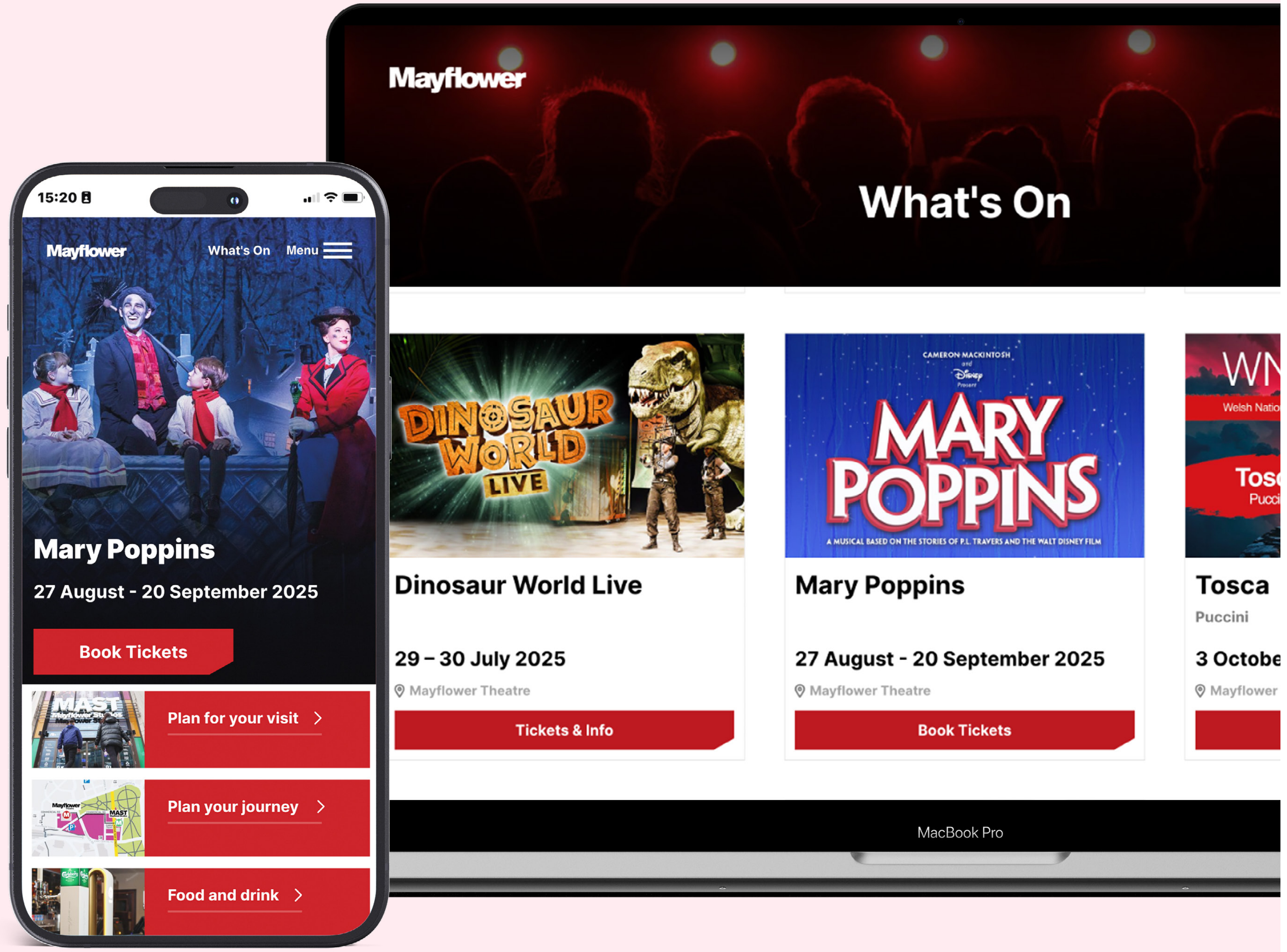
In 2024, the distribution of acquisition channels remained largely consistent with the previous year, although organic search traffic showed a slight increase. Organic search remains the channel sending the most traffic overall - in 2024 an average of 44.3% of traffic to cultural websites came from this source (for cultural organisations based in North America this figure jumps to 50.2%).

Overall, nearly 63% of organic search clicks do not include the organisation's name. This percentage is lower for smaller organisations, with nearly half of their traffic being branded – this is likely due to the 'lower SERP (Search Engine Results Page) authority' assigned to these sites by Google because they receive less traffic overall. It may also be because smaller orgs tend to have fewer high profile shows plus audiences are more local and so, in this context, searches tend to be more branded.

This finding demonstrates the importance of having a solid SEO strategy, which has been the case now for many years. It will be interesting however to review if, and how, Google's AI-powered results affect this data over the coming year.

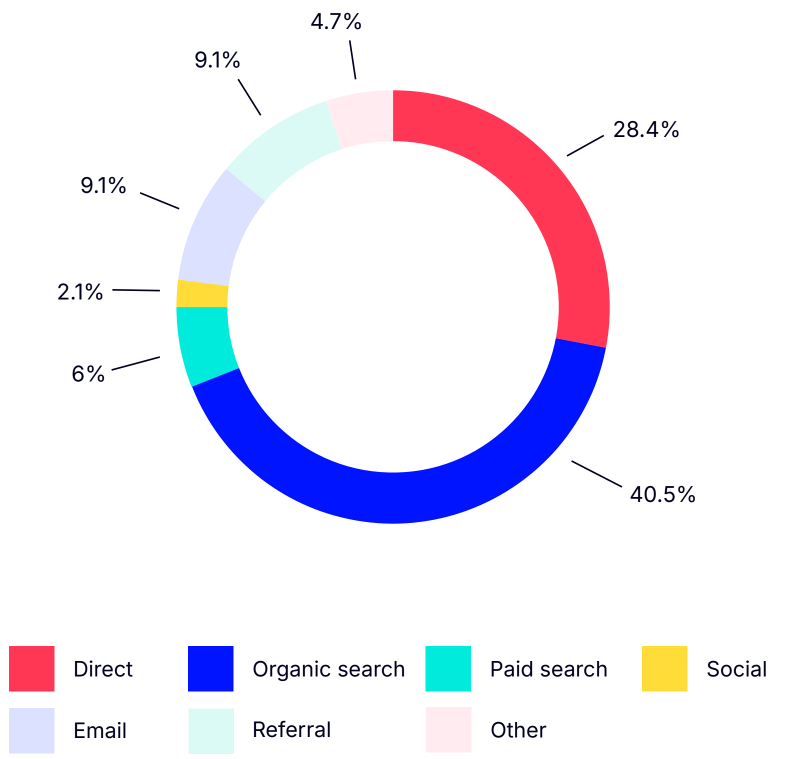
Search intent





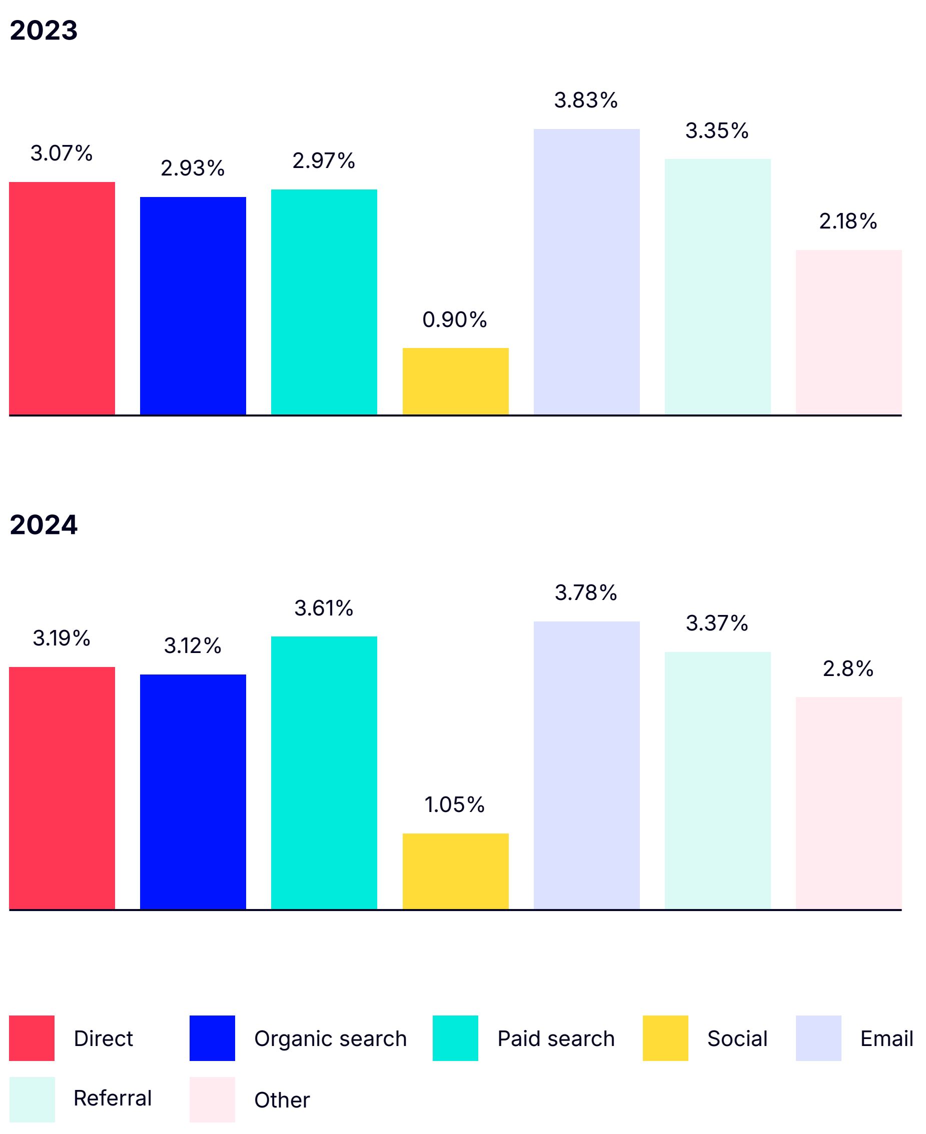
Organic search also generates the most revenue, with 40.5% of revenue coming from this channel. The next section of this report addresses commercial performance in more detail, but it is worth noting that email continues to be the most effective channel for user conversions (for a ticket sale).

Channel insights – revenue split



Perelman Performing Arts Center

Channel insights – conversion rates



Average conversion rates by channel remained similar to in 2023, with every channel increasing slightly apart from email and other.

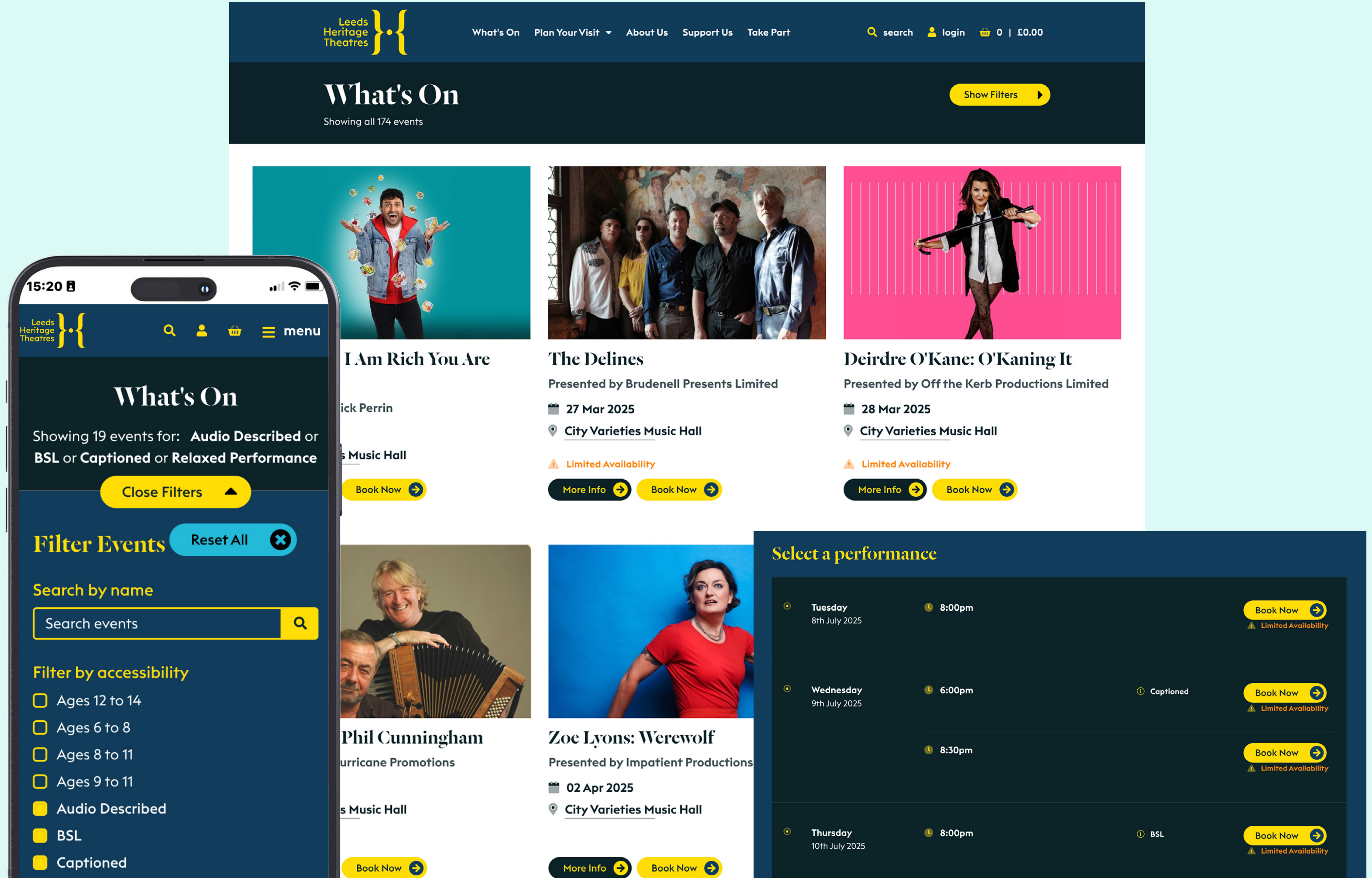
Despite only modest increases across most channels, it is encouraging to see small gains in conversion rates year-on-year, particularly for social and organic search. The improvement in organic social may be due to organisations having a clearer social media strategy or more effective content formats being used. Meanwhile, organic search continues to provide reliable returns with relatively lower ongoing investment, highlighting the value of a well maintained SEO and content strategy.

Email's slight decline in conversion rate is worth monitoring, though it remains one of the strongest-performing channels overall. This could indicate audience fatigue or oversaturation, especially if segmentation or personalisation hasn't evolved significantly. Additionally, the continued underperformance of the "Other" category suggests a need to clarify or streamline tracking setup to ensure meaningful attribution and avoid lumping together disparate or low performing sources.

Leeds Heritage Theatres

A high performer for conversions

Leeds Heritage Theatres (LHT) operates three iconic Leeds venues; Leeds Grand Theatre, City Varieties Music Hall and Hyde Park Picture House.



LHT outperformed the other sites when it came to conversions - both on desktop and mobile.

Our review of their site indicates that its performance is influenced by several key factors, primarily the clarity of information and the impact of subtle yet crucial UX elements:

- **Event listings indicate when there is limited ticket availability remaining, making good use of the scarcity principle to encourage users to buy a ticket while they're still available.**
- **Event listings include icons for shows with access provisions, such as BSL, Captioned, or Audio Described (users can filter the What's On by these options).**
- **In the What's On listing there is the option for 'More Info' or 'Book Now' allowing users to immediately enter the booking path when they already know which event they'd like to book.**
- **A view from seat option gives users confidence in their selected seat option.**
- **For some shows a 'secret seats' option allows users to quickly book tickets for £22 each (they receive a notification of their allocated seats 24/48 hours before the performance).**

Visit Leeds Heritage Theatres at
https://leedsheritagetheatres.com/

Commercial performance

Commercial performance

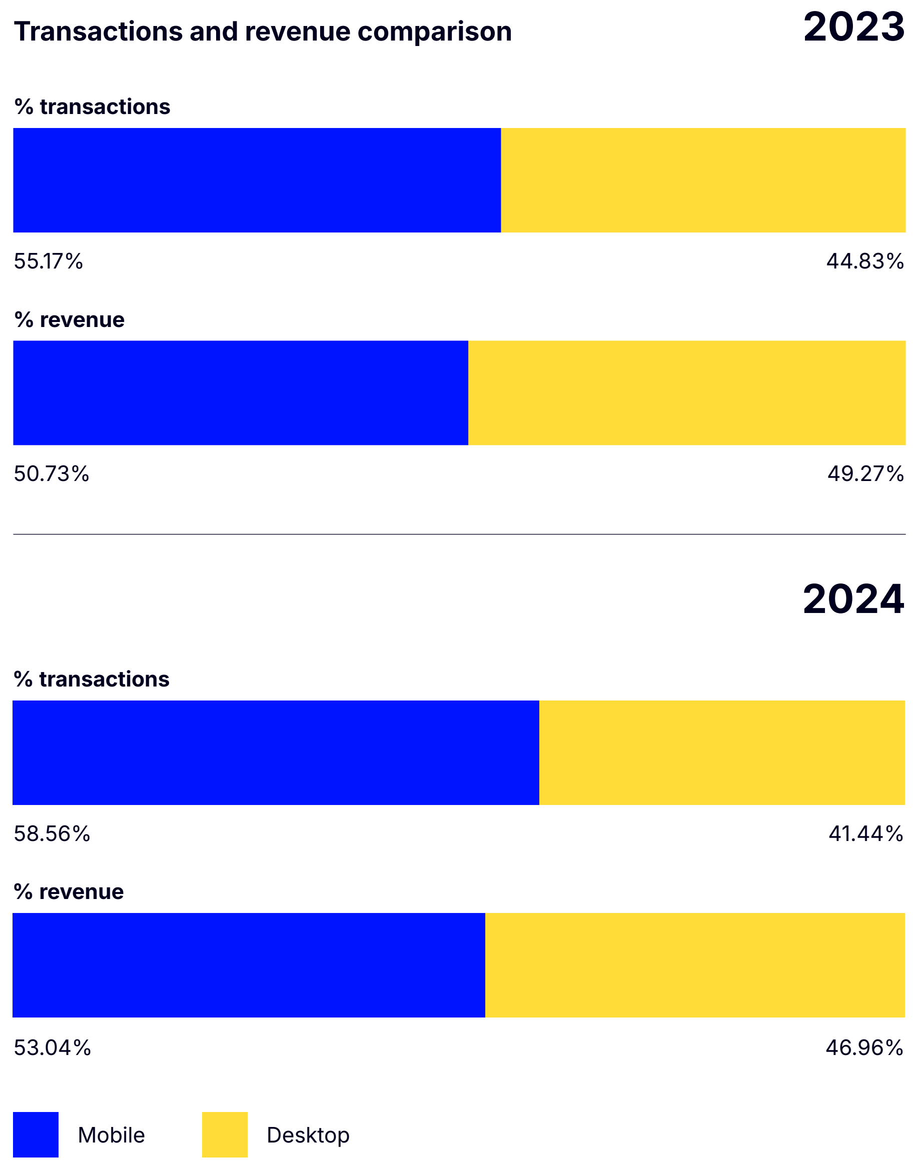
An organisation's website plays a vital role in generating revenue for a cultural organisation, whether via ticket and membership sales, donations, merchandise or sometimes, a comprehensive retail offer.

In this year's report we are focusing on any revenue that comes via a website's CRM/ticketing system. This may be tickets, memberships, donations or merchandise. Since only a relatively small percentage of the overall cohort have a full online retail offer, we have decided to omit retail as a standalone category.

Ticket

The overall number of transactions increased from 2.8m in 2023 to 3.9m in 2024. And even when we remove the new cohort of sites from the analysis, the number of transactions year- on-year increased by 17.85%. This trend applies to all sizes of organisation and across both the UK and North America. This is another positive sign that the sector is continuing to recover post-Covid.

The total revenue generated by the sites analysed amounts to over £436 million, and as mentioned in the Devices section of this report, more of that revenue came via mobile users than desktop.



When considering commercial performance it is particularly important to keep an eye on basket abandonment rate (the situation where a user has added an item to their basket but does not complete that purchase). The websites we analysed use a variety of different ticketing and check out systems, some of which do not allow us to analyse every stage of the purchase process. However, we were able to look at this metric for the majority (60%) of sites and so we include it as a useful reference point.

We found that overall, the average basket abandonment rate has increased slightly, from 40.88% in 2023 to 45.12% in 2024. However, the larger overall volume of transactions is likely to play some part in this figure increasing.

For context, according to data collected by the Baymard Institute the average basket abandonment rate across different sectors is 70.19%[1]. At least part of the reason for the significantly lower figure across the sites we analysed is likely due to the nature of arts and culture audiences, who are more motivated to complete their purchase for a show, exhibition or event that they really want to attend.

It is worth noting that abandonment rates are slightly higher on mobile than desktop (49.49% compared to 40.75%), which once again highlights the importance of optimising your site to work effectively on a mobile. If your site has a high basket abandonment rate you should review the user journey to identify any friction points or barriers to a user completing their purchase. For example, you may want to review whether any of the messaging is unclear, if there are too many steps or an overcomplicated checkout flow, issues with accessibility and, a common problem - confusing login and password reset issues.

Basket abandonment rate

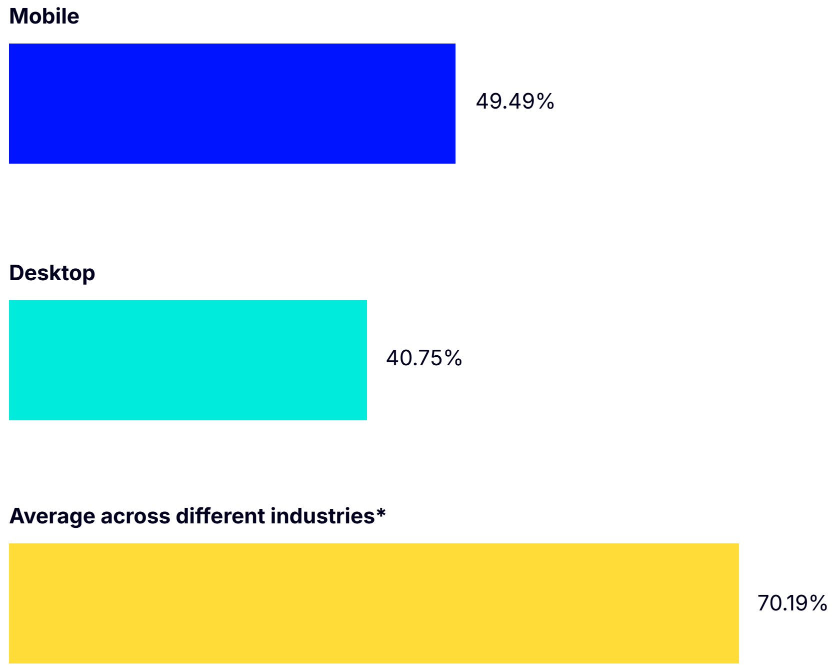
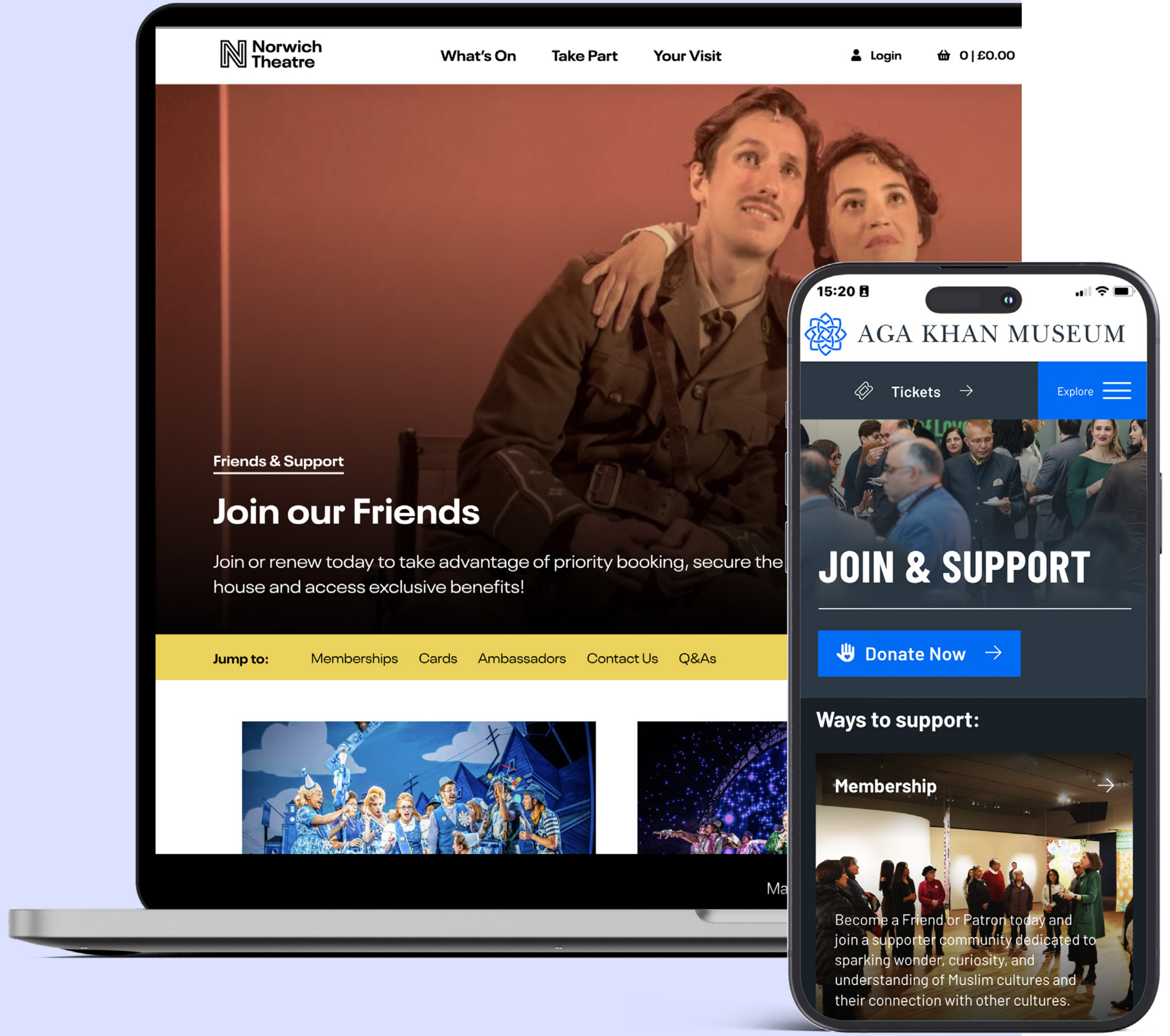


*Figure from Baymard Institute

1 https://baymard.com/lists/cart-abandonment-rate



Donations & memberships

Revenue from donations and memberships is usually a hugely important source of income for arts organisations, both in the UK and North America.

Attracting donations can be particularly tricky, especially in difficult economic times, so it is particularly important that a website's information architecture and content is designed to help gently encourage users to donate, showcasing an organisation's community work and wider societal and/or artistic value.

Memberships offer a route to build loyalty amongst audiences. While their success depends largely on the benefits offered and how the support they provide is positioned, a well-designed website plays a crucial role in driving sign-ups. For example, displaying member-exclusive discounts in the shopping basket can effectively encourage users to join.

In our first benchmark report (which compared 2023 data to 2022 data) we reported that overall online membership sales had declined by 3.5%. The good news is that this year the total number of membership sales, across the original cohort, has increased by 58% and across the whole group of sites by 43.3%.

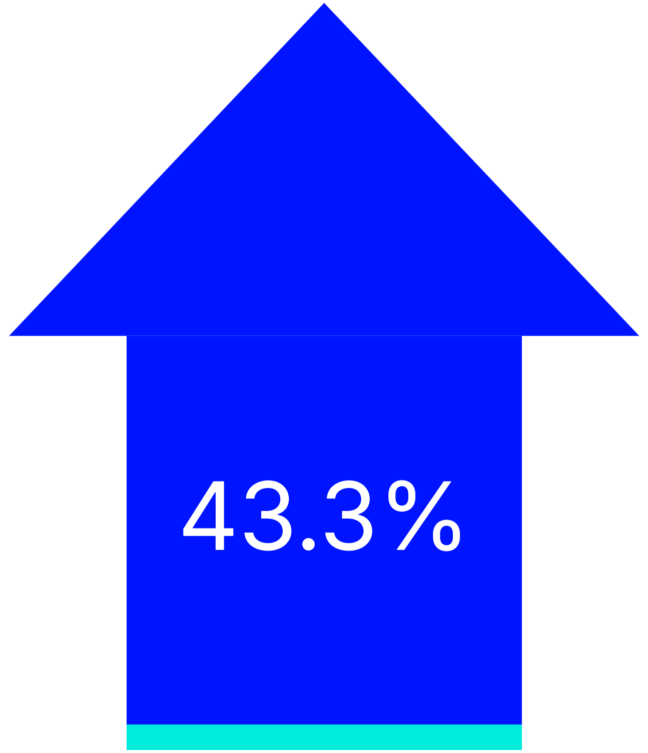
We checked to see whether this overall average was being impacted by a few outliers, but in fact overall online membership sales have gone up for the vast majority of websites that were included in the last report (only four have seen a decrease in membership). This is a positive sign and, we hope, another indication that post-Covid audience engagement with arts and culture continues to get back on track.

There were some significant differences in the size of the increase in membership sales, depending on the size of the organisation. For example, smaller organisations increased their online memberships sales by 117.50% whereas for large organisations that increase was only 17.78%. It is of course impossible to be certain about the reason for this disparity across size of organisation although we can hypothesize that smaller organisations are catching up to larger organisations in how they market their membership offer, and how their website supports this. It is also the case that in the cohort we analysed more websites in the smaller category offer memberships now than in 2023.

Overall, the average number of online donations also increased but, at 6.92% it was a much smaller percentage increase than average membership sales growth and, crucially, the average revenue from donations fell by 11.31%. This is a continuing trend from 2022 to 2023, which also showed a drop in donations. There are probably a number of factors at play here, from the tough economic environment to, perhaps, a wider trend whereby audiences that want to support cultural organisations, prefer to do so via memberships.

The final noteworthy data point for donations and memberships is regarding devices. For both donations and memberships, the majority of transactions took place on a mobile device.

Average number of memberships sold



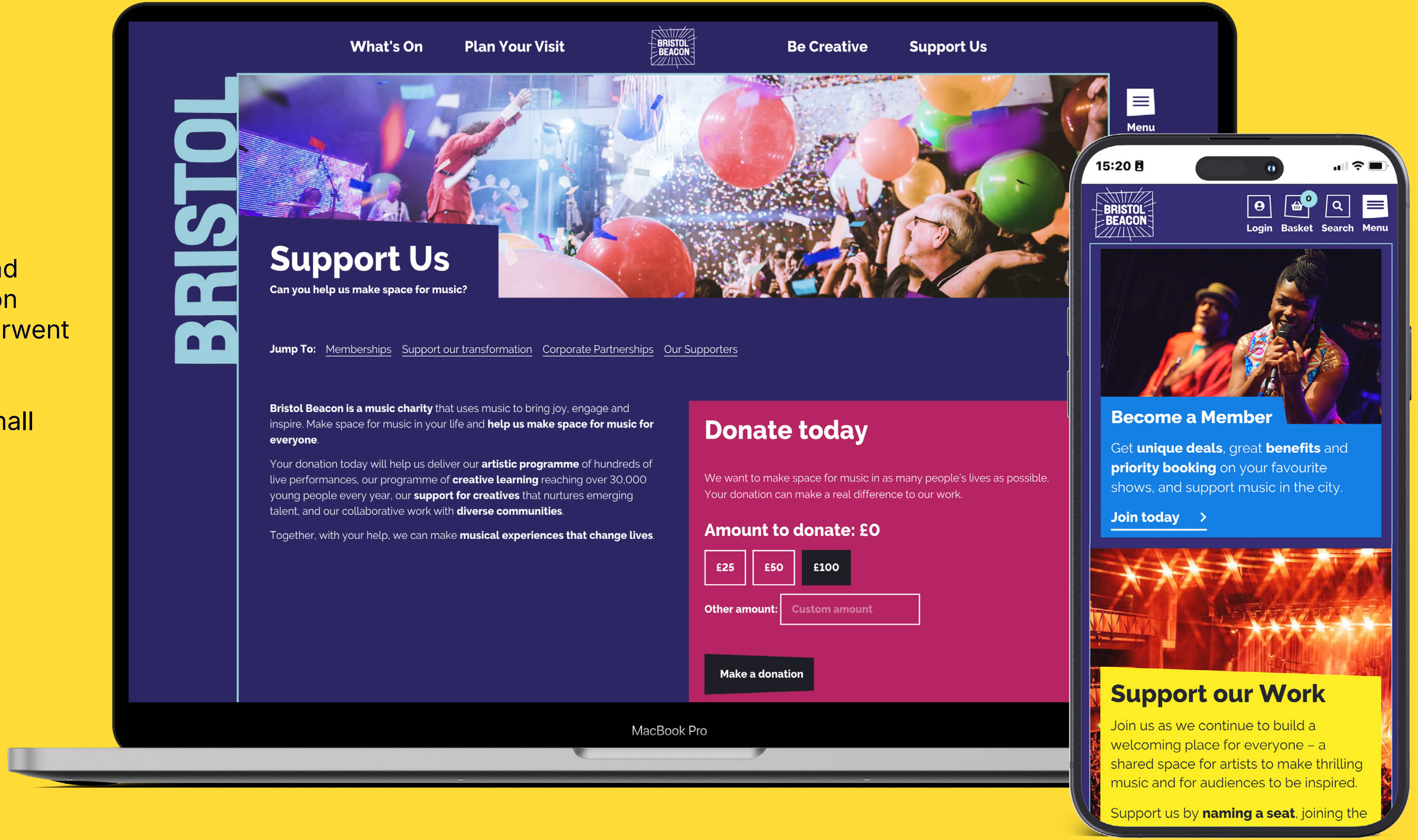
The average number of memberships sold increased by 43.3%, with the largest increase in small organisations.

Aga Khan Museum

Bristol Beacon

Getting donations right

Bristol Beacon is a charity, renowned venue and music education hub. Previously named Colston Hall, their Grade II listed building recently underwent a large capital refurbishment programme and reopened at the end of November 2023 with a capacity of 1,800 (2,100 standing) in the main hall and two additional auditoriums in the cellars.

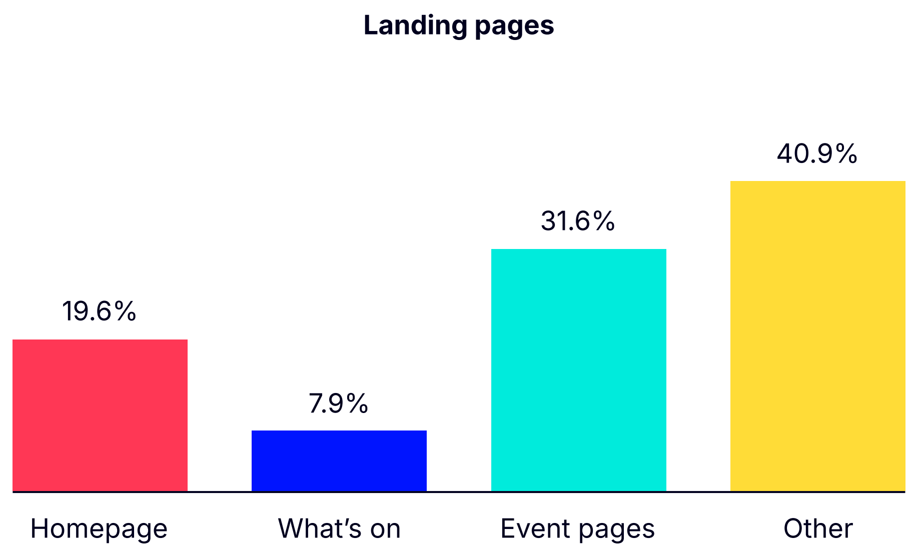


In our analysis Bristol Beacon came out in the top 10 for the number of donations, on both desktop and mobile. It was also above average in the percentage of donations that took place on a mobile. To encourage users to donate, Bristol Beacon uses a combination of effective content, language and design, alongside subtle cues and calls to action:

- **The main site navigation is scaled back to four elements, of which one is 'Support Us'.**
- **The support focused pages use bold colours and design elements to draw the eye's attention.**
- **The "Support Us" page provides viewers with information on how their donation can make a difference, and features a donate widget which takes the user straight into the checkout.**
- **Donation asks are peppered throughout the website at relevant points in the user journey (e.g. within pages focused on community outreach).**
- **There's a joined-up approach to messaging. The donation narrative aligns with other key brand messaging applied throughout the website and across their other touchpoints.**

Visit Bristol Beacon at
https://bristolbeacon.org/

User behaviour & engagement



Landing pages

When designing a website's information architecture, remember that most users won't enter via the homepage. While the homepage is key for branding and positioning – a bit like setting up a storefront – every page should help users quickly orient themselves and navigate their next step.

Similarly to last year's report, we have grouped landing pages into four key groups: the homepage, what's on (the primary event listing page), event pages, and other (includes traffic that didn't land on either homepage, what's on, or an event page).

A significant change in user behaviour in the 2024 data is the increase in users landing on event pages. This has risen to 31.6% overall, from 25% last year, and emphasises the importance of optimising event pages for conversions.

For organisations in the medium sized category this was even higher, with 34% of users entering the site via an event page.

There was a difference when we segmented the data by region; in the UK, the percentage of sessions landing on event pages was 35%, compared with 22.1% in North America. Additionally, in North America, the percentage of sessions that start on the home page is lower than in the UK. In the UK 17.2% of sessions start with the homepage, whereas in North America it is 15.2.% (in North America a higher percentage of sessions begin on pages in the 'other' category).

Engagement

A cultural organisation's website exists not only to facilitate transactions but also to engage audiences with content and other digital experiences – whether to build brand awareness, loyalty, or for educational purposes. There was a period when social media platforms became the main place where organisations shared this type of non-transactional content, but over the last few years it's become clear how risky it can be to put your focus into building an audience on a platform that you don't own.

The data in this section focuses on any areas of a website that are not primarily centred around ticket sales. This includes, for example, blog sections, news, educational content and so on.

One of the primary data points in this area is termed 'Engagement Rate'. Google Analytics defines engagement rate as any of the following:

- A session that lasts at least 10 seconds
- A session that includes at least two page views or screen views
- A session that includes one or more conversion events

Our 2024 analysis shows that the average engagement rate was 77.05%. This is significantly higher than industry benchmarks from other sectors, which shows an average of 56.23% across all sectors, with the highest engagement showing in the 'Ecommerce and Marketplaces' sector at 63.86%[1].

1 https://databox.com/google-analytics-4-industry-benchmarks

The engagement rate metric has increased significantly from last year's report (which was 48% on average). It would appear that this is down to Google changing how they calculate this particular metric.

Engagement rate was highest for those organisations in the large category, at 80.08%. This may reflect larger organisations having more resources to allocate towards creating non-transactional content.

It is perhaps reassuring to see that there was very little difference in the engagement rate between desktop and mobile users, 78.9% and 75.20% respectively.

We also looked at how users were engaging with video, and it is quite sobering to see that only 1.2% of users engaged with this type of content. However, of those that did, almost half watched until the end of the video. This suggests that videos shared on websites appeal to a select, but engaged, set of users and is also a reminder that for many cultural organisations, video content is often directly engaged with on platforms such as YouTube, and therefore highlights the importance of having a multi-channel content distribution strategy.

It is important to remember that engagement rate is an out-of-the-box metric and that tracking custom metrics for different types of content will help you optimise and improve. The best way to approach this is to define the type of behaviour you're aiming for on a page and then monitor it – this might be watching a video, interacting with an element on the page, or downloading something.

Engagement

Engagement rate

75.2% Mobile

78.9% Desktop

1.2% **of users with a video interaction**

Average time sprint on engagement focused pages

35secs Mobile

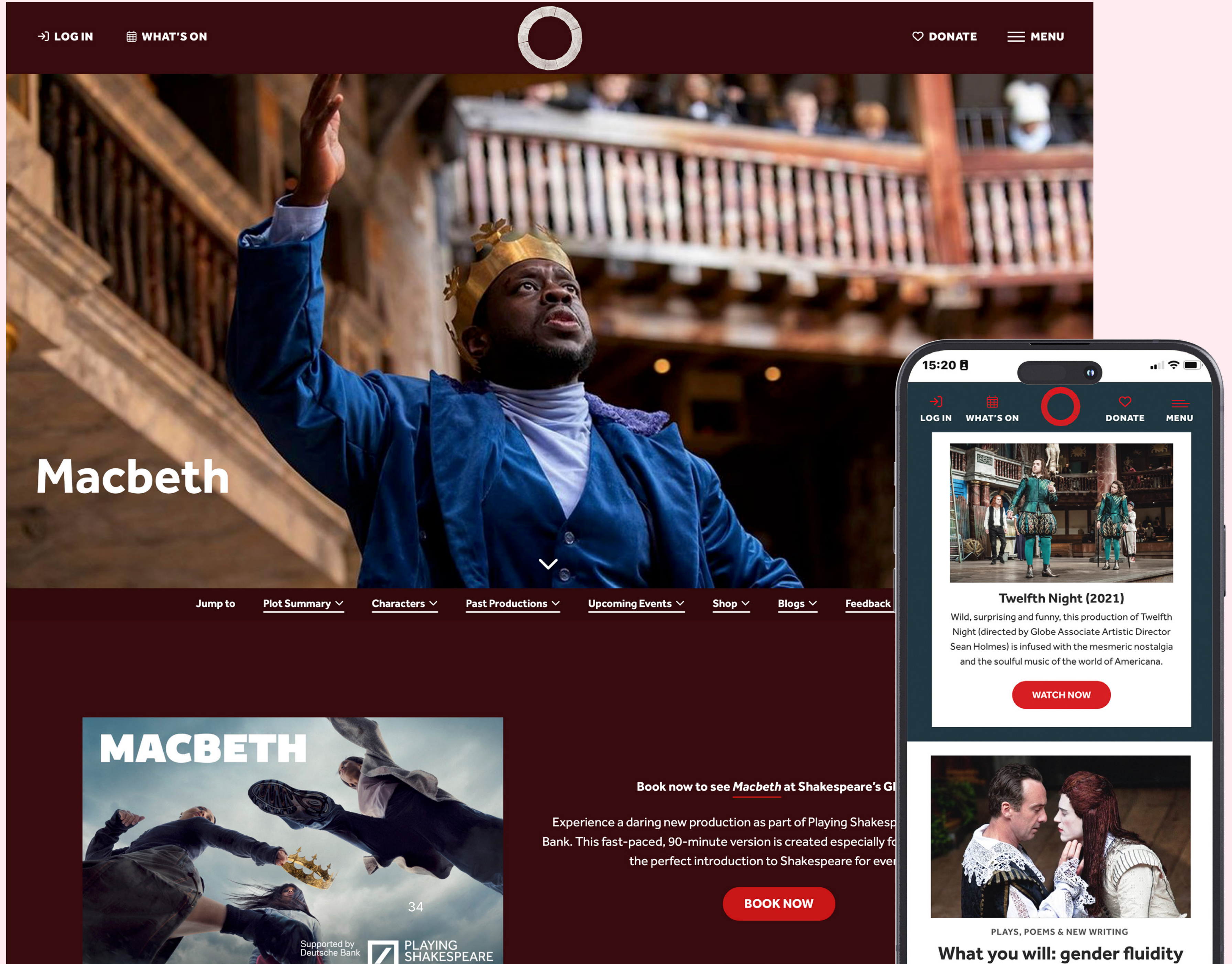
44secs Desktop

Shakespeare's Globe

High engagement rates

A world renowned theatre, education centre and cultural landmark, Shakespeare's Globe performed particularly well in regards to engagement. Engagement is a key objective for the Globe, since at its core it is an educational charity that seeks to engage people in the work of Shakespeare. One of its core strategic pillars is to:

"Celebrate and champion the continued relevance of Shakespeare's work through impactful theatre, education and research, Globe-inspired programming".



The Globe site performed above average in the percentage of users viewing engagement focused pages, the overall mobile and desktop engagement rate, and the percentage of users that watched video. We identified a number of likely reasons for this:

- In addition to their dedicated section for educators (which helps them to rank on the first SERPs page on Google), Globe also has dedicated sections of the site aimed at helping users to find out more about Shakespeare.
- This type of content is varied and includes factual pages, detailed information about Shakespeare's plays, alongside more short-form, bite-size content and videos that are presented in an engaging way.
- The jump navigation in the Discover section makes it easy for users to easily find what they're looking for, or, for users who are browsing, it lays a trail to lead them through the information.
- Video is used throughout the site and includes a number of different styles, including animation, Q&A and backstage videos.

Visit Shakespeare's Globe at
https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/

What next?

Sometimes data analysis can fall into the ‘interesting but not useful’ category, and our aim with these reports is to ensure there are some practical, actionable takeaways. It is in that spirit that we use the insights in this report to make the following recommendations:

Build with a mobile first mindset

With mobile accounting for nearly 70% of sessions but suffering from lower conversion rates, it is vital to focus on enhancing the mobile user experience. This includes improving purchase paths and the checkout process, and ensuring it is simple to navigate and use your website on a device with a small screen.

Continue to improve your SEO strategy

Given that organic search is the largest traffic driver (and despite the increase in AI summaries in SERPs) investing in SEO remains crucial. Focus on optimising for non-branded keywords, improving structured data, and ensuring high-quality content to enhance visibility in search rankings.

Improve conversion on event pages

With a significant increase in users landing directly on event pages (32% overall), these pages should be designed for maximum conversions. Key actions include making CTAs clearer, ensuring ticket purchase options are prominent, and improving accessibility.

Review any basket abandonment issues

It is important to keep a close eye on basket abandonment rate, since an increase could indicate friction in the checkout process. Consider running some user testing to identify any friction points and consider all elements of the experience, including aspects such as making in-basket messages clearer.

Capitalise on online membership sales growth

The increase in online membership sales (+43.29% year-on-year) suggests a growing opportunity. You may want to review your membership offer and reconsider how you present it online - throughout key points in the user journey. For example by emphasising exclusive benefits and highlighting discounts within the purchase journey to encourage sign-ups.

Refine your content engagement strategy

While overall engagement rates have improved, video interaction remains low. You may want to test different formats, experiment with short-form videos, and ensure content is well-placed to attract user interaction.

Next year

We will be producing this report again next year, so we would love to hear your thoughts and feedback on the things you've found useful, less useful or would like to see more of.

We also want to include more organisations in the 2026 report, so if you would like to include your organisation's (anonymised) data then please drop us a line. For both of the above please email us at:

benchmark@substrakt.com

If you're looking to analyse the impact of your website or need tips for optimising performance, just get in touch - we'd love to chat!

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