



An invitation to find out where your High Streets rank in the UK Digital Influence Index.

Dear LEP Chief Executive / Chair,

You will recall that GFirst LEP are the Retail Pathfinder for HM Government and that we have been working on a number of initiatives in partnership with local/national retailers, technology businesses, Government departments, and others to explore the future viability and growth of the retail sector in the UK. One such project that I'm happy to share the results of, in the spirit of sharing good practice, is the successful Digital High Street pilot that we launched in Gloucestershire last year and have now expanded to other parts of England.

We all know the significance of 'place' in current policy thinking and we believe that the success of our high streets is vital in place-shaping and influencing the overall economic success of our LEP geographies.

The pilot addressed three of the key recommendations of the DCLG commissioned 2020 Digital High Street report: Digital Skills, High Street Lab, and High Street Digital Health Index.

At the start of the pilot we researched the digital output of a wide range of High Streets measuring the online presence of local retailers and the use of social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook. It revealed that up to 74% of all High Street retailers have no active social media presence, 50% have no e-commerce facility and 40% have no website at all.

These results suggest that local retailers were not taking up the opportunities created by digital platforms, and analysis of current and future shopping habits all point to the increasing importance of these channels in retail purchases. Research from Deloitte makes it clear that close to 40% of all OFFLINE transactions are influenced by digital communications.

To improve the digital output of local retailers the #WDYT (*What do you think?*) campaign launched last year prioritising the development of digital skills, knowledge sharing, and the creation of a robust nationwide digital index that covers data from 150K retail locations in 1,300 towns.

To date, the pilot program has helped a number of Gloucestershire towns and over 1,000 retailers significantly increase their digital skills. Both pilot towns of Gloucester and Cheltenham now sit in the 12 most digitally active towns in the country.

Stafford, another pilot town, has risen 93 places to 21st in the Digital Influence Index. They have reported a week on week increase in footfall for the duration of the campaign, with footfall increases of over 22% on data from last year.

Included is a press release of summary results from pilot towns, along with summary feedback from participating place managers and retailers. As you can see, there are a great number of individual retailers who are now digital advocates and very willing to share their digital success stories. This campaign has proven to be a catalyst that encourages High Street businesses to begin or accelerate their digital journey. We are extending our ranking technology to include each retailer within each town.

The outcomes of the #WDYT campaign are clear:

1. Digital output drives local footfall
2. Ranking data is a great incentive for improvement
3. Every town is the sum of its digital parts

By increasing digital output, High Streets can reach established or new customers and by working together local retailers can increase their collective and individual influence. Recent headlines have reported the failure of the “Portas” towns and it is interesting to note that all of these towns have a very low Digital Influence ranking. (See press release).

We are also working with other key organisations like BIRA, ATCM and ACS to raise awareness of the Digital Influence Index and to ensure its place as a key economic and productivity driver that must be invested in. We would like to invite you to be part of this by accessing the freely available Digital Influence Index for each of your towns:

-----KEY MESSAGE PLEASE SHARE -----

Visit www.wdyt.org.uk to collect your town’s ranking in the UK Digital Influence Index, which measures the digital influence of 1,300 UK towns. (Bonus: it’s free). You will be sent the Index and be notified of all significant changes weekly. Digital Influence Ranking should be seen as an important KPI.

The WDYT campaign team are now preparing to launch the next 25 towns so please do get in touch with them if you’re interested in a discussion. They would be happy to come to your LEP Area to explain how the campaign works, along with innovative funding options that should make it accessible to all: (www.wdyt.org.uk).

Next year, with Growth Deal funding, we will be launching the UK Retail Innovation Centre in association with Gloucester City Council. This will showcase the latest innovations and learnings that can affect places across the UK and we’ll be really happy to work with LEPs who prioritise their retail/high street offer. Please get in touch if you’d like to have an early discussion once the Centre is up and running.

Regards,

David

David Owen
Chief Executive
GFirst LEP