Quill

Basket or bounce?
How to create fashion product descriptions that convert

Has your purchase funnel got a leak?

The online clothing and footwear market is predicted to become the largest online market in 2016, and to make up a staggering 28.8% of total UK online spend by 2020.[1]

Evidently, the opportunity for online fashion retailers is huge. But the breadth of competition and consumer choice is also enormous – meaning ecommerce businesses need to fight hard for every conversion.

In-store, sales advisors are on-hand to listen to the customer's needs, make helpful recommendations, answer questions and supply the odd well-timed compliment at the fitting room.

But online, there's no friendly shop assistant to help consumers navigate the endless reams of products on offer. And that's where product descriptions become an absolutely vital tool for helping the customer to make a decision, and nudging them (gently) towards conversion.

In short, your product description could be the difference between basket and bounce.

And in turn, having effective product descriptions could be the difference between capitalising on all the effort (and money) spent bringing the customer to your site – whether through ATL advertising, display ads, paid search or email campaigns – and simply losing them at the final 'hurdle' in the shopping journey. A leaky purchase funnel is a retailer's nightmare.

But what should a persuasive product description look like for women's high street fashion brands? What do consumers want to know? And what information makes them more likely to buy?

[1] Source: www.verdictretail.com/uk-online-retail-sales-to-reach-62-7bn-in-2020/

Methodology

We surveyed 100 UK female shoppers, aged 18-30, to help define the key characteristics of high street fashion product descriptions that convert.

The survey looked at characteristics including:

⊙ Description of garment fit
⊙ Description of garment fabric & feel
⊙ Level of detail on garment features
⊙ Description of garment benefits
⊙ Inclusion of style tips
⊙ Inclusion of sizing information (including model size)

Initially, we asked our shoppers to prioritise these characteristics on a purely hypothetical basis, with description of fit and feel coming out as clear top priorities (see table).

Then, to get a more nuanced view – and put these characteristics in a realistic context – we showed our sample a series of example product descriptions for side-by-side comparison. In each instance, we asked consumers to choose their preference between:

⊙ A baseline description
⊙ An enhanced description

SURVEY CRITERIA		NOT IMPORTANT	QUITE IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
1.	How the garment fits	2% 2	14% 14	84% 84	2.82
2.	How the garment feels	6% 6	41% 41	53% 53	2.47
3.	Details of design features	17% 17	55% 55	28% 28	2.11
4.	How to style the garment	25% 25	55% 55	20% 20	1.95
5.	The benefits of design features	37% 37	52% 52	11% 11	1.74
6.	What size the model is wearing	69% 69	21% 21	10% 10	1.41

1. Fit

63% of respondents said they were more likely to buy the product if shown Description B, suggesting a preference for copy that makes a confident statement about how the garment is cut, and how it fits.

This is unsurprising when you consider the fundamental challenge of shopping for clothing online. Although seeing product imagery is great (especially when you can zoom and rotate it to your heart's content), it's still nowhere near as edifying as trying a garment on in the fitting room.

That's where product copy can act as a bridge between the in-store and online experience – providing crucial information about fit that's not necessarily visible from the product photography alone.

DESCRIPTION A

Baseline – No fit information

Rich embroidery and precise lines combine in this scene-stealing jacket. Its boxy shape creates a striking silhouette that lends instant polish to any ensemble.

DESCRIPTION B

Enhanced – An extra sentence of detail on fit of garment

Rich embroidery and precise lines combine in this scene-stealing jacket. Its boxy shape creates a striking silhouette that lends instant polish to any ensemble. **The jacket is cut to finish at the slimmest part of your waist.**

63%
of consumers more likely to buy if you describe cut and fit

43%
of consumers cite 'poor fit' as reason for product return

Unpicking the figures

More surprising, though, is that only **63%** of respondents selected the enhanced description, when 98% rated fit information as 'very' or 'quite' important in our initial prioritisation exercise.

So, why the disparity? Potentially, our enhanced example didn't resonate due to the body-conscious (e.g. 'slimmest') terminology used, or simply because the audience weren't keen on the fit described.

In the latter case, although you might miss a conversion opportunity by being candid about fit, you also avoid the customer making an ill-advised purchase and then returning the product.

Currently, 25% of items ordered online[2] in the women's fashion category are returned. Some of these returns are intentional, when a customer deliberately purchases multiple sizes or colours of a garment with the intention to return. However, the biggest driver of online clothing returns is poor fit, with **43%** of consumers[3] who have returned items citing this reason.

To avoid all the costs and margin drain associated with handling returns, and to maximise conversions, it's therefore in retailers' interest to talk about garment fit in product descriptions – taking care to use sensitive language that appeals to the target audience.

[2] Source: https://next.ft.com/content/52d26de8-c0e6-11e5-846f-79b0e3d20eaf#axzz48MVWnZaQ

[3] Source: www.mintel.com/press-centre/retail-press-centre/size-does-matter-more-than-one-in-three-38-brits-struggle-to-find-clothes-that-fit-them-well

KEY TAKEAWAY
Help the customer envision how the garment will look and fit. If they can imagine it, they're more likely to buy it – and less likely to make a return.

2. Fabric & Feel

A resounding **70%** of respondents said they were more likely to buy the product if shown Description B, the more detailed, evocative option.

Texture and feel is particularly tricky to convey online, and clearly consumers do miss the tactile experience of touching a garment. Product copy has a pivotal role to play in simulating that experience.

Simply saying a product is made from cashmere isn't enough: using evocative, sensory vocabulary like *blend*, *sumptuous* and *cosy* creates a far richer impression.

However, it's a thin line between evocative language and pretentious-sounding fluff. Balancing abstract adjectives with a sentence construction that suggests certainty based on experience – "It's crafted from… so it feels" – also gives a sense of authority and confidence, making customers more likely to purchase.

DESCRIPTION A

Baseline – Minimal fabric detail

This jumper is an instant wardrobe winner, blending versatile styling with quirky design details. Metallic trims around the neckline and cuffs lend an edgy touch to this jumper's classic monochrome stripes. It's crafted from wool and cashmere.

DESCRIPTION B

Enhanced – With extra description of the feel of the garment

This jumper is an instant wardrobe winner, blending versatile styling with quirky design details. Metallic trims around the neckline and cuffs lend an edgy touch to this jumper's classic monochrome stripes. **It's crafted from a sumptuous blend of wool and cashmere, so it feels wonderfully cosy without any scratchiness.**

KEY TAKEAWAY
Don't underestimate the importance of the fifth sense. Describe the fabric quality and how the garment feels to spark the customer's imagination.
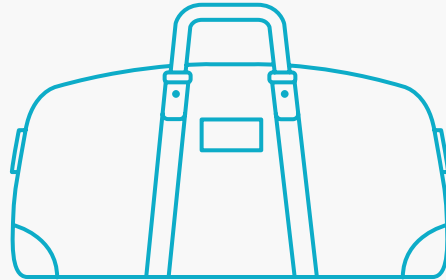
3. Detail

An overwhelming **90%** of respondents said they were more likely to buy the product if shown Description B, demonstrating a clear preference for copy that provides specific, value-adding details such as exact dimensions and measurements.

This comparison also shows how important it is that description copy accurately reflects all the product's features. Knowing that a bag's strap is detachable, or that the handles are padded for comfort, could tip a customer's mindset from 'meh' to 'must-have'.

90%

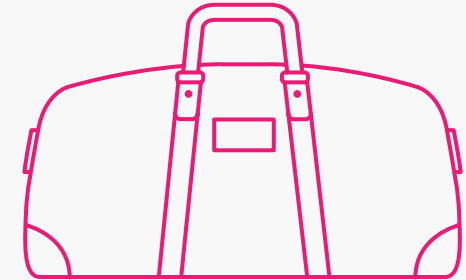of consumers more likely to buy if description includes dimensions or measurements

DESCRIPTION A

Baseline – Superficial feature details

Take all your essentials – with room for souvenirs – on your travels with this weekend holdall. It's made from durable fabric and comes in a range of versatile shades, from cream to cobalt blue.

Key features:
- ⊙ 100% coated canvas outer
- ⊙ Zip fastening
- ⊙ Two top handles
- ⊙ Shoulder strap

DESCRIPTION B

Enhanced – With specific, in-depth details around fabric, features and measurements

Take all your essentials – with room for souvenirs – on your travels with this weekend holdall. This spacious bag is made from **durable, showerproof canvas**. It features a **zipped inner pocket, two padded top handles and a detachable shoulder strap**. It comes in a range of versatile shades, from cream to cobalt blue.

Key features:
- ⊙ 100% coated canvas outer
- ⊙ **Measures 50cm x 30 cm x 20 cm**
- ⊙ Zip fastening
- ⊙ **One zipped inner pocket**
- ⊙ Two **padded** top handles
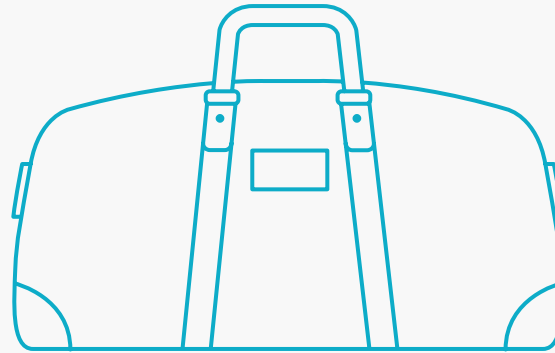- ⊙ **Detachable** shoulder strap

KEY TAKEAWAY
There's no such thing as TMI when it comes to product descriptions. Specific, relevant, accurate details – conveyed succinctly – make consumers more likely to buy.
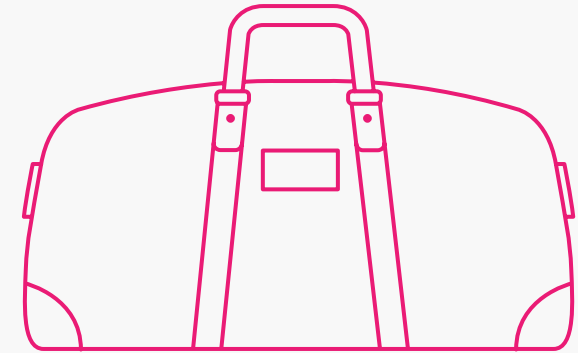
4. Benefits

71% of respondents said their preference was Description B, which indicates that putting product features in a relatable context – describing their benefits and applications in day-to-day life – makes the product more compelling. In short, features are great, but benefits are even better.

71%

of consumers prefer descriptions that explain the benefits of the product

DESCRIPTION A

Baseline – No description of product benefits

Take all your essentials – with room for souvenirs – on your travels with this weekend holdall. This spacious bag is made from durable, showerproof canvas. It features a zipped inner pocket, two padded top handles and a detachable shoulder strap. It comes in a range of shades, from cream to cobalt blue.

DESCRIPTION B

Enhanced – With additional description of benefits of product features

Take all your essentials – with room for souvenirs – on your travels with this weekend holdall. It's made from durable, showerproof canvas, making it **lightweight yet practical.** This **spacious** bag features a zipped inner pocket, **perfect for keeping keys accessible or your valuables that little bit more secure. You can choose between carrying it using two comfortable padded top handles or using the shoulder strap, which is detachable for ultimate adaptability.** It comes in a range of versatile shades, from cream to cobalt blue.

KEY TAKEAWAY
Bring product features to life by wrapping them up in a relatable narrative. It's not just about *what* the product has to offer – but *why* and *how* this will help the consumer.
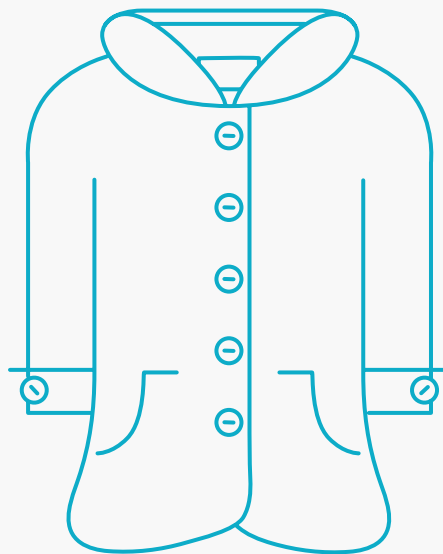
5. Style tips

A natural extension of talking about product benefits is providing specific suggestions on how to style or wear the garment.

Almost two-third of respondents **(62%)** said they were more likely to buy the product if shown Description B, indicating that fashion-savvy styling tips – while not as influential as other crucial elements like specific product detail – are a persuasive add-on.

For the other 38% who preferred the baseline example, it seems fair to assume that they are either pragmatic shoppers ('tell me what I need to know, I'll decide') who prefer not to engage with tips from brands, or simply fashion-agnostic shoppers who aren't interested in trends and looks.
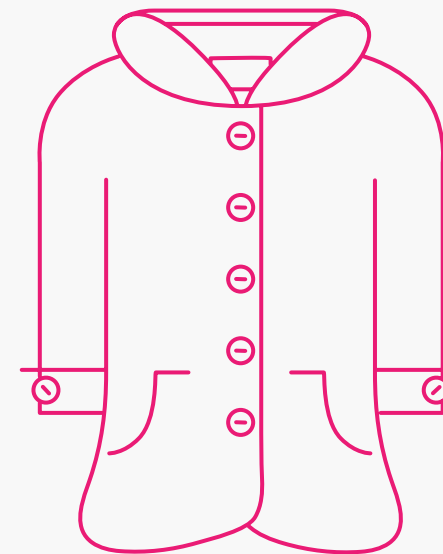
The effectiveness of styling tips, then, will depend on your target audience and their attitudes. If you're specifically targeting trend-following consumers who are inclined to seek validation of their fashion choices, then style suggestions are a valuable way to nudge them to conversion.

DESCRIPTION A

Baseline – No styling tip

This canary yellow anorak is your one-stop ticket to this season's '70s revival. And it's got more than good looks – with roomy pockets and a super-sized hood, it's pretty practical too.

DESCRIPTION B

Enhanced – With styling suggestion

This canary yellow anorak is your one-stop ticket to this season's '70s revival. And it's got more than good looks – with roomy pockets and a super-sized hood, it's pretty practical too. **Pair yours with laid-back pieces, like cuffed boyfriend jeans and a cosy cream knit, for an easy-going retro look.**

KEY TAKEAWAY
Amp up the aspiration factor of product descriptions with styling tips. Most consumers are more likely to buy if they can see how a garment fits into an overall look or trend – and, of course, their wardrobe.

6. Sizing

Perhaps surprisingly, shoppers were split fairly evenly on this comparison, with **52%** expressing a preference for the baseline versus **48%** for the more informative Description B.

However, those who do value specific sizing information were especially vocal about it when talking more generally about their online shopping priorities and frustrations. Comments included:
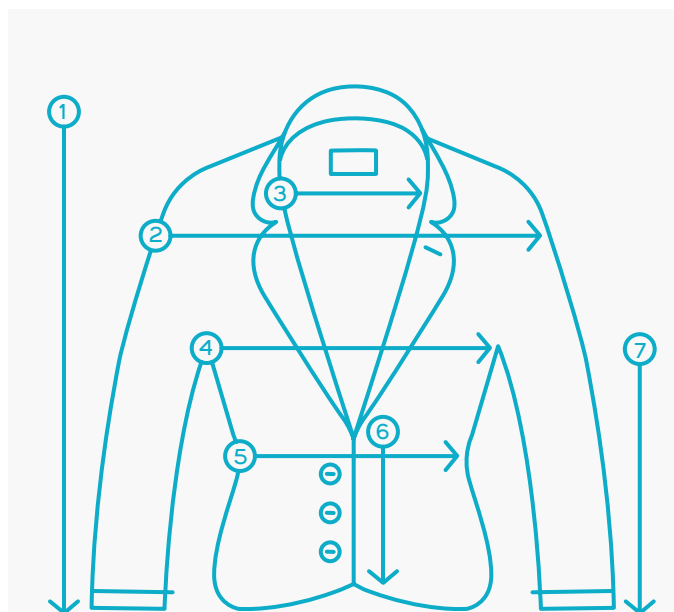
> If a skirt or a dress, I need to know length because I am tall.

> Exact measurements where possible are helpful, especially if it's a bag or length of a dress. The size the model is wearing is helpful too – sometimes it's hard to tell if the garment is a baggy fit or she is just skinny!

Although the lack of consensus indicates that model sizing information isn't a decisive factor in conversion, including the model's height and size in descriptions could help to to bridge the gap between the idealised 'model fit' shown online and the at-home reality – and minimise the likelihood of returns.

DESCRIPTION A

Baseline – No model size information

Rich embroidery and precise lines combine in this scene-stealing jacket. Its boxy shape creates a striking silhouette that lends instant polish to any ensemble. The jacket is cleverly cut to finish at the slimmest part of your waist.

DESCRIPTION B

Enhanced – With information on the model's height and size worn

Rich embroidery and precise lines combine in this scene-stealing jacket. Its boxy shape creates a striking silhouette that lends instant polish to any ensemble. The jacket is cut to finish at the slimmest part of your waist. **The model is 5ft9" and wears a UK size 10.**

KEY TAKEAWAY

Model size details aren't essential, but consumers – especially if tall or petite – do value this info to get a better sense of product proportion. Include it, and you could cut your product return rate.

Product descriptions that convert: the formula

So, what does a conversion-optimised product description look like for women's high street fashion brands? Our research suggests that a highly effective product description should contain a few key ingredients:

ESSENTIAL

- ⊙ **Accurate** information about fit and sizing
- ⊙ **Evocative** description of fabric and feel
- ⊙ **Comprehensive** detail about product features
- ⊙ **Inspiring** narrative around product benefits

BENEFICIAL

- ⊙ **Aspirational** styling tips or 'how to wear' suggestions

Interestingly, in addition, a handful of our survey respondents **(5%)** suggested that a garment's ethical credentials (for example, where it was manufactured, from what materials, and by whom) is another important piece of information to include, as sustainability and CSR in the fashion industry continue to dominate headlines.

Getting all of these elements right – in a high-quality editorial style that reflects your brand's unique identity and tone of voice – gives the customer a compelling, persuasive view of the product, and will ultimately make them more likely to click 'add to basket'.

HOW DO YOUR PRODUCT DESCRIPTIONS MEASURE UP?

QUILL QUALITY SCORE

If you're interested in finding out how your product descriptions measure up against best practice, or want support to optimise your product content for conversion, **get in touch**.

Quill

We produce content that drives online sales.

At Quill, we specialise in helping businesses efficiently use content at the penultimate point of the purchase journey, to take consumers from browsing to basket – and beyond.

Through our pioneering Quill Cloud technology, a global Network of screened specialists and in-house content expertise, we're uniquely configured to produce consistently high-quality content at unparalleled speed and scale – in any language, format or topic.

We are releasing our clients from the cost and resourcing challenges of scaling multi-language content production in-house or via traditional agencies, whilst delivering a positive ROI.

To date we have created over 12 million words of bespoke content – plus videos and graphics – in over 27 languages, and counting. We work with global businesses including Farfetch, Google, Regus, House of Fraser, Boden, AXA, STA Travel and Arsenal.