Best practice and excellence in Irish eCommerce will be recognised for the first time in the Retail Excellence Ireland Awards and through a new quality mark which has been launched by the retail industry body. The winner of the main award, eCommerce Website of the Year, will receive a digital marketing campaign to the value of €20,000 plus help from the eCommerce award sponsor, Google, with digital strategy and marketing.

Now in their 15th year, the awards are the most prestigious and most recognised event in the Irish retail sector, with over 600 entries each year. The new eCommerce category will provide a benchmark by which leading Irish eCommerce sites are judged.

The awards are open to all retailers which have eCommerce operations and it is not necessary to be a member of Retail Excellence Ireland (REI) to enter the awards. The deadline for entries is Friday 27 May.

REI has chosen AMAS to design the assessment process and conduct the evaluations of eCommerce sites. REI was keen to ensure that the eCommerce category matches the stringent assessment process which has been a hallmark of the retail awards since its inception.

There will be a two-stage evaluation process, and all websites that qualify for the second stage will be eligible to use and market the new Retail Excellence Ireland eCommerce quality mark. Those shortlisted websites will then be in contention for three category awards plus a premier eCommerce award.

The Categories

Businesses in the “eCommerce Website of the Year Awards” category will receive awards for their websites under three headings:

“Best eCommerce Customer Experience” – for sites which promote good usability practice, excellent online customer services and other best practices in customer experience

“Best eCommerce Exporter” – for an Irish business which generates significant eCommerce sales in overseas markets

“Best eCommerce Innovator” – recognising a company making innovative use of the internet to market, promote or sell goods or services

The three eCommerce catetory winners will be in contention for the overall eCommerce Website of the Year Award, and the chance to win an integrated online marketing campaign in association with Independent News and Media digital platforms, valued at €20,000. The winner will also receive consultation and support with Google experts on its digital strategy.

REI has partnered with the Sunday Independent for the awards. All category finalists will be profiled in a special “Retail Excellence” supplement published on Sunday 6 November and will benefit from an integrated awards advertising and PR campaign.

Evaluation Process

For the initial stage of the process, AMAS will conduct an independent review and benchmarking of each nominated site, using an eCommerce best practice measurement and assessment tool under headings that include usability, customer experience, compliance and trust (see below).

A shortlist of the best performing sites will be announced in July 2011. All sites which reach this stage will be eligible to use the new Retail Excellence Ireland eCommerce quality mark. These shortlisted sites will go on to stage 2 of the process, a further assessment by an experienced online consultant.

Then in stage 3 a judging panel will select the finalists, based on Stage 2 evaluations and application details from the shortlisted companies. The businesses will then be invited to present to the judges in late September.

The winning sites will be selected based upon the presentation content and all assessment outcomes, and the winners will receive their awards at the annual ceremony in Galway in November 2011.

AMAS's involvement in the eCommerce awards builds on our work of conducting detailed independent evaluations of websites and other online channels for a range of business and government clients.

What AMAS Will Be Measuring

In the initial review, AMAS will examine and benchmark each nominated site under the following 10 headings:

1.First impressions - home page presentation and branding
2.Design approach – is a bright, attractive and modern graphic design consistently applied across site?
3.Clarity of offer – is it immediately clear what the customer proposition of the website is?
4.Presentation of and visual imagery used to communicate product benefits
5.Quality of content – are the text, images, and multimedia messages clear, accurate and up-to-date?
6.Usability – are navigation, labelling, location information all clear and informative?
7.Compliance – does the site apply good practice in privacy, legal statement and inclusion of your registered office address?
8.Trust – how well does the site engender customer confidence (multi-point check)
9.Transparency – are pricing, delivery cost and returns policy all clear?
10.Overview of the customer experience and online proposition

How To Enter

Retailers wishing to enter their websites for the new eCommerce category in other categories in the Retail Excellence Ireland Awards can download an entry form from the REI website

RetailExcellence.ie.

Further details on the awards can be received by emailing awards [at] retailexcellence [dot] ie or by calling 065 684 6927 or visiting www.RetailExcellence.ie .