

Website usability

Gorenje website: really 'Life Simplified'?

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By Martin Cutts



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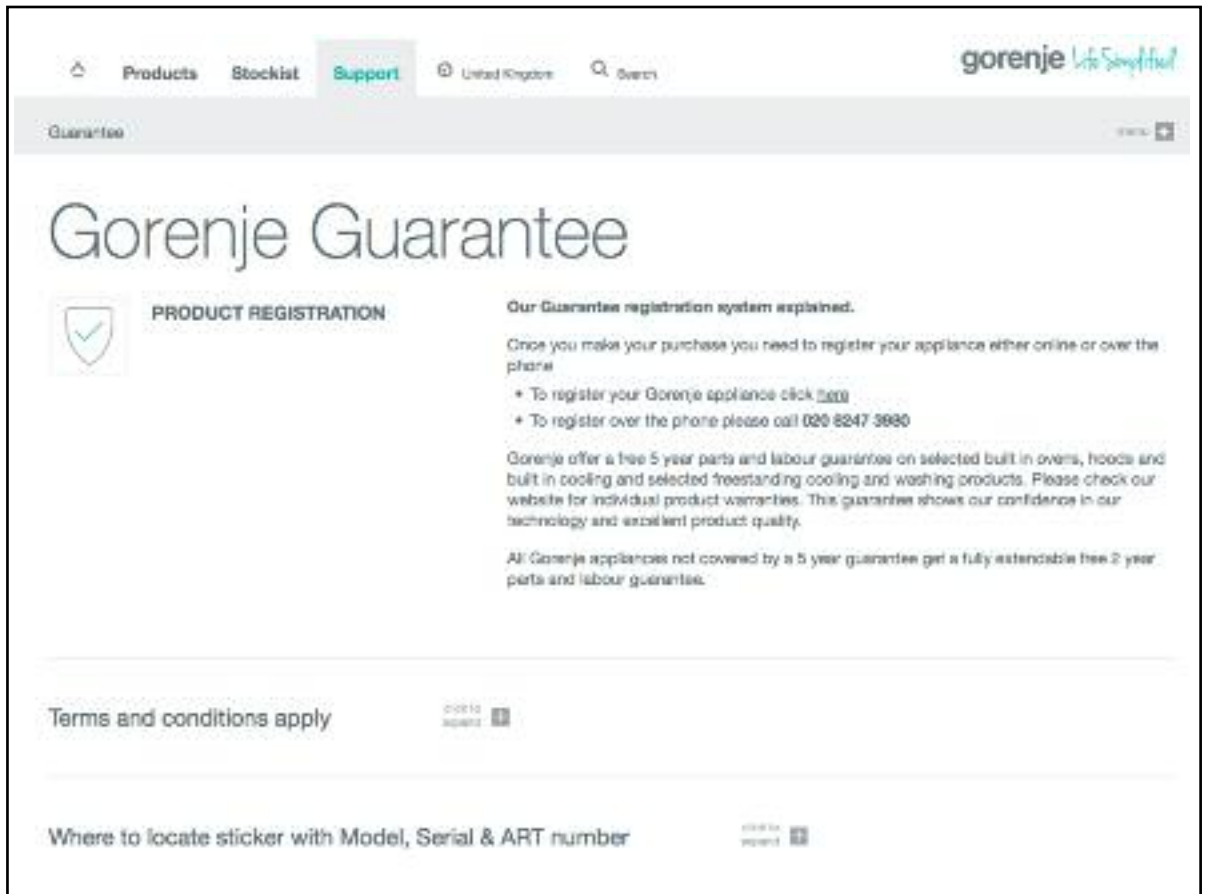
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Sufferers from website rage will know the feeling. You buy a kitchen appliance and want to register its guarantee. In the Stone Age, you did this by filling in a card with your name, address and the product details, and placing it in a red metal cylinder called a post-box. This method remained fashionable for thousands of years, but now it's almost mandatory to register via a website. Which will be, of course, a really simple website, won't it?

No. Because the site will have been designed by creatures known as web designers. Perhaps they should be renamed 'spiders' for their ability to confuse and trap their prey. Rarely, it seems, do web designers pilot-test their creations on human beings before publishing.

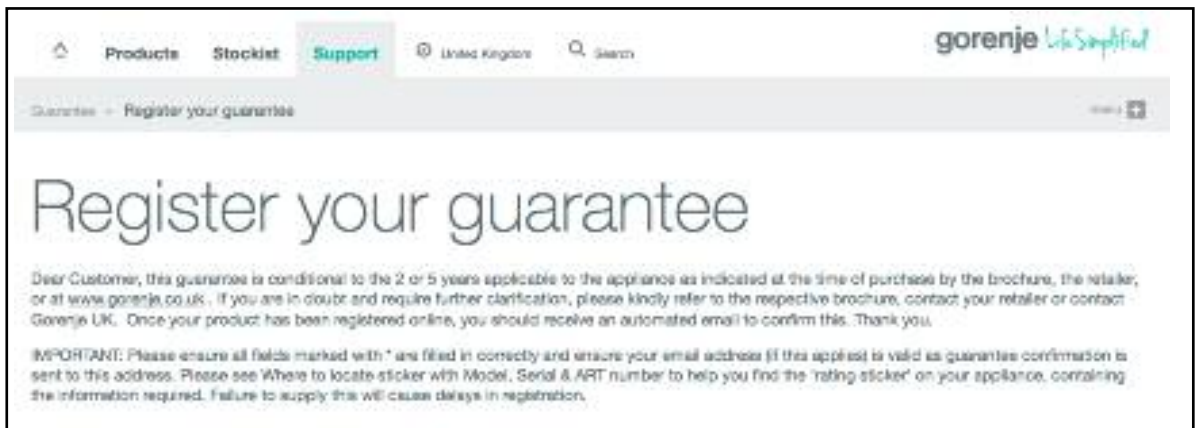
A friend of Plain Language Commission – let's call her Deep Freeze in homage to the Watergate informant Deep Throat – tipped us off about her attempts to register the five-year guarantee for a £450 Gorenje fridge.

Gorenje's slogan is 'Life Simplified'. Fantastic! So first she went to this helpful-looking page on the Gorenje website:



The link in the first bullet point took her to the correct page. This was going to be a breeze! But then came the crucial text when she reached that page:

'IMPORTANT: Please ensure all fields marked with * are filled in correctly and ensure your email address (if this applies) is valid as guarantee confirmation is sent to this address. Please see Where to locate sticker with Model, Serial & ART number to help you find the 'rating sticker' on your appliance, containing the information required. Failure to supply this will cause delays in registration.'



You can see it in the screenshot above.

The second sentence is the killer. It's worth repeating, as it says:

'Please see Where to locate sticker with Model, Serial & ART number to help you find the 'rating sticker' on your appliance...'

What, in the name of all that's English, does this tosh mean? Where is Deep Freeze meant to find this mysterious thing called a 'Where to locate sticker...to help you find the 'rating sticker' on your appliance'?

Reemembering the adage 'If all else fails, RTFM (read the flaming manual)', Deep Freeze studied the instruction booklet. Perhaps this would show the location of the 'Where to locate sticker'? But it didn't – just silence. So she dragged the mighty fridge freezer away from the wall, nearly slipping a disc in the process, and examined its backside for a sticker.

Joy! There was a sticker on the compressor. But when Deep Freeze entered the details on the website, none of them were accepted.

That's because the sticker related to the compressor, dummy!

In despair, she emailed Gorenje thus:

'It's impossible to find these stupid numbers on your fridge, and the piece of writing on your website is meaningless garbage written by a blockhead. I do not have a 'Where to locate' sticker. Please let me know where the relevant numbers are. The brochure says nothing about the location of the numbers! Very very annoying! You have to do better than this.'

Gorenje's customer care manager replied:

'I do apologise that you are experiencing difficulties registering your appliance. I have attached an image of what the ratings plate should look like and this is normally located on the left hand side of the fridge, next to the salad drawer.'

See, that's how simple it is. There is a ratings plate. It's hidden by the salad drawer, but at least it's there. Why didn't the manual say so? Why didn't the website say so?

But it did! The information Deep Freeze needed exists on the website, but it's cunningly hidden. Look back to the screenshot on our previous page. Bottom left, the final sentence says:

'Where to locate sticker with Model, Serial & ART number.'

In clear English, this would be better written as 'Where you can find the

sticker showing the model, serial number and ART number.'

The sentence connects to a long list of Gorenje appliances with locations for all the stickers that have ever been stuck on any of them.

But nobody will see that sentence unless they already know it's there, because they will have clicked the link in the first bullet point on the page. Also, the sentence is ranged left below the boring old terms and conditions, whereas the important stuff is inset and positioned top right. Moreover, the sentence lurks so far down the page it won't even be visible to many users unless they scroll down.

Deep Freeze wasted an hour and a half of her valuable life and a lot of rage on failing to solve this riddle wrapped in an enigma.

Can she be the only customer who has gone wrong with this oh-so simple registration task from the 'Life Simplified' company?

Perhaps Gorenje will learn from it and redesign the page? That's the hope of everyone who complains.

But in this case it seems forlorn. Many weeks after Deep Freeze failed the Gorenje test, the guarantee page remains just as it was, unchanged and gloriously inept.

Perhaps that's the key to a life simplified: just keep ignoring what the customers tell you.