

EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR

The Placement and Design of Warning Labels on E-commerce Sites

Background

Given the increase in online shopping, consumers are exposed to warnings or other safety information on product packaging only after they receive the delivery of the product, as opposed to while making a purchasing decision in a brick-and-mortar store. On behalf of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), Fors Marsh Group (FMG) conducted a multiphase, mixed-methods study to understand buyers' awareness of and engagement with the presence, content, and placement of warning labels and other safety information when reviewing or purchasing toys or other household items and develop guidelines and best practices for the design and placement of warning labels on e-commerce sites.

Methodology

Phase 1 Research

FMG conducted an environmental scan (systematic review of multiple websites to gather key information) and content analysis of warning labels and safety information on e-commerce sites to investigate industry best practices for warning labels and safety information when shopping for toys and household products that may be hazardous to children. FMG also conducted in-store observations to assess consumer engagement with and potential influence by safety information when reviewing the toy or product's physical packaging for purchasing.

Phase 2 Research

FMG (1) conducted virtual IDIs (In-Depth Interviews) with consumers who had purchased a toy for a 3-6-year-old in the last six months to explore consumer online shopping search and decision-making process, (2) developed experimental mock-ups of webpages after the first round of testing incorporating changes in safety and warning information based on earlier research findings; (3) conducted a second set of virtual IDIs with caregivers of 3-6-year-olds to test responses to the multiple experimental conditions (including a control) of mockup stimulus with eye tracking, (4) conducted an online survey with caregivers of 2-3-year-olds to quantify the most impactful features in purchasing decision.



Recommendations for Improving Warning Labels

Recommendations are based on findings across both research phases. Findings show that warning labels should be immediately visible and easy to find. In the Phase 2 Round 2 IDIs and the survey, results showed that improving the location and the design of the warning label made it easier for participants to find and read and that the location and design can impact decisions about whether to keep the toy in their home. Findings show that this effect is most apparent when both the location and design are modified. Best practice recommendations for improving the design and location are listed below.

Location Recommendations

Findings show that improving the location and placement of the warning label increased the number of participants who saw it, how quickly they saw it, and participants' trust of the content they viewed.

- + **Warning information should be offset from the text.** Participants tended to skim the text, making it easy to ignore warning information embedded within other content. We recommend all warning information should be surrounded by white space and offset from any other content.
- + **Warning labels should be immediately visible and require minimal user effort to see. They should not be embedded behind a button.** In Round 1 IDIs, participants had substantial difficulty finding the warning label on one retailer's web page because it was not visible unless they clicked a "See More" button. None of the participants clicked the button without prompting from the moderator.
- + **Warning labels should appear above the fold so that scrolling is not required to see the warning information.** Presenting all warning information appear above the fold will improve consistency across web pages, further helping consumers find the necessary safety information. Findings show that when warning information was above the fold, participants are significantly more likely to see it and rate it as easier to find and more attention grabbing than warning information that requires scrolling.

Design Recommendations

Findings show that improving the design of the warning label, especially when paired with moving it above the fold, increased not only the findability, readability, and noticeability of the warning label, but also the participants' decisions about how safe the toy would be to keep in their home.

- + **Warning labels should be enclosed in a box.** This will help offset the warning label from any nearby text and make it easier to find.
- + **Warning labels should include content that is larger, bolder, and a different color than the other text.** These style features make the warning information easier to find and more likely to be noticed.
- + **Warning labels should include a large warning/safety alert symbol (exclamation mark in a triangle).** Participants indicated that the warning symbol drew their eye and helped them quickly assess that there was warning information that they should read.

