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# Press Release

## **ONLINE OR NOT ONLINE!**

The S.S.F. is not anti-online sales. Many think that the S.S.F. is completely opposed to online selling, but we are realistic and know it is here to stay – many shops could not survive without it.

There is no disputing that it is not good for our feet as no-one knows their true shoe size. Gauges are merely a guide and cannot determine if a shoe fits. A foot is a three dimensional object and therefore length and widths are the basics of fitting. Even then a shoe may not fit correctly despite the size on the box and on the gauge. Despite the number of electronic type devices, nothing is better than the human eye and human touch. Feet of any age should be monitored by experts and shoes fitted accordingly. A qualified shoe fitter can give important advice and spot if the person is developing a problem that might be rectified if seen early enough – or eased by a podiatrist if too late.

We are all aware of the small shops closing in favour of supermarkets and at some point the realisation will be that taking away entrepreneurship is a massive mistake for our economy. The shoe trade has been deeply affected and has already lost hundreds of wonderful shoe manufacturers and now show retailers - shops that would know an entirely family history, customers by name and the peculiarities of their feet. As they close the important knowledge of professional shoe fitting goes with them.

It is for this reason that many elderly people now buy shoes from catalogues because they simply cannot find appropriate footwear on the high street. Diabetics are greatly at risk as their feet are as sensitive as their eyes and they run the risk of very serious health problems (worst case scenario amputation) if shoes or hosiery do not fit correctly.

To a certain extent adults are in charge of their own well-being. If they wish to cram their feet into shoes that don't fit purely because they match an outfit or are the latest fashion, well that is down to them. They know that the chances are they will rarely wear the shoes; they will simply sit in the back of the wardrobe...money wasted and later will discover the cost of remedial care. However for children it is another matter. Children are reliant on their parents to do what is right and good for them. Children rely on their parents to keep them safe and it is their natural right. But many parents simply don't realise the importance of shoe fitting. They have grown up being taken to chainstores and fashion outlets that do not offer a fitting service, merely seeing shoes they and their parents like (or can afford) and trying them on 'trial and error' style. It's not their fault, it is a general ignorance because retail patterns have changed and there have been no government health information initiatives in the past 20+ years.

A child will say a shoe is comfortable even if it isn't - if they like them! However an infant cannot determine or communicate if a shoe fits incorrectly, as their feet have not developed sufficiently to tell; the sensitivity is not the same, but the problems start at this point. For an older child a parent thinks a cursory push on the toes is sufficient to see if the shoes fit. But a direct push can damage the toe box and does not determine the actual fit.

The public often think that it is cheaper to buy online and for some things it is, but footwear is unique. The profit margin on shoes is very low and most adhere to the recommended retail prices. Children's shoes are usually only cheaper online if they are a season old at sale time. By the time p&p is paid, you may as well buy instore with the correct service and care – which is free!

Shops want to give all children regular, free 'fit testing', but are enraged when a parent takes advantage of this and asks the size, just so they can go and buy elsewhere. Some shops when realising they are being 'used' have been known to give out incorrect information. The parent simply doesn't realise the gauge is just a starting point and no two pairs of shoes fit the same. A child may have a slight pronation, supination, high or low ankle bone, flaccid foot etc., all these things and more need to be taken into account. It is like going into a hairdresser, using their brush and comb and walking out – or sitting in a restaurant to eat your packed lunch without ordering anything. If you are determined to do a price comparison and find exactly the same shoe cheaper online, then show your local stockist, they would sooner offer a little discount than lose a customer!

We have two requests from the health authorities.... That online websites selling children's shoes carry a prominent government health warning advising parents that ideally children's shoes should be professionally fitted, and secondly: That 'gauges' should not be sold to the public as there is no standardisation of shoe sizing and gauges are all calibrated differently.

For more information about National Shoe Fitting Week go online: [www.shoefitters-uk.org](http://www.shoefitters-uk.org)  
or email: [secretary@shoefitters-uk.org](mailto:secretary@shoefitters-uk.org)  
or visit the SSF stand at MODA in February.