

On-Site Search – Ideas Into Actions (Part One)
By Craig Smith | Founder and Managing Director
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Executive Summary

When executed properly, site-search is the homepage tool that assists your visitors in identifying their desired products as fast as possible. When executed poorly, it is an inhibitor to the overall user experience as customers are led into “guessing” situations in trying to find products.

Simply put, the search tool needs to deliver results that mirror user word associations, so the business can fully meet its merchandising potential.

This first part of a two part series discusses the aspects that you should consider when both evaluating your existing site-search solution, as well as a analytical plan to gauge and monitor your current site search data. Part two will discuss what to plan for when upgrading to a more complete and effective site search solution.

Site Search - The key ingredient in your eCommerce recipe

People use site search when they know, or at least have an idea, of what they are looking for. Consumer anticipation is that the ecommerce store will understand their query and provide relevant results. The eCommerce shopper expects to receive these results and further filter in ways that meet their needs.

In a perfect world, eCommerce stores would execute this correctly. More often than not however, eCommerce businesses provide site search solutions that deliver poor results, or even worse, don't find any results at all.

When a business delivers poor search results and the consumer is not satisfied within the first 5 seconds of looking at the results, the visitor you just had is now leaving – and likely heading to your competition. It is simply astounding the lost revenue that is attributed to poor internal search solutions. With 40% of your homepage traffic using the tool – its crucial to maximizing your overall performance.

How to fix it? Let's first think about diagnosing the problems. Follow these three steps to gauge how effective your search tool is performing.

Step #1: Look at your site-search to cart and site-search to checkout progression data.

Analytics provide concrete information into how consumer processes are conducted on your site. By utilizing your web analytic package, your business can and should create path reports that track and monitor "site-search" order scenarios and the percentages of success.

Although different businesses are hard to gauge, as catalog shoppers have different goals than brick and mortar shoppers, these progression metrics should be followed very closely and the terms should be closely reviewed.

A standard "rule of thumb" would be to expect "search to purchase" conversion rates of 12-18% (as a percentage of overall traffic), with page conversion rates approximately between 65-80% per step.

Analyze your current levels and set goals to achieve. Imagine the incremental dollars in raising the needle 10-15%!

Step 2: Evaluate your top 100 site search terms and manually assess relevance

Think in the shoes of your customer. What are they searching for in the words that they provide you? Is your assortment meeting their shown needs? Do you have the products that they are looking for but are they not being delivered properly through your search tool?

Spend a couple days going through your most popular terms and analyze the results that you are providing back to the customer. With confidence, give yourself a grade to the RELEVANCE for which your results provide.

Providing relevant results is a crucial component of making your site search airtight. Doing so may take a lot of work with taxonomy modifications and synonym mapping, but your sales will undoubtedly improve.

Step 3: Assess the flexibility of your search results

In situations when your customer receives results that are relevant, what ability do you provide for your customer to filter the results in the manner that he/she is looking for? Let's go over a real life example.

John is looking for a new microwave. He knows he wants a mid-sized model but he also knows that he only wants to spend less than a hundred dollars. After typing in microwave and getting his results – John is much more likely to convert when he is able to filter the search result list by a variety of product variables and attributes.

This is where the strength is tested within your merchandising team. Each of your core categories must be assessed and product variables must be defined. Only when this work is initially done, can products be uploaded and integrated within a new search tool that accurately displays the new filtering capabilities.

The next article of this two part series will outline the projects and technologies needed to improve your search functionality. In the meantime, assess your current metrics and search results. Give yourself a grade and keep an eye out for part two of this series in the upcoming weeks.