

## Site Search Best Practices

1. ***The success and ubiquity of public search engines has raised the bar on expectations of search within your own eCommerce site.*** Customers now expect a search to yield relevant results. If it doesn't, they will think that you do not have it and will move quickly to other sites. The site search functionality that comes with your eCommerce platform may be good, but don't assume that. Dive deep into its capabilities and assess whether you need to integrate a site search solution.
2. ***Make sure your product data is robust enough for good search results.*** There are many cases where a retailer implements site search on poor data, resulting in only a marginal improvement. Do not forget to look at your underlying product data and be prepared to spend significant effort to expand and/or improve it to support a new search solution. You may find that once you improve your data, your search results dramatically improve for your existing solution.
3. ***The primary reason for implementing an improved site search solution is to help your customers find your products.*** Complete your diligence in determining if the solution you wish to integrate will help, by how much, and what the end result is in your customers' ability to find your products. Your data may work for one search tool, but not another. Think about the nuances with different providers.
4. ***Make your search query highly visible and accessible to the customer.*** A customer should be able to access your search function quickly and effortlessly. Do not make them hunt for it. Display it on every page and make it simple to use. If they can't find it and/or they can't figure out how to use it, they will leave.
5. ***A search should never come back with "0 results".*** Even today, this is the single most common result of most searches. Be sure to implement the capability of correcting misspelled terms, using synonyms, suggesting comparable brands, products or categories. Test your search tool.
6. ***Understand how customers want to search for the type of products you sell and support that.*** Learn the best way to find your products and adjust your search to accommodate. Searching for a Red, X-Large shirt is different than a searching for a book. Search tools should be customer-friendly, use Natural Language Processing, interpret misspelled words, and integrate a customized dictionary and thesaurus. Google is incredible at interpreting misspells with "did you mean?". Your site can do that too.
7. ***Implement dynamic refinement and sorting.*** If a customer tries a keyword search on a very general item, don't just present a long list of products. Offer them ways to refine their search using subcategories, product attributes, brands, product types, price, etc.. Further refinements should reduce the number of additional refinement options. Allowing them to sort the result by name, price, most popular, and newest products will also help search be more effective.
8. ***Ensure that your customers' search habits and the results are tied to your web analytics system.*** Tracking how your customers search on your site, what PPC keywords work well, and what pages are top SEO ranked should be tracked with your web analytics system. Plan to continually redefine your search results, internal and external, through analysis of the actual search patterns of your customers.
9. ***Balance the ranking and relevancy of search results with the ability to control where products appear in the list.*** You can also control the content that is displayed, based on a specific search query. Your margins are a factor, as well, and should be included in algorithms that determine display order.
10. ***When a shopper is performing a site search query is the best time to maximize all your merchandising capabilities.*** Present up-sell and cross-sell opportunities as part of the return. Combine personalization tools and collaboration with search to maximize likelihood of purchase.