

12 Site Search Tips For Holiday Success

Is your web site ready for a profitable holiday season? The answer depends heavily on your site search capabilities. Numerous studies indicate that online shoppers rely on site search as a primary form of navigation. Research also shows that shoppers who use site search have a higher conversion rate than those who don't. The bottom line: Your success this season demands an engaging and intuitive search experience. As a leading provider of site search, Visual Sciences offers you these best practices in the spirit of the upcoming holidays.

1. Offer A Prominent Site Search

Many brick-and-mortar businesses with strong brands have perfected the art of guiding consumers through a very controlled and consistent shopping experience. They may feel that search feels too open or uncontrolled, so they choose to de-emphasize or not offer it. Analytics data demonstrates that commerce sites see higher conversion rates when they offer a prominent site search. The more open and intuitive the experience, the higher the conversions.

2. Provide Refinement Options

Continue the conversation by providing refinement options to let shoppers tell you more about the products they want. These options don't have to look like your site's navigation and should generally be more prominent, emphasizing the opportunity they present. Studies show that shoppers using site search are quick to ignore everything outside the body of the page. They will likely ignore refinement options that look like site navigation for fear they will take them away from the results they are browsing.

3. Use Common Terminology

Shoppers often don't think of or refer to products the same way a site does. The search interaction should provide refinement options in plain terms. For example, what you consider periwinkle, shoppers consider purple. Reviewing your keyword reports is a great way to see if you have this problem.

4. Make Your Options Stand Out

Shoppers are more likely to stay engaged and buy when you show the breadth and depth of product options. So don't hide your refinement options inside drop-down menus. Sites often make this mistake in favor of keeping more results above the fold. The results of variant testing may be surprising. Shoppers are happy to scroll down when they know there's more to see, but are less likely to refine if the choices are hidden.

Using options such as color palettes is a great way to ensure that shoppers quickly understand the range of options available while reducing spelling errors or terminology mistakes.

5. Let Customers Change Their Mind

Much like the in-store experience, shoppers may locate what they want on your site but not commit to the exact configuration. If your product has different options, let shoppers quickly access them without having to select the product again. Use breadcrumbs and other methods to let shoppers refine their choices and change their minds with ease.

6. Present Related Products

When you show related products and accessories based on a shopper's search criteria, you give them options and new ideas they may not otherwise have sought. Increase your chances to up sell and cross sell by suggesting items that fit the context of the products your shoppers seek.

7. Keep It Local

Research indicates that a large percentage of shoppers will "window shop" on the web but make their purchase at a local store. Let your shoppers search your site based upon physical locations. This geographic-based site search supports the entire shopping cycle from Web browsing to store purchase.

8. Provide Value During Their Search

A good salesperson can provide shoppers with tidbits of valuable information about sales promotions, inventory, warranties, product uses and more. Site search can mimic this by injecting query-specific information. This content appears directly in the search result page, getting your message to the customer immediately. If they search for a brand that's on sale, display information about the promotion. If they search for an outdated model, provide a product photo and description of the newer one.

9. Ensure Accuracy

When a typo in the search query returns no or irrelevant results, shoppers get frustrated and the opportunity to convert them may be lost. Be sure to offer a "Did You Mean" option to display the likely spelling. Anticipate and suggest words as the shopper types to avoid the issue before they submit the search.

10. Provide Results In Context

Increase your shopper satisfaction by tailoring the results display to match the query, audience, and content returned. In some cases, providing a text-based list of results works—in others, you want to show more information. When the results can be better represented with pictures, display a product gallery of those results with the corresponding graphics. When there is a single result, show the product with additional related information.

11. Reduce The Number Of Clicks

Occasionally, it may make sense to bypass a search results page and send the shopper immediately to the right answer. For example, if a shopper searches for "Customer Service," take them directly to your Customer Service page. Providing a direct route to the content they want makes for a better experience. But be careful: this best practice applies to a narrow list of scenarios. If you jump directly to the content, make sure your shoppers know what happened. If their query could have multiple destinations, it may be best to stick with a traditional results page and inject the content most visitors are seeking.

12. Improve Conversions With Analytics

When searching for products, a majority of commerce site visitors use two words or fewer, such as "blue shirt." When your product portfolio consists of 100 blue shirts, how do you decide which blue shirt is the best one for the shopper? Let your data automatically present products that sell the most, have the best margin or are in season. With analytics-driven ranking, your site can present results based upon real data, which improves the shopper interaction and conversion rates.

With the holiday season fast approaching, make sure you are ready. If you're having difficulty achieving some of these best practices with your current site search solution, learn why you should consider Visual Sciences Search. It's not too late.

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