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Six features to consider when selecting a site search tool

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Website and in-app search functionality has become more robust in recent years. As consumers have begun enjoying faster, higher-quality searching on ecommerce sites like Amazon, they've come to expect instantaneous access to content across other websites and platforms as well. They don't want to wait, and they don't want to play detective to navigate to the items they need.

As a result, websites and apps must deliver a seamless search experience for their users. Shoppers need to be able to quickly search for, access, and engage with their desired products and content. If your site search is slow, provides too much irrelevant content, or is plagued by user-experience challenges, potential customers will go see if your



competitors offer an easier path. The driving force behind why this matters is in the numbers: shoppers who use on-site search convert nearly 2 times more than those who don't.¹ Without an innovative solution and strategy, you're losing revenue and your customer base.

Companies often get "analysis paralysis" about whether they should develop solutions in-house or seek out a vendor. Each path can deliver site search growth, but the financial difference between the two is tangible. Third-party tools deliver about a 7–8% higher level of [search success](#) through the development of five features. A noticeable difference, but after that point, the number of companies that achieve high-level success from third-party tools is 20 percentage points higher than for companies that utilize tools developed in-house.

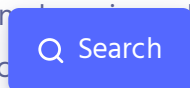
Any solution you leverage must be quickly and easily deployable. It should also be scalable, lead to bottom-line growth, and more.

Check out these must-have search features that can help you identify the right platform:

1. Improved load speeds for search results and content pages

Customers are always evolving, and that can prove costly for companies that don't change with them. Nearly three-quarters of American consumers won't wait 5 seconds for a web page to load.² Compounding that challenge is the fact that a 1-second delay in page load speed can cost a company about \$2.5 million per day.³

What do search-results page load speeds have to do with content-page load speeds? They're the two sides of the site performance and user experience coin. Users would rather leave your site than wait for a slow page to load, and it doesn't matter if that page is a search results page or a content page. Factor in the various devices customers are using, plus whether they're searching for content by querying, and ensuring optimal site performance becomes a challenge.



Good vendors not only realize this, they can provide you with a strategy

Good vendors not only realize this, they can provide you with a strategy and technical capabilities that ensure your load speeds for search results pages and content pages are integral and tied together. These aspects shouldn't be thought of as separate components of the user experience. Customers may wait a few seconds for an internal search engine results page to load, but once they click on a content page, if they have to wait a few more seconds for *that* page to load, they're likely to give up, and your competitors will reap the rewards of their frustration.

2. Voice Search

Voice Search has become an ever-present part of the online-shopping customer experience. Currently, 27% of the global online population uses mobile Voice Search.⁴ That's more than one quarter of the world's consumers, who, at any given moment, pick up their smartphones and ask them questions.

Every ecommerce site needs an internal search engine that can leverage Voice Search to convert shoppers' verbal intent into relevant content that drives sales. Imagine a scenario in which a customer is using your site's Voice Search capability to look for a red shirt. Poor Voice Search might make the search engine look for a "redd shirt" or a "read shirt", which would provide no results and create a frustrated shopper. A vendor must be able to integrate this technology deeply enough in both your search *and* your site's overall functionality to provide users with relevant, applicable results.

From 2016–2018, according to a Review42 study, the use of voice searching grew among millennials, gen Xers, and baby boomers.⁵ Furthermore, research shows that 98% of iPhone users and 96% of Android phone users employ Siri and OK Google as part of their search experiences.⁶ The growing use of Voice Search underscores the importance of teaming with a vendor that can incorporate it in your site's user experience.

3. AI tools

 Search

Forty-eight percent of smartphone users and 64% of tablet owners expect to increase their use of those devices' Voice Search tools in the

expect to increase their use of those devices' voice search tools in the future.⁷ However, a similar number of consumers, 70%, complain that Voice Search doesn't always deliver their desired results.⁸

What's the factor that determines whether customers have a good or bad Voice Search experience? Artificial intelligence! AI is what converts a user's Voice Search query into relevant results, as well as makes suggestions about additional content. For instance, in that "red shirt" example, AI can effectively search for and list all the red shirts on a site, as well as pants and shoes that might look good with it. It can even predict what customers might want based on their search and purchase histories.

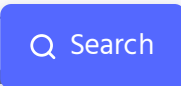
As you engage vendors, look for those that offer [AI-powered site search](#) advanced enough to truly learn about customers and understand what they're looking for. A good AI solution offers semantic and natural-language understanding (NLU) tools to determine the intent behind searches and help users find what they want faster. Synonym-based solutions match the adjectives in users' search requests with similar terms. That "red shirt" query won't just deliver red shirts, it will show you shirts in similar colors, like crimson and scarlet, even if the descriptions don't contain the word "red" or any variations of it. Superior AI solutions can more quickly present relevant content to drive sales.

4. Delivery of personalized experiences

The increased focus on delivery of personalized experiences is highlighted by two statistics that explain their impact on shoppers:

- 80% of customers equate a site's UX with the company's products and services⁹
- 48% of users spend more money when the UX is tailored to their shopping preferences¹⁰

So if a more bespoke UX leads to a nearly 50% boost in sales, plus a positive brand impression, then how can you offer that? The answer is [Analytics](#).

Analytics can illuminate what customers want by looking at their search histories (and browsing ing records), then suggesting relevant, individualized content. Vendors in the on-site

search space should focus on helping you [build great experiences](#) for your customers. That means leveraging Analytics (the endgame of AI) at such a granular level that it's as if, based on content, sales, and other factors, each user is truly getting their own personalized experience. Putting more-sought-after content directly in front of consumers leads to greater revenue.

5. Mobile-optimized search

Nearly half of all web traffic comes from mobile devices, and in the second quarter of 2020, mobile phones alone accounted for more than 51% of that traffic.¹¹ A recent *Ericsson Mobility Report* is predicting a 25% rise in mobile traffic by 2025.¹²

Customers are increasingly using mobile devices to find their desired content, and sales and marketing teams shouldn't assume they're doing it only through Google searches. Brand loyalists, and even those who have your company as part of a consideration set, will go directly to your site (or app) to search. Being mobile friendly isn't enough. Your internal search functionality needs to be fully optimized for [mobile](#) in order to capitalize on consumers' increasing desire to use their devices for search.

As you scan the marketplace, look for search vendors that can take you beyond standard, off-the-rack solutions you could run yourself. Ask vendors if they have the ability to optimize your internal search features for the wide array of mobile devices your customers are using. This includes having an easily accessible and easy-to-use search bar and the ability to include suggested or related results.

"Typo tolerance" for when users enter the wrong letters or numbers is another key component. A strategy that aligns a mobile search bar with the user experience drives success across handheld devices. Search must function equally well on iPhones and Android phones, in apps, and in different web browsers, and it must automatically adjust search results as necessary.

6. Adaptable search performance based on user Analytics

 Search

Analyzing the search terms used on Google is one of the cornerstones of digital marketing, and it doubles as one of the most effective

of digital marketing, and is deemed as one of the most effective strategies for learning about your customers.

So why, then, do just 7% of companies look at *internal* search data to learn about their customers?¹³ The bottom-line benefits of examining internal data are notable: while just 30% of online shoppers in one

study leveraged a company's on-site search tools, these shoppers converted 6 times more often.¹⁴

The best site-search examples should be multifaceted. Yes, they should connect users with queried content. But a modern vendor should also provide search features that use AI and Analytics to continually learn more about what customers are seeking, with a focus on keywords and patterns.

Over time, companies will be able to strategically offer products and services in search results based on users' prior queries. In some cases, they'll even be able to suggest content based on past searches before the customer starts entering a search term. Analytics can even surface business insights around user engagement and sales to help companies restructure their content plans to more effectively hit their KPIs.

About Algolia

Algolia is a leader in Search and Discovery, offering a suite of on-site search solutions that align your content and product offerings to deliver a more engaging user experience.

Algolia AI is a search Cloud platform built with self-learning AI. It analyzes trillions of search results to better understand user intent, analyze engagement metrics, and account for typos. It even leverages natural-language processing (NLP) to support multilingual queries. Voice Search products deliver a more personalized, curated customer experience that can be quickly implemented on mobile, web, and voice-first platforms.

Knowing what to ask a vendor is the first step in boosting your on-site search functionality.

 Search

Sign up for a [free trial](#) of Algolia today and discover how a better search strategy can power a better user experience *and* drive your bottom line!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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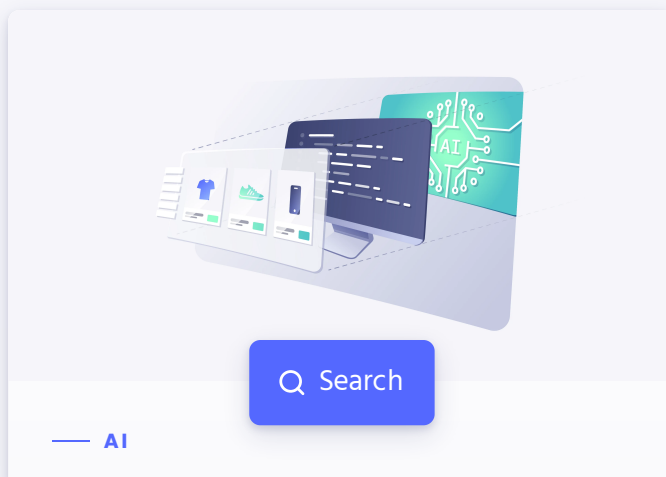


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