

RESEARCH

Strong search tools key for retailers amidst crisis: Lucidworks

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The holidays are the most informative (and the most stressful) part of the year for retailers and consumers. VPs of Ecommerce all the way to search merchandisers need to remember these three lessons while unpacking the treasure trove of data that online shoppers delivered during the 2022 holidays. Ecommerce leaders must prioritize these three things:

- 1 Relevancy across every navigation feature
- 2 Results and recommendations that balance precision and discovery
- 3 Connect every screen for the biggest sales

Lucidworks' report shared tips for retailers based on the holiday numbers across the U.K. and U.S., emphasizing diverse navigation tools. Image credit: Lucidworks

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

Retailers are being encouraged to step up their search offerings as consumers engage in further research before buying.

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Sixty-five percent of U.K. and U.S. shoppers surveyed stated that the search bar is vital to their online shopping experience, according to data from global search solutions firm Lucidworks' [2023 Consumer Survey Report](#). Per the report, more than 60 percent of those surveyed revealed that they research many brands before deciding on a purchase, showing just how important the search bar is for retailers.

"We found that nearly 100 percent of shoppers consider the search bar an important part of their online shopping experience," said Sanjay Mehta, ecommerce head of industry at [Lucidworks](#).

"The search bar is where shoppers act with the most intent," he said. "It's the quickest step to narrowing down a huge product catalog to find what they're looking for.

"The survey shows that 40 percent of people get a negative impression of a retailer if what they're searching for doesn't give them the results they want."

Search savvy

The reliance on accurate searches requires that retailers implement strong search engine tools into their virtual channels.

The consumer survey frames shoppers as being researchers first, scouring the Internet for the best deal and product before deciding from which brand to buy. For this reason, behind search bars themselves, strong filter tools were ranked as being the second-most important navigation tool by those surveyed, as it allows for a customized search.

"Better search results, dynamic filters and landing pages, and relevant recommendations are all connected to one another they all hinge on a retailer understanding the signals that a shopper shares through their behavior and then using technology to automatically optimize the whole experience," Mr. Mehta said.

"Less than one-third of shoppers in the survey plan to make a purchase on their first visit," he said. "They said that they're more likely to compare prices, scan the inventory to get ideas, or browse online for later in-store purchases.

"Retailers only have a fraction of what's available in brick and mortar compared to their online stores, which makes that online research journey a major driver of sales."

Retailers need to embrace the latest technology to support the heavy traffic to online channels and the uptick in consumers that prioritize powerful search bars.

Lucidworks data suggests that using innovations such as synonym detectors or semantic vector search engines can help improve the entire face of a retailer's search function.

These technological add-ons not only improve the customer experience with the search bar itself, but they add power to the drop-down options and filters in place.

This interconnected search system emphasizes the benefits of tracking on-site customer behavior. The more brands invest in getting to know their customers, the more likely it is that they will know for what the consumer is looking.

"Retailers fall into the trap of putting product discovery above all else, but it's important to understand that the customer journey nowadays includes research online and you want that shopper to stay online with you as long as possible," Mr. Mehta said.

"Retailers should track the influence of those non-product recommendations on purchase pathways," he said.

"Especially during the holiday shopping season when people are buying gifts for friends and family that they may not already know about. That research piece is key."

Impulse purchase-averse

Lucidworks' data reflect the overall economic issues at hand, as consumers tighten purse strings.

Global consulting firm Deloitte recently released an outlook report for 2023, finding that nearly half of all Americans believe that their economic circumstances have worsened in the last year ([see story](#)).

Per [the report](#), seven in 10 Americans are responding to this difficulty at large by delaying making large purchases. Subsequently, consumers are engaging more in researching products they want.



#2: Research first, purchase later.

Your customer likely isn't buying on the first date.

Less than one-third of shoppers plan to make a purchase on their first visit. Many are comparing prices, scanning the inventory to get ideas, or online browsing for later in-store purchases. During this past holiday season, nearly 40% of shoppers say that they planned to take their time doing research to determine which brand is the best fit. Retailers can nudge them in the right direction with relevant recommendations.

When you go to an online retail store what are you likely going to do?

Compare prices



Browse the inventory to get ideas



The majority of those surveyed reported extensive research time going into their shopping process. Image credit: Lucidworks

Retailers are already responding to this development, with companies like Shopify testing out universal search features to support the deeper research being done by consumers ([see story](#)).

Consumers are only going to be more particular with their purchases as the pandemic situation develops in China, war wreaks havoc on eastern Europe and the financial crisis hits the homes of even the highest earners. Retailers will have to adapt to even more specific searches, evolving with the online language of financially-strapped customers.

"We're seeing consumers move towards more conversational search behaviors when they're browsing online," Mr. Mehta said.

"As opposed to punching out a few keywords that they hope will deliver what they're looking for, they're using natural dialogue to find results," he said. "Shoppers expect retailers to be able to return the same quality of results and recommendations online that they would get if they were talking to a sales associate in the store."

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