



The Complete Guide to Site Search

funnelback 

Intro

Your website visitors, trained on Google and Amazon and often browsing from small mobile screens, are increasingly turning to search as a primary means of navigation. Where user experience (UX) experts have valued site search for years, its true value is becoming ever more apparent to marketing and IT leaders. As Forrester research notes, however, “search on many websites is an understaffed, IT-funded afterthought.”

Search has a direct impact on key performance indicators. And a growing number of institutions are measuring the value of digital visitors across their properties. Study after study has shown that site search drives key conversion metrics. Relatively few digital investments can prove ROI as quickly, for both marketing and IT, as site search.

This guide is focused on three key concepts critical to implementing successful search on your website:

- **Information retrieval:** The most basic aspect of site search.
- **Key insights & analysis:** Look for significant insight into user needs and actions across digital properties, from trends to accessibility tools.
- **Personalized experiences:** More sophisticated search platforms build extensive personalizations across your digital properties.

A convenient **checklist** is at the end of this guide.

Why invest in site search?

Many site visitors (43%) rely on search.

The default search experience can be disjointed and frustrating — especially if there are separate search systems representing internal content repositories like products, events, staff. Users expect an Amazon-like search experience. Too often, the actual experience is a cobbled-together mix of old, irrelevant results.

43% of website visitors immediately go to the search bar.

FORRESTER RESEARCH



- Improve navigation and usability
- Increase user satisfaction
- Increase conversion rates
- Improve SEO rankings



- Reduce accessibility challenges
- Lower cost of interactions
- Decrease reputational risk



What can search do?

Promote the most relevant content

Provide insight across your content library

Connect sources and content libraries



Information Retrieval

55% of users will abandon their online visit if they can't find information quickly.

Information Retrieval

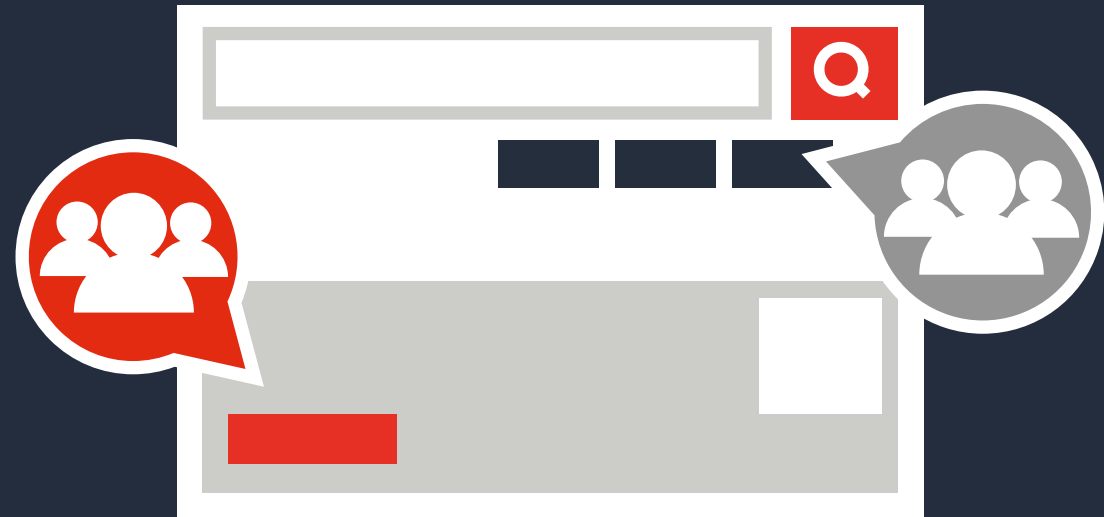
1. Know your users

In the age of effortless whole-of-web (Google), entertainment (Netflix) and retail (Amazon) search, your visitors expect their search experience to deliver intuitive and accurate results immediately. It is more vital than ever that you have the best site search in place to ensure that you meet your users expectations.

The first questions to consider: **Why** are visitors on your site, and **what** are they looking for.

Using your existing web analytics tools, consider which pages and search terms are popular. Combine this data with subjective reports based on your most common email inquiries, phone calls and feedback on what your visitors can't find. This data provides a sense of any gaps in your digital presence.

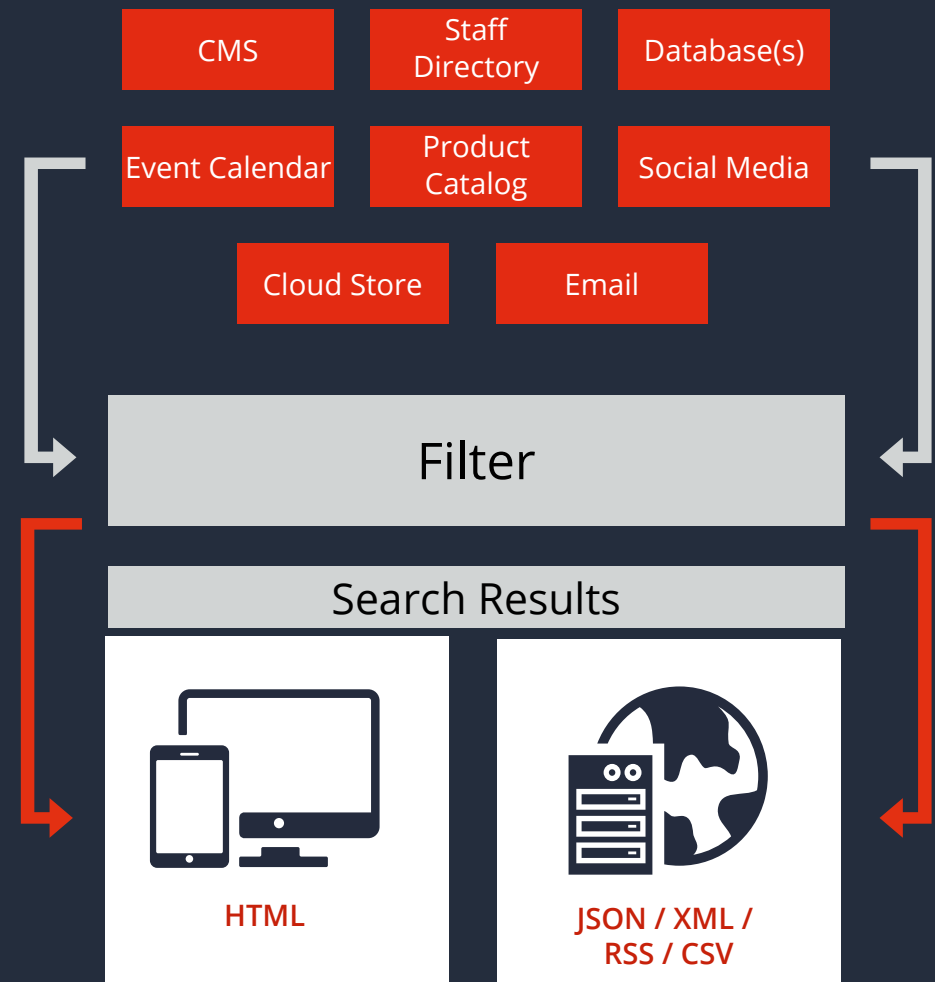
With this knowledge, many digital marketing teams are readily providing access to key pages and other content through intuitive site navigation. How does your search system perform in surfacing the same key data?



2. Connect silos & index everything

Finding answers is all too often restricted by internal departments. Staff directories are kept separate from PDF forms, and landing pages are inaccessible from your homepage. Your users don't care where your information is stored, or if the best answer is spread across multiple content repositories. They just want to find the most relevant and accurate information.

Your job as an IT or marketing leader is to make it easier for your users. If you are able to unite content across data and internal silos, you'll become a hero to your users and to institutional leadership.

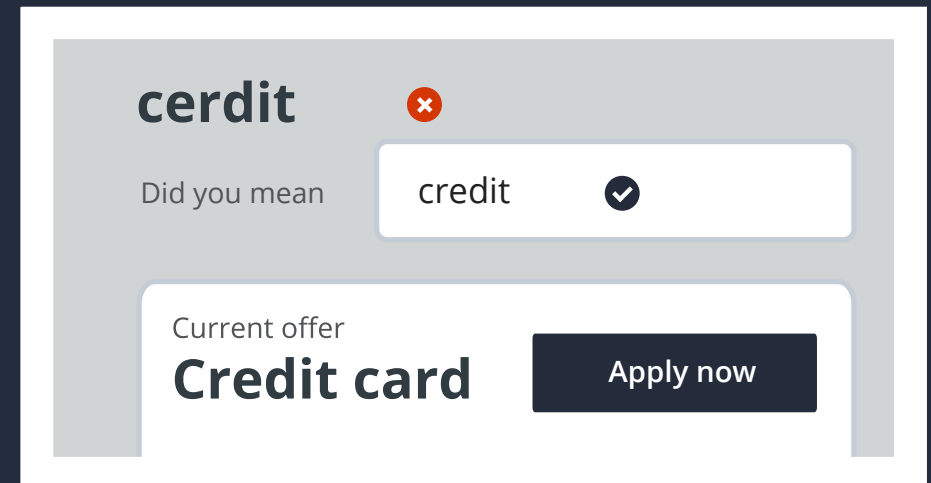
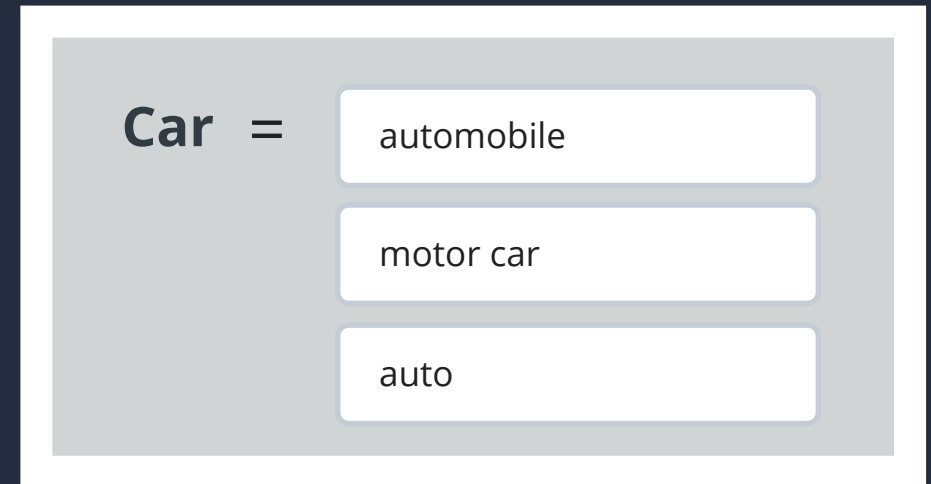


3. Speak your user's language

In an increasingly globalized world, be sure you speak the language of your consumers.

Your search should recognize and respond to common misspellings, slang, preferred format (video, Facebook, PDF, HTML), and jumbled words. If your site has international visitors, you might even include common searches in other languages.

In many search solutions, you can provide for these linguistic challenges with contextual navigation, query completion, synonyms, best bets and automatic spelling corrections.



4. Beyond search

Your search results page should deliver more than just accurate search results. Site search solutions provide the opportunity to supplement results pages with recommended content for your users and their specific queries.

Search results pages are a showcase opportunity for your organization. Beyond a list of the most relevant results, your search results page can include rich media, maps, relevant events, relevant staff contact information, and more.





















Many searchers have specific content in mind. Others are exploring. Provide each with the most robust results.

The screenshot shows the 'Discover Tasmania' website search results for the query 'wine'. The page features a dark blue header with the 'Discover Tasmania' logo and the search term 'wine'. Below the header, the 'SEARCH SUGGESTIONS' section is organized into five columns: 'About Tasmania', 'What To Do', 'Where To Stay', 'Travel Information', and 'Articles'. Each column contains several items with images and brief descriptions. For example, under 'About Tasmania', there are suggestions for Richmond, Beaconsfield, and Vineyards and Wineries. Under 'Where To Stay', there are suggestions for Riversdale Estate Cottages, Riviera Hotel, Touchwood Cottages & Craft Gallery, and Red Brier Cottage Accommodation. Under 'Travel Information', there are suggestions for Cruisin' Tasmania Motorhome and Campervan Rentals and Launceston Minibus Rentals. Under 'Articles', there are suggestions for Bruny Island Experience and Ghosts of Launceston. The page also includes several 'More' buttons, such as 'More Travel Info', 'More Places to Stay', and 'More Things to Do', which are highlighted with a white border.

Discover Tasmania

wine

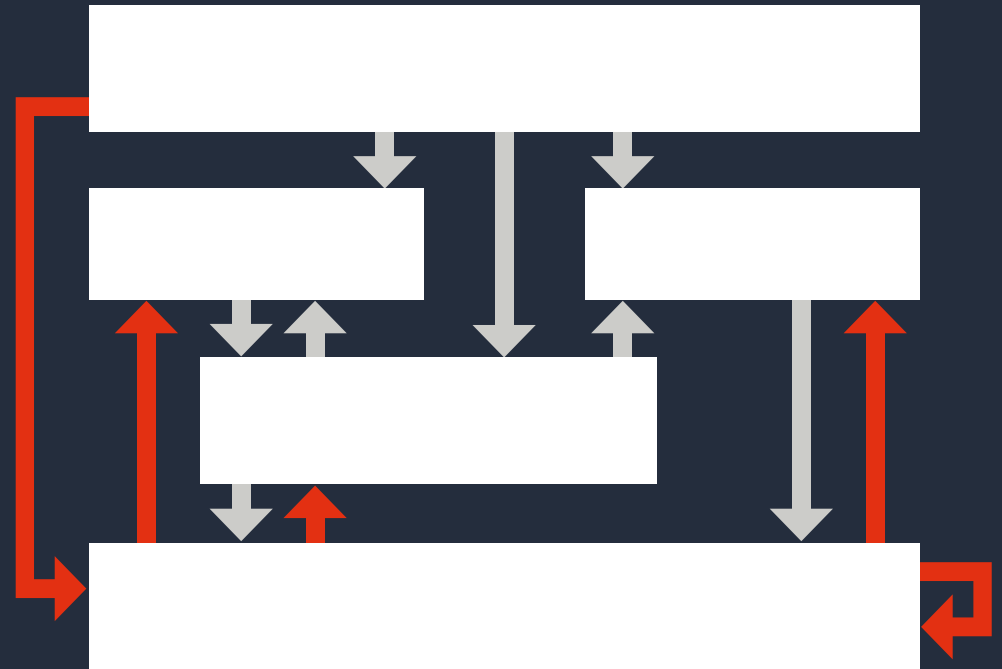
SEARCH SUGGESTIONS

About Tasmania	What To Do	Where To Stay	Travel Information	Articles
 <p>RICHMOND</p> <p>Richmond is a picture-perfect town in the heart of the Coal River Valley wine...</p>	 <p>MOORINA GOLF CLUB</p> <p>Moorina Golf Club offers a nine-hole course in the far north-eastern region of...</p>	 <p>RIVERSDALE ESTATE COTTAGES</p> <p>Riversdale Estate Cottages are located 18 minutes from Hobart and offers...</p>	 <p>CRUISIN' TASMANIA MOTORHOME AND CAMPERVAN RENTALS</p> <p>Tasmania is an island with spectacular scenery, a rich heritage and superb food ...</p>	 <p>BRUNY ISLAND EXPERIENCE</p> <p>Whether you are a gourmet, a history buff or lover of the outdoors, Bruny...</p>
 <p>BEACONSFIELD</p> <p>Beaconsfield is a gold-mining town in the heart of the Tamar Valley Wine Region ...</p>	 <p>HILLWOOD BERRY FARM</p> <p>The iconic Hillwood Berry Farm offers the perfect experience for the entire...</p>	 <p>RIVIERA HOTEL</p> <p>The Riviera Hotel provides comfortable accommodation on the banks of the Tamar...</p>	 <p>LAUNCESTON MINIBUS RENTALS</p> <p>Launceston Minibus Rentals offer minibus hire in Launceston's central business...</p>	 <p>GHOSTS OF LAUNCESTON</p> <p>Tasmanian history reads like a series of horror stories, with the Island's...</p>
 <p>VINEYARDS AND WINERIES</p> <p>Tasmania's cool climate, mild summers and long autumn days are similar to those ...</p>	 <p>LILYDALE VILLAGE MARKET</p> <p>The Lilydale Village Market, a fun monthly event in Lilydale, Tasmania, a...</p>	 <p>TOUCHWOOD COTTAGES & CRAFT GALLERY</p> <p>Looking for a breath of fresh air? If so, you can't beat the quaint little...</p>	 <p>More Travel Info</p>	 <p>TEN THINGS TO DO IN LAUNCESTON</p> <p>Looking for things to do in Launceston? Here are a few suggestions.</p>
 <p>41 DEGREES SOUTH SALMON FARM AND GINSENG FARM</p> <p>41 Degrees South is a salmon farm, wetland and ginseng plantation near...</p>	 <p>More Things to Do</p>	 <p>RED BRIER COTTAGE ACCOMMODATION</p> <p>At Red Brier you can stay in old world cottage or contemporary villa...</p>	 <p>More Places to Stay</p>	 <p>More Things to Do</p>

5. Shorten user journeys

Effective UX design considers the navigation routes and likely actions for various personas who interact with your site. The intention is always to provide the smoothest interaction for your user to find their intended target, whether a landing page, a purchase button, information about an event or new location.

Good site search is built around best practices in UX. Seek to shorten the user journey, from your first page to finding the answer they require. Contextual navigation, autocomplete and UI design elements in site search ensure that user journeys get shorter and conversion rates grow higher.





Key Insights and Analysis

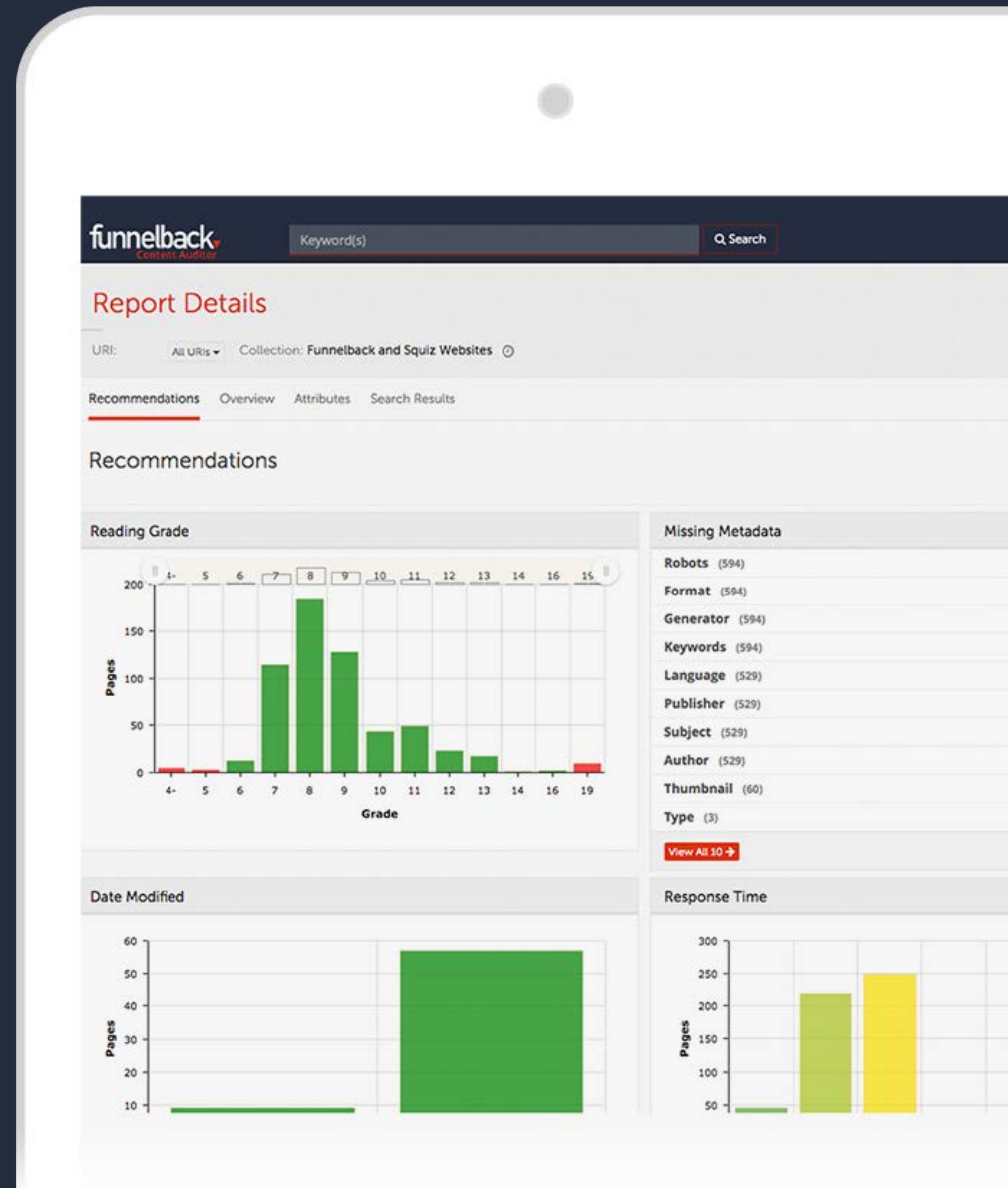
Search provides necessary metrics to provide a higher level of service to your existing customers, reduce churn rates and drive conversions.

Key Insights & Analysis

1. Improve content

In the era of content marketing, most organizations have some capacity for content generation, from white papers to video and social media posts. A good site search solution can uncover great content that might have been overlooked. With a generic search solution, you risk returning bad content over good and diminish the value of your content to users.

Site search and content marketing are a team. As your search solution is crawling your content, it should identify broken links, missing metadata, bad grammar or duplicate content. Insight into your content library with advice on changes can be invaluable to improving your online experience.

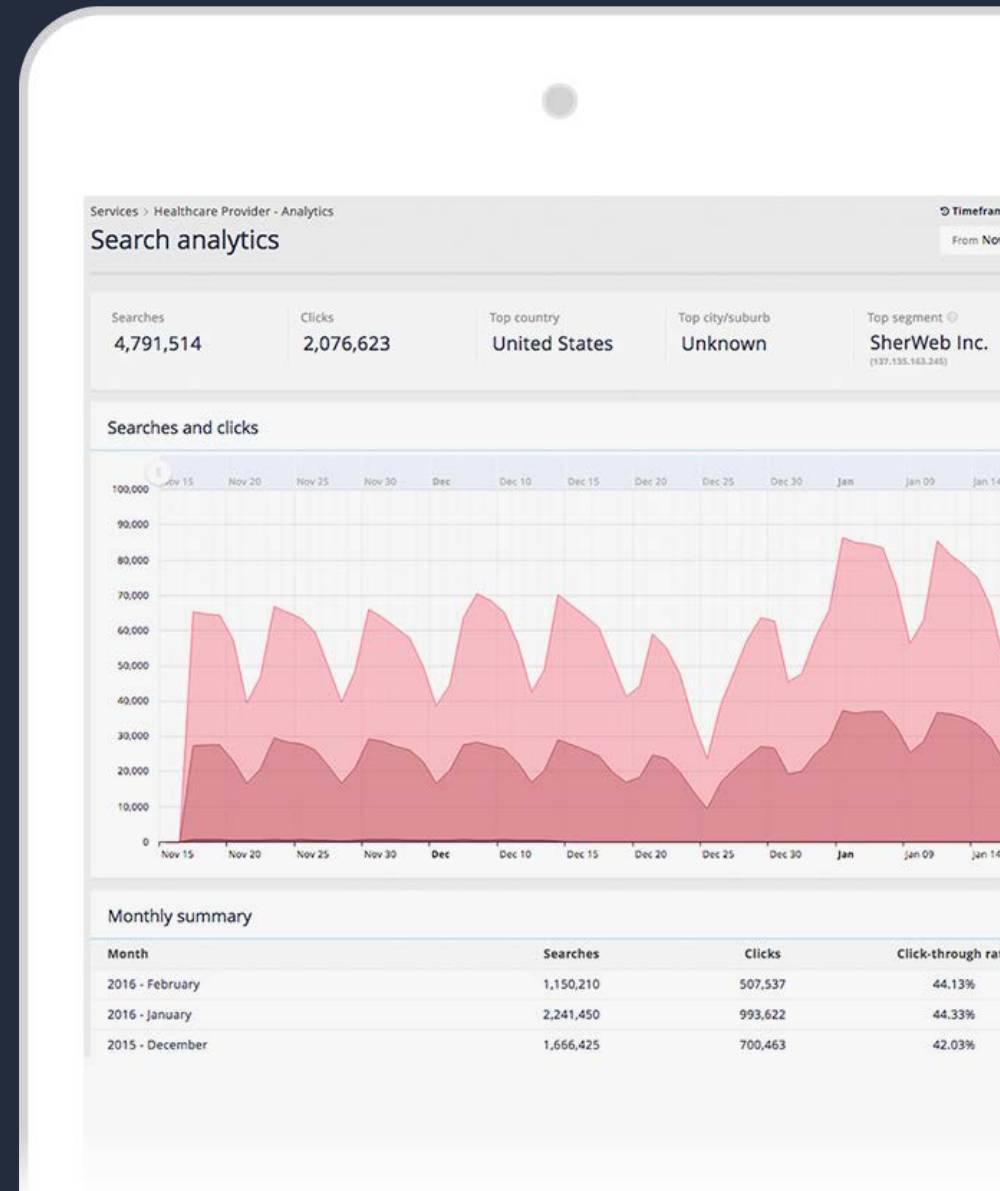


Key Insights & Analysis

2. Understand your users

Site search should uncover the questions and terms your users are asking, helping you to precision-target a digital strategy to your varied audiences, from Gen X to Gen Z, and everything in between.

One simple solution built in to most site search systems? A list of unanswered search queries. This list presents an opportunity to create content responding to the queries, re-direct users to existing answers or perhaps broaden results shown to include misspellings and synonyms.



Key Insights & Analysis

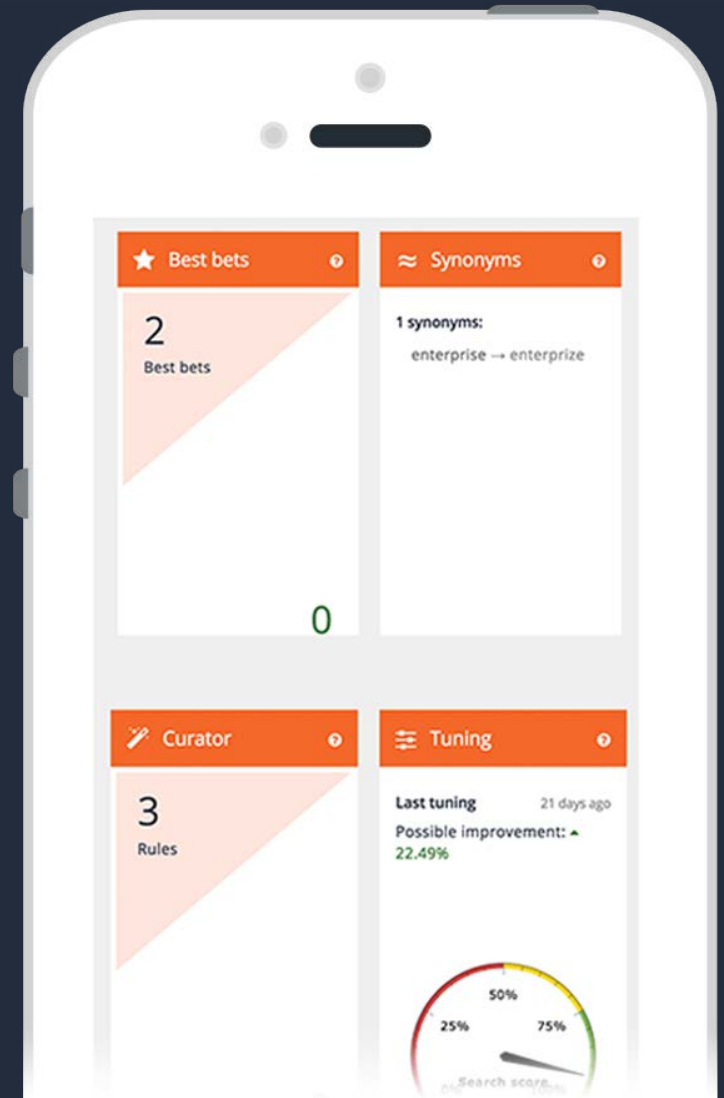
3. Refine and perfect your campaigns

Most leaders understand that dashboards are the control room of any operation. More than broad insights, dashboards present the opportunity to refine the mechanisms at work in the platform.

The search dashboard is no different. Gain a broad understanding of activities across your digital properties, then react by refining search results, boosting or reducing campaigns and quickly respond to new trends.

Properly integrated into your other dashboards, insights and analysis from search can help you understand how and why users meet your conversion metrics -- from registering for a mailing list to switching accounts.

Site search only grows better over time as expert users iterate to provide maximum value to users and administrators. Technical and non-technical users need to be able to optimize search with just a few clicks.





Personalizing Experiences

Users expect your website, like others they use daily, to answer questions and only deliver the most relevant content.

Personalizing Experiences

1. Macro personalization

Most modern site search solutions can personalize your user experience through macro level details, such as location or language.

With this information, you can begin to serve more personalized and relevant content to your users. International visitors, for example, will receive more relevant details. You can also restrict or promote certain content: for example, local store results for those within a geographic region.



Benefits

- Deliver unique experiences based on location or language
- Provide a more precise list of the most relevant results
- Connect your users to information that matters to them
- Customize with local language, currency or region

Limitations

- While useful, location, language and time zone may not provide the level of personalization many expect
- Limited ability to create an experience tailored to the individual visitor

2. Micro personalization

Spotify and Netflix always know what you want to enjoy next. Conditioned by social media, online advertisements and tailored web searches, users assume that when they arrive on your website, they will be served with content relevant to them. Site search should provide experiences tailored to your users while respecting modern privacy standards.

Personalization is best when your CMS, marketing automation and CRM systems are unified, allowing you to create a unique experience based upon a user's profile and their history interacting with your organization. If an existing customer or prospect has already logged into your system, you might already know their gender, age, location and sales rep. If your CRM is limited or not yet implemented, search might still be able to infer surprising details about visitors.

Each user should experience a tailored journey. Even new visitors can experience a semi-customized experience with search. On their next visit, the courses they marked are retained in search to ensure a seamless experience.

Benefits

- Experiences reflective of major consumer sites
- Stand out from competitors
- Boost loyalty and reduce churn
- Power personalized search results and dynamic content across your website

Limitations

- Personalization needs to be carefully considered to ensure that it is appropriate and meets regulations
- Siloed data sources can be challenging to integrate effectively, especially if undertaken alone

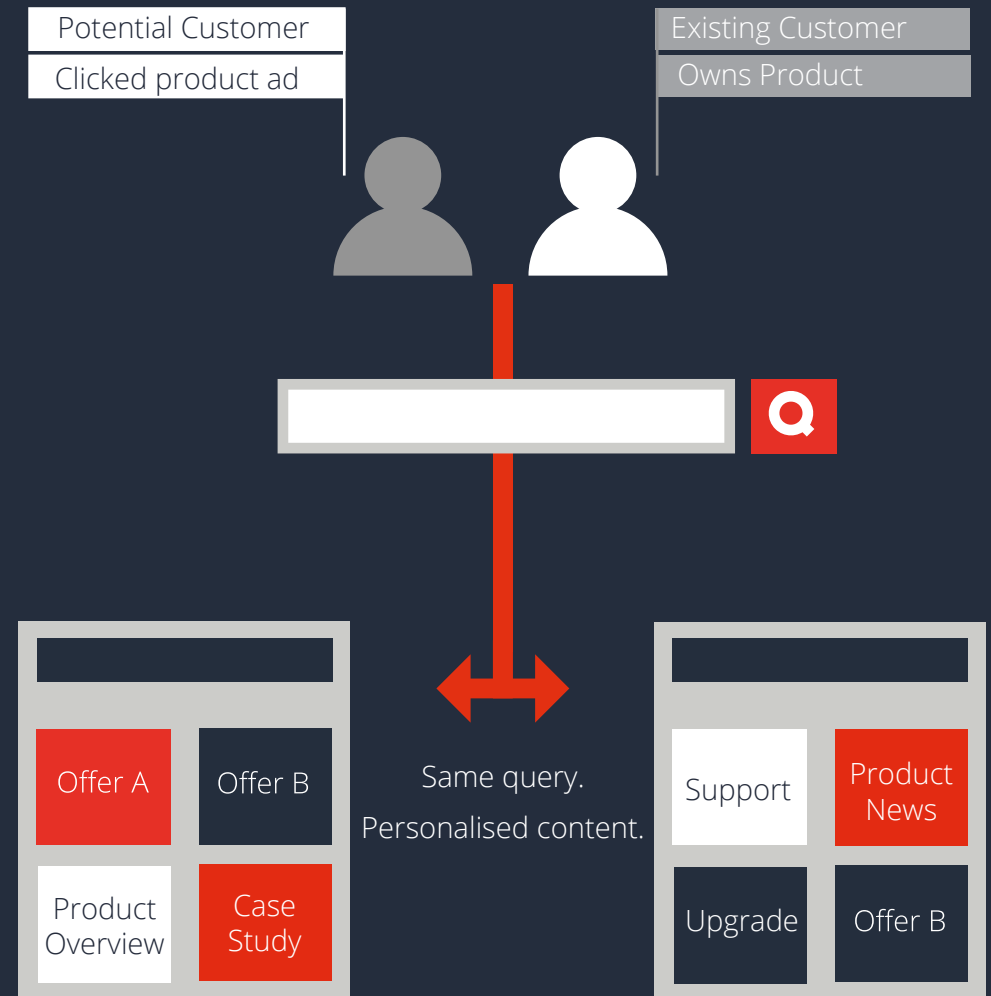
Personalizing Experiences

3. Dynamic & proactive

The days of reactive search are over. Your site search solution should be dynamic and proactive, providing unique experiences for users before they even enter a keystroke. Dynamic pages utilize search systems to understand a user's likely next step and surface recommended content.

Modern search solutions work seamlessly behind the scenes, dynamically composing content most relevant to each user. This might include recommending similar pages, products or locations related to a user's interests, or up-weighting content and search results that are deemed more relevant.

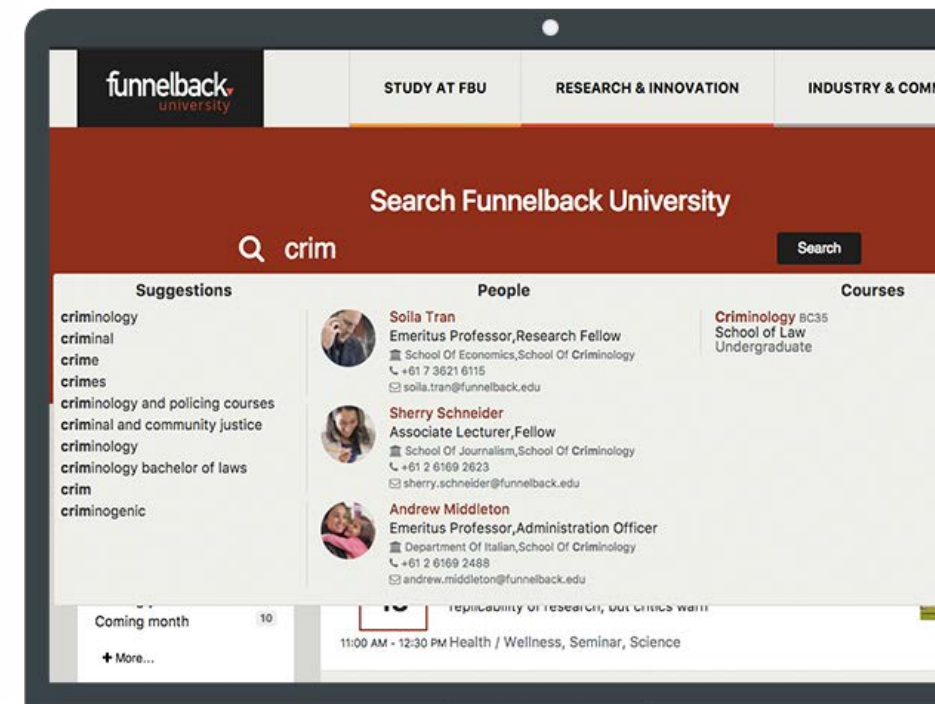
From proactive landing pages with search-powered content to advertisements, product recommendations and functional messages in search results, your search platform should provide a personalized experience that exceeds the expectations of your most demanding users.



Summary

Study after study has shown a correlation between effective site search and an increase in conversions, user satisfaction and a streamlined user experience. As marketing and IT leaders look for new ways to boost their KPIs and combat the age-old challenge of data in separate systems, site search has proven a robust, reliable and intelligent part of the solution.

Use the checklist in the following pages to evaluate your current or prospective site search and see opportunities for “quick wins” in the user experience on your site.



Checklist: your site search

Whether you're examining your current site search solution, comparing vendors, or analyzing user experience (UX) across your digital properties, this checklist will ensure that you don't miss any valuable opportunities in your search solution.

Feature	Requirements	Notes for your website
<p>1. Index all relevant content</p> <p><i>List all the different data sources you will need to index content from. (For example, your CMS, social media, event calendar, staff directory, maps, and any databases.)</i></p>	<p>Make sure your search provider can index multiple data sources. Many stop at your CMS. A truly useful search experience crosses user personas and silos and provides access to all relevant data.</p>	
<p>2. Speak to everyone</p> <p><i>Do you speak Gen Z? Are there any differences, ambiguous phrases, industry jargon or confusing words that your users might prefer?</i></p>	<p>Ensure that your search solution comes with tools that enable you to make direct adjustments to your user experience. For example, you should be able to create synonyms to stop users from hitting dead ends.</p>	
<p>3. Control your ranking</p> <p><i>The freedom to control your search rankings allows you to promote certain results to the top of the results page, or hide content or entire sources that you don't want users to uncover.</i></p>	<p>Your chosen solution shouldn't lock down algorithms, but allow you to tune your collections to fit your organizational needs. Ideally, you should have complete control over your results pages and the ability to promote and hide URLs.</p>	

Feature	Requirements	Notes for your website
<p>4. Be engaging</p> <p><i>Your site search shouldn't detract from your site design or user experience objectives.</i></p>	<p>Ensure that your search solution has the ability to fit seamlessly into your site, matching your design while supplementing results pages with rich media thumbnails, maps and people profiles.</p>	
<p>5. Localize content</p> <p><i>Your site search should reflect your other content, with localization for out-of-state or international prospects and customers.</i></p>	<p>Site search should respond to the known identity of the searcher, providing, for example, only relevant information for international customers using the Euro.</p>	
<p>6. Understand your content</p> <p><i>Discover weaknesses in your content library, down to document level, with actionable insights on how to improve.</i></p>	<p>Your search engine should be capable of providing insight into the content it is indexing. This includes user-friendly review of relevant metadata (author, date etc.), assessing the reading age, or checking for duplicate content or broken links.</p>	

Feature	Requirements	Notes for your website
<p>7. Understand user behavior</p> <p><i>Sophisticated insights and analytics help you understand how your users interact with your site search, and permit you to take action to improve the search experience.</i></p>	<p>Site search is an integral part of your digital platform. Independently or as part of a broader dashboard, you should be aware of trends and shifts in behavior on your search page and able to react quickly to account for these changes.</p>	
<p>8. Get personal</p> <p><i>Use your search engine for more than information retrieval. A true insight engine allows you to personalize content across your site relating to what you know about a visitor.</i></p>	<p>Your site search solution should have the capacity to drive personalised experiences, be it at a macro or micro level, incorporating information from your marketing technology solutions.</p>	
<p>9. Consider user journeys</p> <p><i>Make adjustments or changes to your user journey within the site search administration interface.</i></p>	<p>Adjusting the user journey can include anything from setting rules on what certain users can see, to contextual navigation, recommendations or autocomplete.</p>	



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