



Changes to size and location of search box yield more revenues and customer conversions

Business problem:

How to make customers more aware of the site search feature to increase the overall conversion rate

Solution:

Increased the size of the site search box, centered the box at the top of the page, and changed the text and color

The Results:

Revenue per customer up 84 percent
Conversion rate up 34 percent

Increased conversion rates with SLI Systems' Learning Search inspires better awareness of search feature

In mid-2006, Black Forest Décor (www.blackforestdecor.com), a mail order and Internet home décor retailer based in Tulsa, OK, implemented SLI Systems' Learning Search solution to improve search results for browsing customers online. After seeing the positive impact of effective site search on revenue, Black Forest Décor President Jason Dupus decided to go a step further and experiment with the size and placement of the site's search box to see if that might have even greater impact.

Dupus knew that having a site search on his website that delivers relevant results – like SLI's Learning Search - would help convert more browsers into buyers. According to MarketingSherpa's Search Marketing Benchmark Guide 2008, roughly 50% of people prefer to use the search on a site rather than simply navigate, and site search provides a higher conversion rate than other website navigation/browsing activities. However, Dupus believed that making the search box more prominent might also help boost such conversions.

"We were about to undergo a site redesign, so it was the perfect time to take a hard look at the search box and see if some simple changes would make the box easier to find and use," said Dupus. "Before redesigning the site, we noticed that there was a very high conversion rate for customers who used the site search, versus customers who didn't use it. The challenge was to figure out how to get more customers to use our site search."

Says Shaun Ryan, CEO of SLI Systems, "Once you've made the investment in a solution like SLI's Learning Search, you want to attract as many visitors as possible to the search feature, since shoppers who use search are more likely to make a purchase."

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Black Forest Décor President***





Larger, centered search box gets more attention from site visitors

The Black Forest Décor team first looked at the site search design on several leading ecommerce sites, including Amazon and Wal-Mart. The most successful online retailers, Dupus observed, did not place the search box in the default spot: the upper-right corner

of the page. Nor did they use the standard small search boxes, which are often difficult to find. In addition, Dupus and his team noticed that other retailers used attention-getting colors or words to draw attention to their search boxes.

“These large retailers had placed the search box in the center of the page, and they also increased the size of the box,” said Dupus. “It was clear that moving the box to a more prominent spot on the page – and making it larger – might draw more attention to search, and therefore increase sales.”

Dupus and his marketing team first increased the size of the search box by 72 percent. The old search box was 209 pixels; the new box is 359 pixels. Next, the team moved the search box to the middle of the page near the top, just under its top navigation bar.

The team also decided to make a small change to the text that appeared in the button just to the right of the search box. “We were using the word ‘Go’ for the button, but we decided that it seemed out of date,” Dupus explained. “The word ‘Find’ was much more intuitive.”

The final step was to make the search box pop out of the page with color. “The old search box was drab, and didn’t stand out as much as it should have,” Dupus said. The marketing team placed the box in a lighter color against the darker background color of the page, and used black text on white for the “Find” button.

Revenue per customer rises dramatically

Black Forest Décor’s site redesign, including the changes to the search box, took effect in September 2007. The improvement in site search revenue was dramatic, Dupus said: “We expected to see greater conversions and revenue, but the results exceeded our expectations.”

Comparing a two-month period in 2006, and the same period in 2007 (just after the site redesign), average revenue per customer using search went up 84 percent. In the 2006 two-month period, search revenue made up 35 percent of total website revenue; that figure went up to 42 percent after the search box redesign. The website conversion rate also increased 34 percent.

The marketing team also noticed that the number of raw searches increased dramatically after the search box redesign. Armed with new keywords gleaned from these searches, the marketing team has been able to add these terms to its Search Engine Marketing (SEM) campaigns, and further improve results.

“Black Forest Décor’s simple changes to its search box show that improving site search and driving increased revenue doesn’t require a lot of time or money,” said SLI Systems’ Ryan. “Easy changes like moving the search box or making it more visible can quickly pay off, and help you take advantage of intelligent site search.”

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Jason Dupus
Black Forest Décor President

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