



Site Search Vs. Re-platforming: How focusing on advanced site search can eliminate the need to re-platform your ecommerce website

Discover ways that online retailers are using site search solutions to delay or eliminate the need to re-platform, to deliver great online experiences, and to ease transition to new platforms

FitForCommerce Whitepaper Series

Multi-channel and online retailers regularly face a daunting decision that can cost millions and take years to implement – the decision to move onto a new ecommerce platform. Today's advanced site search solutions enable retailers to bypass their ecommerce system and handle a variety of key areas that have traditionally been major factors in the decision to re-platform. We have observed a number of retailers utilizing state-of-the-art site search solutions to delay, and, in some cases, avoid re-platforming projects. This whitepaper examines this trend and provides retailers with hands-on tips on how to extend site search solutions to improve upon their ecommerce platforms.

Brian Beck, Senior Consultant
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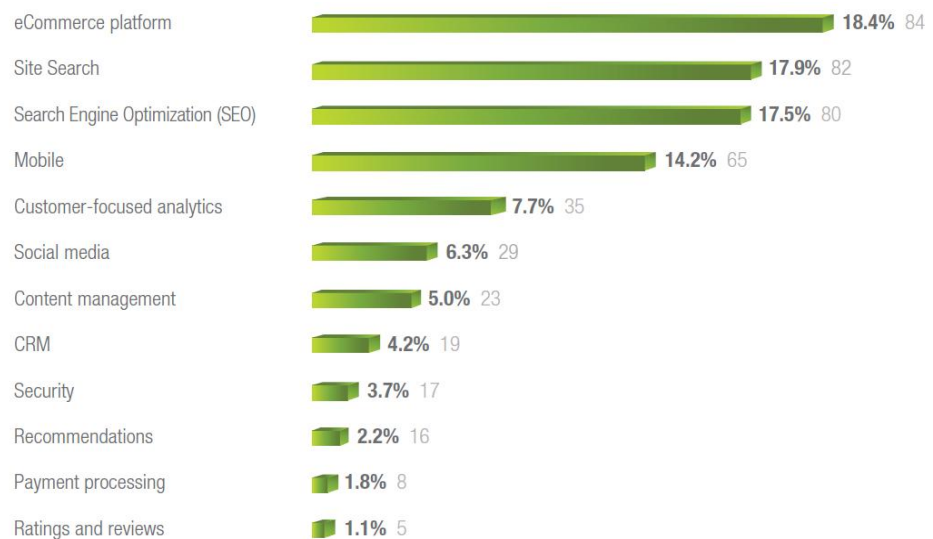
Introduction

Multi-channel and online retail leaders regularly face a daunting decision that can cost millions and take multiple years to implement – the decision to move onto a new ecommerce platform.

FitForCommerce data shows that a re-platforming effort can cost large retailers up to \$10 MM, while small and mid-market retailers regularly shell out \$500,000 to \$1 MM to implement new ecommerce platform. Re-platforming can also be extremely disruptive to the business, driving unseen costs such as lost revenue and profit opportunities while IT and merchandising staffs focus on the re-platforming effort vs. current business operations.

Despite these challenges, re-platforming continues to be an important consideration for retailers. A recent survey conducted by SLI Systems shows that optimizing the ecommerce platform is a top priority in 2013 for more than 18% of online retail executives. In a November 2012 survey by Internet Retailer Magazine, over 60% of retailers rated “ecommerce Platform” among their top budget priorities. Why do ecommerce executives continue to show deep interest in what seems to be such a difficult endeavor?

TOP ECOMMERCE SITE PRIORITIES FOR 2013



Source: SLI Systems November 2012 survey of 457 eCommerce executives

While re-platforming investment and effort levels can be high, merchants have powerful incentives to explore moving to new ecommerce platforms.

Return on Investment (ROI) approaches used by retailers typically tie to improvements in revenue and profit, efficiency improvements, and long term cross-channel initiatives, and can include:

- Improvements to conversion rates and average order values though improved merchandising and website experience

- Enhanced cross-channel experience – store, web, mobile, catalog, B-to-B, and social commerce
- Increased site traffic
- Improved competitive positioning
- Addressing new ways customers are seeking to interact with the brand, such as mobile and social media, and encouraging customer-generated content
- Efficiency gains from eliminating maintenance of older, cumbersome technologies
- Driving increased web-influenced store sales through rich product content and other means

The reality is that the upside can be considerable for retailers. However, the profitability improvements must be significant in order to justify the associated investment of time and dollars as well as the risks of migrating to a new platform.

Through FitForCommerce’s work with dozens of Top 100 and mid-market online retailers on re-platforming and other technology selection and strategy projects, we have observed an interesting trend related to the use of specialized, best-of-breed site search solutions to delay and, in some cases, eliminate the need for re-platforming.

As state-of-the-art site search solutions have evolved to capably handle more and more of the customer’s online experience, retailers have been empowered to free themselves from technical constraints of their current ecommerce platform. Today’s more advanced site search solutions enable retailers to complement their ecommerce platform and handle a variety of the key areas that have traditionally been major factors in the decision to re-platform. Retailers can positively impact conversion rates, average order values, and other key metrics - the very reasons many merchants pursue re-platforming - by using specialized, best-of-breed site search for:

- Management of front-end product taxonomy, including site navigation, product presentation, non-product content, and the overall front-end user experience
- Offering a consistent user experience between site search and navigation
- Flexible and dynamic merchandising, including putting control of the site into the hands of merchandisers versus IT/web engineers
- Generating relevant search results for visitors
- Product data management
- Improvements in driving relevant site experiences (landing pages and customized content) for various traffic sources and customer types (online, brick-and-mortar, mobile, marketing channel-specific landing pages, etc.)
- Overall website look and feel
- Better understanding of visitors’ behavior and intent
- Search Engine Optimization and web traffic improvements
- Improved efficiencies in site management

This has resulted in a blurring of the line between advanced, best-of-breed site search solutions and ecommerce platform technologies.

We were surprised by the many ways advanced site search tools were being used by leading online retailers to augment – and even circumvent – their ecommerce platforms.

- FitForCommerce



Not just B-to-C

Jelly Beans are Big Business

Site search's ability to address platform limitations extends beyond business-to-consumer websites to address **business-to-business** functionalities.

For **Jelly Belly**, a retailer and manufacturer of jelly beans and candy products, the company's state-of-the-art site search solution will soon enable the company to expand its business -to-business operations without re-platforming.

"We are enabling site search to power a b-to-b experience that is similar to our b-to-c shopping experience," said **Brandon Finch**, the company's Director of ECommerce. *"Many of our retail store purchasers are looking for a b-to-c style experience – including product taxonomy – but integrated into a purchasing structure appropriate for business users. Site search will allow us to accomplish this, particularly for the thousands of mom and pop retailers out there that rely on us for their retail assortment."*

We have observed a number of merchants utilizing advanced site search solutions to improve conversions and increase average order values, and therefore delay, and, in some cases, forego re-platforming projects. And, when the decision is made to re-platform, we are seeing retailers utilize site search to ease the transition to the new platform.

This whitepaper examines and documents these trends, and provides merchants with hands-on tips on how to extend site search to improve upon their ecommerce platforms and perhaps delay or replace their own re-platforming initiatives.

Overcoming User Experience Challenges

A primary reason many merchants re-platform is to enable improvements in site experience in order to capture revenue via increased conversion rate, average order value, and overall improved and more relevant shopping experiences for their customers.

Key areas that are often the source of problems for retailers include poor navigation, lack of relevant site search, lack of consistency between the search and navigation user experience, limitations on ability for business users to effectively merchandise products and categories, and other constraints preventing retailers from meeting the true one-to-one shopping experience expected by today's online shopper.

By leveraging state-of-the-art site search solutions, many retailers have found ways to circumvent these limitations, enabling companies to utilize best practice features on their webstores - even when not supported by the underlying platform.

The screenshot shows the Jelly Belly website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'SHOP our candy', 'EXPLORE our candy', 'Visit Us', 'Entertainment', 'Athletes We Sponsor', and 'Gift Cards'. A search bar contains 'jelly belly jelly beans'. Below the navigation, there's a 'McAfee SECURE' badge and a search results section. The search results show '1 - 12 of 692 Search Results for All Products'. A 'Did you know...' section lists facts about Jelly Belly products. Below that, there are product listings for 'Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans', 'BeanBoozled', 'Belly Flops 2 lb. Bag', and '50-Flavor Gift Box'. A left navigation menu is visible, listing categories like 'Occasions', 'Jelly Belly Jelly Beans', 'Bulk Candy', etc. An arrow points to the left navigation menu.

Jelly Belly uses Advanced Site Search to drive Left Navigation

For example, by using site search tools, retailers can implement faceted navigation, which enables site visitors to quickly narrow a product assortment within a product category or search result set by key attributes. These navigation options can include product characteristics like color, material, price, and brand, or merchandiser and customer driven attributes such as “best use” or customer review rating. Many older, home-grown or ecommerce platform-based site search tools do not support faceted navigation.

In addition, retailers can create landing pages powered by the more advanced site search solutions. This gives merchants the ability to create unique navigational elements and structures on the fly, without IT involvement, putting site experience fully in the hands of the merchants and creating a more efficient merchandising process.

Online merchants operating on less flexible or less up to date platforms will also find themselves in situations where they are limited in their ability to create merchandised site pages, often having to rely on the IT department to create pages for them. Or, merchants are forced to manually create pages in the ecommerce platform without a way to enable dynamic updates to these pages. So, if an item goes out of stock, the page must be manually updated, creating an administrative nightmare. By using advanced site search, merchants can enable merchandised landing pages and category assortments that are dynamically updated for product availability. These solutions can be overlaid on top of older ecommerce platforms, empowering merchants with easy-to-use, graphical interfaces to create these pages without the involvement of the IT group.

A merchandised holiday landing page with dynamic updating of product assortment at Jelly Belly

Many merchants have found that advanced site search solutions enable them to implement these shopping features, which directly impact site conversion and average order values, extending the viability of their current ecommerce platform and, in some cases, eliminating the imminent need to re-platform.



PartySuppliesDelivered.com, a pure-play retailer of party supplies and favors and part of **Mattress USA**, has used the merchandising capabilities inside of its advanced site search solution to eliminate short-term consideration of a re-platforming effort.

“In our case, the shopper’s entire browsing and navigating is controlled by our site search solution. We rely on this solution’s extensive merchandising capabilities instead of the limited capabilities of our ecommerce platform,” said Ian MacDonald, Division VP of Ecommerce and Marketing of PartySuppliesDelivered.com. “Almost 50% of our visitors use site search when they come to our site. The remainder browse the site using the navigation provided by our site search solution. With our site search solution delivering both experiences in a consistent way, we know customers get a great experience.”

PartySuppliesDelivered.com is operating on an ecommerce platform that has been widely used among early stage and mid-market ecommerce pure-play retailers for over a decade. Many firms have re-platformed off of this software as they have grown. Not so for PartySuppliesDelivered.com or for their family of websites, which includes **US-Mattress.com**, **FurnitureCrate.com**, and **LinensForLiving.com**. By optimizing the user experience in site search, navigation, and merchandising, the retailer has been able to increase conversions without re-platforming.

PartySuppliesDelivered’s Product Category Page with stock status display and refinements on price, product rating, and other shopper friendly attributes

The screenshot shows the PartySuppliesDelivered.com website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the logo, a search bar, and links for 'view cart' and 'checkout'. Below the navigation bar, there are promotional banners for 'EVERYDAY FREE SHIPPING' and a 10% discount on email newsletters. The main content area displays a list of products under the 'Cinco de Mayo' category, including a Cactus Beverage Cooler, 12" Red Balloons, Red Balloon Weight, and 12" White Balloons. Each product listing includes an image, a price, and a 'Related Searches' section.

“We have no imminent need to re-platform,” says MacDonald. “We can create great usability without the pain and expense. For example, on our item listing (category) page, we are able to show more information to the customer with our site search solution than is possible through our platform. We can now show visitors important shopping metrics to help them make a purchase decision, such as percentage savings and in-stock vs. out-of-stock. Our site search solution also allows our customers to re-sort results by best-sellers, low/high price, and ratings.”



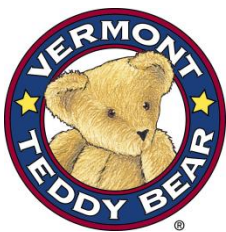
National brands are similarly leveraging best-of-breed site search. At **Lakeshore Learning**, a leading national provider of learning products for parents and teachers, the company is implementing its advanced site search solution to completely supplant most front-end site features. Once fully implemented, the underlying ecommerce platform will only power the product pages, shopping cart and checkout, making it easy and quick to create new site experiences and merchandising features as needed. “We expect improvements in conversion rates, customer engagement, fewer search abandonments, and overall a vastly improved site experience for our customers,” says Sam Sarullo, VP Ecommerce at Lakeshore. Also, with more than 50% of site visits using site search, the shortcomings of the platform’s built-in site search solution were very apparent. By implementing a state-of-the-art site search solution, Lakeshore further extended the life of its platform.

Even a website’s “look and feel”, a common reason given by many retailers to re-platform, can be enhanced using advanced site search.

Lakeshore Learning, for example, has used its site search solution to host special pages, including a holiday gift guide section. “Creating uniquely designed landing pages and sections of the website are easy with our site search solution,” said Lakeshore’s Sarullo. “We can also test new experiences to really optimize our conversion rates.”

By enabling these best-of-breed site experience features from within their advanced site search solutions, these retailers have fully leveraged their investment in their current ecommerce platforms. They have also realized some of the bottom line improvements that are typically only expected with a full re-platforming effort.

Extending Platform Life



By implementing a modern, feature-rich site search solution, many merchants are significantly extending the life of their eCommerce platform – some of them indefinitely.

For **Vermont Teddy Bear**, a leading manufacturer and retailer of teddy bears and collectibles, implementing a state-of-the-art site search solution has been critical to avoid the time and expense of re-platforming.

“We have not re-platformed recently, largely because of our extensive use of our advanced site search solution” said Victor Castro, Director of Ecommerce at the company. “Site search has taken over many aspects of our website experience, including navigation, search, merchandising, landing pages, and search engine optimization efforts. Using site search as the core of our website has also enabled our business users to merchandise without involving the IT department, making everyone’s work more efficient.”



Valentine's Gifts

Make your Valentine really happy this year and send 'em the best gift there is - a Bear hug from an authentic, handcrafted Vermont Teddy Bear. Your Bear will arrive as a Bear-Gram gift, packed inside our fun and colorful gift box with air hole complete with a personalized card and gourmet candy.



Site search drives dynamically-updating merchandised landing pages at Vermont Teddy Bear, such as this Valentine's Gifts page

Similarly, Lakeshore Learning has put off its decision to re-platform indefinitely as a result of using their advanced site search solution. The company is on an ecommerce platform implemented in 2006 and is currently several versions behind on upgrades. However, the retailer remains confident in its ability to meet customer website expectations, due to their reliance on site search.

“Using advanced site search has bought us at least one, possibly two, years to determine if we need to re-platform”, said Sam Sarullo, VP Ecommerce at Lakeshore. “With site search, we can now provide a user experience that enables our web customers to quickly find what they are looking for on our site. Using landing pages and attribute drill-downs with faceted navigation, we can accommodate the shopping preferences of our two most important customer groups: teachers – who shop by grade – and parents – who shop by age. Without a best-of-breed site search solution, we would have needed to re-platform several years ago.”

PartySuppliesDelivered.com also credits its state-of-the-art site search solution as the only reason it has been able to remain on its current platform. The company expects to continue to host its ecommerce site with this platform, even with the dramatic growth they have experienced via the web channel.

“Our store platform only runs our content pages, product detail pages, and checkout – our advanced site search solution does the rest,” said MacDonald from PartySuppliesDelivered.com. “We have been on our platform for over 10 years, but we use our search to manage our product taxonomy, site navigation, site search, and product presentation. Our customers can find the product they want based on attributes like size, color, brand, style, and more. These are all best-practice features that would be impossible on our platform without our advanced site search solution.”

“What’s more, during our peak periods - like Halloween time – we need to update our assortment every hour. We need to pull out-of-stock items out of the navigation and product list pages, add replacement items in, and make other product updates very quickly. Without a real-time site search solution, we wouldn’t even be able to merchandise this way. Our platform does not support real-time product updates – it requires a cumbersome publishing process – but, our site search does support it.”

For these retailers and other merchants FitForCommerce has observed, advanced site search has clearly enabled an extension of ecommerce platforms’ lifetimes.

Obtaining “Free” Traffic

SEO site traffic increases of over 300% were reported from implementing search engine friendly pages with a state-of-the-art site search solution. This was reported by a large online retailer of cosmetics and beauty supplies we spoke with for this study.



Overcoming Search Engine Optimization (SEO) challenges is another key reason why many retailers opt to re-platform. Merchants will often seek to replace older ecommerce platforms that are not “friendly” to Internet search engines, and prevent retailers from realizing high rankings on important keywords and obtaining lucrative “free” traffic from Internet search engines (called SEO or “natural search” traffic). Modern, best-of-breed site search solutions have been used by some retailers to help overcome these challenges, by virtue of their ability to create optimized landing pages based on their learning capabilities.

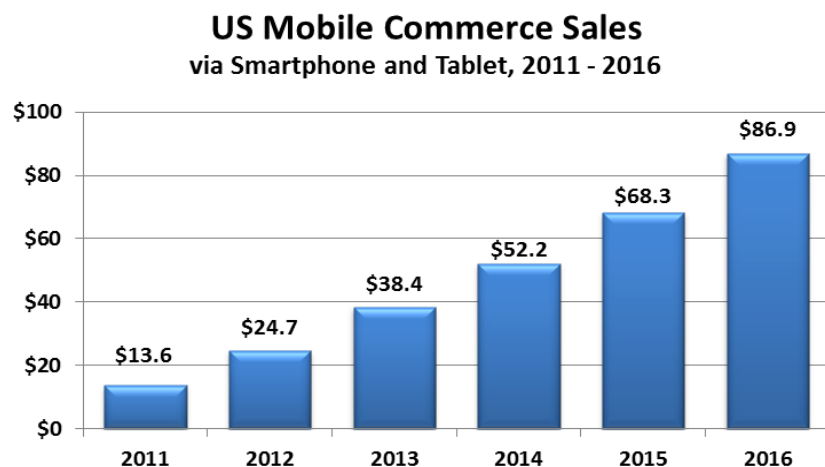
Vermont Teddy Bear uses landing pages created by their site search solution to drastically expand their reach of indexable pages, enhancing the company’s overall “footprint” in SEO. By using advanced site search solutions to create search results pages that are indexable by the Internet search engines using SEO friendly URL structures and site maps, companies can capture natural Internet search engine traffic they might otherwise not receive. The site search solution they use learns over time from visitors’ use of the website and generates SEO focused pages by analyzing the searches that are being executed on the retailers’ websites – reflecting the reason that customers are coming to the retailer’s website to begin with. This tactic drives extremely relevant traffic – a web merchandiser’s gold mine.

Ian MacDonald at PartySuppliesDelivered.com notes that SEO benefits of using site search go beyond traffic to other key performance metrics. “Because the indexed pages in the search results are so tightly tied to the search term, they make great landing pages. We regularly see higher average order values and better conversion rates from traffic landing on these pages versus our site average,” notes MacDonald.

Retailers considering a re-platforming effort in order to obtain more SEO traffic should closely review how the implementation of an advanced site search solution can meet these same goals. While site search may not address all structural website issues related to SEO, the solution can be implemented far more quickly and cost-effectively, and should be strongly assessed as an alternative or supplemental approach.

Meeting the Mobile Imperative

Mobile usage of websites is exploding, creating an imperative for retailers to build mobile friendly websites.



Source: eMarketer

According to an eMarketer study released in January 2013, US mobile commerce sales were up 81% from 2011 to 2012, and are expected to exceed \$38 billion in 2013. By 2016, mobile sales are expected to account for 24% of overall ecommerce retail sales.

Various smart phone and tablet screen sizes are driving the need for some merchants to deploy responsive design on their websites, while others are simply seeking basic mobile capabilities. Responsive design, which enables sites to be presented in an optimal way regardless of device, is being built into some ecommerce platforms. However, not all are enabled for either responsive design or basic mobile usability.

Advanced site search can again be a saving grace, whether retailers choose responsive design or not.

Vermont Teddy Bear turned to their site search solution to enable a mobile experience. This allowed management to evaluate how its customers were seeking to interact with the company via mobile devices and assess its mobile strategy quickly and with a minimal investment. The mobile application, hosted by the company's site search provider, is an integrated experience that enables a vastly improved browsing experience and prominent searching capabilities, with a "click to call" function for ordering.

"We avoided spending a huge amount of time and money to enable a mobile experience", said Victor Castro, Director of Ecommerce at Vermont Teddy Bear. "We had a mobile site up within a week by leveraging our search solution. Enabling transactions via mobile is a possible next step for us, but now we have our eyes open going into this, and deeper pockets without having spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on an experiment (e.g., a commerce-enabled mobile website)."

A Future View

Integrating a state-of-the-art site search solution can also be a part of **forward-looking strategy** to optimize future investments in eCommerce platform technologies.

One **national big box multi-channel retailer** we spoke with for this study indicated that, while site search was not a viable solution to replace their aging and unstable eCommerce platform, search is still a critical component of the re-platforming effort that will help the retailer get more out of their new platform.

"We are extending a best in class site search solution to manage both our on-site search as well as our site navigation," said the VP of ECommerce. *"And we expect this move will help us to extend the life of our new platform."*

Capturing Efficiency Gains

Another important driver for re-platforming eCommerce websites is to improve efficiencies of managing the web business, including more effective data management, de-coupling merchant's dependency on IT for site changes, and overall process improvements.

By empowering staff to more effectively and more quickly do their jobs, companies can drive lower costs and improve overall output and profitability. Again, advanced site search comes to the rescue by filling many of these capabilities handily - at a much lower cost than a re-platforming effort.

For example, at Lakeshore Learning, the seemingly simple act of grouping a collection of products onto a website landing page has historically been completed through a cumbersome process that consumes 3 to 5 business days. The process included report generation by IT to determine which products to include on the page, page set up by a content administrator, merchandising of the assortment by the merchandising team, creation of the page by IT, testing the page, and a go-live process to publish the page.

"Today this same process takes us an hour," said Sarullo of Lakeshore. "We were able to give our merchants the ability to take the role of report generator, content administrator, and IT, and we can now adjust our merchandising in real time. We can really react to trends and take advantage of unique, time-sensitive opportunities like we had never been able to do in the past."

Advanced Site search solutions can make merchants more efficient. For example, PartySuppliesDelivered.com reports significant time savings through assignment of business rules on product listing (category) pages. “We use our site search solution for both website merchandising and maintaining product attributes,” noted PartySuppliesDelivered.com’s MacDonald. “Basically, with our site search’s guided navigation, the products on our item listing / navigation pages are sorted dynamically and in near-real time based on popularity. Previously, our merchandisers had to manually decide which product to put first, second, third, etc. Using site search has saved almost 50% of our merchants’ time in this area by removing a highly manual process.”

Another **large party supplies retailer** we spoke with (who declined to be named in this study) indicated that the ability to use their site search solution to drive site navigation was a time saver for merchants. The ecommerce executive at this company noted, “Because we have product attributes in the database already from our use of the solution for site search, our merchants have the ability to quickly test new assortments and to get into category listing pages and immediately override the first results that are shown. In the past, IT resources would be required to do this – usually requiring a day-long process to refresh the data feeds and adjust product listings.”

Some companies even reported using state-of-the-art site search solutions to improve infrastructure efficiency. Some site search solutions are hosted by the provider. In these cases, website traffic loads can be shared between the retailer’s website hosting company and the site search provider, resulting in lowered required server capacity at the web host.



Richard Sexton, Founder of **Carolina Rustica**, a leading home furnishings retailer, noted “We achieve operational efficiencies by using our site search solution to drive our search and navigation on our site. This takes the load off of our servers at our web hosting company and puts it onto our site search provider. This not only saves us money, but actually makes our overall website faster.”

Can Search Do Everything?

While site search can address many of the reasons that retailers re-platform, there are still some key areas most of these solutions cannot address (at least not yet). These areas include:

- Shopping Cart/Checkout Optimization
- Underlying website stability and scalability
- Product detail page
- Handling of promotions (discount codes, etc.)
- Static content administration

- Overall poor website usability and design
- Extended back-end functionalities baked into many ecommerce platforms (order management, customer service, complete product information management, warehouse management, etc.)

When some of these factors come into play, a re-platforming effort may be necessary. Even in these cases, advanced site search can help.

Easing Transition to a New Platform



When **Jelly Belly** makes the transition to its new platform, site search will be powering many of the front-end aspects of the website, enabling a seamless transition from a customer experience standpoint, as well.

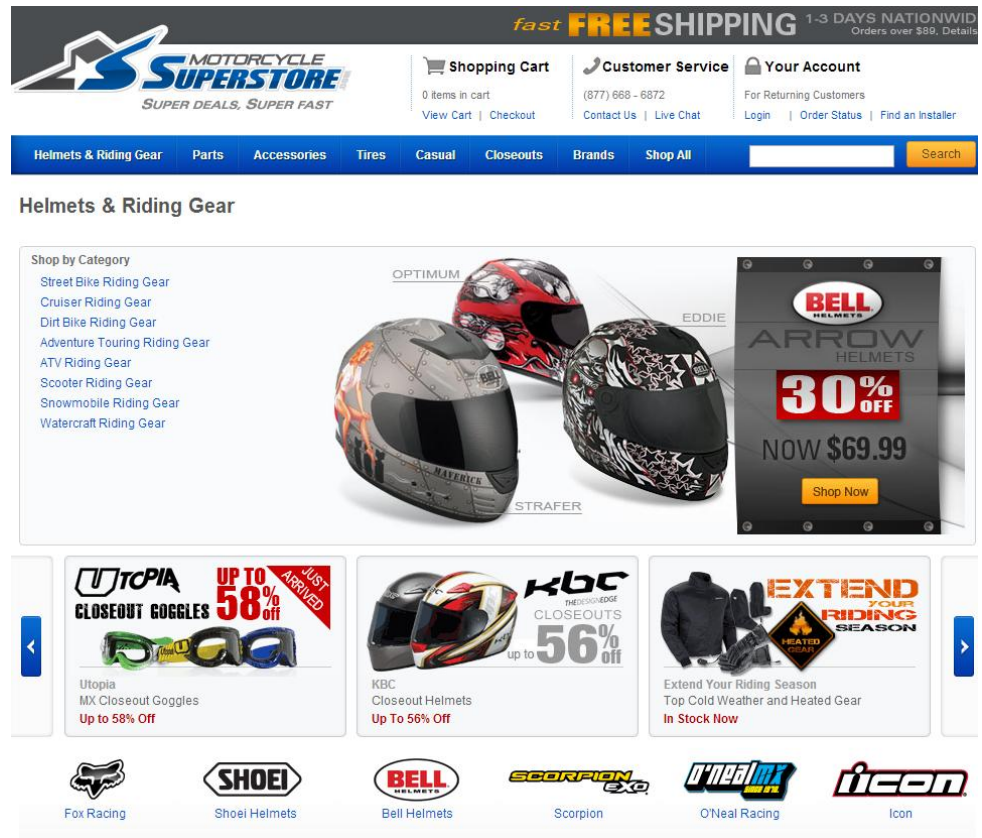
When a merchant makes a decision to re-platform, advanced site search can ease the transition to a new platform by keeping all user-experience aspects consistent and relevant while the back-end is sorted out and data is transitioned to the new platform. In addition, when retailers are committed to a re-platforming effort, state-of-the-art site search solutions have helped to buy time on the retailer's current platform to pursue a deliberate, well thought-out approach to replacing the platform.

At **Jelly Belly**, the retailer and manufacturer of candy, the company's site search solution is providing the basis of the re-platforming effort. "Site search provides us with the ability to move into the re-platforming effort already knowing what we want from a navigation, customer experience, and product taxonomy standpoint," said Brandon Finch, Director of eBusiness at Jelly Belly. "We are modeling our taxonomy on the new site after the current taxonomy on our site powered by our site search solution."

Advanced site search gives the ability for retailers to do multi-variant testing when the underlying platform does not support this functionality – to show different users different experiences and test conversion and average order value. "Testing was critical for us to accomplish before we re-platformed," says Finch. "For example, we tested an 'add to cart' button on our search results page and we actually found it had a lower conversion rate than pages without the button. We were surprised, but it was a key finding that will be put to use on our new site. This kind of testing would not have been possible on our current platform without advanced site search."

This was also the case with **Motorcycle-Superstore**. The company went through a re-platforming in 2010 and credits their advanced site search solution with aiding the transition process. According to Jason E. Miller, the company's VP of Technology, "When building our new platform, we did not have to worry about building the user-experience piece for our on-site search. We provided a feed of our data to the site search provider, and the provider mirrored our site build, including the look-and-feel. We kept both versions of our site search live through the transition and go live process. – so the switch over was seamless when we flipped our new site live."





Maintaining consistent search results pages like this merchandised search landing page smoothed the transition onto a new platform for Motorcycle-Superstore

Many retailers are concerned about the risks of changing the user experience when moving to a new ecommerce platform, as customers unfamiliar with a new “look and feel” and other site changes sometimes cause drops in conversion rate and average order values. Maintaining consistency in navigation and search options using site search solutions can mitigate these risks, as the retailers in this study found.

A Cost-Effective Alternative

The cost of implementing and maintaining a state-of-the-art site search solution is a fraction of the cost of a best-of-breed ecommerce platform.

The retailers FitForCommerce spoke with for this study reported spending a small percentage of their overall IT budget for ecommerce support on site search. Several reported spending less than \$5,000 per month for search solutions, many with little or no set up fees and rapid integration timelines. This compares to hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars for a typical ecommerce re-platforming for a retailer with anything greater than a few million in annual online sales.

Vermont Teddy Bear's Castro reports, "The best part of our extensive use of advanced site search is that the solution driving all of this is less than 5% of our overall IT budget to support ecommerce. This is one of our best ROI initiatives across the entire enterprise."

Site search implementations are also far less disruptive to the organization – both in terms of opportunity costs of staff time as well as risks during site transition.

"We had our site search solution up and running within five weeks of contract signing," said Lakeshore's Sarullo. "In my experience here and at other companies running large ecommerce operations, re-platforming can take up to 12 months." FitForCommerce data shows many re-platforming projects for large enterprises can run even longer – up to two years for highly complex re-platforming initiatives with multiple integration points.



Conclusion

Ecommerce executives constantly struggle with the decision to re-platform. Advanced site search solutions provide an alternative to re-platforming for some retailers, and – at minimum – a way for executives to buy themselves some time to make a considered decision and make the transition less painful. The retailers described in this study provide just a few examples of how site search has evolved in recent years to become a powerful ally to the merchant. While most of the site search capabilities highlighted in this whitepaper are available in only the most advanced site search solutions, the relatively low cost and quick implementation times of these solutions versus a full ecommerce re-platforming effort make them a compelling alternative.

To help evaluate the benefits of advanced site search versus a re-platforming effort for their own companies, ecommerce leaders should challenge themselves with the following questions:

- What are the main drivers of return on investment for re-platforming for my company? What specific metrics will be used to measure success of re-platforming?
- How do my main drivers and metrics match up against the levers that can be affected by an advanced site search solution? If some or all of the drivers and metrics can be addressed with an advanced site search solution, this should be strongly considered – at least as a first step prior to full re-platforming. These include potential improvements in:
 - Site experience – navigation, search
 - Merchandising , product taxonomy management
 - Staff efficiency
 - SEO traffic

- Mobile website experience
- Reduced IT dependency for merchants
- What does my return on investment model look like in a re-platforming effort? Initial budget for implementation of a new ecommerce platform versus revenue/profit benefits need to be weighed against a similar model for an advanced site search implementation. If I am a multi-channel retailer - with much offline (in-store) purchase behavior driven by online research, how will an investment in search help me to drive offline sales as well as online sales?
- What issues would I still have if I implement site search in lieu of (or to delay) re-platforming?
- If SEO traffic improvements are what I'm after, what are the main reasons that I can't improve my traffic today? Can site search impact these?
- Excellent product data is critical for maximizing the value of site search (product attributes, descriptions, etc.) – do I have or can I get or create this data?
- Should I implement advanced site search now – even if I am already planning to re-platform? The benefits of site search can aid in transition, as we've shown.

In many cases, re-platforming will remain the only avenue for retailers to overcome larger issues such as legacy system challenges, shopping cart/checkout optimization, scale and stability challenges, order management needs, and other broader issues. However, site search can be an aid in platform transition in these situations and can fill in important gaps in the meantime.

By establishing answers to the questions above and taking time to evaluate advanced site search solutions, ecommerce leaders can determine for themselves whether site search provides a reasonable solution for their company to delay, replace, or ease a re-platforming effort.

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