Five Visitor Behavior Cases That Will Increase Your Customer Conversion

Shopping involves three stages – find, decide and purchase. Yet, most E-commerce sites measure their success based on conversion rate and abandonment rate, which are measured in a simplistic manner – did a visitor complete a purchase after placing items in a cart, or did they leave the site and abandon that cart?

This simplistic view can often mask other problems with the e-commerce site, in particular all the activity up until placing items in the cart. This is why many practitioners are now advocating measuring, understanding and tuning your site across this entire process.

Since "find" is the first stage in the purchase process, understanding how customers find products on your e-commerce site and adjusting the site to match their needs is the most essential element to improving the purchase process. This will increase your customer conversation rate, generate larger order sizes, drive more revenue and increase customer satisfaction.

To understand your "product findability" you must put yourself in the visitors' shoes and understand how they behave. Then you can tune your site to work effectively with this behavior. Let's start with five basic rules of shopping behavior by customers when trying to find products:

- When performing a search, visitors often misspell words, use a different tense or include a term that may not be understood,

- Visitors often describe products in their searches using their own terms, which may be different than the words in your product catalog,

- Buyers react faster to products appearing near the top of the results and often leave if the product they are looking for is not on the first page,

- Visitors are attracted to products in "special blocks" (Featured Items, New Items, etc.) and often click there first,

- Customers may not relate to the category structure your site uses and could have different navigational categories in their heads.

If you can prepare your site to deal with these customer behavior patterns, you will increase the product findability on your site and convert browsers into buyers.

Tuning Your Site for the Five Customer Behavior Patterns

Let's explore each of the five customer behavior patterns and discuss ways in which you can use third-party search and merchandising tools to more effectively interact with your visitors.

Misspellings, Tenses and Outlying Search Terms

Your search box may run afoul of what a user types for a number of reasons:

- Fast typing, complex product terminology or interesting new branding words can easily cause visitors to make spelling mistakes in your search box,

- They may use different instances of specific words (tenses, plurals, comparatives, superlatives, etc.), for example: sleeve, sleeves, sleeved, with sleeves, long sleeved, short sleeved

- The visitor may put in terms they think relate to a product but are not used by your site to describe a product.

If your site is not tolerant of these issues, it might result in an extremely frustrating experience – a "no results" page – which typically leads to a lost visitor.

Your site needs to be tolerant of these potential search problems and ensure that visitors always find the products they seek even when such issues occur. The ideal solution is to use site-search software that:

- Supports automatic spell-correction and stemming with sophisticated algorithms to match misspellings and word-forms to terms in your product catalog, eliminating costly administration of your search environment,

- Uses relaxation techniques that that weed out unknown or unmatched terms and perform searches based on the remaining terms.

These capabilities virtually ensure your visitors will always see accurate results to their searches regardless of mistakes or different terminology.

Varying Customer Descriptions and Terms

Your merchandisers are always in tune with the characteristics of your products (fabrics, materials, uses, etc.) and can accurately describe them as such. But your customers may use their own descriptions that use "concepts", not just key words.

For example, the North Face found that customers were searching for jackets using two similar but distinctive terms – "warm winter jackets" and "warm weather jackets". Each phrase had common terms but meant very different things and was not the terminology used in describing the products.

Natural Language based search systems can handle these challenges and the others presented in this paper. Natural language technology provides a collection of techniques that help in a variety of ways including semantic processing, term inflection, relaxation, spelling correction and more.

Natural language search supports an understanding of "concepts", including recognizing when a search term is an attribute value (color, size) or category name. This allows the visitor to ask for exactly what they want and returns an accurate set of products that match the concept.

Another important aspect to this customer pattern is to have an easy-to-use tool to monitor and tune your search environment. You need deep analytics that track every search that customers perform to help identify what terms shoppers are using and how often. Once you understand shopper behavior, it is critical to have a user interface that makes it quick and easy to adjust the site to understand new terms and concepts.

Promoting the Most Effective Products

When a customer performs a search, the most important thing the site has to do is get the right products at or near the top of the results. Visitors are naturally attracted to the first products they see, and will react quickly and decisively. On the contrary, if they don't find what they are looking for on the first page, there is a good chance they will leave.

There are two aspects to getting the right products to the top of the page – sophisticated relevancy and easy to specify merchandising rules. Most e-commerce platforms won't give you either of these capabilities, leaving you with simple value-based ordering of results.

Natural language search give your visitors the ability to ask for exactly what they want and get the exact results. And a sophisticated relevancy engine will enable more accurate relevancy scores based on where the search terms were matched with (specific attributes such as name, category, color and size versus broader catalog fields such as product description). This pushes products that more accurately match the search to the top.

In addition, merchandising rules can be applied to promote (push to the top) products with specific characteristics such a brand, product age or stock level. This gives merchandisers the ability to promote and move products around on the display just like they would promote on the store floor.

Effectively Using Special Blocks

Highlighting the most appropriate products in special areas on the site is a great way to get the attention of visitors and attract them to those products. Special display blocks such as "What's New", "On Special" "Featured Items", "Top Sellers", "Related Items", or "You Might Also Like" give merchandisers the ability to highlight products they want to promote, cross-sell, or up-sell.

Most e-commerce platforms treat the placement of products into these special blocks as a static, configuration exercise. This presents two problems: (a) the blocks may not show the most appropriate products based on the visitors current "context", and (b) create a time-consuming process for the merchandisers to adjust the products to be shown in the special blocks.

Dynamic, natural language merchandising rules and an easy-to-use merchandising tool alleviate both of these problems. The dynamic rules execute on the fly based on what the visitor is searching on, clicking on or looking at, determining the best products to place in the block(s) and increasing the click-through and conversion rates. By using the easy natural language rules, merchandisers can quickly set up and manage promotions in these blocks, saving valuable time.

Flexible, Dynamic Navigation Categories

Many e-commerce sites suffer from what experts call "SKU clutter" – a problem that occurs over time as more and varied items are added to the catalog. This makes navigation difficult for the visitor and site managers have difficulty promoting products in the navigation. Also, as your audience becomes wider, you will find a greater diversity in how they want to navigate to find products.

Numerous practitioners are spouting a new wisdom that categorization does not have to be the simple, hierarchical structure that most e-commerce platforms support. They advocate categories to be fluid and diverse, with products in multiple categories to support the different ways visitors navigate.

Using derived attribute refinement gives your site navigation the flexibility and promotional capabilities to increase conversions. Merchandisers create natural language rules to dynamically derive attributes interactively, and tailoring them to the product areas the visitor is exploring. The natural language rules can derive attributes from any field in your product catalog and adds to the richness and diversity of the navigational attributes.

The previously mentioned "What's New", "On Special", "Featured Items" and "Top Sellers" groups can also be used in navigation, allowing visitors to quickly drill down on products. Natural language rules to support these categories are easy to create and are virtually maintenance free.

About EasyAsk

This paper was brought to you by EasyAsk, the company that is radically changing the speed and ease of how people find information through our groundbreaking natural language search and query software. EasyAsk software products go far beyond traditional search, allowing users to simply ask questions in plain English and receive highly tuned results on demand. The EasyAsk eCommerce Edition uses this unique technology to deliver an industry leading website search, navigation and merchandising solutions that boosts online revenue through increased conversion rates, better customer experience and agile merchandising. EasyAsk Business Edition revolutionizes enterprise decision-making, moving beyond traditional business intelligence solutions with easy, low-cost deployment and a unique natural language interface that extends access to information anywhere in the organization.

Based in Burlington, Massachusetts, EasyAsk is the leader in natural language software and solutions. Customers such as the North Face, Anna's Linens, True Value, Coldwater Creek, Aramark, Journey's, Harbor Freight Tools, Hartford Hospital, and Samsonite rely on the EasyAsk software products to run their business and e-commerce operations daily. For more information, please visit http://www.easyask.com/.