**EasyAsk**

# Five Fast Ways to Increase E-Commerce Conversions and Grow Revenue

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EasyAsk, LLC

200 Wheeler Road

South Tower, Third Floor

Burlington, MA 01803

+1.800.425.8200

www.EasyAsk.com

Online retail spending totaled $225.5 billion in 2012, up 16 percent versus the previous year, according to the U.S. Commerce Department. This strong acceleration represents a return to double-digit growth rates.  Isn't it time for you to capitalize on new search and merchandising technology and take full advantage of this rapidly growing market to ensure your piece of the pie?

## Why Can't Your E-commerce Site Think Like a Human Being?

Why can't e-commerce sites think more like human beings?  That's the fundamental question asked by online shoppers as they are frustratingly trying to find that one item they really want to buy right now, and merchandisers as they try to find ways to show the buyers the products they seek.  While we haven't yet reached that technological milestone where Web sites can magically read the mind of each visitor, there are now easy tactics and strategies that put human intuition inside Web sites that serve this dual purpose – propel consumers to quickly find what they need and complete their purchases, and allow any Web site owner or merchandiser, regardless of technical proficiency, to deliver an optimal, relevant and personalized shopping experience that increases sales conversions.  It's all about usability, for the benefit of the consumer <u>and</u> the online merchandiser.

The online retail market is expected to reach nearly $249 billion by 2014 according to Forrester Research.   For companies that want to get their piece of this huge pie (or even larger share), e-commerce search, navigation and merchandising play a critical role.

## Why Shoppers Typically "Jump Site"

Consider this oft-referenced statistic:  In less than half the time it takes to blink, people make an aesthetic judgment about a Web site that makes them stay or click away (*Behavior and Information Technology* Journal).  And once they've decided to stay, there are too-many-to-count landmines that make shoppers jump site.  In the top three are 1) slow loading pages, 2) irrelevant search results, and 3) tough-to-navigate pages.

With two of these top three issues related to search and navigation one can immediately see its' vital role in the e-commerce toolbox.  It is critical to load the quiver with proven best-practice search, navigation and merchandising strategies to capture that elusive wallet-share.  This paper singles out five actionable search navigation and merchandising tactics that increase conversion rates and boost revenue for online retailers.

# Natural Language Search

Smart e-commerce sites always seek ways to minimize the number of clicks it takes a user to find the products they are looking for and reach the shopping cart. When you have thousands or even tens-of-thousands of SKUs, even the best category-based navigational structure will still take many clicks and navigation time stretching into the minutes to find exact products. Thus, it takes much more than sound navigation strategies to get users to the cart faster.

What if the buyer could type a complete phrase in the search box that described exactly what they are looking for – "black sleeveless dresses under $50" or "1/4 inch jobbers drill bit" – and get specific, highly tuned results to the search entered. The buyer could find the product in 1 click, drill-down in a 2nd one, and have it in the cart in 3 clicks, all taking a matter of seconds (not minutes!).

Natural language search technology provides you with that type of speed and efficiency in the search box. Using linguistic and semantic processing techniques, natural language search interprets what the shopper is looking for so that the most relevant products are returned. If no exact match is found, the search returns the closest thing available. It's the easiest to understand, most intuitive type of search—since it allows shoppers to type in exactly what they are looking for.

Natural Language searches reduce the number of shopper clicks to find a specific item down to 1 to 2 clicks instead 6-10 clicks, a critical conversion increaser. Typical customers who use natural language search see a major increase in conversion rates (50% to 200%), a major drop in lost visitors (20% to 30%) and a significant decrease in call center costs because shoppers were finding the items they were searching for. Results from switching over to Natural Language search: $4 million ROI annually.

Natural language search does much more than just enhance your search box. The ability of the natural language processing engine to understand context and intent provides a foundation by which the site navigation is better tuned to user inquiries and a means by which merchandisers can more effectively target product selection, offers and promotions to their shoppers. With a natural language engine, the entire user experience is enhanced.

# Effective Search, Navigation and Merchandising Strategies

With a natural language search, navigation and merchandising toolset in your hands, there are five important strategies you can quickly deploy to make the e-commerce experience better for your customer and see an immediate jump in conversion rates and revenue. For the rest of this paper, we will explore each of these five key strategies.

## 1. Banish the No Results Response Forever

The "sorry, there are no results" prompt is a huge turn-off to shoppers. Their first reaction is that the site does not carry the products they are looking for. Even if the buyer falls back to navigation and gets beyond that hurdle, they loose confidence in the site. In either case, the user mostly likely leaves and navigates to a competitor. And, it's likely they won't be back for future purchases either.

Completely eliminate the "no results" page by turning all searches into selling opportunities with techniques that deliver complete and relevant results using a search with relaxation, tuned results relevancy, automatic spelling correction, full search term control and language stemming, all Natural Language techniques that eliminate the "no results" page.

## 2. Location, Location, Location

Every millimeter of web page real estate is beachfront property and no place is more important than the location of the search box. Now that shoppers are "programmed" to look for search boxes (thanks to every search site on the web), vendors need only focus on where to place the box and how to present it so the eye naturally goes there. Here are the four cardinal rules to remember regarding search boxes: 1) put a search box on every page in the same location 2) make sure the search box size is consistent and is the large enough to contain most longer searches used by your visitors —it's irritating to see most of your search term disappear as you type; 3) don't make visitors scroll for the search box – it has to be easily visible near the top of each page preferably in the middle or on the right side where most people expect to find it; and 4) don't put other text boxes anywhere near the search box, as it will visually confuse visitors.
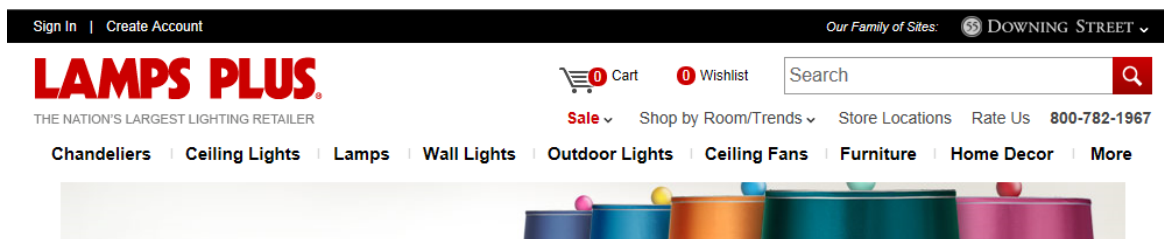


## 3. DIY Merchandising

Today's merchandising-friendly software invites the biggest techno-phobe to channel his or her inner Simon Doonan (retail giant Barney's legendary creative director). Easy-to-use templates and simple instructions allow online retailers to creatively up- and cross-sell complementary products, limit search results to only what is in stock, and test changes (new content and images) immediately before going live. With most e-retailers growing the number of SKUs they offer, buying trends changing almost weekly, and unique preferences for almost every individual customers, merchandising need to take control of the online selling experience. Easy to use tools and robust, full-featured dashboards allow merchandising managers, without the help of IT staff, to quickly promote individual items to consumers and adjust promotions and products at the drop of a hat.

## 4.  Trend Spotting

Site search analytics provide fascinating insight into customer intent and behavior.  Many an online retailer has missed a night or two of sleep delving into data.  It is, after all, a window into our buying psychology.  Imagine being able to look over the shoulder of every customer and potential customer to see how they search and why they click.  No online retailer can ignore the rich insight revealed by search analytics.   What you do with this knowledge can make the most profound impact on boosting conversions, whether it's stocking your warehouse with merchandise people are hunting for or showcasing complementary products or identifying slow-movers, which may need an extra promotional push BEFORE moving this stock to the "on sale" page.  Merchandising managers can easily act on search analytics insights.
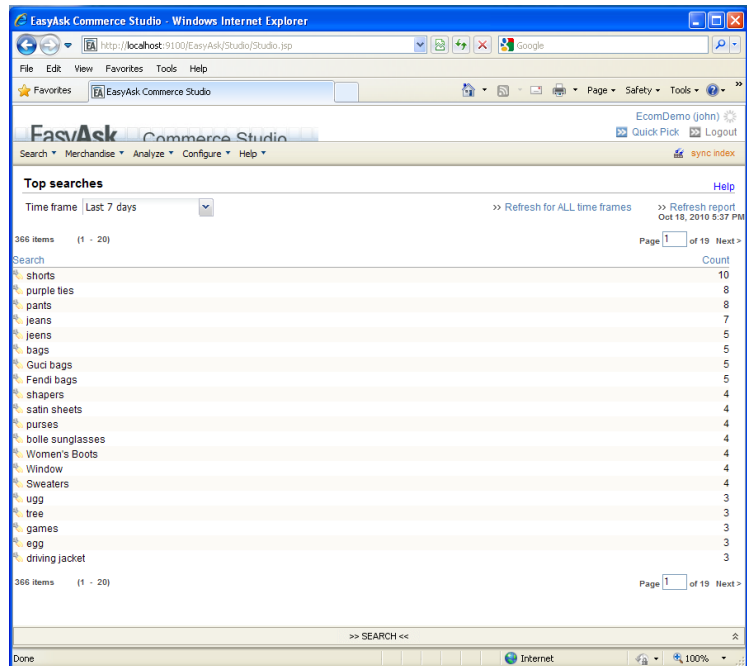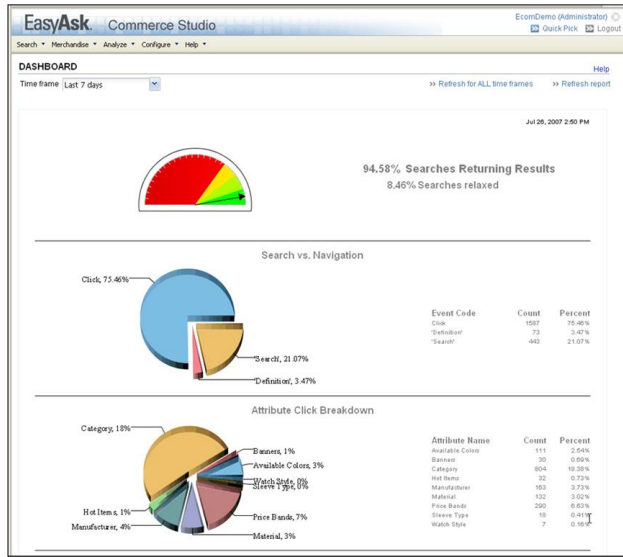
## 5. SEO (We'd Be Remiss if We Didn't Remind You)

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) isn't sexy. But it does deliver. ROI metrics should include inbound links, traffic from social media sites, search rankings for phrases and numbers of interested, potential shoppers landing on relevant pages and products. Make sure you know your site's keyword rankings in search engines, and how it compares to key competitors, to

determine your SEO effort effectiveness.    Fine-tuning internal links and trying new promotional tactics can boost these rankings. Tracking search phrases that bring potential shoppers to your site from search engines is key.  You don't know what you don't know.  In other words, you may be surprised at some of the long-tail searches that bring eyeballs, and credit cards, to your site.  Find the phrases that work and use them frequently, but not to the point of obnoxiousness of course.   Other important SEO tactics include tracking inbound links and monitoring search engine referrals over long stretches of time to see variations. Delivering a complete SEO XML sitemap is critical to increasing your site's find-ability.

Today's e-commerce success stories include providing rapid, relevant products and information to potential shoppers making it easy for them to find and purchase "your" product.  The easier and faster you can get in front of a current or new customer, the more sales you tally up.  The return on investment for strategic e-commerce keeps on delivering and positions your products and services for years to come.  Get in front of the right shoppers, match them with the right products, manage your own merchandising and trend analyses, keep a larger share of shoppers that arrive at your site, and watch sales climb and your bottom line grow.

## Act Now!

Now is the time to prepare your website to maximize your visitors' shopping experience. By employing the practices discussed in this paper, you will be able to increase e-commerce conversion and grow your revenue.  Plus, shoppers who have a positive experience purchasing from your website are more likely to be back over and over again.

## 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 Ceridian rely on the EasyAsk software products to run their business and e-commerce operations daily. For more information, please visit [http://www.easyask.com/](http://www.easyask.com/).