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5 Best Practices for Site Search

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In an online world where users expect relevant, timely results, site search needs to be much more than just a basic search bar.

When users enter your site and [...] hat they are looking for, they go elsewhere within seconds. [...] however, site search can

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be a very important business tool, driving conversions, engagement, and generating valuable insights.

Design and optimization are the difference between satisfied users who can confidently maneuver on your site, and users who walk away due to a negative search experience.

Here are five key best practices to keep in mind:

1. Make the search box user-friendly.
2. Analyze search data.
3. Optimize for mobile searching. (Or anywhere your users might be!)
4. Use autocomplete, autocorrect, filters, and facets to assist search.
5. Make the results page intuitive, helpful, and inspiring.

By following these key practices, you will equip your site with a robust site search that allows users to find what they need — and perhaps even discover things they didn't even know they needed yet.

Why Optimize Site Search?

Site search is an invaluable part of the user experience. Committing to a great search experience with relevant results and intuitive design can jumpstart your site and satisfy visitors.

Some visitors know exactly what they want when they enter your site.

BLOG   ≡ Menu

search you can help them find   ed quickly, refine their
searches meaningfully, and he   ge with other related content

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on your site. Smooth, optimized search means happy, engaged visitors who convert.

For site browsers without a strong goal in mind, site search functionality can provide them with meaningful next steps. Search and discovery tools such as related searches, promoted banners, and filters and facets can help to pique their interest, leading them to satisfying experiences, content, and products. As long as their clicks continue to deliver value, they will continue to engage with your site.

5 Best Practices for Site Search

Here are five ways to get the most from your site search:

1. Make the Search Box User-Friendly

The search bar is a portal for users to engage with your site search. Leave no room for doubt.

You can make the search box intuitive in several important ways:

- Place the search box in plain view in a location that makes sense.
- Make sure the search bar is in the same location on all pages so users know exactly where to find it as they move through the site.
- Use microcopy as a textual prompt to help the user out.
- Make sure the search bar is large enough to bring attention to it.
- Create a search bar long enough to accept the average search string. If you need to save space, make sure the search box can expand when clicked.

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2. Analyze Search Data

Every time a user interacts with your site, they generate valuable and actionable data you can use to clarify user intents and drive business priorities. Analyzing your site search data can help you evaluate the quality of your search function, reveal important keywords, and give you insights to improve conversion rates.

The data can also drive specific improvements for different types of sites:

- E-commerce site owners can identify the most popular products and see new trends arise in search, then configure the search accordingly. Make popular products easy to find, highlight on-trend or on-sale items, and help searchers discover popular related products.
- Owners of content-heavy sites (e.g. media sites) can identify content gaps—topics that users are searching for, but for which no content exists—and fill them. Make popular videos or resources easier to find, and point users to content related to what they initially watched or searched for.

3. Optimize for Mobile Searching (or anywhere your users might be!)

These days, users don't just search from a browser on a desktop. From mobile to voice to virtual assistants, every device your visitors use needs optimized, relevant search.

Mobile search is expanding rapidly, with more searches performed on mobile devices than standard computers.

Mobile search should be built on great search with enhancements such as instant results, typo tolerance, and query suggestions. Mobile search should also take into account   c UX elements, such as whether a tab bar, full search   best for your content.

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Voice search functionality is also a must-have. Roughly 36% of consumers have smart speakers, and 75% of smart speaker owners use it everyday. Great voice search provides relevant results by using dynamic filtering and providing context and personalizing results. Make sure yours lives up to the challenge.

Customers who don't currently have smart speakers may still use voice to search in the future. Conversational search, which allows customers to use natural language patterns to interact with apps and websites, is on the rise, too.

4. Use Autocomplete, Autocorrect, Filters, and Facets to Assist Search

Unfortunately, online visitors are not always experts in search. Research shows that customers need not only good search, but also great navigation and UX to find what they need on a website.

The role of a good site search, therefore, is to guide the user to what they ultimately want. This includes helping them refine and perfect their search terms, or helping them find what they need without typing the perfect query.

There are many ways to help make search easier, including:

- **Leave the search terms in the search box** so users can easily edit their current search. This can be especially important if the search uses auto-correct.
- **Use auto-suggest and recommended search terms** to help users further define their searches.
- **Make sure your site search is tolerant of typos** and uses textual relevance so users get r̲   er what.
- **Provide filters and face** g further specificity to their search. For an e-commerce site, some common filters might include

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5. Make the Results Page Intuitive, Helpful, and Inspiring

The results page should be easy to read, comprehensive, and anticipate user needs—without being overwhelming. Consider a few ways to add value to your results page:

- **Inspire users to find new interests** by using promoted banners within the results, and using merchandising features within your site search.
- **Consider bolding or highlighting the search terms** within the results. Make sure a search bar is present on the page so users can refine or change their query.

- **Avoid a "no-results page" at all costs.** Make sure your synonym library is built out, user profiles are well-defined, and all your relevant pages, products, and content can be indexed by your site search. Instead of showing a "no results found" page, drive users to related products or content to help them convert, even if you don't have the exact product they had in mind.

- **The format of the results page can make or break the user experience.** Results should incorporate all types of relevant content from all over your site, like a federated search interface does. Use a grid layout for image dominant results, and use a list layout for text dominant results. If it's a combination of both with no clear dominance, review user statistics to see which would be the most beneficial layout for the information.
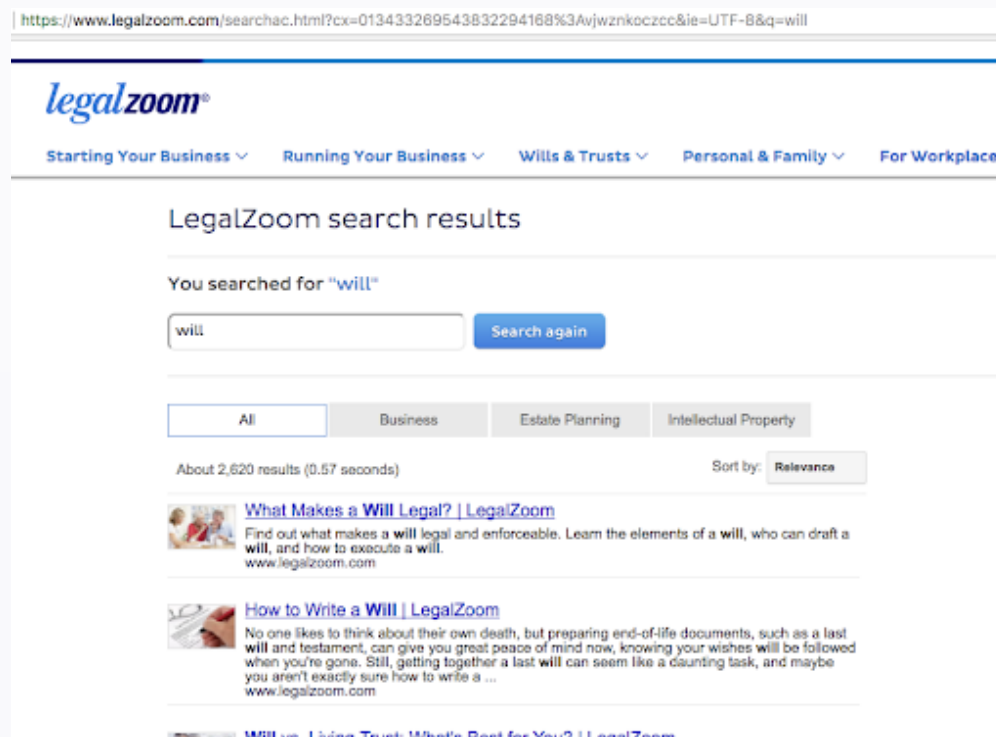
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3 Examples of Great ___ch

A great site search can make or break the user experience, especially for large sites with a diverse group of content. Check out these examples of great site search in action:

LegalZoom: Crawler Extraordinaire

LegalZoom, a company that provides online legal assistance and resources, was faced with the challenge of making the wealth of legal information on their site accessible to users. To deliver relevant and timely results, Legalzoom optimized their site search with an advanced crawler that could index everything efficiently and help users answer even the most nuanced legal questions.


Coursera: Cutting Edge S

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As Coursera's course catalog expanded, the developer team found itself in a costly iteration cycle that was failing to keep the search up to par. They knew that they needed to improve the experience for their mobile users, enable discovery on the site, and provide an intuitive interface.

Coursera implemented a new search UX that was mobile friendly, offered search-as-you-type capabilities and typo tolerance, and allowed users to search across content types. With these improvements, Coursera saw a 10% increase in pageviews for target pages, and now 30% of enrolled students come from search.
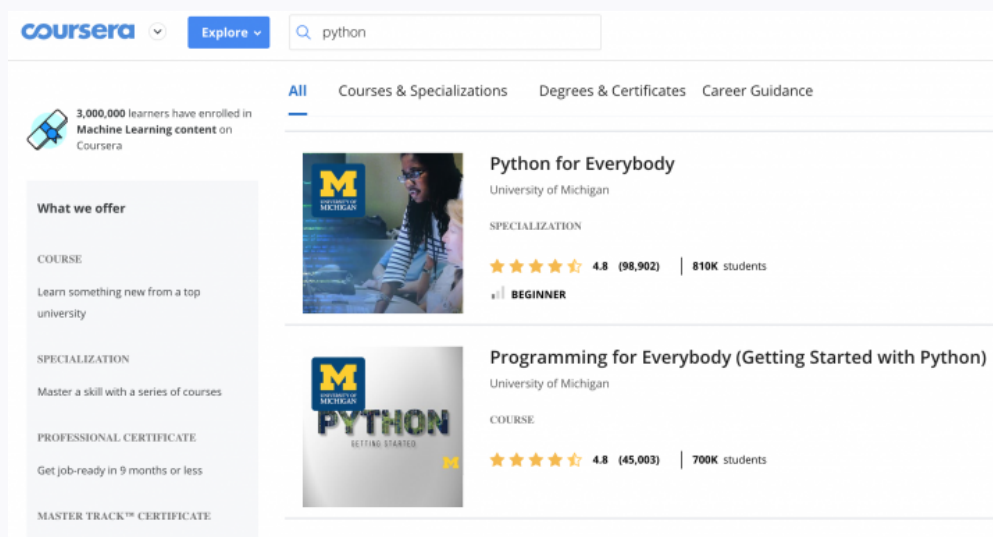

iflix: Lightning Iterations

iflix, an entertainment platform for emerging markets, relies on strong user analytics data to delight users with new content. Despite search being an integral way for visitors to navigate their site, iFlix's results weren't relevant or served intuitively.

Replacing their inefficient sea~~~~e-friendly search that allowed for easier and faster iteration drove a 20% increase in their

Q Search

conversion rate.
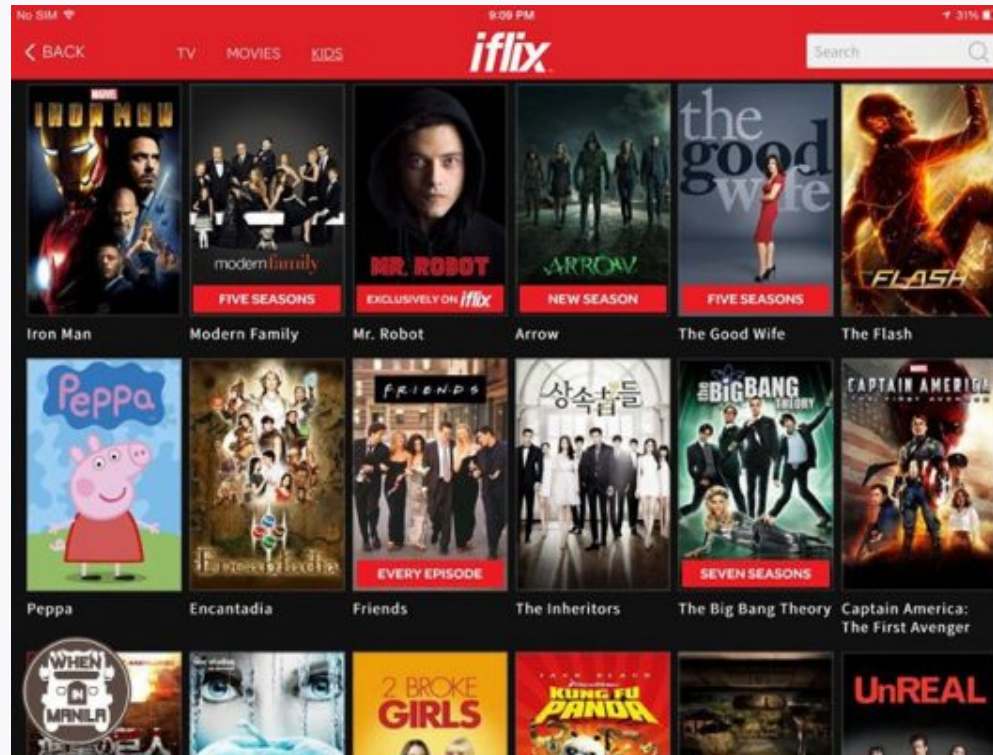
Getting Started with Site Search

Optimized site search brings users to the products, content, and services they want in less time with less hassle. It is key to encouraging users to engage, convert, and buy.

Algolia's rapid search and intuitive interface is built on all of the best practices of effective site search. Equipped with voice search, mobile optimized, and boasting an analytics dashboard,, Algolia can help you reach your customers, where

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Xabier Ormazabal
VP of Product Marketing

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search experience to improve discoverability of
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