



# Breathe New Life into Your Tired Ecommerce Platform

Discover How Advanced Site Search Can Delay,  
or Even Eliminate, the Need to Replatform

Fitforcommerce Whitepaper Series - March 2019

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## Executive summary

Let's face it. Today's savvy online shoppers expect to find what they're shopping for quickly and seamlessly. Typically, 30 percent of ecommerce site visitors use internal site search to find products.<sup>1</sup> These shoppers have a higher level of purchase intent and can convert five to six times higher than visitors who do not use site search.<sup>2</sup>

However, most site search tools – whether embedded in the platform or a third-party add-on – fail to consistently deliver relevant results. 70% of ecommerce sites require visitors to search by the exact product type their site uses: “blow dryer” vs. “hair dryer,” or “multifunction printer” vs. “all-in-one printer.”<sup>3</sup>

Once shoppers encounter even the slightest amount of friction, most will leave your site and go elsewhere. While ecommerce platform providers are continually improving the customer experience, you may not have the time or budget to embark on a replatforming journey. So, what's a retailer to do?

FitForCommerce data shows that a replatforming 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 a new ecommerce platform. Replatforming can also be extremely disruptive to the business, resulting in lost revenue and profit opportunities while IT and merchandising staff are distracted by the replatforming effort rather than focused on current business operations.

Despite these challenges, multi-channel and online retail leaders routinely face this daunting replatforming decision – one that can cost millions and take multiple years to implement. A recent survey conducted by Internet Retailer reveals that nearly 17% of those surveyed say they are in the midst of a replatforming, while more than 72% say they plan to switch within the next two years. And 30% of those retailers surveyed said they planned to spend more than \$1 MM on this effort.<sup>4</sup>

### ONLINE RETAILER REPLATFORMING SURVEY

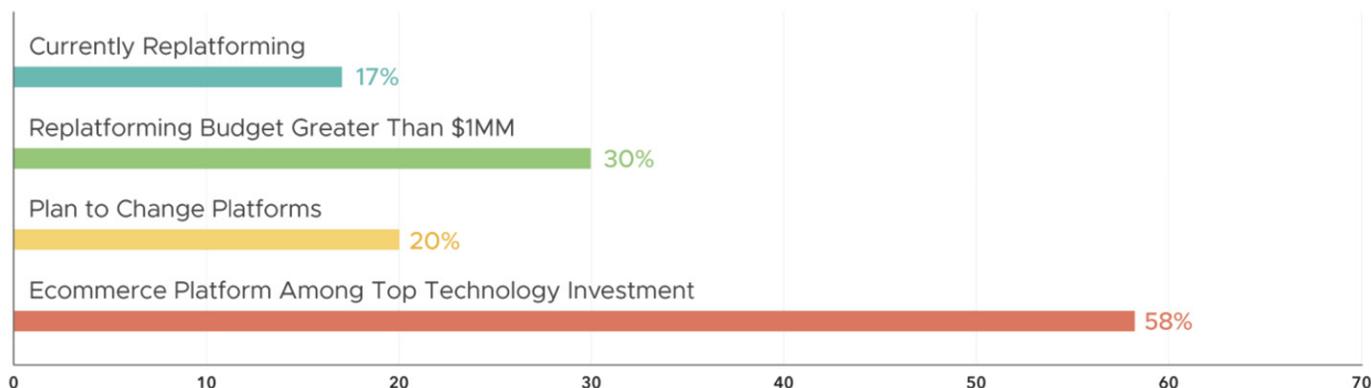


Figure 1: Source: 2018 Quintessential Guide to E-Commerce Platforms, Internet Retailer

While replatforming investment and effort levels can be high, merchants have powerful incentives to explore moving to new ecommerce platforms. Many retailers typically see improvements in one or more of the following areas with a replatform, yielding the return on investment (ROI) needed to justify the change:

- ▶ Conversion rates and average order values through improved merchandising and website experience
- ▶ Site traffic
- ▶ Competitive positioning
- ▶ Enabling new ways customers seek 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
- ▶ Enhanced cross-channel experience – store, web, mobile, catalog, B2B, and social commerce

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**

The reality is that the upside of a replatform can be considerable for retailers. However, retailers must drive significant profit to justify the investment of time and dollars as well as the risk of migrating to a new platform.

FitForCommerce works with dozens of top 100 and mid-market online retailers on replatforming and other technology selection and strategy projects. In the course of these engagements, we've 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 replatforming.

As state-of-the-art site search solutions have evolved to enable a growing portion 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 replatform. Retailers can positively impact conversion rates, average order values, and other key metrics – the very reasons many merchants pursue replatforming – by using specialized, best-of-breed site search to:

Continued...

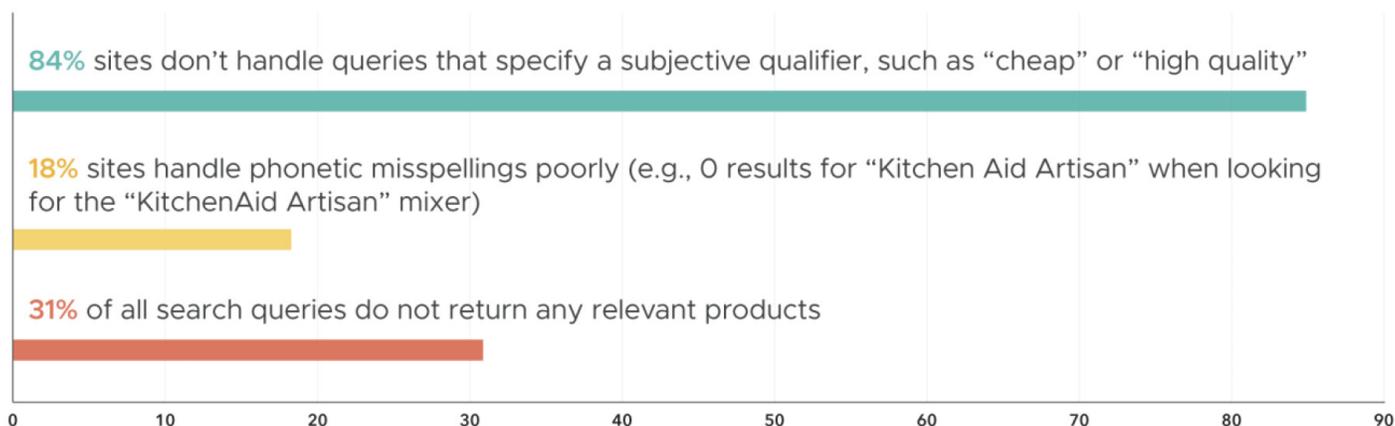
- 
- ▶ Manage front-end product taxonomy, including site navigation, product presentation, non-product content, and the overall front-end user experience
  - ▶ Offer a consistent user experience between site search and navigation
  - ▶ Flexibly and dynamically merchandise, including putting control of the site into the hands of merchandisers versus IT/web engineers
  - ▶ Generate relevant search results for visitors
  - ▶ Manage product data
  - ▶ Better drive 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.)
  - ▶ Improve overall website look and feel
  - ▶ Better understand visitors' behavior and intent
  - ▶ Improve web traffic, such as through Search Engine Optimization
  - ▶ More efficiently manage the site

These capabilities blur the line between advanced, best-of-breed site search solutions and ecommerce platform technologies. Using advanced site search solutions to improve conversions and increase average order values can delay, and, in some cases, forego replatforming projects. Site search's ability to address platform limitations extends beyond business-to-consumer (B2C) websites to address business-to-business (B2B) functionalities. And, when the decision is made to replatform, retailers can use site search to ease the transition to the new platform.

# Overcome Today's Challenges by Optimizing Eight Key Areas

A primary reason many merchants replatform 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. This paper explores the benefits of using advanced site search and how it can be used to optimize ecommerce pain points.

## STATE OF ECOMMERCE SITE SEARCH



Sources: Baymard Institute, "Deconstructing Ecommerce Search" <https://baymard.com/blog/ecommerce-search-query-types>  
Baymard Institute, "Ecommerce Search Usability," <https://baymard.com/research/ecommerce-search>  
Unbx: <https://unbx.com/commerce-search>

## Ecommerce problems often stem from:

- ▶ Lack of relevant site search
- ▶ Poor navigation
- ▶ Lack of consistency between the site search and navigation user experience
- ▶ Limitations on ability for business users to effectively merchandise products and categories

These and other constraints prevent retailers from delivering 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 them to use best-practice features on their webstores – even when not supported by the underlying platform

This whitepaper examines and documents these eight key areas:

1. Advanced Site Search
2. Improved Customer Experience
3. Intelligent Merchandising
4. Conversion Optimization
5. Obtaining Free Traffic
6. Meeting the Mobile Imperative
7. Infrastructure
8. Platform Synergies

It also provides merchants with hands-on tips on how to extend site search to improve their ecommerce platforms and delay – or possibly eliminate – the need for replatforming.

## Advanced Site Search

Advanced site search optimizes product rankings, thereby improving search relevance and ultimately, the customer experience. Even a website’s “look and feel,” a common reason given by many retailers to replatform, can be enhanced using advanced site search. According to Unbx, site search contributes 20-40% of ecommerce revenue, so there is a huge opportunity in implementing an advanced site search solution while deciding whether to replatform. Retailers also risk a huge opportunity cost if they decide to wait until replatforming to adopt a new site search solution.

Prior to embarking on a replatforming project, US Patriot Tactical – an online retailer specializing in military apparel, footwear and gear – implemented a site search solution to provide a better customer experience. With over 75,000 SKUs, the retailer needed to bridge the gap between what customers call products and their military names. For example, a zip-up fleece top is known as a waffle top in the military. By ensuring such search terms are linked to the product, US Patriot created an “internal SEO” capability on its site. This solution bridged the gap in the retailer’s current ecommerce platform to deliver the search capabilities that US Patriot Tactical required.

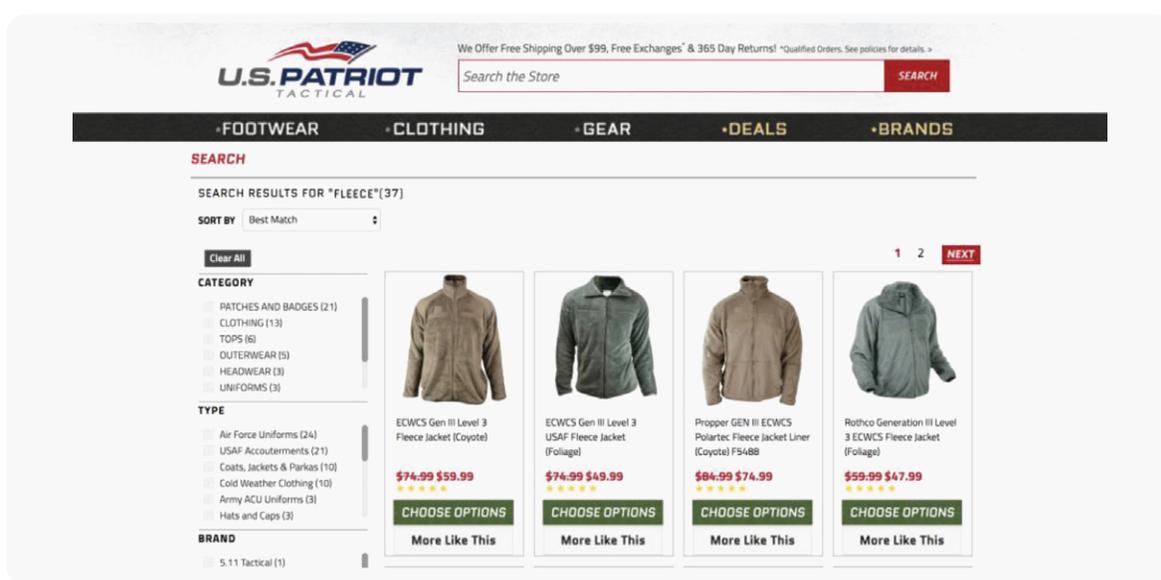


Figure 2: Advanced search capabilities help customers find items when they don't know the exact name of the product.

Even when a company decides to replatform, the new platform's site search capabilities could be limited. For example, savvy shoppers expect to use natural language search when looking for products. Instead of trying to figure out what keywords describe the product they seek, they treat the search bar much like they would if they were talking to another person.

Fresh Direct, an online grocer serving six states in the northeastern US, with more than 15,000 SKUs, and revenue expected to surpass \$800MM in 2019, implemented a natural language search solution following a replatforming project. The company found it wasn't getting relevant search results from the tool bundled with its new platform. Instead, it required manual tagging to get the desired search results and manual reporting.

The screenshot shows the Fresh Direct website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "free range chicken soup" and a magnifying glass icon. To the right of the search bar are links for "Contact Us", "Help", "Reorder", and "Create Account". Below the search bar is a navigation menu with categories: MEALS, FRUIT, VEGETABLES, MEAT & POULTRY, SEAFOOD, DAIRY, DELI & CHEESE, BAKERY & PASTRY, PARTY PLATTERS, GROCERY, FROZEN, BEER, and WINES & SPIRITS. Below this is a secondary menu with options: FRESH DEALS, COUPONS, SALE, NEW, TOP-RATED, BLOG, LOCAL, and MONTH OF LOVE.

The main content area features a promotional banner for "dr. Praeger's" with the text "LOVE TO LOVE YOUR VEGGIES!" and "2/\$8" for "veggie burgers, littles, veggie cakes, & more!". Below the banner, the search results for "free range chicken soup" (4) are displayed. The results are sorted by "Most Relevant" and include filters for "DEPARTMENT" (ALL DEPARTMENTS, Organic & All-Natural (4), Pantry (4)), "BRAND" (Select a Brand), "POPULAR" (Gluten-Free), and "NUTRITION" (Dairy-Free, Low Sodium, Low-Fat, Wheat-Free).

The search results list four products:

- Pacific Organic Free-Range Low-Sodium Chicken Broth**: 32fl oz, \$4.69/ea (\$2.34/lb)
- Pacific Organic Free-Range Low-Sodium Chicken Broth, 4-Pack**: 4ct, 8fl oz ea, \$4.99/ea (\$2.50/lb)
- Pacific Organic Free Range Chicken Broth**: 32fl oz, \$4.69/ea (\$2.34/pt)
- Wolfgang Puck Organic Soup, Free Range Chicken with White and Wild Rice**: 14.5oz, \$3.29/ea (\$3.63/lb)

Fresh Direct chose to implement an advanced site search solution to complement its replatforming project. The online grocer found it increased conversion rates, AOV and line items per cart when tested against the search capabilities of its ecommerce platform.

The online grocer selected a third-party solution and tested it against the incumbent. The results in the 50/50 split were dramatic with higher conversion rates per searcher, higher average order value (AOV), and more line items per cart. Additionally, the company saved 10 manhours per month through automated reporting with the new solution.

## Improved Customer Experience

Online shoppers fall into two categories with respect to site search: those who know what they want and those that are unsure or are looking for suggestions. Several techniques can aid these shoppers: autocomplete, faceted search, autosuggest, and guided shopping.

## Autocomplete and faceted search for buyers with a product in mind

Many site search engines offer autocomplete capabilities based on simple text-pattern-matching techniques. As the shopper types, a dropdown menu appears, offering suggestions that likely fit what the shopper seeks. According to Google, autocomplete reduces typing by about 25% and is especially helpful to those shopping on mobile devices.

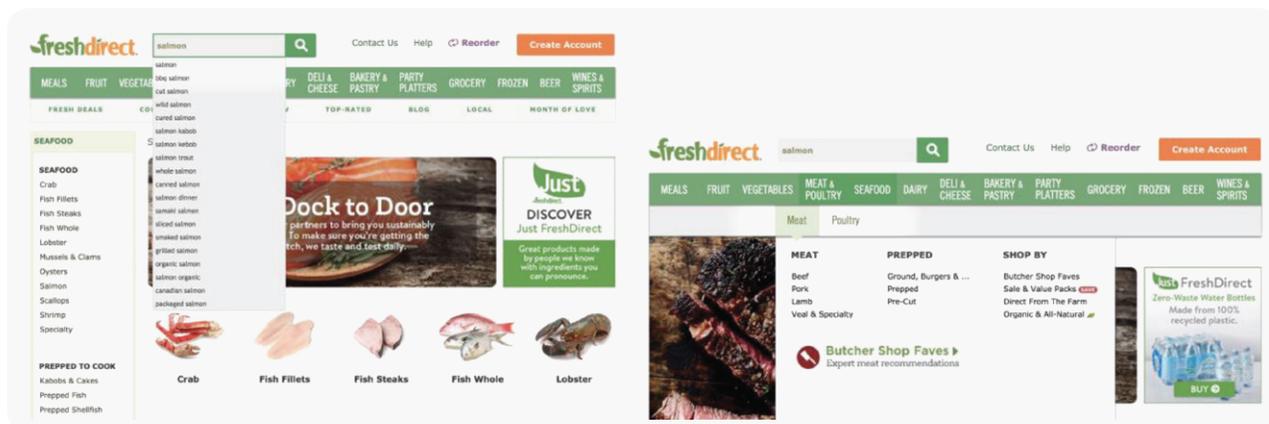


Figure 3: Search solutions can offer dropdown menus that complete the search query and show shoppers the available product categories.

Faceted search, by nature, supports shoppers who know what they want. However, it guides them to products by allowing shoppers to drill down through product collections by applying a series of filters based on attributes such as price, color, or brand. This 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 ratings. Many older, home-grown or ecommerce platform-based site search tools do not support faceted navigation. Because advanced site search tools manage the facets, the facets change with the merchandise category.

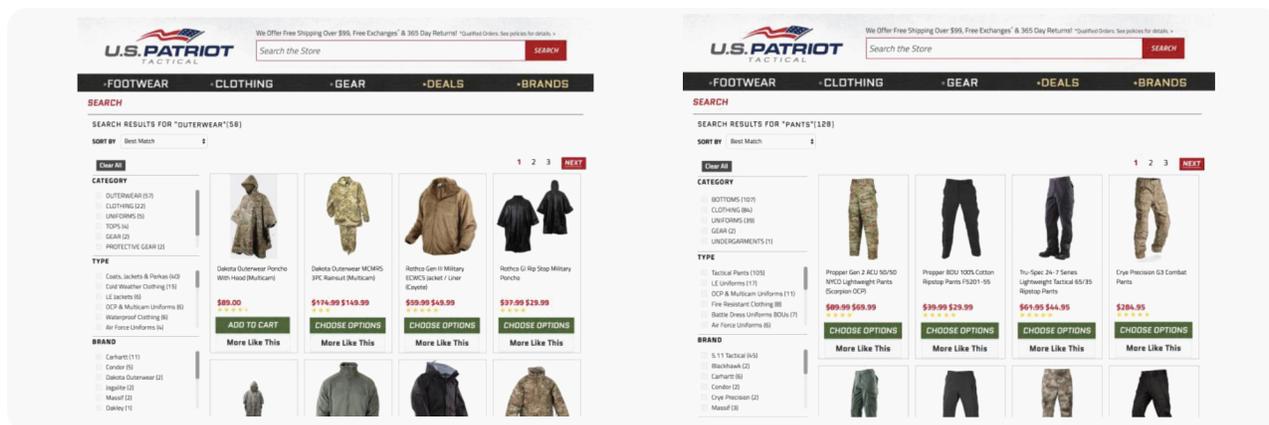


Figure 4: Advanced site search tools can drive faceted navigation to help shoppers narrow their choices. Note that the facet choices change based on the category of merchandise.

## Autosuggest and guided shopping for buyers seeking suggestions

Autosuggest and guided shopping for buyers seeking suggestions Autosuggest goes beyond autocomplete by applying ecommerce context to a shopper's search activity. It maps search queries to the most relevant products and desired attributes by predicting the shopper's intent. By profiling customers in real time, it creates a personalized customer experience. Studies show that personalization improves conversion rates, instills customer loyalty and ultimately increases Customer Lifetime Value (CLTV). This search is especially helpful to B2B shoppers, who are more likely to purchase the same products on a cyclical basis and, often, on behalf of others. Autosuggest streamlines their purchasing process by leveraging data about past purchases to suggest reorders and by enabling searches based on partial SKUs or product part numbers. Guided shopping also helps shoppers who don't have a specific product in mind. It shortens the path to purchase by leading the shopper through suggestions based on predictive analytics and machine learning. By asking a series of questions, guided selling helps shoppers get closer to the right product at each step.

## Intelligent Merchandising

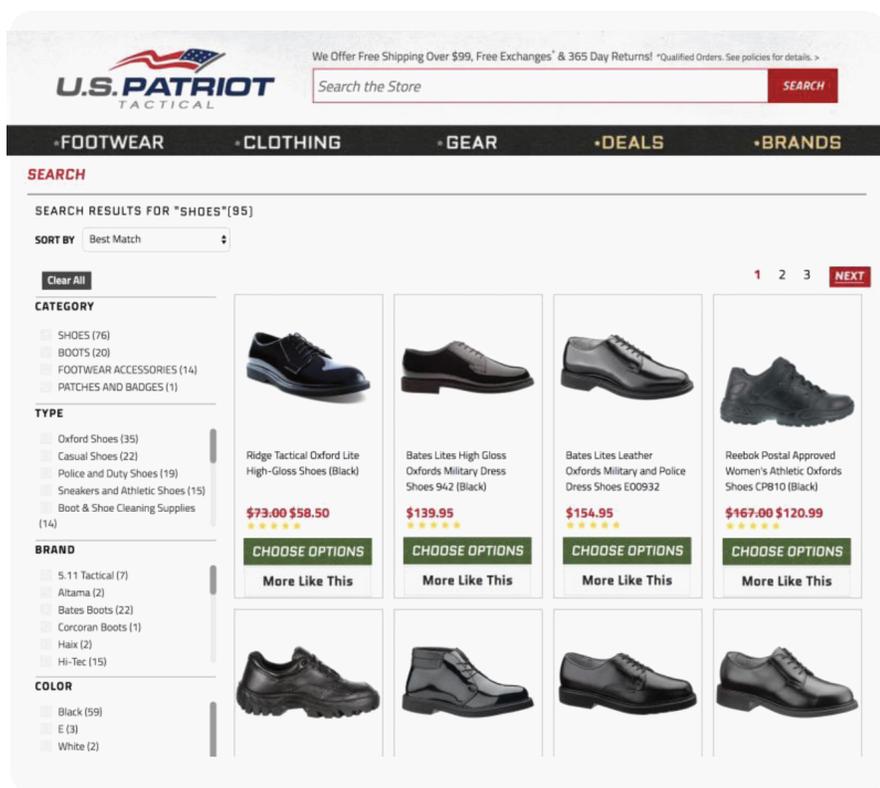
Today's advanced site search capabilities go beyond accommodating changes in inventory as mentioned earlier. By incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) – also known as machine learning – retailers can build product assortments to accommodate specific customer segments. For example, buyers residing in warm climates would not see the same apparel assortment as those in colder climates. Segments can be based on many attributes such as buying behavior, gender, and price ranges.

The screenshot shows the U.S. Patriot Tactical website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search the Store" and a "SEARCH" button. Below the search bar are navigation tabs: "FOOTWEAR", "CLOTHING", "GEAR", "DEALS", and "BRANDS". The main product featured is the "ROTHCO GENERATION III LEVEL 3 ECWCS FLEECE JACKET (FOLIAGE)". The product image shows a green jacket. Below the image are three smaller images of the jacket in different views. The product details include a 4.5-star rating from 9 reviews, an MSRP of \$99.99 (reduced to \$47.99), and an availability notice: "Please allow an additional 3 to 5 business days for shipments with sewing. SKU: 9730". The brand is "Rothco". There are dropdown menus for "COAT SIZE" and "COAT LENGTH". Below these are radio button options for "PLEASE SELECT YOUR NAME AND BRANCH TAPE OPTION::": "None", "USAF ABU with Navy Blue Thread Hook Back (+\$11.99)", and "Army ACU with Black Thread Hook Back (+\$11.99)". To the right of the product, there is a "PEOPLE WHO VIEWED THIS ALSO VIEWED" section with three product recommendations: a black and orange jacket for \$49.99, a camouflage jacket for \$53.95, and a black jacket for \$49.99. Below this is a "SIMILAR PRODUCTS" section with one product recommendation: a black jacket for \$44.99.

**Figure 5:** Product recommendations further enhance the customer experience by showing similar items that others have bought.

US Patriot uses advanced search to gain better insights about merchandising opportunities. By examining terms queried over a given time period, the retailer identifies new merchandise to add to its collections, new options to add to products and has an ability to assess trends within the various merchandise categories. By profiling shoppers in real time, AI can dynamically create collections based on shopper affinities, such as style or brand. Offering recommendations on the product detail page curates the customer experience by revealing products that others have chosen.

Merchandisers can create marketing-specific landing pages such as seasonal collections, and campaign-specific landing pages to support a variety of promotional and inventory-driven campaigns. US Patriot, for example, pins new products to the top of their category so customers can find them easily. Moreover, the ability to schedule the date and time for new pages to roll out eliminates the need for ecommerce staff to manually push pages live or take them down. Another important driver for replatforming ecommerce websites is to more efficiently manage the web business by more effectively managing data, de-coupling the merchant's dependency on IT for site changes and improving overall processes.



Because online merchants operating on less flexible or less up-to-date platforms find themselves limited in their ability to create merchandised site pages, they often must rely on the IT department to create pages for them. Or they are forced to manually create pages in the ecommerce platform, making it impossible to enable dynamic updates to these pages. When 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.

Dynamic facets complement the merchandising changes; as the product assortment changes, so do the facets. 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.

Advanced site search 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.

Retailers can realize significant time savings by assigning business rules on product listing (i.e., category) pages. Some retailers use site search solutions for both website merchandising and to maintain product attributes. Using site search's guided navigation, the products on item listing / navigation pages can be sorted dynamically and in near-real time based on popularity. Without these site search capabilities, merchandisers must manually decide which product to put first, second, third, etc. Using site search saves merchants' time by eliminating a highly manual process.

For example, it took one retailer we interviewed three to five business days simply to group a collection of products on a website landing page. 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
- ▶ Go-live process to publish the page

Today, this same process takes an hour with site search. By empowering staff to more effectively and 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 capabilities handily – at a much lower cost than a replatforming effort. A large party supplies retailer we spoke with (who declined to be named) indicated that the ability to use its site search solution to drive site navigation was a time saver. The ecommerce executive at this company noted, “Because we have product attributes in the database from our use of site search, our merchants can quickly test new assortments and access category listing pages to immediately override the first results that are shown. In the past, IT resources were required to do this – usually requiring a daylong process to refresh the data feeds and adjust product listings.”

## Conversion Optimization

Retailers can call upon numerous tactics to improve site conversion, including shopper profiling, A/B split testing, multivariate testing, and business rules. By profiling shoppers in real time, advanced site search and intelligent merchandising can create highly personalized experiences that improve conversion rates while instilling customer loyalty.

Smart merchants use testing techniques to learn shopper preferences, understand shopper behavior and eliminate friction in the shopping experience. A/B split testing can incorporate anything on a website that affects shopper behavior, such as banners, headlines, images, links, social proof, and content. Retailers can assess each of these for a number of personalized elements, including color, user experience, pricing, and sales promotions.

Advanced site search makes it possible for retailers to conduct multivariate testing when the underlying platform does not support this functionality. This enables retailers to show different users different experiences and test conversion and average order value.

The difference can be dramatic as seen in Figure 6.

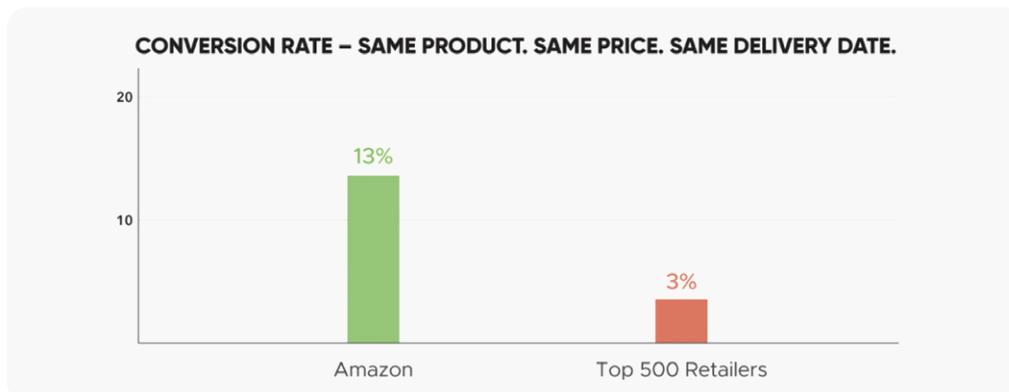


Figure 6: Using testing to optimize the shopping experience can have dramatic results.<sup>6</sup>

During peak holiday seasons, merchants can employ business rules governing situations such as replacement suggestions for sold-out products. Providing the shopper with other options can be the differentiator between a conversion and a site abandon.

## Obtaining “Free” Traffic

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

*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 interviewed.*



For these retailers and other merchants that FitForCommerce has observed, advanced site search has enabled an extension of their ecommerce platforms’ lifetimes. Retailers considering a replatforming effort in order to drive more SEO traffic should closely review how the implementation of an advanced site search solution can meet these goals. While site search may not address all structural website issues related to SEO, the solution can be implemented quickly and cost-effectively and should be strongly assessed as an alternative or supplemental approach to a replatform.

## Meeting the Mobile Imperative

While mobile commerce (Mcommerce) continues to explode, conversion rates continue to lag behind desktop. Retailers must employ site search solutions that can be easily navigated on any mobile device, regardless of screen size or platform. Features such as advanced autocorrect and the ability to showcase a diverse product catalog in a simple fashion will help mobile shoppers stay engaged and help increase conversion.

### HOW DO US INTERNET USERS FEEL ABOUT USING MOBILE AND SOCIAL FOR SHOPPING?

% of respondents, 2015 & 2018

	2015	2018
My mobile device is quickly becoming my most important shopping tool	29%	45%
My social networks have become as important as my other information sources for me to make best product choices	27%	36%
Look forward to being able to pay for more and more transactions from my mobile device	17%	28%

Source: GFK "FutureBuy 2018," Nov 12, 2018

Figure 8: According to eMarketer, US Mcommerce sales are expected to exceed \$500 billion by 2022. Smartphones alone will account for 85% of overall ecommerce retail sales, fueled by mobile-friendly checkout processes and the nascent opportunity to shop through social networks.

## 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 multichannel retailer** we interviewed indicated that, while site search was not a viable solution to replace its aging and unstable eCommerce platform, search is still a critical component of the replatforming effort that will help the retailer get more out of its 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."***

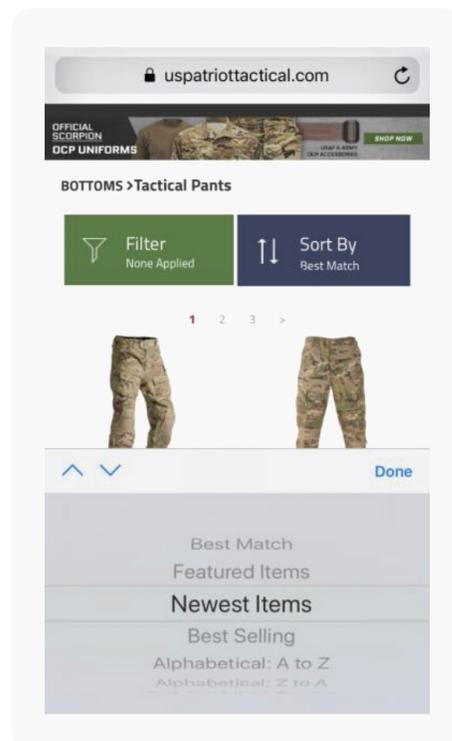


Figure 7: US Patriot's search capabilities extend to its mobile environment, allowing shoppers to search by filtering or sorting as shown here.

Various smart phone, tablet screen sizes and other electronic devices illustrate the need for merchants to adopt responsive design on their websites. Responsive design, which enables sites to be presented in an optimal way regardless of device, is built into most commercial ecommerce platforms. However, a number of retailers are on older platforms with basic mobile capabilities and some still with no mobile capabilities.

## Infrastructure

Site search solutions must be able to support the existing site infrastructure. In addition to considering the number of SKUs to be indexed, retailers should evaluate the search solution's processing capabilities and where product information resides. Is the information stored in a centralized product information management (PIM) database or pulled from multiple data sources throughout the enterprise? Depending on the situation, it can take hours to days to process inventory.

Some companies even report using state-of-the-art site search solutions to improve infrastructure efficiency. When site search solutions are hosted by the provider, website traffic loads can be shared between the retailer's website hosting company and the site search provider. This results in less required server capacity at the web host and better overall performance.

## Platform Synergies

Yet another consideration is the amount of time it will take for the search solution provider to integrate with and support the ecommerce platform. Most providers have developed built-in integrations for industry-standard platforms. But home-grown or uncommon platforms may take more time to integrate.

## Can Search Do Everything?

While site search can address many of the reasons that retailers replatform, most of these solutions cannot address the following key areas (at least not yet):

- ▶ 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 replatforming effort may be necessary. Even in these cases, advanced site search can help.

## Easing Transition to a New Platform

When a merchant decides to replatform, advanced site search can ease the transition 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 replatforming effort, state-of-the-art site search solutions can help buy time on the current platform while the retailer pursues a deliberate, well thought-out approach to replacing the platform.

Site search can ease the transition to a new platform by using it to inform navigation, customer experience, and product taxonomy requirements. It also enables 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.

Many retailers are concerned about the risks of changing the user experience when moving to a new ecommerce platform, as 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.

*We really liked the capabilities that our site search solution delivers, and the value it adds to our business. Our company has replatformed a number of times, so knowing that our site search solution is platform-agnostic provides an added level of assurance that we've made the right decision."*

**- Saul Stafford, COO, US Patriot Tactical**

## 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. At the same time, it can produce dramatic results. Figure 9 illustrates what some retailers have achieved using solutions from Unbxid.

Industry		Conversion Increase	Revenue Increase
Furniture & Home Decor	pepperfry ARHAUS Ashley HOMESTORE	63.04%	53.68%
Fashion	burkes OUTLET rue21 SHOP LC EXPRESS	32.95%	28.57%
B2B	PURCHASING POWER ib supply™ <small>By Industry for the Best</small>	21.64%	34.66%
Mass Merchant	HSN POTPOURRI GROUP INC	10.80%	12.13%
Grocery	freshdirect FOODKICK <small>BY FRESHDIRECT</small>	23.50%	28.10%
Specialty	US AUTOPARTS™ deborah lippmann LUCKY VITAMIN	25.65%	18.15%
Electronics	Discount Two-Way Radio 1000Bulbs	28.15%	86.82%

**Figure 9:** A sampling of customers from Unbxid illustrates the levels of improvement that are possible without replatforming.

The retailers FitForCommerce interviewed 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 setup fees and rapid integration timelines. Compare this to hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars for a typical ecommerce replatforming for a retailer with anything greater than a few million in annual online sales.

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. While the duration of replatforming projects varies based on complexity, FitForCommerce data shows they can run up to two years for highly complex replatforming initiatives with multiple integration points.

## Conclusion

Ecommerce executives constantly struggle with the decision to replatform. Advanced site search solutions provide an alternative to replatforming for some retailers and – at minimum – a way for executives to buy themselves some time to make a considered decision and ensure a less painful transition. The retailers referenced in this paper 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 replatforming effort make them a compelling alternative.

To help evaluate the benefits of advanced site search versus a replatforming effort for their own companies, ecommerce leaders should answer the following questions:

- ▶ What are the main drivers for replatforming for my company? What metrics will we use to measure the success and ROI of replatforming?
- ▶ 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 replatforming. 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 ROI model look like in a replatforming effort? Weigh initial budget for implementation of a new ecommerce platform versus revenue/profit benefits against a similar model for an advanced site search implementation. If I am a multi-channel retailer – with significant offline (i.e., in-store) purchase behavior driven by online research, how will an investment in search help me 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) replatforming?
- ▶ 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?

Continued...

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- ▶ Do I have – or can I get or create – excellent product data, which is critical for maximizing the value of site search (product attributes, descriptions, etc.)?
  - ▶ Should I implement advanced site search now – even if I am already planning to replatform? The benefits of site search can aid in transition, as we've shown.

In many cases, replatforming 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 aid in platform transition in these situations and can fill in important gaps in the meantime.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Econsultancy, "Site Search for Ecommerce," <https://econsultancy.com/site-search-for-e-commerce-13-best-practice-tips/#i.e6bb0iahterern>

<sup>2</sup> ConversionXL, "Convert More Visitors By Improving Site Search," <https://conversionxl.com/blog/convert-visitors-improving-internal-site-search/>

<sup>3</sup> Baymard Institute, "Deconstructing Ecommerce Search," <https://baymard.com/blog/ecommerce-search-query-types>

<sup>4</sup> 2018 Quintessential Guide to E-Commerce Platforms, Internet Retailer

<sup>5</sup> Google, <https://www.blog.google/products/search/how-google-autocomplete-works-search/>

<sup>6</sup> Digital Commerce 360, <https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/2018/01/19/top-retailers-conversion-rates-stack-holiday-2017/>

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Unbxid delivers an AI-driven Product Discovery Platform that understands shoppers' intent and connects them to products they are most likely to buy — across site search, navigation and recommendation purchase journeys. The platform combines AI-based automation, powerful merchandising controls and extensive user experience capabilities, to enhance on-site shopper experience and increase revenue for online retailers.

Unbxid enables 36 billion interactions and \$4.5 billion in online revenue for leading retailers like Express, HSN, Rue21, Ashley Homestore, FreshDirect and the Children's Place.

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