GARBAGE-IN, GARBAGE OUT WHEN IT COMES TO ECOMMERCE SEARCH

CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS ARE REDEFINING SEARCH

With the dominance of Google for web search, customers have become trained to expect search *within a website* to respond and behave in the same manner. According to Forrester, 43% of site visitors immediately navigate to the search box and carry out a targeted search; if the search does not return the expected result, the customer exits the site and increases the chance of becoming a competitor's customer. Even with this much emphasis placed on site search, most eCommerce sites continue to rank poorly when it comes to search relevance. New search vendors are continuously entering the market attempting to improve relevance by:

Adding more business control over what results to show to what user	Using machine learning to understand the intent of the customer based on their digital footprint	Allowing you to create a curated experience for very specific search terms and contexts

SEARCH EXPERIENCE GOES BEYOND THE CAPABILITIES OF THE SEARCH ENGINE

What many retailers and brands often fail to realize is that the search engine can only do so much if the underlying data it is indexing does not contain what the customer is searching for. Most search engines expect a product data feed in a specific format. Retailers will typically generate this product feed using custom ETL, a process that content managers, merchandisers and search experts rarely have any control or visibility into. The search engine will then allow you to set the searchable fields, and in most cases, even the importance of these fields. The challenge with this process is that an incomplete view of a product may be shared in the feed, so despite the ability to select searchable fields, information required to match may be missing. For example, if a search is made for a *similar* concept to a topic in the product name or description, search will fail. This is because the search engine will only work with what you give it - it won't create anything new. Considering that the customer doesn't speak the language of your systems of record, finding what the customer is looking for may be difficult if the search engine can only find exact matches to the customer's query.

KEEPING UP WITH THE CURRENT TRENDS

Consider the Meghan Markle effect. Each time Meghan is photographed and pictures of her outfits are shared on media channels, the websites of the respective designers experience a surge in traffic. Meghan's white 'Line the Label' power coat, which she wore during the announcement of her engagement, sold out within 12 hours. A loyal fan may visit a fashion retailer's website and enter the search query 'Meghan Markle white coat'. Is it likely the customer will find they're looking for? Likely not. The back-end system holding the product data likely does not store a field with the term 'Meghan Markle' anywhere in it. In effect, the search engine has no way of finding that particular product out of the 100's of thousands of products that it carries because that information was never indexed.

Whether the customer is searching on an eCommerce website or using filters to navigate to the department or category they are interested in, the meta-data associated with the products is what ultimately drives their findability and the browsability. In the recent years, few companies have recognized this opportunity to improve the quality of the search index by enriching the underlying product information with additional meta-data.

SELECTING THE RIGHT SOLUTION FOR YOUR SEARCH EXPERIENCE

When selecting a solution to build your search experience on, many variables come into play which impact your customer's experience and their affinity to your brand. In order to decide what solution is right for you, here are factors to consider:

HUMAN CURATION VS. ALGORITHMIC ENRICHMENTS

Some product data enrichments require manual curation, while others can easily be automated. For example, adding the term 'Meghan Markle' to specific products that you sell requires a content manager to stay abreast of current fashion trends and manually tag the 'Line the Label' power coat with the Markle's name. This level of control requires content managers to have self-service tools to tag the products they carry. On the other hand, if you want to tag every 'Line the Label' product you carry with 'Meghan Markle' as soon as the product shows up in your catalog, this is a process best automated with a data enrichment rule.

ONE TIME VS. CONTINUOUS

Let's continue along the same example. Marketing, advertising, and media influence fashion trends which changes daily, or even by the hour. The inability to react to a fashion trend and infuse this intelligence into your product catalog translates to lost revenue. If you are in an

industry where your product catalog, or the trends surrounding the products you carry, don't change very often, you maybe able to perform sporadic product enrichments. Otherwise, you need the control to make continuous updates. As product data is typically synced with the search engine through file exports or API integration, in order to have continuous enrichments applied to your product catalog, you must be able to seamlessly integrate your enrichment platform with your search index.

TRANSPARENCY AND CONTROL

Handing over your product catalog to a third party service is definitely easier than taking control of it yourself. The only caveat being that they are not experts in your industry and do not know your customers the way you do. In some cases, when the rules are clearly defined, someone who has little product knowledge can follow your instructions to make updates to the catalog. If you want to ensure that your product catalog fully reflects expert knowledge, outsourcing this activity is not a best practice. Ask your vendor whether they provide you with a self-service interface to view and enrich your product data so that your product experts can control what your customer sees.

USING AI FOR DATA STANDARDIZATION AND AUTO-ATTRIBUTION/CATEGORIZATION

The challenge of inconsistency in data becomes exponentially worse with the size of the catalog, as well as the number and types of product attributes. Consider, as an example, a hardware catalog with half a million skus and a couple of hundred unique attributes specifying different units of measurement such as width, height, weight, depth, capacity, voltage, resistance, and more. Most retailers deal with multiple suppliers for the products that exist within their catalog and have to spend a herculean effort to manually standardize these units of measure for a smooth search and browse experience across their digital channels. If you have a large catalog with a broad array of products resulting in numerous attributes, it makes sense to apply machine learning to standardize and cleanse the data and allow your product teams to use their time and effort doing more interesting and productive activities.

Apart from dealing with inconsistency within the product catalog, retailers spend considerable effort categorizing the products against a constantly changing product taxonomy. You can imagine the pain of having to re-categorize products to an updated taxonomy or simply having to categorize every product that is onboarded to the catalog on an ongoing basis. This task of categorization and attribution can be made much simpler using AI techniques. Ask your provider what tools they offer that will allow you to leverage AI to enrich your catalog.

TAXONOMY MANAGEMENT AND DYNAMIC ASSIGNMENT

Most retailers use some combination of a PIM, an ERP system, a database, and a CMS to manage product information and content. These systems are typically very rigid when it comes to mapping products to a taxonomy. The categories within which products are placed depend on the questions of WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and WHY? For example, a diamond ring belongs to the Jewellery category but may also be found under a 'Valentine's Day Gifts for Her' category. This requires an agile taxonomy management and assignment approach that category owners and merchandisers are able to use to create a dynamic and relevant eCommerce experience. A taxonomy management tool goes a long way if your PIM/MDM is restricting you from creating multi-dimensional hierarchies for your product catalog.

THE VUE SOLUTION FOR DATA ENRICHMENT AND ECOMMERCE SEARCH

VUE is a recent addition to the ecosystem of data enrichment and ecommerce search players. It is a Content Intelligence Platform that addresses each of the above retail challenges and provides self-service control over your product catalog to product and category managers as well as e-commerce search/merchandising teams.

BOOK YOUR FREE DEMO NOW

To learn more about the Conscia VUE content intelligence platform and how it can help your business, contact our friendly team at sales@conscia.ai

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Conscia is a Toronto based SaaS company that offers knowledge management solutions that quickly and easily unifies and enrich data across enterprise silos and makes it consumable by modern digital applications. Conscia automatically tags enterprise information with metadata and domain specific taxonomies, making this information easily findable and browsable. Conscia provides knowledge experts direct access, full control and visibility over their content. Conscia makes it possible to easily combine internal expertise with artificial intelligence to enhance information quality across the entire enterprise making your content easier to find and navigate. www.conscia.ai