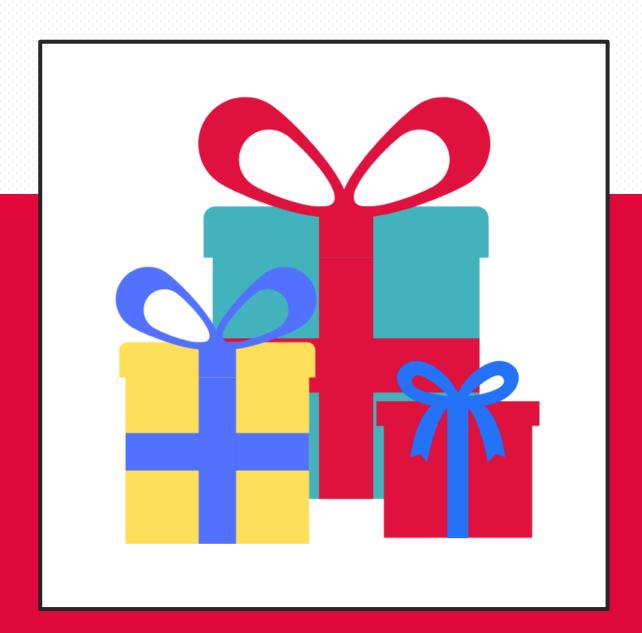


# Preparing for the Holiday Season

A GUIDE FOR YOUR ECOMMERCE SITE



## Introduction

It's the most wonderful time of the year for eRetailers.

Now is the time to act in order to maximize revenue this Holiday Season. Follow the advice in this guide to create an optimized shopping experience for your customers.



What you can expect from this eGuide:

#### Lessons from 2018

The 2018 Holiday Season was a record-setting one, but what learning can we apply as we prepare for 2019?

#### **Preparing your Site**

The subsequent chapters will break down how to optimize your eCommerce site:

- Interpreting Search Analytics
- Reducing 'No Results'
- The Potential of Redirects
- Messaging on Product Results Pages
- Creating and Managing Landing Pages
- Navigation Best Practices
- Why NLP does Keywords Better



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### 2018 HOLIDAY ECOMMERCE RESULTS

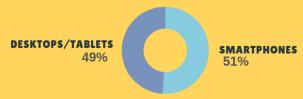
## U.S. ONLINE RETAIL SUMMARY FOR THE 2018 HOLIDAY SEASON

**126.0B** 

2018 Holiday Season Total Online Retail Revenue



#### **mCommerce Growth**



**% OF VISITS TO ECOMMERCE SITES** 

**\$2B** 

Average daily online revenue exceeded \$2B for the first time; 26 days of the 61-day season exceeded that mark



16.5%

ONLINE REVENUE GROWTH 4.5%

OVERALL RETAIL GROWTH

2017 → 2018

Online revenue growth continues to outpace overall retail growth



#### **Lessons from 2018**

As we prepare for the coming Holiday Season, it is important to look back on what we have learned from previous years.

The headline news is that ecommerce sales in 2018 set records. From the beginning of November through the end of 2018, E-commerce sales totalled \$126 billion, compared to \$108.2 billion in 2017, according to a report from Adobe Analytics<sup>1</sup>.

Internet Retailer estimates e-commerce sales during the 'Cyber 5' (the five days from Thanksgiving Day through Cyber Monday) grew 19% to \$22.55 billion, up from \$18.90 billion in 2017.

For the first time, Smartphones drove over half the traffic and nearly a third of the revenue (Average daily visits: 51.4% / Revenue: 31.0%).



#### **Lessons from 2018**

The record sales emphasize the need to capitalize in 2 main ways in 2019:

#### Mobile

The growing importance of mobile shopping shows that providing a superior mobile shopping experience for customers is vital for driving holiday sales.

With cart conversion happening over 30% less often on smartphones compared to desktop, it is crucial that we make smartphones more than just a tool for browsing. Customers need to be able to find the right products, first time.

Customers will be searching during the Holiday Season using their smartphones, so search needs to work well.

#### Cyber 5

Those crucial days between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday (the Cyber 5) have long been considered crucial for holiday shopping, and eRetailers need to get everything right that weekend.

Customers will be driven by Cyber 5 and it is all the more important that promotions, flash sales and site search work effectively. A shopper returning a 'No Results' page is just not an option in 2019.

Having looked back on 2018, let's look forward to this year's Holiday Season, and the ways in which we can drive revenue.



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# Interpreting Search Analytics



#### 1. Interpreting Search Analytics

Understanding the behavior of your customers is the crucial first step to improving their online shopping experience, and to boosting your ecommerce site's conversion.

You need visibility into how users are using search and search navigation, which then allows you to make changes that will improve your bottom line.

The most effective Search Analytics reports are presented in order of frequency, with the top searches presented at the top of the page. With all Analytics reports, there is more to be gained in most cases from acting upon the most frequent searches.

There are two key aspects to interpreting Search Analytics:



#### 1. Fixing Problem Areas

The first and most obvious way to use Search Analytics is to remedy searches that produce inaccurate, or no results.

Fixing 'No Results' searches is fundamental.

If customers are commonly searching for something that produces no results, either those customers are all coincidentally using the wrong site, or something needs to be done to show results for those searches.

The next chapter will give you more tips for reducing 'No Results'.

It may be that a simple spell correction rectifies a 'No Results' search, but it is also important to monitor what EasyAsk call 'Relaxed' Searches. A relaxed search is one where the search system has modified the search by intelligently dropping (or 'relaxing') a term or terms. For example, if a customer searched for a 'Men's black lace jacket' and there are no products that match this description, we would want the results to show 'Men's black jackets', rather than 'Men's lace jackets' or 'black lace jackets', having relaxed the term 'lace'.

Being able to monitor relaxed searches is important to make sure that the search system is relaxing in the correct way.

Some searches will inevitably need to be modified and in our example, we want our search system to recognise that the gender stated in the search query is more important than the fabric.



#### 1. Interpreting Search Analytics



#### 2. Improving the Most Popular Searches

Optimizing the most frequently searched queries on your site is like collecting the low-hanging fruit: it makes the most significant impact for the least effort.

The key is to identify the most popular customer searches and then show exactly the right products for those searches.

For example, if the most commonly made search is 'Women's jackets', don't just show all women's jackets in a haphazard way. You may show the most popular products first, or the products that you want to sell most of, for example end of season products, those with higher stock levels, or even products with higher profit margins.

EasyAsk provide Analytics about how users have clicked within their session as well as about the search entries.
Customers make searches then often click filters, such as price or color. EasyAsk can give an analysis of the most popular attribute clicks, making it possible to 'click stream' products.

For example, if the color black has been identified as the most popular click in the category, the site might be fine-tuned to show black products first in the search results.

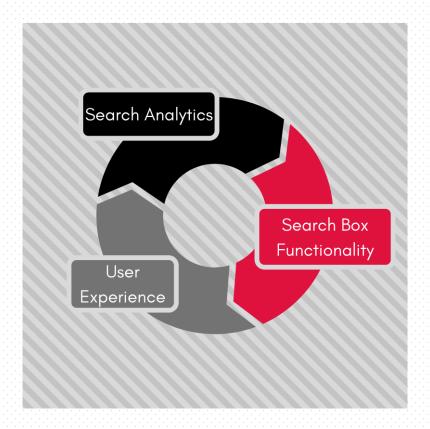
If you use Google Analytics or another standard ecommerce analytics tool, you can baseline your current conversion rate, then monitor how any changes you make affect your bottom line.

#### It's not just about great search

Although optimizing your site in response to good Analytics will make you more money, there is a lot more information to be gleaned from Search Analytics.

Understanding how your customers shop can help you to provide enhancements to your user interface. It may lead you to create landing pages or dynamic attributes. Search Analytics offer a live insight into your industry and your customers' behavior, allowing you to respond to increases in searches for particular products by putting them in stock.





1. Interpreting Search Analytics

## Search Cycle

The process is cyclical: Search Analytics provide insights that allow businesses to optimize their search results, and the better the search box functionality, the more use it gets and the better the quality of the data produced.

But in order to obtain great quality data for analysis, the search system needs to be up to the job so your customers will actually use the search box.

Returning customers quickly lose faith in a bad search system.



2

# Reducing 'No Results'





#### 2. Reducing 'No Results'

According to a WebLink study, shoppers using internal site search deliver a 216% higher conversion rate compared to customers that simply browse.

With search playing such a crucial role, generating a generic 'Sorry, no results matched your search' message could be disastrous.

How many shoppers would stay on your site and how many would go straight to your competitor?

Check out these common causes for 'No Results' pages and how to avoid them:

#### 1. Spelling Errors

A large number of 'No Results' searches can be put down to poor spell correction. An effective Search Engine must have sensible spell corrections and synonyms, including the ability to understand plurals.

For example, the adjectives 'smoked' and 'smoky' should be understood by the Search Engine as synonymous.

Most Search Engines provide a reasonably good service when it comes to spell correct or synonyms, but can yours manage word inflection, such as changes in tense or verb conjugation?

For example, will your search system recognise that 'mattresses' is the plural form of 'mattress' because it has the suffix 'es' rather than just 's'?

If your business operates across different countries, and therefore languages, this becomes an even bigger challenge.

Do you have a Natural Language engine that understands these complexities across multiple languages?

#### 2. Specific Language

Another cause of 'No Results' searches is shoppers' use of language. It could be that a search is too specific, and that by 'relaxing' one or more words, a relevant set of results can still be shown.

A good Natural Language tool will be capable of understanding that words such as 'over' and 'under' relate to a price indication.

As people become increasingly used to using voice searches, they may include phrases like 'show me' or 'I'm looking for'.

Although typically searches would fail with the addition of these phrases, a Search Engine that can understand Natural Language will still make sense of the query.



#### 2. Reducing 'No Results'

#### 3. Products are Out of Stock

If a popular product has gone out of stock, most Search Systems will display a 'No Results' message.

This is no longer a reason for a wasted opportunity with EasyAsk's unique tool, 'Conditional Redirects'. The tool enables businesses to set up a redirection to a separate set of products when their customers search for a popular product that is out of stock.

For example, if a company usually sells Gracey Recliners, they may find that they sometimes have an issue with the supply, due to the product's popularity. The merchandizer could set up a conditional redirect rule using EasyAsk software, so that when Gracey recliners are unavailable, a message displays explaining this, along with a redirected search for 'leather recliners'.

When the Gracey recliners are back in stock, they will once again be shown in the search results.

It is not necessary for a merchandizer to remove the rule; the Search System will automatically show the product again.

#### No Results? No Way!

Avoiding 'No Results' searches is a simple yet valuable way to ensure your customers find, and buy, what they are looking for.

It is essential to use a Search Engine that is flexible and can understand the multitude of ways that a user might phrase a query.

Quite simply, you won't resolve the underlying causes of 'No results' without an intuitive Natural Language engine.

With flexible merchandizing and search tuning, you can make sure that you're not hard-wiring the way that search works.







# The Potential of Redirects



#### 3. The Potential of Redirects

When done right, Redirects have the power to inform and invite your customers towards more relevant content.

Running a text-search for their queries may not be the most appropriate next step in their journey through your ecommerce site.

Sometimes, it is more appropriate to show a different page or set of results. And customers who realize that your search engine is intelligent and intuitive in this way will trust you with their time and money.



There are many uses for Redirects in ecommerce and we like to define them in three ways:

#### 1. Web Page Redirects

A Web Page Redirect redirects a search term to a specific web page instead of performing a search. It is useful for catching queries, such as 'delivery' or 'returns'.

For example, a customer may enter 'delivery' into a search box to find out about the company delivery costs or policies. When a Web Page Redirect is set up for 'delivery', the customer is redirected to the delivery web page rather than the engine running a search.

This kind of redirect can be set up to recognize queries such as, "Where's my order?" or, "How much does delivery cost?"

Web Page Redirects are also valuable for when you wish to direct customers to a specially-created landing page. For example, you might set up a redirect for a particular brand that takes customers to a brand page that includes brand information, cross-sells and other content.

Perhaps you would like customers who search for party dresses over the coming months to be redirected to a 'Christmas Party' landing page that displays dresses, jewelry, shoes and other accessories.



#### 3. The Potential of Redirects

#### 2. Search Page Redirects

A Search Page Redirect redirects from one search to another search. For example, there may be searches for which you wish your customers to only see a specific set of products that you have defined.

Instead of seeing results for their original search, customers will be redirected to a different results page.

Perhaps when users search for a particular brand, you would like to drive them to a particular set of products with a special deal or a higher profit margin.

#### 3. Conditional Definitions

This tool, unique to the EasyAsk solution, is an incredibly useful way to avoid 'No Results' pages for products that are out of stock.

If a business identifies a popular product that frequently goes out of stock, it is possible to use Conditional Definitions to show the specific product if it is in stock, but a different (defined) set of products, should it the requested product be out of stock at that time.

The previous chapter, Reducing 'No Results' covers this in more detail.

#### **Take Control**

By using Redirects in conjunction with data from their search analytics, retailers can take control of their customers' experience.

When customers use the search box, they don't always need or want the search results for their query.

Redirects allow flexibility over what pages and products are put in front of customers.







# Messaging on Product Results Pages





#### 4. Messaging on Products Results Pages

Intelligent search engines will show alternative products or searches when users search for something that returns no results. Messaging on product results pages is used when this has happened.

It is an opportunity to inform customers why they're seeing a particular set of products and it is imperative that users quickly understand what has happened so that their confidence in the search system is maintained.

Messaging might be used in the following instances:

#### **Spell Correction**

When a change has been made to the original text, it is important to inform the user how the spelling has been changed. For example,

"sofaa" returned no results, so we're showing you results for "sofa" instead.

It is of course necessary that your spell correct function is up to the job in the first place. An intelligent search engine will check spellings against the company data as well as a dictionary.

#### **Out of Stock Products**

Popular products may periodically go out of stock. Messaging allows your business to let customers know that certain products would normally be available and that you are showing them alternative products.

For example,

"Gracey recliner" returned no results, so we're showing you results for "leather recliner" instead. The Gracey recliner is currently unavailable.

#### **Products not in the Catalog**

If your business does not stock a particular brand, but does stock brands who produce similar products, it is important to redirect your customers to relevant alternative products.

An electronics supplier might display a message such as,

Sorry, we don't stock Canon, but Nikon are an excellent alternative.



#### 4. Messaging on Products Results Pages

Simply telling your customers that you don't stock a particular product or brand is a missed opportunity.

#### Relaxation

With certain customer search queries, part of a search may need to be relaxed. If a user's search has been changed in this way, a message explaining the changes to the original search should be displayed.

For example, a user may search for "purple leather couches" and see the following message:

Sorry, we don't have purple leather couches, but here are the leather couches we do have.

This user could have searched for leather couches in the first instance and spent a long time scrolling through the pages of results looking for any in purple.

But by using messaging in this way, the user is informed immediately and is more likely to use the search system again.

#### **Keeping the Customer Informed**

The key to messaging is letting the user know what is happening.

If there is a message that could be conveyed, it should always be displayed, and the more explicit you can be, the better. This gives the user confidence in the search system.

Conversely, if no message is displayed when changes have been made to a search, it is confusing for the user. If, for example, an alternative brand of product is presented with no messaging to explain why, the user may assume that the search is not working, lose confidence in the search system and even abandon the site.

Ideally, there would be multiple messages set up for different purposes.

Implementing messaging on product result pages is straightforward to set up and configure with EasyAsk's intuitive search solution.





# Creating and Managing Landing Pages



#### 5. Creating and Managing Landing Pages

#### **First Impressions**

Impressive email campaigns are an essential part of your marketing strategy, but the place where your customers land after clicking through is of equal importance.

Landing pages on eCommerce sites come in many shapes and sizes, but the most effective amongst them are clear, succinct and consistent, with an obvious call to action. Consider reading <u>these tips</u><sup>1</sup> when planning your landing page content.

### Creating Landing Pages: A Technical Job?

Typically, Landing Pages are created by a technical team, with merchandizers providing information about the products. But what if it were possible for the merchandizing team to react to news items, changes in the market or analytics by creating and managing Landing Pages without the need to involve IT colleagues?

What if they could very quickly (we're talking minutes) create a Landing Page and have dynamic control over which products they promote?

EasyAsk's Search solution provides a complete solution to the landing page

problem, with the ability to create the whole page, not just a list of products.

With its unique use of Natural Language Processing, merchandizers can quickly define products they want on the Landing Page and then add content such as banners, scrolling banners and video.

One of the key advantages of EasyAsk's Search Solution is its ease of use and flexibility, meaning that knowledge of the catalogue and market is more important than technical knowledge – and we think that this is the way it should be.



A merchandizer can use Natural Language to define a set of products, for example,

"leather sofas over 2000 dollars"

and then assign these products or searches to an attribute value, e.g. "Living Room Luxury". As a merchandizer, you can see the products dynamically as you change the search terms in EasyAsk's interface, Commerce Studio. It is also possible to select individual products.



#### 5. Creating and Managing Landing Pages

Is there a cold spell forecast?

Send an email with a link to a Snow Jackets landing page.

Is there lots of talk in the news about cyclist safety?

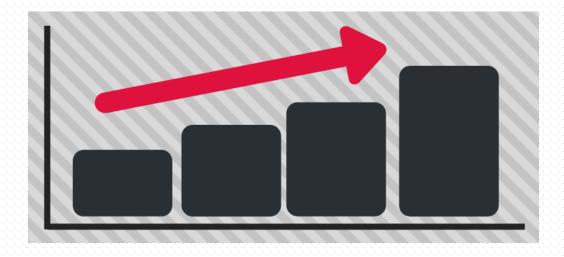
Start a 'Be Seen at Night' email campaign that leads to bright-coloured products on a landing page.

#### **Complete Solution**

EasyAsk makes it easy for customers to define what their searchers see on Landing Pages and to therefore respond to analytics or campaign directives.

The Landing Page functionality can be used not only for one-off campaigns, but for run-of-the-mill marketing, for example providing links to several Landing Pages from the weekly email to customers.

With the effective combination of a merchandizer's knowledge of a catalog and EasyAsk's Natural Language Processing, Landing Pages can be created and managed dynamically, keeping your business ahead of the game and in touch with your customers.









## Is Navigation important if you have great Search?

An overgeneralization is that shoppers navigate if they don't know exactly what they want (or if they feel they can't trust the search engine, like an obsolete key word search).

Conversely, shoppers use the search box when they DO know exactly what they want. It's critical to avoid the 'clicking to oblivion' syndrome via poor navigation.

How much patience do your customers have?

How long will they hang around on irrelevant pages before they bounce?



Does your whole Search System work in sync, providing a consistent experience whether your customers search or navigate?

Navigation is distinct from search and is typically a way of reaching a set of products without searching. Customers can navigate an eCommerce site by clicking on menus, categories and subcategories. Once an initial product set is displayed, customers can click on filters too.

Intuitive, Natural Language search is imperative, but great customer experience should also permeate your site's navigation.

Here are some important considerations for the navigation of your site:

#### **Keep it Consistent**

A lot of category pages don't give users many options for what to do next.

Unless your site's landing page is to be set out in a particular way, it should reflect a search results page. It may have extra components, such as banners, but the products and filters should be the same.

By presenting the same filters as on a search page (being able to choose price range or color, for example), options are provided for users who perhaps don't know the right words for a search.

There should always be consistency between the experience of a user who searches and a user who navigates.

If a customer navigates the categories mens > jackets they should expect to see the exact same products as if they had typed the search, 'men's jackets'. This gives the user confidence in your site.



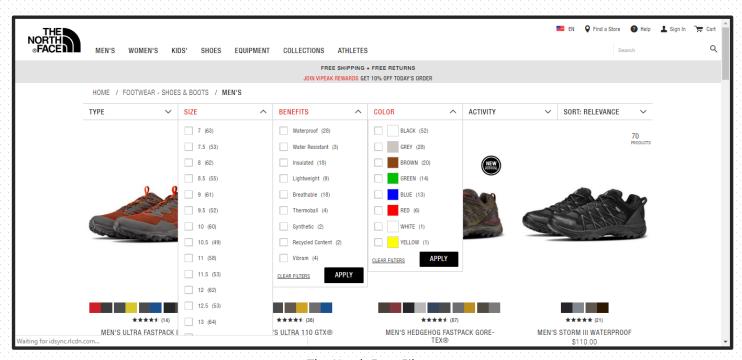
If, however, a customer performs a search that doesn't return any results and subsequently navigates to find lots of products, their confidence in your search or navigation is undermined, having a detrimental effect on your bounce and conversion rates.

Customers are likely to leave a site that they feel they can't trust.

If customers don't see the right products, they can't buy them.

#### **Build Navigation into the Search Box**

When a user starts to type a query in the search box, does your search system display category or attribute links dynamically? SAYT (Search as you Type) is another form of navigation, allowing the user to stop short of typing their whole query and start to navigate using the links. Once the user has clicked a category, it is important for them to be able to zoom in as easily as possible, using a combination of filters, such as textual/numerical filters, price sliders or color swatches. These options should be visually attractive and easily recognisable.



The North Face Filters



#### Give your customers what they want

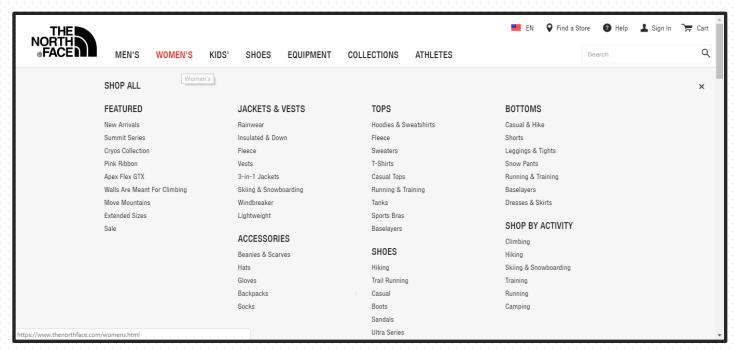
When offering sub-category filtering, always try to present attributes in the order that they are most likely to be used. For example, if the price filters are the most-clicked, show them first.

Make use of analytics to keep an eye on where people are clicking on your site. EasyAsk can even provide analytics showing which values are the most popular within attributes. If blue turns out to be your customers' top color click, show blue as an option before red.

Don't bury the popular clicks, especially on mobile sites and apps.

#### **Use Mega Menus**

A Mega Menu can be displayed when a user hovers over or clicks a category heading and contains everything related to that category. Think of it as Search as You Type for navigation.



The North Face Women's Mega Menu

Users can see everything in detail and decide which sub-category to click next. With EasyAsk driving this functionality, special headings or sub-categories can be generated dynamically from derived attributes and used to pull up appropriate products, such as collections with a given name.





## Easy does it...

Navigation and search should be in sync and complement each other; this is a real opportunity for your search system to resonate with your customers.

It is crucial that your business does not rely on a development team to generate and tweak changes to navigation. Many systems are coded by developers, so if a business wanted to make changes, there would be time and cost implications.

With EasyAsk, merchandizers have direct access to analytics and dynamic tools in order to optimize their customers' search and navigation experience.







#### Keywords-used-2018?

You'll be familiar with the default search language of Keywords; that condensed string of search terms, void of any connecting words. Many people who are used to using web search engines still choose to use keywords.

CollegeHumor illustrate Keyword Search hilariously in their 'If Google was a Guy' videos<sup>1</sup>.

But the tides are turning with the growing awareness of Natural Language Search. Being able to phrase questions as you would ask them if you were talking to someone, using everyday language, is increasingly expected of search engines.

It would be easy to assume that keyword search systems will deal as effectively with keyword searches as a Natural Language Processing (NLP) engine. But this is just not the case.

Not only will a good NLP search system produce the right results first time for the growing numbers of users who are familiar with natural language searching, but it will also out-perform keyword search engines when it comes to seemingly simple keyword searches.

Here's how:

#### 1. Understanding Language

A good NLP search engine understands word inflection and is able to take versions of words and create a single concept.

Changes such as tenses and pluralities are reduced down to a single word, normally a noun. For example, it would be equally natural for a customer to search for either 'jackets' or 'jacket'. With some traditional keyword search systems, however, business users would have to manually create synonyms to say that jackets = jacket.

Irregular plurals such as 'goose/geese' or 'lady/ladies' can confuse a keyword search engine, whereas a good NLP system will understand all pluralities and grammar.

EasyAsk's search solution will even understand these language complexities across multiple languages.





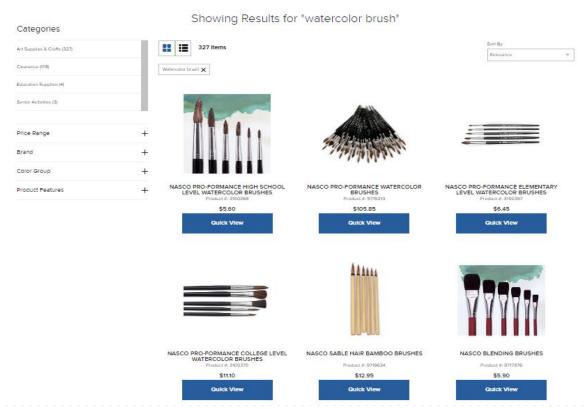
#### 2. Understanding Words

Take the simple example of the keyword search, 'red jacket'. A keyword search engine will match products that contain the words 'red' and 'jacket'. It may even be configured to search in categories. But what if the category name is 'jackets' and the system doesn't recognise 'jacket' as meaning the same thing?

A good NLP system will match products containing the words 'red' and 'jacket', but it will also match if, for example, there is some text that describes the product as 'redder than purple'.

EasyAsk's solution goes one step further. It will understand the keywords completely and realise that the words could be mapped to something else. It understands that red is a color attribute, and will bring back products that don't necessarily contain the word 'red' but that are burgundy, scarlet, berry, crimson... It will also understand that 'jacket' is a category name, and that certain products may not include the category name, 'jacket', but instead a model name, such as a 'red Bomber'.

The EasyAsk system on Nasco's website responds perfectly to the simple keyword search 'watercolor brush':





enasco.com

EasyAsk's system has recognized that 'brushes' in the product name matches 'brush' in the original search and that 'watercolor' describes the type of brushes.

A simple keyword search system may have shown watercolor paints first in the product results and found no matches for 'brush'.

#### 3. Ranking Products

Even if your customers are running relatively simple keyword searches, there is still lots more that can be done with the results.

With EasyAsk, you have the ability to rank the products intelligently, using relevant scoring. Depending on where the match is found will affect the score for that product. For example, a product name match is more important than a match in the description as it could contain misleading text.

You also have the ability to search the most important parts of the product first for matches, and only search the less important parts if nothing is found initially.

Yet another option is to configure EasyAsk to only search the highest weighted fields (e.g. product and category name), and if results are found, to stop there. If no matching products are found, however, EasyAsk will go back and try the lower weighted fields (e.g. product description and keywords). In this way, it is possible to only show the less-relevant results when there aren't any highly relevant products to show.

Results pages shouldn't be filled with lessrelevant information.

#### 4. Reducing 'No Results'

Great NLP engines will avoid 'No Results' for keyword searches by relaxing one or more of the terms.

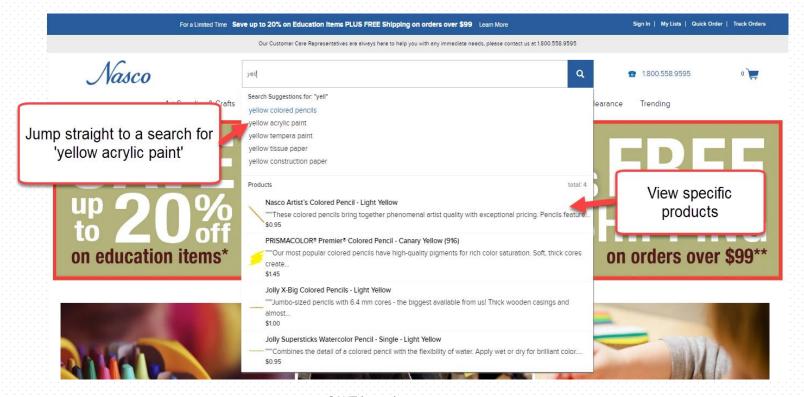
Where there may be no results for a search for 'pink scissors', one of the terms could be relaxed to show either pink products or scissors.

EasyAsk even allows its users to configure the priority of which term is relaxed. In our example, EasyAsk would ignore the color and show scissors rather than pink products that aren't scissors.



#### 5. Search As You Type

Search As You Type (or SAYT) intelligently finds the most common searches and shows products before the user has even hit return. This function means that customers with a simple keyword search can type the first few letters and click the search or even go straight to the product that they had in mind.



SAYT in action at enasco.com

#### How does your business measure up?

NLP search systems understand everyday language with all of its complexities.

Intelligent, intuitive NLP systems can take the simplest keyword searches and provide a vastly superior experience to that of a traditional keyword search engine.

Does your search solution provide relevant products, however your customers decide to ask?





# Maximize your Holiday Revenue with EasyAsk

Let us show you the full range of features that the EasyAsk solution offers.

**REQUEST A DEMO** 



www.easyask.com