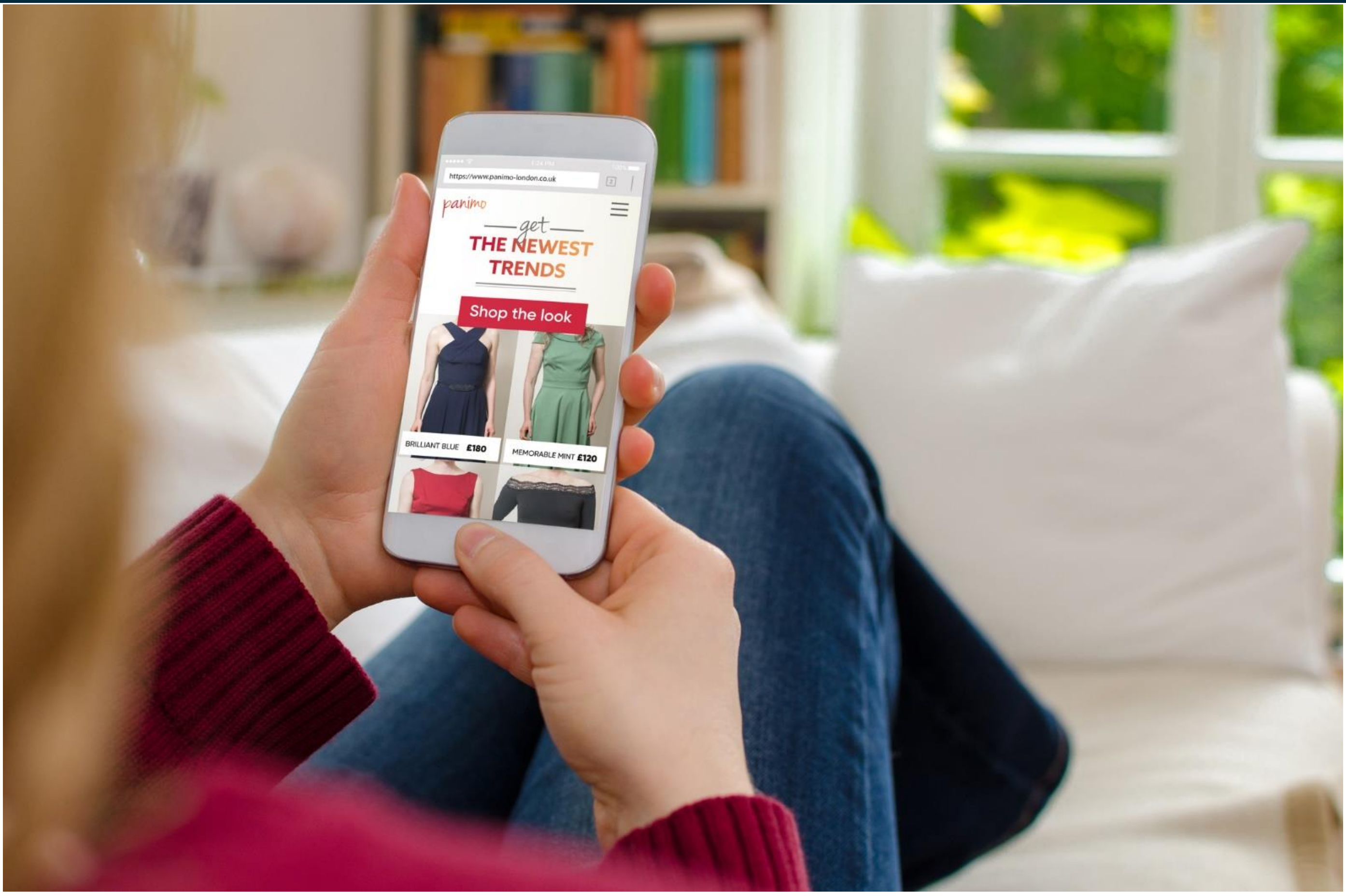
IMRG Data Report:

Best practice for optimising site search on smartphones

Analysis of how retailers structure the smartphone site search experience



An IMRG report, supported by IBM, sharing insight from a study analysing participant performance in our site navigation datasets – to identify how retailers with the highest percentage of site search use on smartphones structure their site search functions.

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Site search – something to be encouraged?

The kind of outcome achieved from a site visitor can be heavily influenced by the journey that they take.

This is true of device – where the possible range of contexts on a smartphone is far greater than that of a desktop, for example – as well as marketing channel, where a visitor arriving from a voucher site may convert higher but spend less.

The same also applies to how visitors navigate the site. There are three primary ways – clicking on page content, using the nav bar or using site search.

IMRG research shows that those who make use of site search are more likely to view a product page – finding products of interest quicker and hence getting further down the customer funnel toward a purchase.

In this report we present two bits of smartphone site design best practice you may considering implementing to encourage greater use of site search.

Andy Mulcahy, Strategy and Insight Director, IMRG

The Evolution of Search

Search is a key component of a great customer experience. Engagement levels and conversion are affected by the visibility of search throughout discovery but of paramount importance is the breadth and accuracy of the results returned.

Our research shows a third of shoppers using search can't find what they are looking for and are disappointed with the results of their search enquiry. The onus is on the retailer to keep pace with shoppers' search behaviour; an ongoing challenge requiring constant analysis, optimisation, and rule creation that can be both resource intensive and often manual.

The pace of change, trends, and customer expectations continue to add pressure on organisations to adapt and be in a position to meet demands. Search is a key example and an activity which can no longer be maintained by traditional processes of manual optimisation and rule creation. Further, as search expands beyond just online and mobile, we move into voice, natural language, visual, and ultimately search transforming into conversation.

This report suggests some easy next steps, to improve search, and ensure the basics are covered brilliantly. As organisations look to expand search into more channels, into driving deeper and wider customer discovery, whilst tapping into real-time trends and behaviour to maximise opportunity, organisations may wish to consider cogntitive technologies such as Search Insights and Natural Language to improve search in 2019.

Imran Choudhary – Digital Commerce Leader, IBM Europe

About this study

The content for this report is based upon a dedicated study we undertook in relation to the site navigation metrics we track in *the IMRG Capgemini Quarterly Benchmark*[1].

While we track data from a total of 200 participants in our sales and performance indices, we focused on a sample of 30 in this study – the retailers covered included a group of the best (ie those with the highest percentage of visitors that use the site search facility) and worst performers, plus a group with average rates. Participants were both large and small retailers, ranging across multiple sectors and product offerings.

We then reviewed the smartphone sites for each of those participants to see if we could identify common factors that may be influencing a high / low use of site search on smartphone.

Use of site search is significant as it can be effective at getting site visitors onto stage one of the customer funnel with greater relevance than site content or use of the nav bar.

What is the customer funnel?

This section provides a brief overview of the customer funnel and the four stages that constitute it. The metrics that we track in our Quarterly Benchmark are defined as follows:

Stage one – view a product page	*Percentage of total visits that view a product page*
Stage two – add to basket	*Percentage of sessions that convert from a product page view to 'add item to basket'*
Stage three – proceed to checkout	*Percentage of 'add to basket' sessions that convert to checkout*
Stage four – complete payment	*Percentage of checkout sessions that convert to payment*

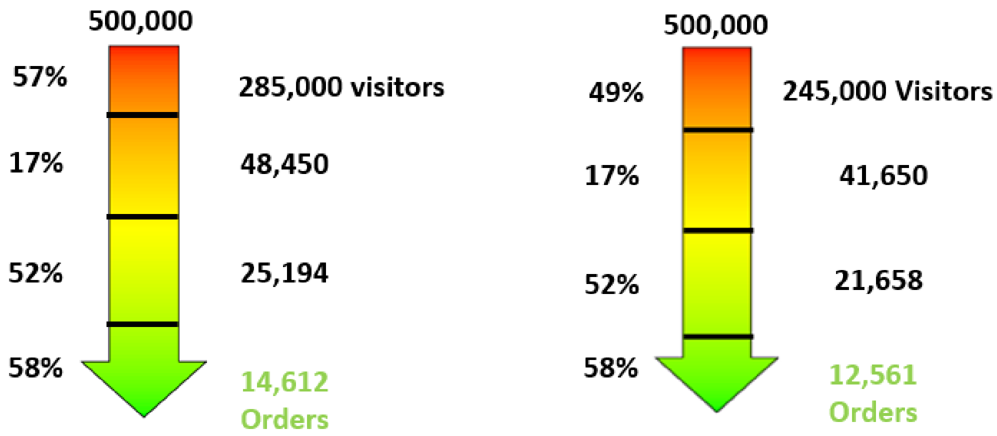
The below image provides the market averages for the four stages of the funnel.

[1] IMRG Capgemini Quarterly Benchmark

The pyramid is showing the market averages that reach each stage of the customer funnel. So, for example, 53% reach the product page, 17% add an item to their basket from the product page and so on.

The above showed an average across *all participants*. The below shows how the percentage of site visitors that reach stage one of the funnel (viewing a product page – 53%) is influenced by use of site search; those retailers with high use of site search get an average of 57%, while those with low use get an average of 49%.

To illustrate the importance of optimising each stage of the funnel, the below gives two examples of the number of site visitors that would reach / complete each stage given those market averages (assuming that the site receives a monthly average of 500,000 visitors) with the first stage split by high / low use of site search.



The arrow down the left shows the impact these percentages would have on those 500,000 monthly site visitors – on average 285,000 view a product page for those with high use of site search, while for those with low use of site search the number falls to 245,000.

If a retailer had the market average percentage for the remaining stages of the funnel, those 500,000 monthly visitors would yield 14,612 orders for those with high site search use vs 12,561 for those with low.

It is important to understand that the metrics used in this example are market averages, so no retailer actually matches those figures exactly. It is also not necessarily the case that a retailer who has a high percentage at one stage of the funnel performs very strongly across all stages.

We will now look at a few bits of design best practice to encourage greater use of site search on smartphones.

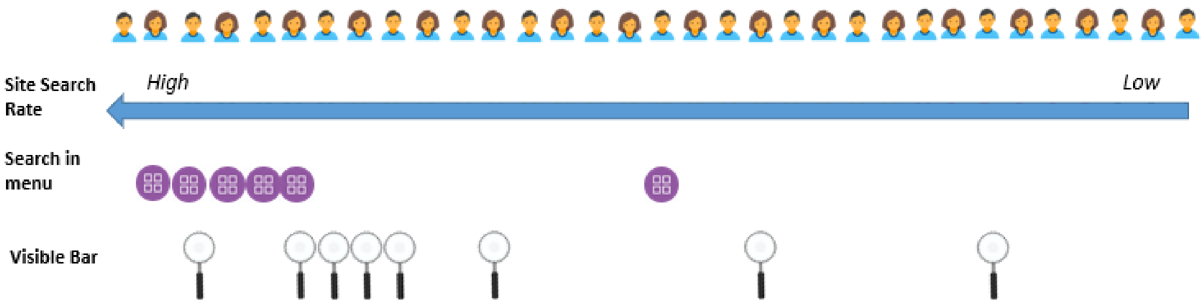
Site search best practice

Search in nav bar menu

The first element relates to use of the site search facility in the nav bar. The below image shows three anonymised examples to illustrate what this means. The one on the left has a nav bar that does not feature site search, the other two include the option at the top of the nav menu when it is opened on a smartphone.

Now if we line up the 30 retailers from the sample used here, laid out in the below chart from left to right in order of high-to-low usage of the site search functionality on their smartphone sites, we can identify something interesting.

As can be seen, it is not currently used widely but there is a very strong correlation between retailers implementing that functionality and having very high percentage use of site search.



Visible search bar

The second element in this chart shows the retailers in the sample that have a 'visible bar' at all times on the site. This refers to the retail smartphone sites that feature the search bar at the top of the site and keep it there, even when the user scrolls down the screen. However the user navigates the site, the option to use site search is always visible and usable at the top of the page.

The retailers that use this feature on their smartphone sites are a little more spread out, but there is a strong concentration of them among the top site search performers.

Conclusion

Some retail sites carry an enormous range and variety of products, sometimes spanning multiple categories, demographics (ages, genders etc), styles etc.

While the nav bar has its merits and some people may always prefer to browse using that function, there would appear to be some logic as to why giving customers the ability to 'ask' for specific types of product to be presented to them (ie using site search) can lead to more efficient journeys through the customer funnel. As this study shows, making it easy for them to use the search facility generally means they are more likely to reach stage one and view a product page.

As ever, this is only one part of any overall journey; getting more users to view product pages can be highly beneficial, but only if the search results produce relevant and meaningful matches to the terms used (which isn't necessarily as straightforward as you may think[2]), the product pages have also been optimised to provide the highest chances of converting, the basket review page is clear and free of unnecessary friction…

IMRG are producing a series of Data Reports that address each of these areas in sequence – see the reports section on our site to see the full suite.

[2] IMRG Data Report: Customer Funnel Stage 1

About IMRG

For over 20 years, IMRG (Interactive Media in Retail Group) has been the voice of e-retail in the UK. We are a membership community comprising businesses of all sizes – multichannel and pureplay, SME and multinational, and solution providers to industry.

We support our members through a range of activities – including market tracking and insight, benchmarking and best practice sharing. Our indexes provide in-depth intelligence on online sales, mobile sales, delivery trends and over 60 additional KPIs.

Our goal is to ensure our members have the information and resources they need to succeed in rapidly-evolving markets – both domestically and internationally.

www.imrg.org

About IBM

Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the way marketers, commerce and supply chain professionals engage customers. Fueled by the Watson AI platform, IBM Watson Customer Engagement is leading the way with proven solutions that are designed to fit seamlessly into the way practioners work and get smarter over time. It extracts new value from the all the right data to deliver more personalised customer experiences; deepen iunteractions through better recommendations; and provides unprecendented visibility to mitigate risk.

With embedded expertise and advice, Watson Customer Engagement gives marketing, commerce and supply chain professionals a 360-degree view of the business that results in better outcomes for every customer.

IBM Watson Customer Engagement is the only AI powered solution enabling clients to: do more with their data, enrich individual interactions, assess and pre-empt disruptions and act with confidence.

For more information, please visit here.

To schedule an appointment with an IBM representative, visit here or call Manil Allal on +353 83 844 87 42.