



The UK
eCommerce
Association

The State of Site Search in eCommerce 2024

Enhance engagement through optimising
site search and product discovery



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Meet the experts



“We are happy to share our comprehensive report on enhancing customer engagement in eCommerce through site search and product discovery. In today’s competitive landscape, understanding and optimising customer interactions are paramount for sustained growth and customer satisfaction. Supported by industry leaders Klevu and Monetate, this report provides actionable insights and strategies to elevate your engagement efforts and achieve significant business outcomes.”

About

We help our members understand and improve their online retail performance through a busy programme of performance benchmarking, data analysis, insight, best practice-sharing, and events. We have been tracking online sales since 2000 – and now measure over 120 individual metrics in a series of indexes, providing in-depth intelligence on online and mobile sales, delivery trends, marketing ROI and channel performance.

Editorial:



Ellie-Rose Davies, Content Executive at **IMRG**



Andy Mulcahy, Strategy and Insight Director at **IMRG**



Klevu:

“Search is everything in life, we are all searching for something. When you visit an online store as a shopper, you go with a purpose – whether it’s to buy a brake pad for a bike, or a nice handbag. Whether you make a purchase at that point or not, there is an intent that you go with. A good search experience is about understanding the intent and then translating it into bringing the most relevant product to the shopper in the most genuine way. Having that genuine discovery experience pays off in better conversion rates and revenue.”

Get a [free search and discovery audit from Klevu here >](#)



Nilay Oza, Co-Founder and CEO at **Klevu**

Monetate:

“Personalised search and product discovery are fundamentally transforming how today’s shoppers find and engage with products. They can help bridge the gap between brands and their global customers, fostering meaningful connections that go beyond traditional, static shopping experiences.

Whether shoppers are in buying mode or browsing mode, organisations should ensure that every click, scroll, and query is relevant and impactful. They should empower customers to find exactly what they need, when they need it, with a level of ease and personalisation that was previously not possible in the search box and beyond.”



Brian Wilson, CEO at **Monetate**

Methodology

This report empowers retailers to enhance their customer engagement strategies through a blend of IMRG's Online Retail Index data, insights from recent IMRG reports, and exclusive findings from Klevu's customer survey of 2,019 participants.

The charts presented responses from 1,900 individuals who have made online purchases in the past six months, ensuring relevance. Additionally, expert insights from Monetate guides retailers in growing profitability and personalisation in their strategies.

The Klevu customer survey was conducted in May 2024.



Introduction

Customer engagement on online retail sites has been down for the last few years, largely owing to economic crises in the UK and other external variables such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and geopolitical events. This report delves into essential strategies and insights aimed at maximising customer interaction and satisfaction in the eCommerce sector, specifically through optimising site search and product discovery.

As businesses navigate complex consumer behaviours and preferences, understanding the dynamics of engagement, site search optimisation and personalisation becomes essential for driving growth in difficult metrics such as conversion and helps to foster lasting customer relationships.

Read on to benefit from new customer research and gain actionable insights to take back to your business.



A brief history of search & product discovery

From Klevu

In the beginning all eCommerce search engines were the same, they relied on keywords and manual inputs. Merchandisers and search operators were left to scour Analytics to find out the search terms that are resulting in zero results. At that point they would update their catalogue. But as that kept happening, they would find that they were unable to accommodate the number of words necessary in product titles and descriptions.

Then, systems opened the back end and enabled merchandisers to add synonyms there, so they didn't need to keep adding keywords to the front end. Sounds good, right? But the problem with that is that a customer had to be shown a 'no results' page first in order for the retailer to know synonyms needed to be added, causing a real customer to get a bad experience. And by the time the synonym was added to the system, the shopper and the sales opportunity was gone, likely not to return.

In 1996, the search engine "Ask Jeeves" paved the way for conversational searching by encouraging users to phrase their queries in the form of a question. Now, with an abundance of information at our fingertips and high standards for natural language searching, consumers are becoming more thoughtful and specific in their searches. In response, businesses must understand the impact of search and discovery on conversion and adopt the right tools to stay ahead in the ever-evolving eCommerce landscape.

eCommerce has evolved significantly over the years, with search and product discovery playing a vital role in determining the success of an online shopping experience. As consumers demand more from their online shopping experience, businesses are investing in these two crucial aspects to reap the benefits of increased conversions, customer loyalty, and a competitive edge.

Customer purchasing behaviour

How many customers are shopping online?

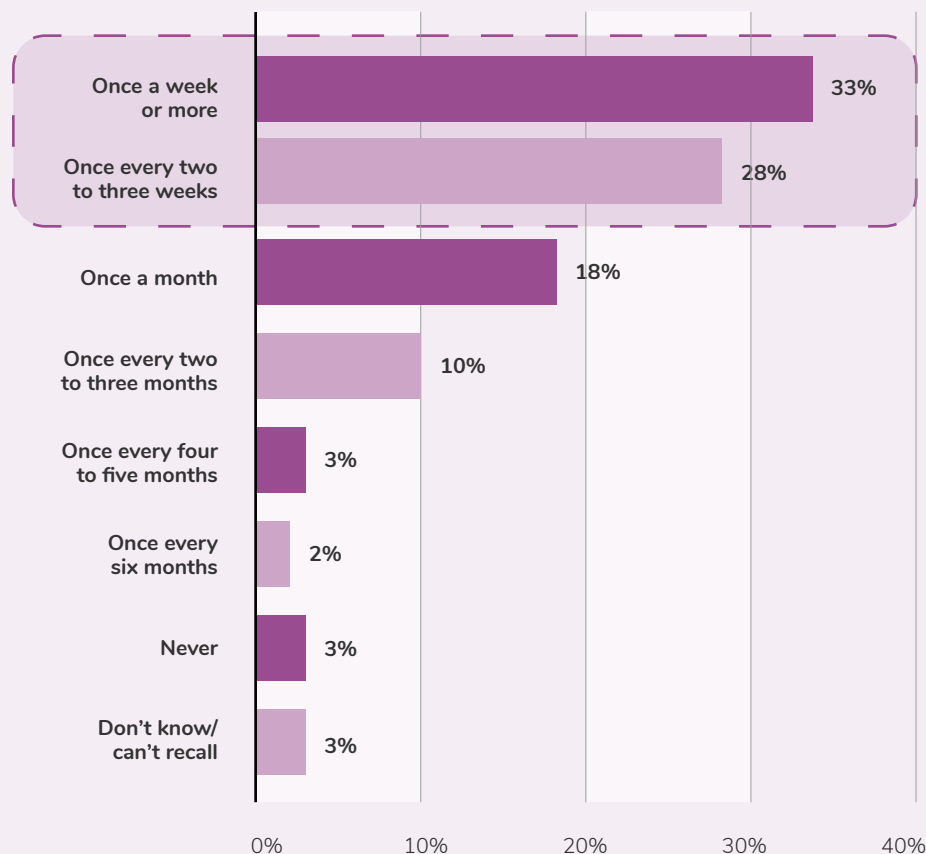
Klevu research has found that 94% of British adults have shopped online in the last 6 months (since Nov 2023), with varying consistencies.

A significant portion, one-third (33%), shop online very frequently (once a week or more). This indicates a strong reliance on online shopping among a substantial part of the population. Nearly another third (28%) shop online every two to three weeks. Combining this with the weekly shoppers, over 60% of British adults currently shop online at least once every three weeks.

28% of the population shops online less frequently, ranging from once a month to once every two to three months, and 5% shop very rarely (every 4-6 months or so). Promisingly, only 3% never shop online, and 3% either don't know or can't recall.

Acknowledging that there is a considerable number of customers who often shop online, retailers should prioritise providing exceptional customer experiences to boost their conversion rate. This strategy not only fosters loyalty among existing shoppers but also entices new ones, including those who may not typically shop as frequently.

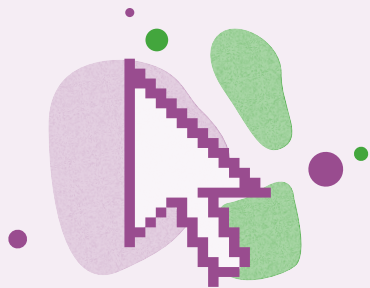
How often, if at all, have you shopped online in the last 6 months (i.e., since November 2023)?



The importance of site search

Site search – among the top prioritised eCommerce features

IMRG carried out a survey at the start of the year to their retail audience which asked them to reveal their top priorities for 2024. Site search was the top focus area for retailers. To meet demand, this section uncovers the value of this feature and will reflect on the ways it can optimise eCommerce performance after a lengthy period of consistent declines.



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Filters and Sort Orders

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Search result merchandising

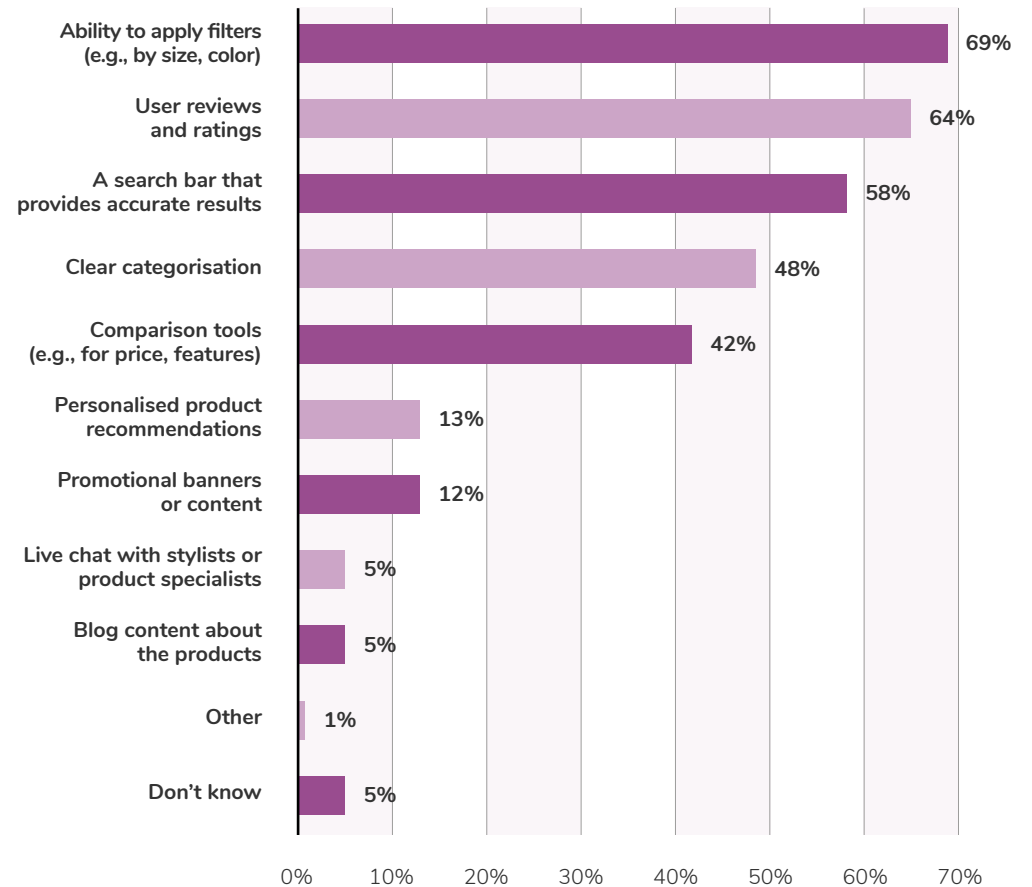
'A search bar that provides accurate results' is among the top three features of an online store that respondents (58%) find useful. The 'Ability to apply search filters' such as size and colour to their search result is considered the most useful feature (69%); this is particularly the case for females, where 72% find this feature useful as compared to 65% of males.

The popularity of search features highlights how customers are making more considered purchases, preferring to filter results to meet their specific needs. Offering relevancy in the search stage can help reduce browsing time, minimise buyer hesitation, and decrease search page bounce rates.

Once a retailer has provided relevant search results and a customer clicks on a product page, the retailer can provide 'User reviews and ratings,' which is the second most popular feature (64%). Honest feedback from other customers can facilitate trust in the retailer and set accurate expectations, helping to prompt conversion and reduce return rates.



Still thinking about shopping online... which, if any, of the following features of an online store do you find useful? (Please select all that apply).



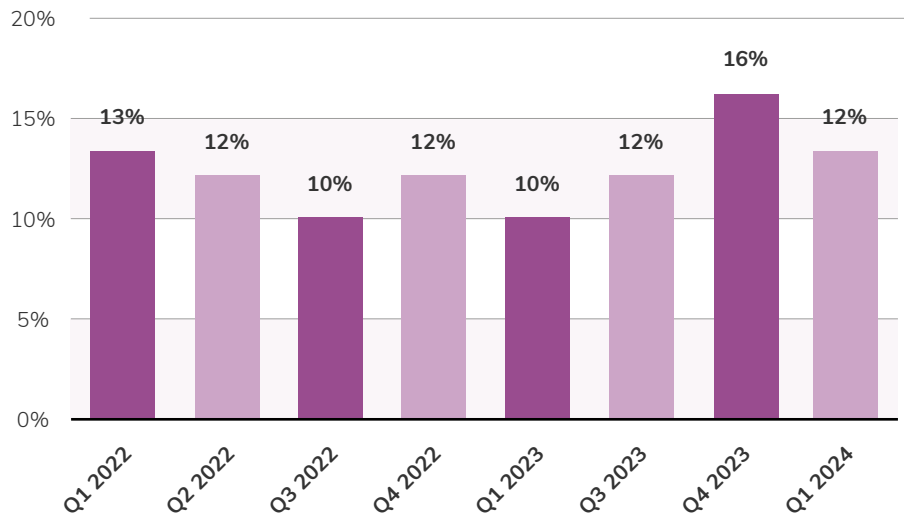
Unweighted base: All of GB adults who have shopped online in the last 6 months (1,900),
Source: Klevu survey, May 2024

How often do customers use the search bar functionality?

Data from IMRG's Online Retail Index shows that the percentage of site search usage in Q1 2024 (13%) was higher than the usage in Q1 2023 (10%), indicating growing reliance on this feature.

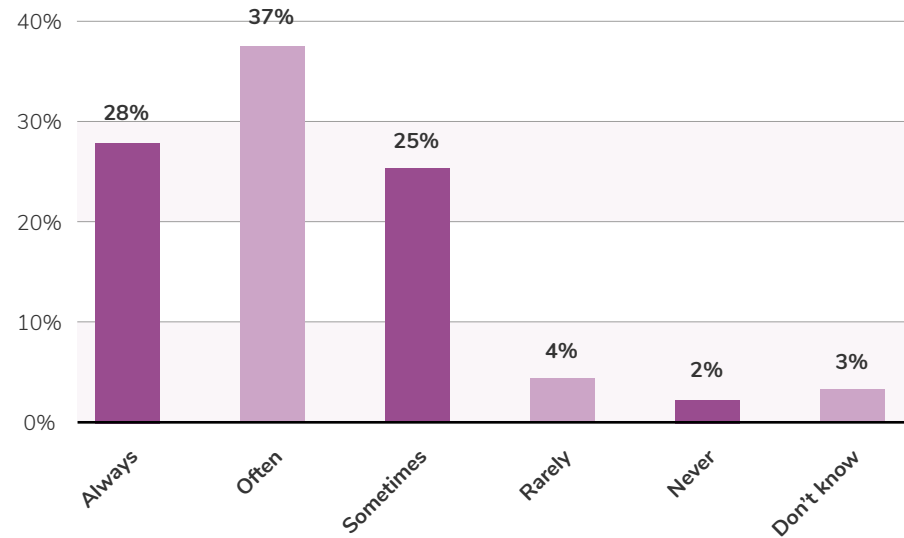
In Q4 2023, site search usage surged to 16%, reflecting a strong buying intent among customers seeking specific Black Friday and Christmas deals. This marked increase compared to Q4 2022 can be attributed to the improvements in supply chain issues, which ensured better product availability, and a slight alleviation of economic pressures, which boosted consumer confidence and spending, leading them to use the functionality more.

Site search Percentage - Market Average



Klevu's data shows that 65% of the 1,900 adults who have shopped online in the last six months noted that they 'Always' or 'Often' use the search bar functionality, proving it is an important part of a customer's buying journey. This is especially the case for younger demographics (aged 18-34) who noted that they 'always' use it. For all age groups, only 6% 'rarely' or 'never' use it and 3% don't know if they do.

How often, if at all, do you use the search bar functionality when shopping online (Please select the option that best applies).



Unweighted base: All of GB adults who have shopped online in the last 6 months (1,900),
Source: Klevu survey, May 2024

Site search's correlation with average conversion rates

IMRG's research into site search usage in 2022 revealed some compelling insights. From January 1st to December 31st, 2022, the average conversion rate for customers who did not use the search feature was 2.6%. In contrast, existing customers who used search had an average conversion rate of 7.6%, highlighting how site search usage can significantly boost online growth.

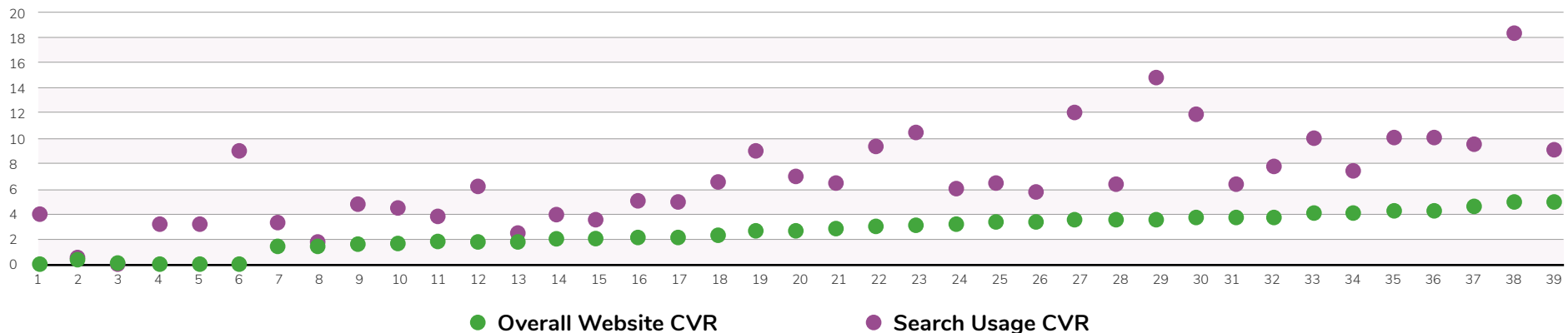
New customers using site search had an average conversion rate of 5.6%, also markedly higher than those who did not use the feature.

It is clear to see from this chart how impactful site search is on eCommerce conversion rates.

Between 1st Jan to 31st Dec 2022, what was the conversion rate for New and Existing customers who used site search during their session?

	CVR Rate
New Customers using Search	5.6%
Existing Customers using Search	7.6%
Any customer not using Search	2.6%

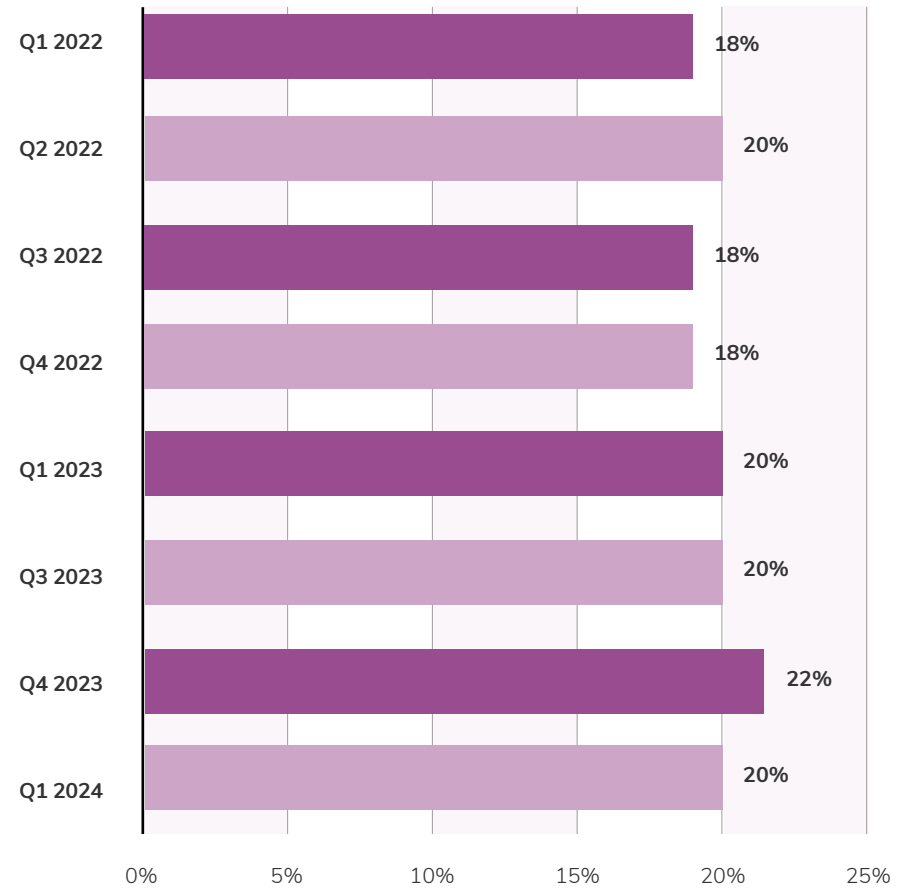
Industry average website conversion rate, Overall website CVR vs. Search usage CVR.



The market average search page exit rate

The market average search page exit rate in Q1 2024 was 20%, which is consistent with trends from previous quarters. Retailers experiencing higher exit rates should explore strategies to enhance the relevance of their search results. Effective approaches include leveraging AI and personalisation, implementing natural language processing (NLP) to automatically correct spelling errors and interpret long-tail keywords, offering more niche filter options, and improving overall navigation.

Search page exit rate: Defined as the percentage of visits that leave the website when the last viewed page was a search result page.



The value of product recommendations

Creating hyper-personalised online experiences

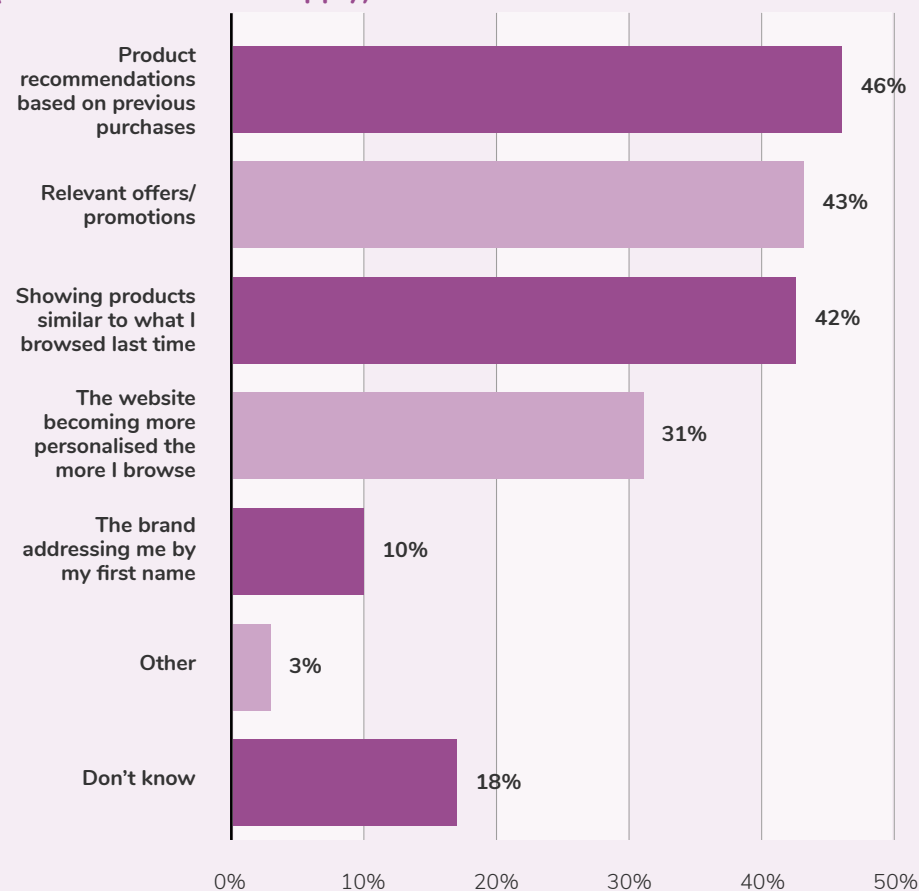
Personalisation has become crucial for online retail growth, so it's essential to grasp what customers expect from it and how it can add value. When asked about their views on personalisation, 46% of respondents said it means receiving product recommendations based on previous purchases. According to a Monetate study, even shoppers who clicked on a product recommendation but didn't make a purchase showed higher engagement rates, being 20% more likely to revisit the site later.

Customers expect retailers to analyse their past purchasing behaviour to guide them toward suitable products on their next visit. For those who haven't made a purchase yet, 42% believe retailers should show products similar to those they previously browsed. However, it's important to offer a varied mix of items. Just because a customer showed interest in a particular product before doesn't mean they will want the same type again — for instance, it might have been a gift and is not something they would buy for themselves.

Monetate comments:

Seeing but not engaging with a recommendation has a similar impact as seeing no product recommendations at all. For shoppers shown no recommendations, the average order value (AOV) was \$107.04, with an average of 3 items bought, compared to an AOV of \$101.63 and 2.9 items for those shown irrelevant recommendations.

What does personalisation on an online store mean to you? (Please select all that apply)



Unweighted base: All GB adults who have shopped online in the last 6 months (1,900).
Source: Klevu study, May 2024

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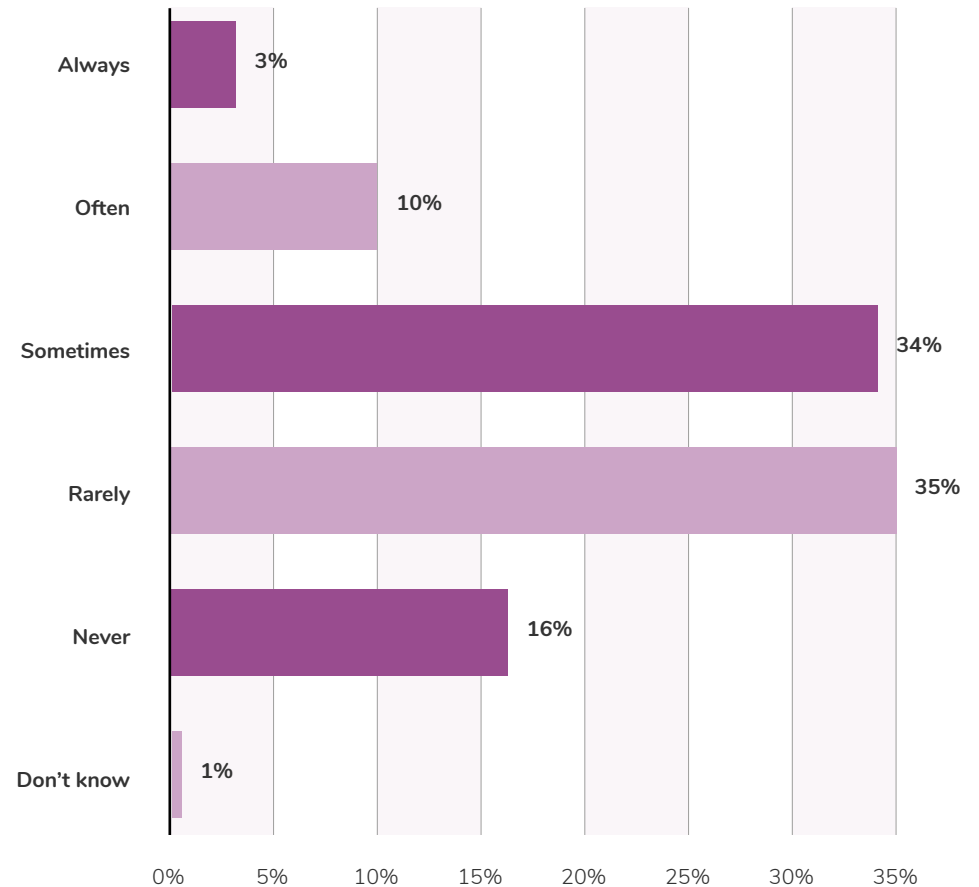
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Although most define personalisation as product recommendations based on past purchases, only 13% of the 1,900 customers who shopped online in the last six months noted that they are 'Always' or 'Often' influenced by product recommendations, such as "users also bought," "style with," and "similar products."

The average retailer would benefit from putting greater focus on ensuring product recommendations are sufficiently personalised to individual customers' preferences. Breaking the trends down by demographic, it is clear that retailers are more successful at influencing the younger population (18–34-year-olds); 26% of this group 'Always' or 'Often' are influenced by product recommendations.

34% are 'Sometimes' influenced by these recommendations, 35% are 'Rarely' influenced, and 16% are 'Never' influenced, showing that work is needed to ensure that there is product relevancy for all customers.

How often, if at all, are you influenced by product recommendations e.g., 'users also bought,' 'style with,' 'similar products'? (Please select the option that best applies).



Unweighted base: All GB adults who have shopped online in the last 6 months (1,900).
Source: Klevu study, May 2024

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What happens when customers don't like product recommendations? The search bar can save the day

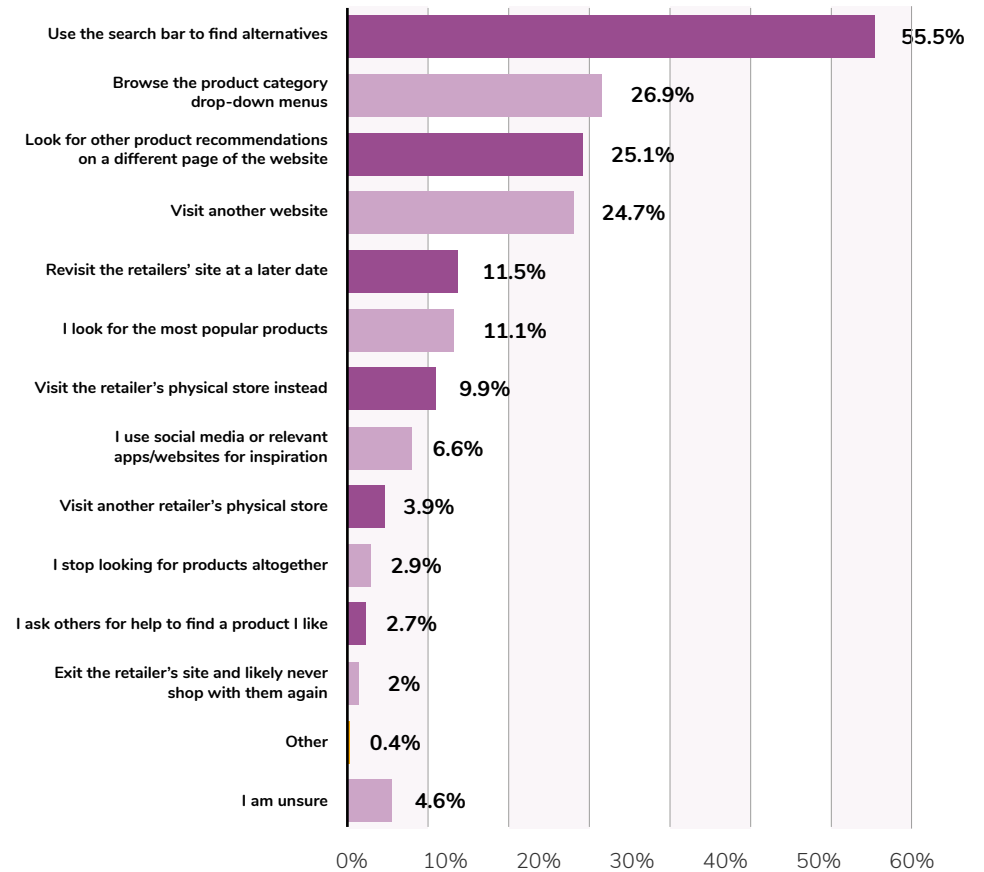
Research from IMRG's personalisation and AI study in 2023 showed what a customer will do once they receive product recommendations that they don't like. Interestingly, over half (55.5%) will return to the search bar to find better alternatives. This shows the incremental value of the search bar feature and highlights how customers are willing to give retailers a second chance.

Close to 25% will decide to shop with a different retailer if they dislike the products a retailer recommends, suggesting that it is better to get it right the first time around.

Monetate comments:

A study by Monetate aimed to measure the sales impact of product recommendations revealed that online shoppers who engaged with a recommended product had a 70% higher conversion rate than those who did not during that session. Meanwhile, return sessions saw a 55% increase in conversion rate. Personalised product recommendations are an important component of modern shopper journeys at any stage of the purchasing process, but their value is even more pronounced when they resonate with shoppers on first contact.

What are often/would be your first points of action if you dislike the products a retailer recommends?



Source: The Power Of Personalisation & AI In Ecommerce Report, IMRG and Adobe Commerce, 2023

Site search and product discovery

Klevu explores the power of using both

Integrating search and product discovery (e.g., product recommendations, complete the set bundling, etc.) is essential for meeting shopping intent effectively.

One of the key factors that impact search and product discovery performance is **relevance**. Businesses can use relevance algorithms that consider a variety of factors, such as the shopper's search term, browsing history, and purchase history. These algorithms help ensure that the most relevant results are displayed at the top of the search results page. This sounds complicated, and it is. But it's easy with an AI search and product discovery platform.

Another key factor is **speed**. No one likes to wait, especially when shopping online. A slow search or product discovery process can lead to frustration and a negative customer experience. That's why it's important to optimise the search process for speed, using techniques such as indexing, caching, and pre-loading data.

User interface is also crucial when it comes to search and product discovery. To make the search and product discovery process simple and intuitive, businesses must use a clear, uncluttered design, and organise their products into categories and subcategories that are easy to understand.

Product categorisation and faceted navigation are two best practices for optimising search and product discovery. Product categorisation helps shoppers find the products they're interested in quickly and easily by grouping similar products together. Faceted navigation allows shoppers to refine their search results by selecting specific criteria, such as colour, size, price, and brand. This can greatly improve the relevance of the results, making it easier for shoppers to find exactly what they're looking for.

Best practices for optimising search & product discovery

Optimise the search bar itself

Make it large, central, prominent and stand out. Show examples of major retailers such as eBay and Amazon. The search bar is there for a reason. They have thousands of products they want to sell. Many retailers copy Apple's search icon but they in comparison do not have many products to actually search for.

Make the search bar easy to find. Avoid clutter around with newsletter signup etc.

Use search prompts as keywords in the search bar and encourage natural language search. E.g. search for a particular grape of wine, or style.

Push for the search bar to be always visible as the users scroll down any page. This can make searching easier if they cannot find what they are looking for.

Seasalt Cornwall did multivariate testing on the prominence and placement of their search box, encouraging 42% more sessions with search, which drove a 47% increase in revenue YoY.

Make sure your search bar actually works

Ensure your search can handle typos, long descriptive queries, and even price range searches.

Paul Smith went from a manual search engine to AI, trusting Klevu's AI to automatically merchandise products. Results: Revenue from search increased by 74%, and eCommerce conversion rate improved by 31%. Notably, conversion rates from men's category pages went up by 33.75% YoY during peak trading.

Search starts at the click, not the keystroke

Use a search overlay that appears when shoppers click into the search bar. Optimise this with imagery, trending products, banners and more. Enable rollover images to allow users to see more views of a product directly from the search page and encourage users to interact with it.

Make filters and facets dynamic

On category pages or search results listing pages, ensure your shoppers can drill down to the exact products they are looking for by connecting your facets and filters directly to the attributes in your product catalogue.

Enable content search

Include accessible after-sales information and blog articles in search results. Surface non-product content if it is relevant to the search term. Users who do their research of a product are more likely to buy from those retailers as they are seen as a source of authority on the subject. Use merchandising banners to link to non-product content where the search term is relevant to it e.g. Arthritis in dogs, if you have a page about it.

Monetate's 5 techniques for improving search & discovery

- 1 •• → Consider including product recommendations in autosuggest dropdowns and search suggestion boxes as users type their queries (or even before they type a query within search flyover elements). This helps guide users towards relevant products early in their search process.
- 2 •• → Display related or recommended products directly on the search results page (SRP) based on the search query. These recommendations can appear as organic suggestions that complement the search results and can be styled to mirror the product listings grid or restyled to serve as product showcase blocks.
- 3 •• → Offer product recommendations within filter and sorting options on the search results page. For example, provide a “Recommended for You” filter that prioritises products based on user preferences and browsing history.
- 4 •• → When a search query returns no results or empty results, display product recommendations that closely match the user’s intent or provide similar or trending options that might interest them.
- 5 •• → Display additional products in the shopping cart based on the items already selected by the user from a search query. This can include accessories, related items, or items frequently bought together to increase average order value (AOV).

The presentation of search and filter functions

Customers want to be able to find products quickly with a limited number of steps required. By optimising the presentation of search and filter functions on their website, retailers can improve the user experience.

How can retailers present the search functionality?

Keep the search bar open

Open search bars, where the search function is always visible, are more frequently used than closed search bars hidden behind an icon. According to IMRG data from 2022, 30 out of 38 retailers had open search bars on their desktop sites. This popularity indicates significant benefits in terms of usability and accessibility.

Position it centrally or to the right

Most retailers position the search function at the centre or right of the desktop screen, leaving the left side for product categories and brand imagery. This layout aligns with typical eye movement from left to right: customers first identify the brand on the left and then quickly locate the search feature as their eyes move to the right.

Implement autosuggestions

Autosuggestions enhance the search experience by offering suggested text either directly in the search bar or upon clicking it. In 2022, 29 out of 38 retailers incorporated autosuggestions, making it easier for customers to find products and reducing search time.

How can retailers present the filter functionality?

Design and layout

A minimalist, clutter-free interface with clear visual hierarchy enhances usability. Ensure filters are responsive and user-friendly across all devices. Sticky filters that remain visible as users scroll through product listings improve accessibility.

Style

Consistent styling with uniform fonts, colours, and buttons creates a cohesive look. Interactive elements like sliders for price ranges and checkboxes for categories engage users visually. Small icons/thumbnails such as for colour, brands, and product categories can enable quicker navigation.

Structure

Group filters logically by categories such as price, brand, and size for intuitive navigation. Retailers can use expandable sections to keep the interface tidy and allow users to access relevant options easily. The 'sort by' option in the filter should be placed near the top, especially because the most popular filter selected by customers is 'price - low-high.'

Functionality

Display applied filters prominently and offer simple options for removal or reset to enhance user control. Retailers can also include a search bar within filters for quick access to specific options. Offering a "recently used filters" section can show the most recent filters applied by the customer, and a help button can guide customers on effective filter use.

Improving site navigation

Site navigation trends Q1 2023 Vs 2024

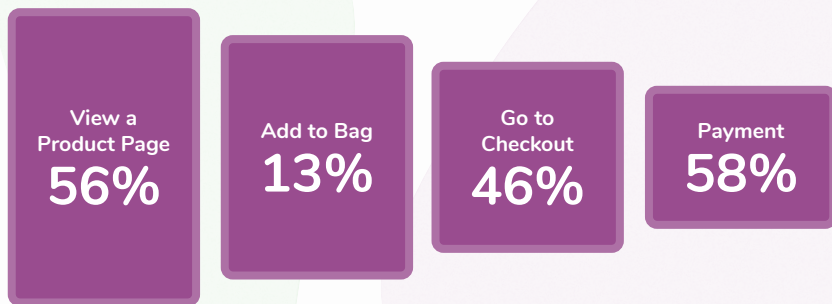
Analysing behaviour trends helps identify which parts of the purchasing funnel are performing well and which areas need improvement.

According to IMRG's Online Retail Index, 58% of customers visiting an eCommerce site in Q1 2024 viewed a product page, a 2% increase from Q1 2023. However, only 13% of customers added an item to their bag, a static and relatively low figure, indicating the need for strategies to drive positive performance.

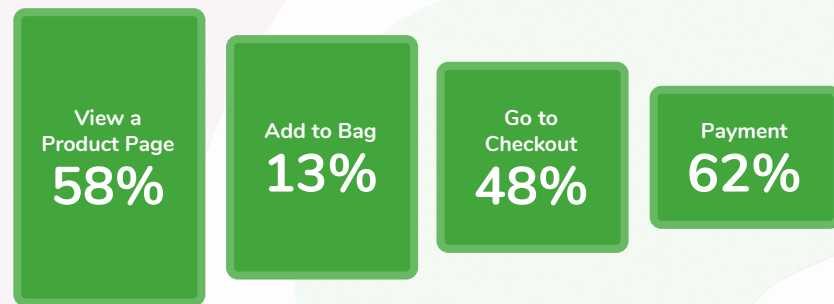
While the percentage of customers proceeding to checkout increased by 2%, the most notable improvement was at the payment stage, which saw a 4% uptick. This suggests a positive trend in converting interest into completed sales, but more effort is needed earlier in the funnel for retailers to meet their targets.

Customer purchasing funnel trends, Total Market Average, Q1 2023 vs. Q1 2024 (Source: IMRG's Online Retail Index)

Q1 2023



Q1 2024



Where are customers most likely to drop-off?

This chart displays quarterly trends for various eCommerce metrics from Q1 2022 to Q1 2024, focusing on basket abandonment, checkout abandonment, homepage bounce rate, homepage exit rate, product page exit rate, and search page exit rate.

Here are some of the key trends:

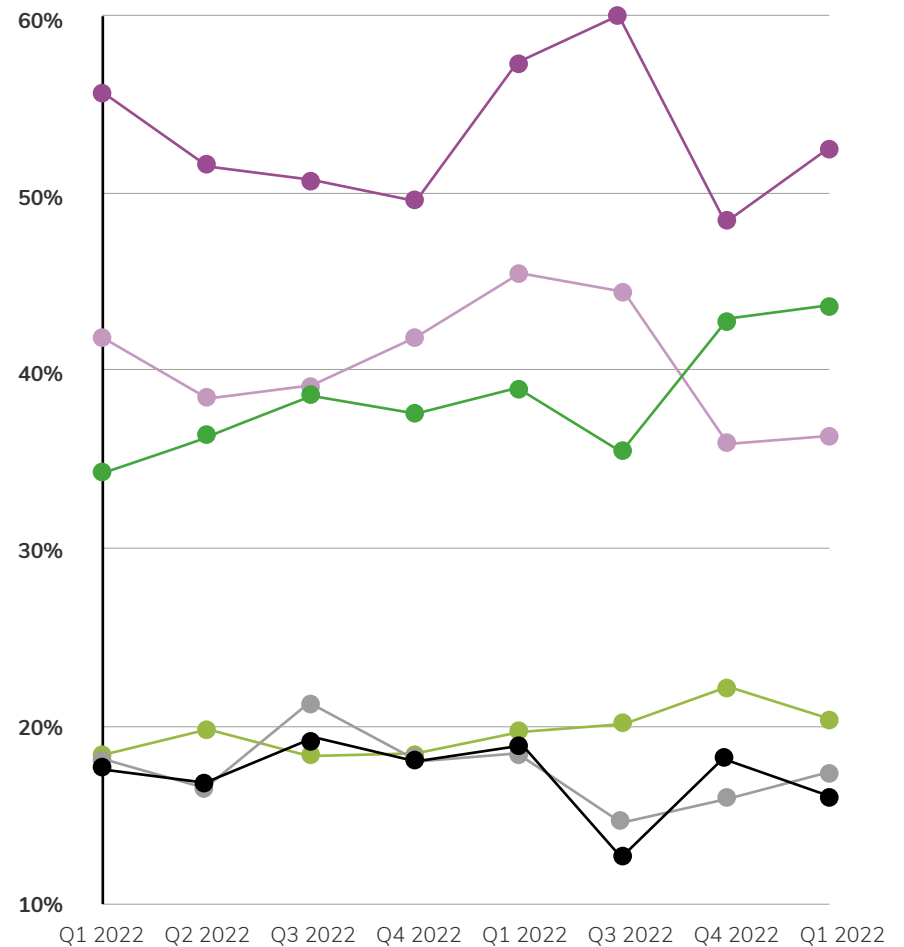
Basket Abandonment: The basket abandonment rate fluctuates significantly, peaking around Q3 2023 at over 60% before declining slightly by Q1 2024. This indicates a persistent issue with customers not completing their purchases after adding items to their basket.

Checkout Abandonment: Promisingly, there has been a decrease in checkout abandonment rates relative to 2023, which could owe to the easing of cost-of-living pressures and stronger checkout optimisation techniques.

Homepage Metrics: The homepage bounce rate and homepage exit rate remain relatively stable, with minor fluctuations. For retailers with high exit rates, they should focus on improving initial engagement on their site.

Product and Search Page Metrics: Product page exit rates and search page exit rates are more stable, averaging around 20%. However, both metrics experienced slight increases towards the end of 2023, which may indicate emerging issues in product presentation or search functionality.

Total Market average exit and abandonment rates, Q1 2022 - Q1 2024



● Basket abandonment
 ● Checkout abandonment
 ● Home page bounce rate
 ● Home page exit rate
 ● Product page exit rate
 ● Search page exit rate

Source: IMRG's Online Retail Index

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Conclusion

This report has revealed how prioritising customer engagement strategies, specifically focussing on site search and product discovery, can increase revenue, grow acquisition and retention rates, and improve conversion metrics.

By focussing on these key areas and refining strategies, using tips as those offered by Klevu and Monetate, retailers can navigate the challenges of the current market, enhance customer experiences, and ultimately drive growth in the eCommerce sector. Consistent adaptation and innovation can help retailers to maintain competitive advantage and meet evolving customer expectations.

Here are the key takeaways from this report:

1. Online retail is still experiencing significant Year-on-Year revenue declines. Retailers can make the most of big events in the calendar, such as the Euros, the Olympics, and Black Friday to boost performance in H2.
2. The site search functionality is critical, with 65% of online shoppers frequently using it to find products. Implementing niche filters and autocomplete features can streamline the browsing and purchasing process, reducing bounce rates.
3. Consider aesthetics and search bar capabilities. The search bar should stand out so that it is easily identifiable to all customers. It should be visible both above and below the fold to prompt usage. An optimised search bar should have the capability to understand and provide results for more niche search terms and sentences, reducing the risk of 'no results' pages.
4. When it comes to search and product recommendations, retailers can prioritise best-selling items with high user ratings, which is one way to enhance customer satisfaction and limit returns. They can also prioritise new collections, or a 'recommended for you' drop down option in the search bar to build on personalisation efforts.
5. Product recommendations are what most customers define as personalisation on online retail sites. However, 51% feel that they are 'rarely' or 'never' influenced by the recommendations they're offered, suggesting a greater push is needed to ensure hyper-relevancy.
6. Add to bag rates have proven the most difficult to grow, remaining at 13% for Q1 in the last two years. Retailers can explore how their customers are navigating their online store to improve these levels, as well as reduce basket abandonment.



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