

Website search checklist

Is your website search leaving
money on the table?



Checklist: Your site search

Whether you're examining your current site search solution, comparing vendors, or analysing user experience (UX) across your digital properties, this checklist will help you ensure all the valuable opportunities are covered.

Golden rule	Requirements	Notes for your website
<p>1. Make search prominent</p> <p><i>Users have been trained by the likes of Google and Amazon to look for a large, prominent search bar. So make your search obvious.</i></p>	<p>Ensure your site design places search in a prominent position. A full search bar is more obvious than a small magnifying glass, and will result in more searches. Consider placing search in an obvious central position, rather than in the top right hand corner.</p>	
<p>2. Constantly coach your search results</p> <p><i>Users quickly abandon a search when the results are irrelevant and out of date. Make sure your search results are accurate and current.</i></p>	<p>No matter your search tool, frequently groom the search results for your highest value search terms. Ensure your solution allows you to tune your collections to fit your organizational needs. Ideally, you should have complete control over the results pages and the ability to promote and hide URLs.</p>	
<p>3. Index all relevant content</p> <p><i>List all the different data sources you will need to index content from. (For example, your CMS, GIS, social media, event calendar, staff directory, maps, and any databases.)</i></p>	<p>Make sure your search provider can index multiple data sources. Many stop at your CMS. A truly useful search experience crosses silos and provides access to all relevant data.</p>	

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<p>4. Empower your search users</p> <p><i>Your site search users will want different things from the same search query - make sure you allow them to filter and refine their results</i></p>	<p>Ensure your search tool empowers users to control their search experience. Facets allow users to quickly drill down on sub sections of interest within a search. Contextual navigation allows them to alter or expand their search query (like Google's related searches).</p>	
<p>5. Allow for synonyms and misspellings</p> <p><i>Not every user will be familiar with your internal language. Some of your users will have english as their second language. Allow users to find content regardless.</i></p>	<p>Your site search tool must allow you to create your own synonyms, as well as giving you insight into the words which site visitors are using in search. Ensure your CMS caters for misspellings, for example through 'did you mean' prompts.</p>	
<p>6. Design matters</p> <p><i>Your site search shouldn't detract from your site design or user experience objectives.</i></p>	<p>Your search page should entice people to click. The better your search page looks, the longer users spend on it. Your search page must match your site design, and be enriched with maps, people profiles, and rich media thumbnails.</p>	

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<p>7. Get personal</p> <p><i>Use your search engine for more than information retrieval. A true insight engine allows you to personalise content across your site relating to what you know about a visitor.</i></p>	<p>Your site search solution should have the capacity to drive personalised experiences, be it at a macro or micro level.</p>	
<p>8. Understand your content</p> <p><i>Use your search tool to give you sophisticated insights into your content so that you can improve it over time.</i></p>	<p>Your search tool should be capable of providing insight into the content it is indexing. This includes user-friendly reviews of relevant metadata (author, date etc.), assessing the reading age, or checking for duplicate content or broken links. Consider using it to discover undesirable content.</p>	
<p>9. Understand user behaviour</p> <p><i>Sophisticated insights and analytics help you understand how your users interact with your site search, and permit you to take action to improve the search experience.</i></p>	<p>Site search is an integral part of your digital platform. Independently or as part of a broader dashboard, you should be aware of trends and shifts in behavior on your search page and able to react quickly to account for these changes.</p>	

Thank you

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