

SEARCH BEYOND THE BOX

Innovative user experiences
for improving e-commerce
conversion rates



Why read this book

A simplistic view of the customer journey: **search bar > click > add to cart** can be costly. Search is not simply about helping the user find what they are looking for. Today's consumers come to your site for experiences, and it is inspiring experiences that will keep them returning.

Market leaders use search technology as an underexploited strategic weapon, driving KPIs like conversion rates — and stickiness, engagement, and increased basket size. In this book, we'll look at innovative ways in which search and discovery can power creative discovery experiences for your users, and better business results for you.

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Search matters (in numbers)

But really, why read this book?

Why spend time on moving your site's search experience forward?

Bad search is expensive

Things are simple as this: if the user can't find what they are looking for, they will bounce and go to a competitor.

FORRESTER

"43% of site visitors
go immediately to
search boxes"

Forrester Research



"shoppers using search
spend 2.6x more"

Salesforce
Demandware

 **kissmetrics**

"12% of users
will go to a competitor's
site after an
unsuccessful search"

KISSMetrics

Users remember bad search experiences

While great search provides an impression of an overall smooth customer experience, bad search is far more memorable:



"So many e-commerce
sites still suck really badly.

Too little information,
too inconvenient to
browse and search.
Ripe for disruption."

@giffengrabber



"The search functionality
in Spotify actually sucks
pretty bad. How can I find
more playlists!?!"

Where are they hiding
the good playlists!?!"

@Voyno



".@Rackspace gaaaaah!
your webmail search
SUCKS!!! it doesn't work
on finding "mail from"
an email address"

@flatpooks

Great search produces business results

Which KPIs you are tracking depend on your vertical and your business, but across the board, improving your site's search experience will improve your KPIs.

RetailMeNot.inc.

↑ 13%

Click through rate
compared to
previous solution

BIRCHBOX ♦

↑ 12%

Increase in average
order value

↑ 9%

Increase in
conversion rate

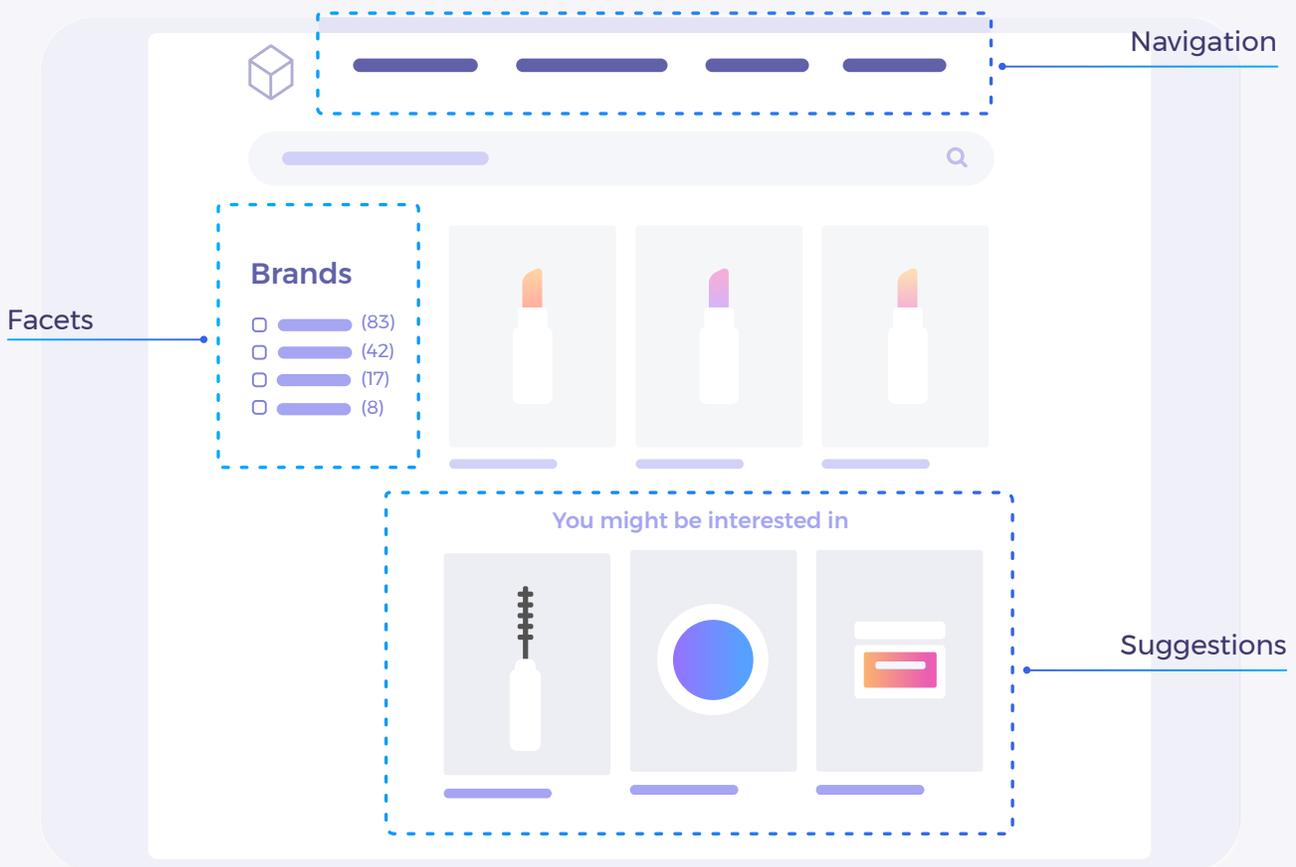
JB HI-FI

+35%

Conversion rate
from searches
to checkout

User intent: search beyond the box

At its essence, search is about harnessing the user's intent and connecting it to the product users want to find. Users can indicate intent in many different ways: by typing directly into the search bar, leveraging filters and facets, or even clicking suggestions you provided because you know something about their preferences. Anything that the user directly tells or imparts to you is something that can be leveraged to ensure that what they are seeing and finding is relevant to them.



Covering the basics

Before considering advanced use cases, it is key to ensure that the basic elements of your search technology are in place. First and foremost: are the results coming to the user relevant to them? There are several different aspects of relevance that are useful to differentiate between, and we'll list them in order of importance:

Textual relevance

The name of a product, its brand, keywords in the description — what we call attributes — constitute textual relevance. Textual relevance means reading correctly into the user's intent even if they misspelled a word or used a stop word (the, and, at, with...). It also means giving them a synonym result (offering a parka when they typed in "jacket"), and making sure that plurals are accounted for (searching for "feet warmers" should display foot warmers).

Business relevance

You can leverage your own business metrics to further impart relevance, ensuring that the user sees content they are most likely to act on. You could, for example, be tracking conversion rates on your products, and wanting to display first the result with the highest conversion rate.

Personalization is a proverbial cherry on top for stellar relevance, and it can be considered at a user level or at a group level. Let's say a user is not logged in but you know they are in a certain age bracket or from a certain country — in that case, we are talking group level personalization. If they are in fact logged in, and you know their browsing or purchase history, you can take advantage of personalization at the user level.



Textual Relevance

Typo-tolerance
Synonyms
Language-agnostic
Advanced language
processing



Business Metrics

Conversion rates
Media views
Comment counts
... and more



Personalization

User behaviour
User preferences
Contextual awareness

Personalization is all about taking signals from your user: the conscious signals they are sending you by interacting with your user interface, and the more subconscious, latent signals coming from their past preference indications.

User experience: advanced use cases

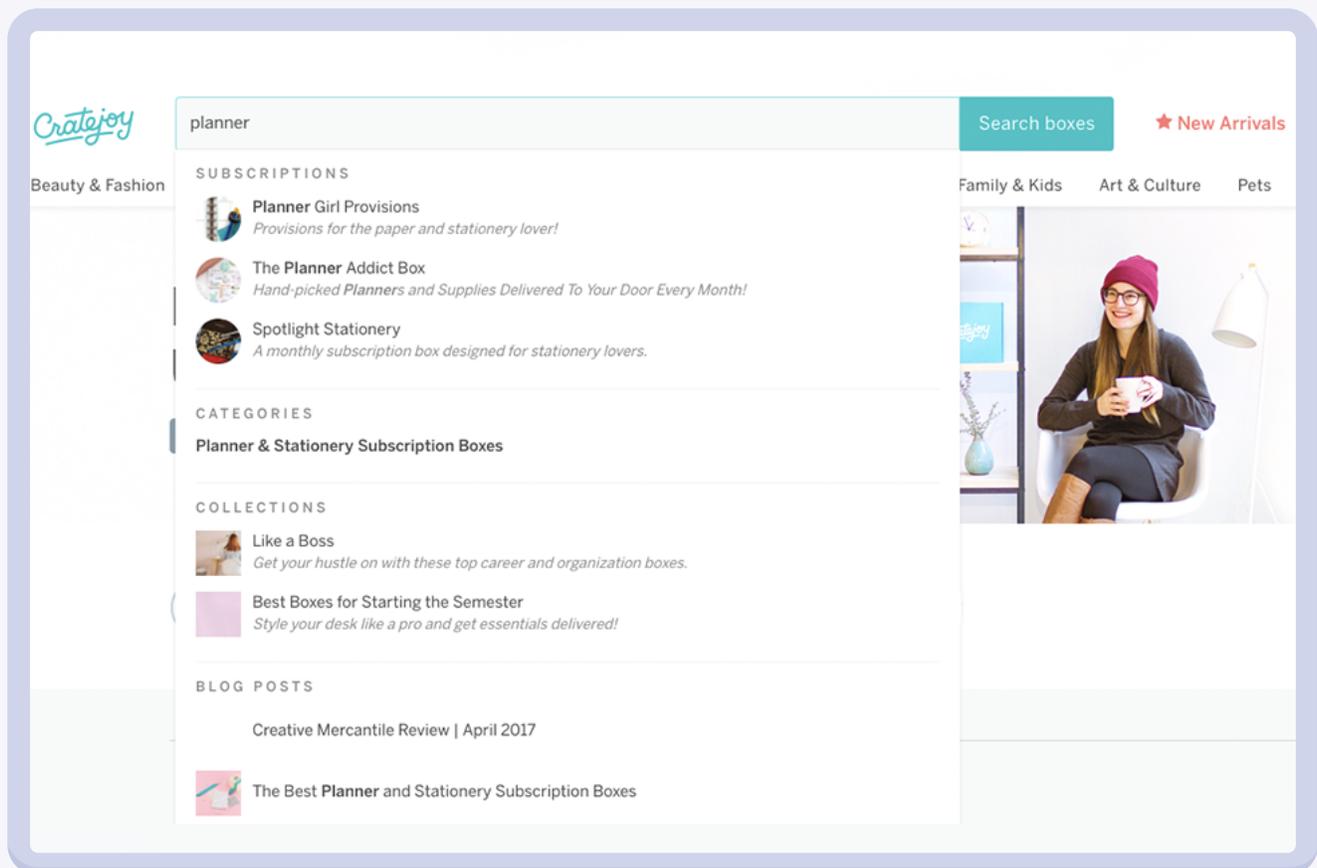
There was a time when search was just a box: a box to check on your list of website elements, and a box for users to enter queries into. This is no longer the case. Advanced technologies are raising the bar for customer experiences, which are, as Forrester put it, “becoming not only omnichannel but more multisensory and complex to design. To adapt, companies must embrace a design thinking approach focused not on technology but on ease, effectiveness, and emotion.”

With this in mind, search technologies must offer users the most logical and most inspiring ways to get to the shopping cart. This means going past the standard usage of the search box. Here, we'll take to examples to illustrate how search technology powers search experiences beyond the box.

Multiple paths to conversion

[Cratejoy](#) is an e-commerce website that makes it easy for users to subscribe to boxes of products they'll love. Their search experience is particularly interesting, because they leverage something we call multi-category autocomplete. Here, the user is searching within multiple content types at once, while having an autocomplete experience. This allows the user to indicate their content type preference by further diving into it.

For example, if a user types “planner” in the search box, they can instantly choose a subscription, a category, a collection related to planners — or, if none of that works, dive into a blog post. This is interesting because it offers the user multiple paths into different types of content, which translates into multiple paths to conversion, based on user’s personal preferences and ways of processing information.



Facets: filters with special intelligence

[The Kooples](#) is a popular European clothing brand. Similarly to Cratejoy, their search is an as-you-type experience, but they have another interesting feature that showcases advanced search possibilities. Let's say a user types in "dress" in the search box: on the left, facets will appear.

What exactly are facets?

We are all familiar with filters as a way to narrow down our search result options. A facet is a filter that is intertwined with the result sets: the only facets that appear are the ones that match result sets. This prevents a "no result" type of screen experience, which almost universally causes users to bounce. Looking at our "dress" facets, we already know the number of items available in each category, together with the pricing.

The Kooples
PARIS

SEARCH

CATEGORIES

- FOR HER (16)
- GIFT FOR HER (3)
- WEDDING (1)
- WOMEN (79)
- WOMEN SPORT (2)

Sort by :



DRESS
~~\$365.00~~ **\$219.00**



CHINA CREPE SILK **DRESS** WITH
A BLUE BIRD PRINT
\$350.00

If a user refines her search query to, let's say, a "silk dress", we see that the categories available to her have decreased, showing only applicable facets.

The Kooples
PARIS

SEARCH dress silk ✕

CATEGORIES

FOR HER (7)
WOMEN (23)

COLORS

BLACK RED
 ECRU BEIGE-BLACK
 BURGUNDY ECRU RED
 NAVY

Sort by : RELEVANCE ▼


CHINA CREPE **SILK DRESS** WITH
A BLUE BIRD PRINT
\$350.00

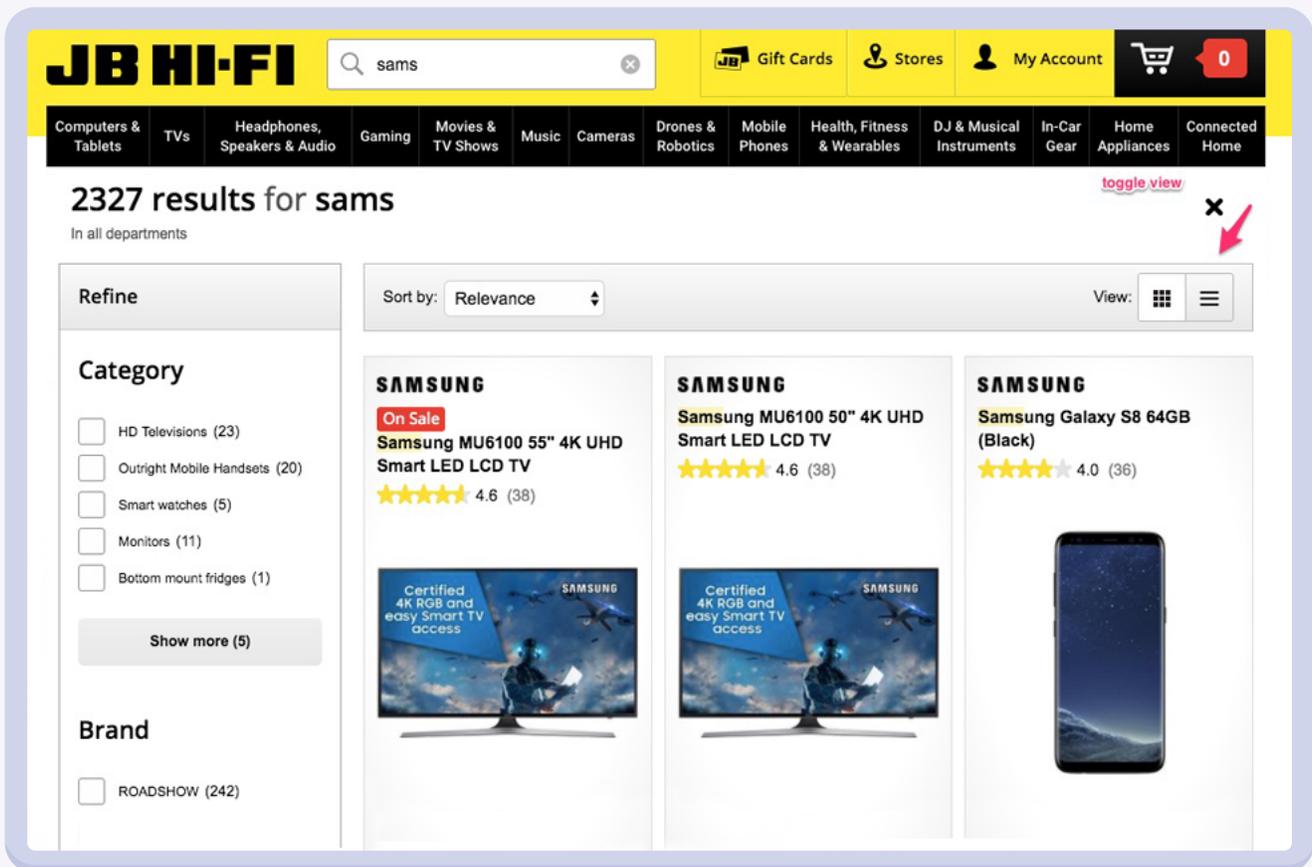

DUFFEL **DRESS** WITH **SILK**
SCREEN DESIGN
\$190.00

This means that in a few keystrokes and clicks, the user finds the very item they want. Compare this with a long list of items that comes with a standard search bar experience — by far superior.

Letting the user define the interface

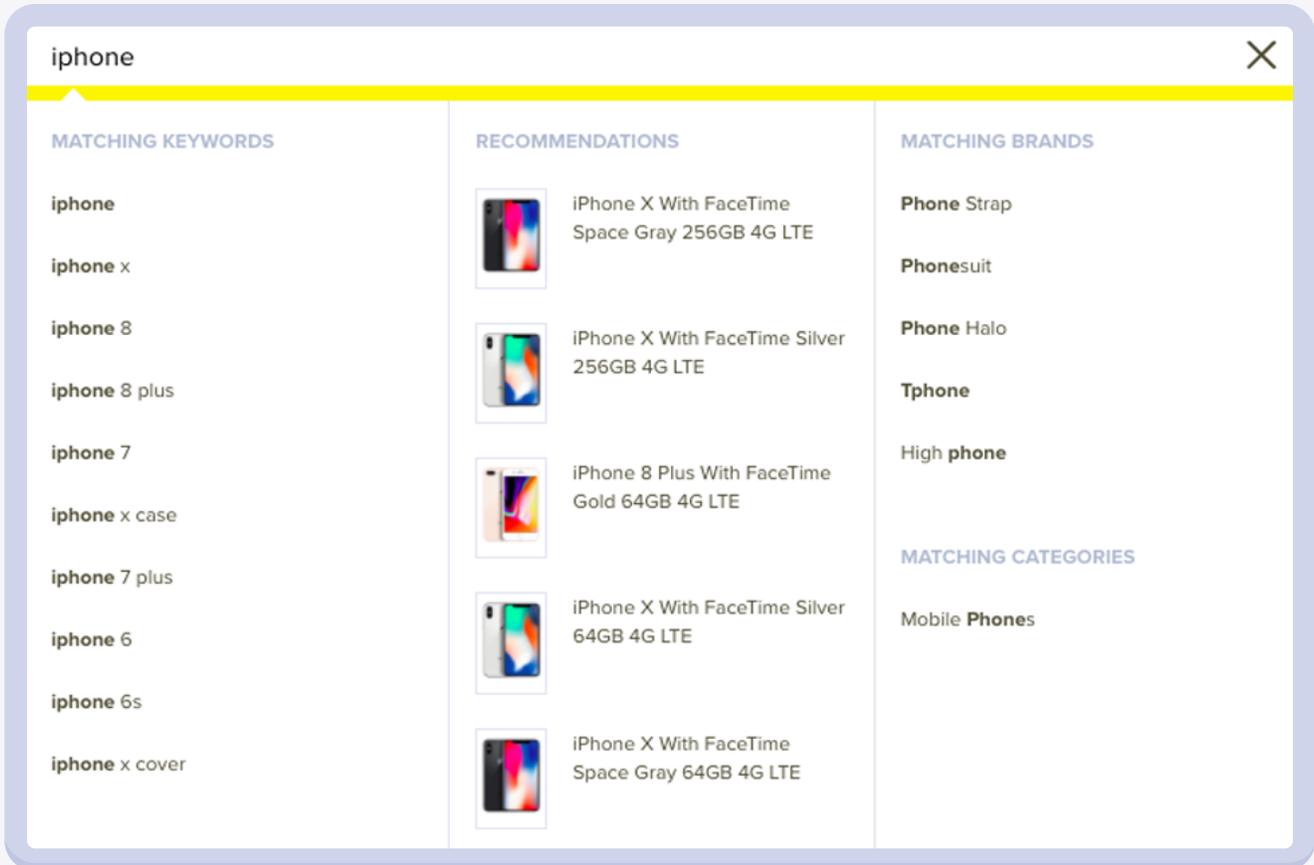
Search on [JB Hi-Fi](#) offers a unique user experience — what we call an autocomplete overlay. When the user types in a query, a new, large overlay window pops up, offering users to dive into additional facets via the “Show more” and “Show less” buttons, as well as a price range filter.

Another nice UX addition: letting the users toggle the view, indicating what is useful for them in terms of the interface itself.

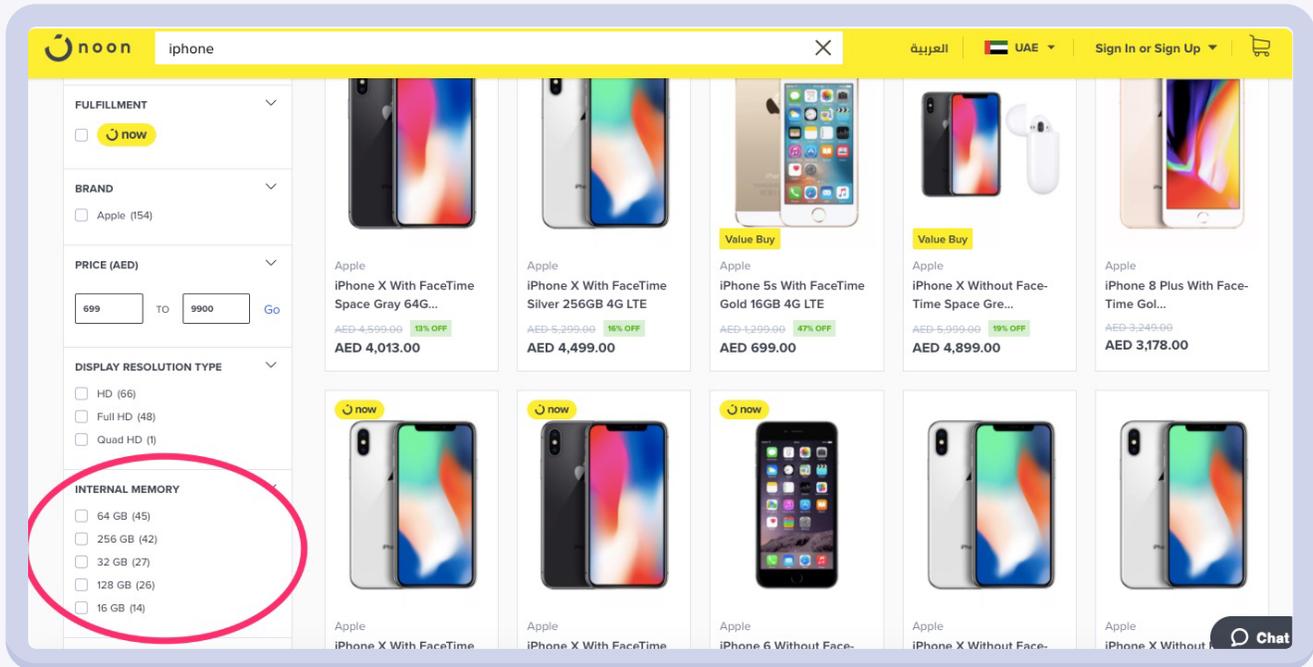


Recommendations and dynamic faceting

[Noon](#), a popular e-commerce store, offers a multi-category autocomplete experience, but in a slightly different manner. They not only show matching keywords, but also matching brands and matching categories as recommendations. In short, they are giving users an easy way to drill down into what they really want.

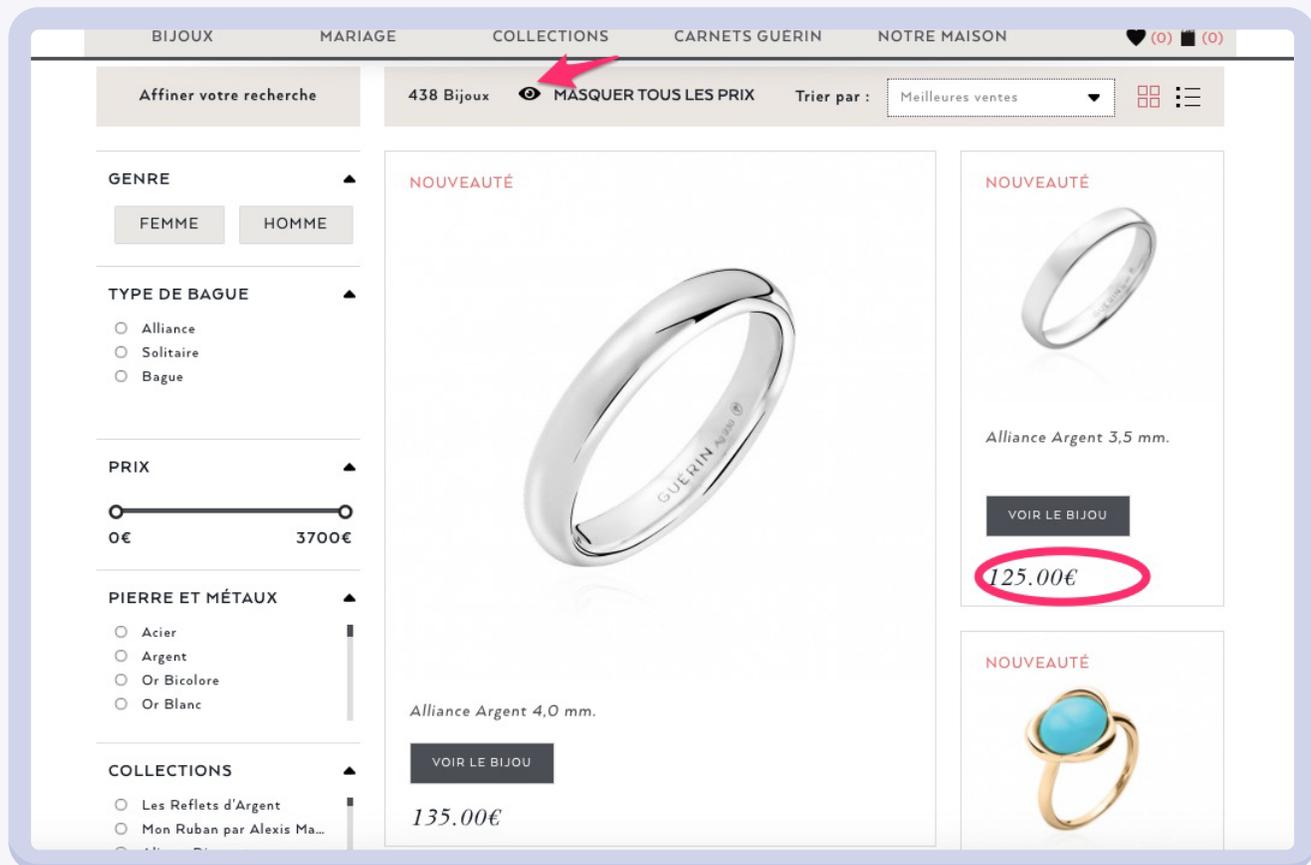


Here, we also see an advanced use case of dynamic faceting. When a user searches for “iPhone”, she gets applicable advanced facets, such as internal memory or screen sizes specific to iPhones — the “internal memory” facet might not be applicable to other products.



Understanding the audience

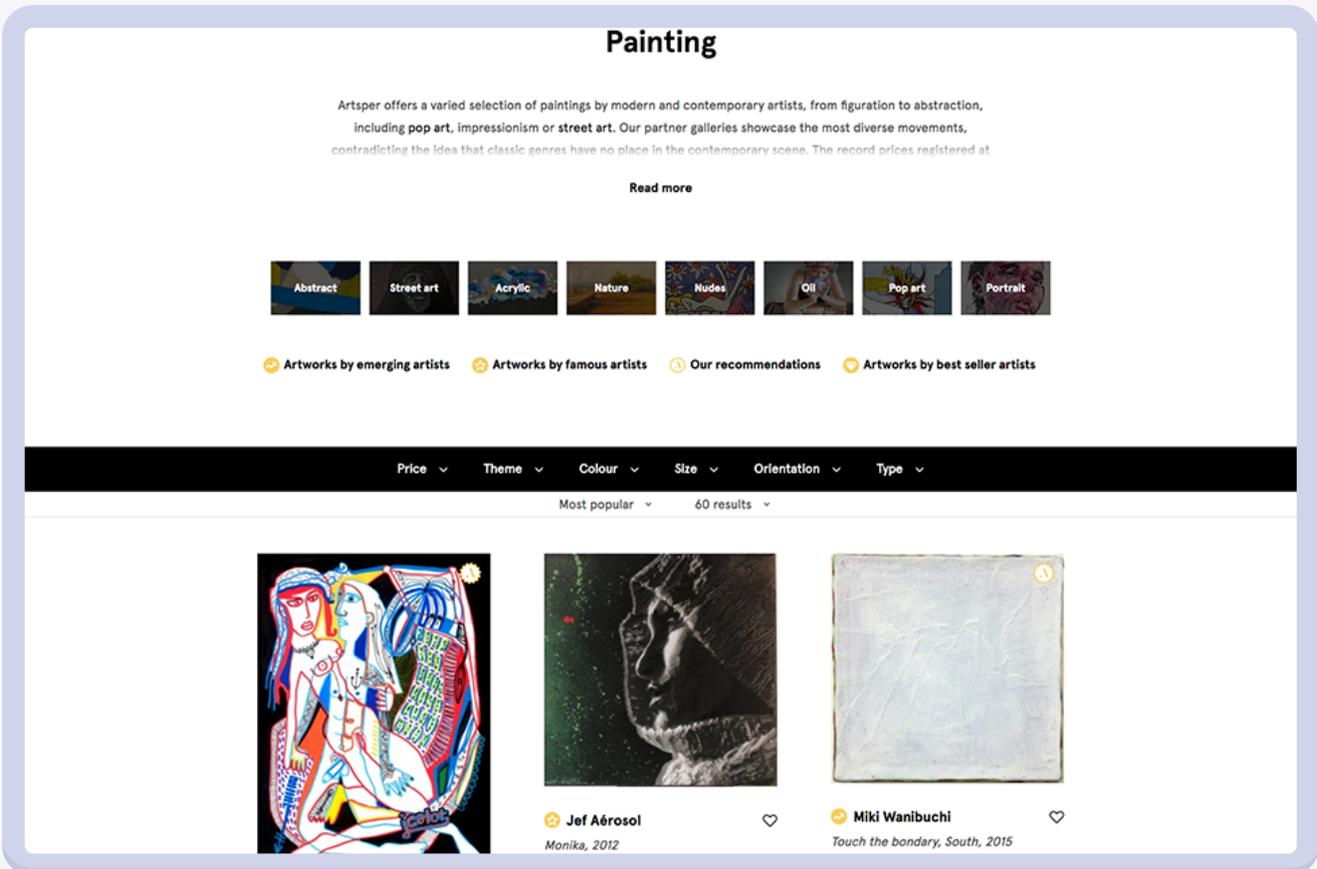
[Guerin](#), a French jewelry retailer, does a few interesting things to support an advanced customer journey. The very click on the search bar — without the user typing anything in at all — reveals several suggestions, which are frequently asked questions from their support center (the first one, for example, is “how to select your ring size?”). This is a great way to show understanding of customers’ desires and move them along their journey, while significantly reducing the number of support tickets.



Another innovative solution: Guerin allows the shopper to hide prices. In the case of jewelry, we can easily imagine a fatigued shopper enjoying this option because they don't want swayed by the price, be it high or low.

From beyond the box to no search box

[Artsper](#), an arts buying and selling website, takes to heart the idea that search is not just about the search bar. Search technology rather powers the entire browse experience. If a customer selects a “painting” category on the home page, products and facets are showing up — even though no search query is entered.

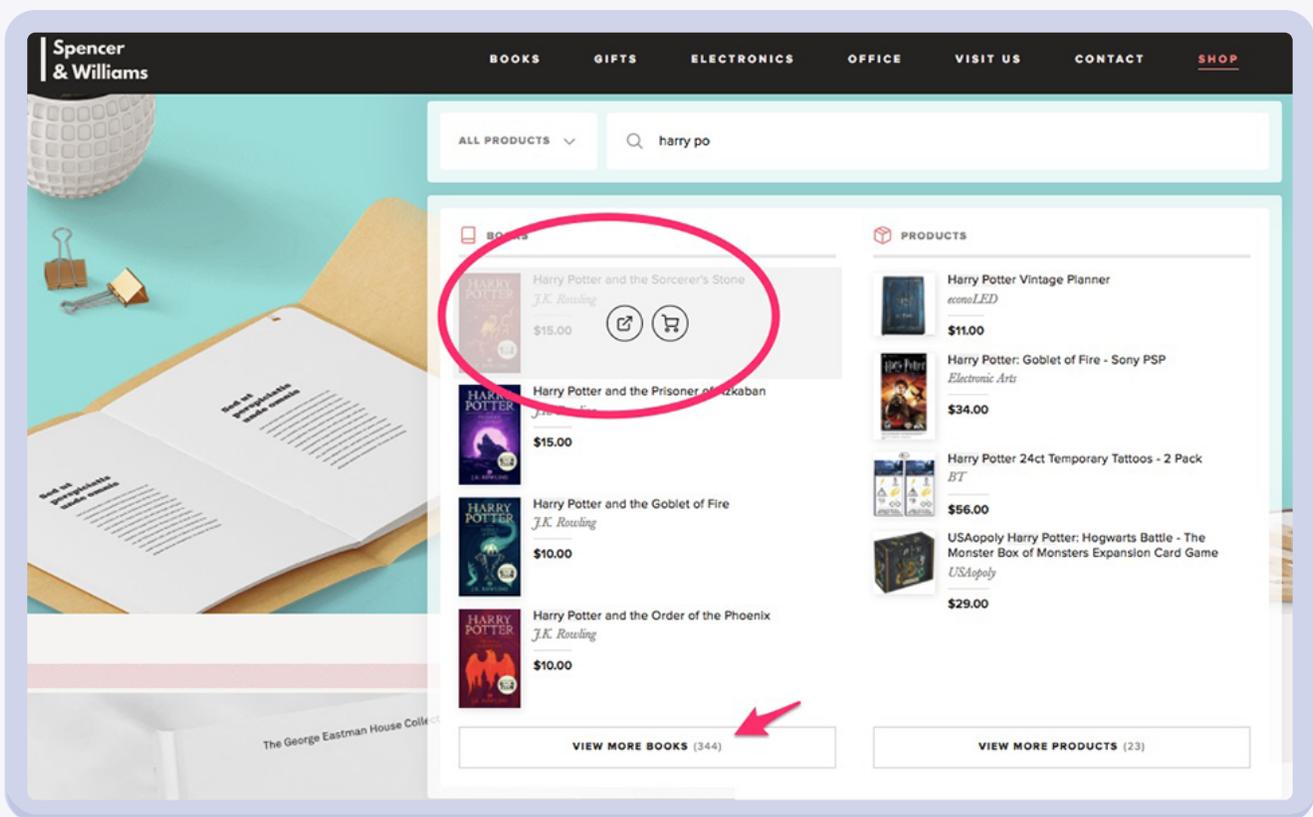


Artsper also includes recommended categories; a customer can easily dive into abstract paintings, for example — and that filter is just as easily removed.

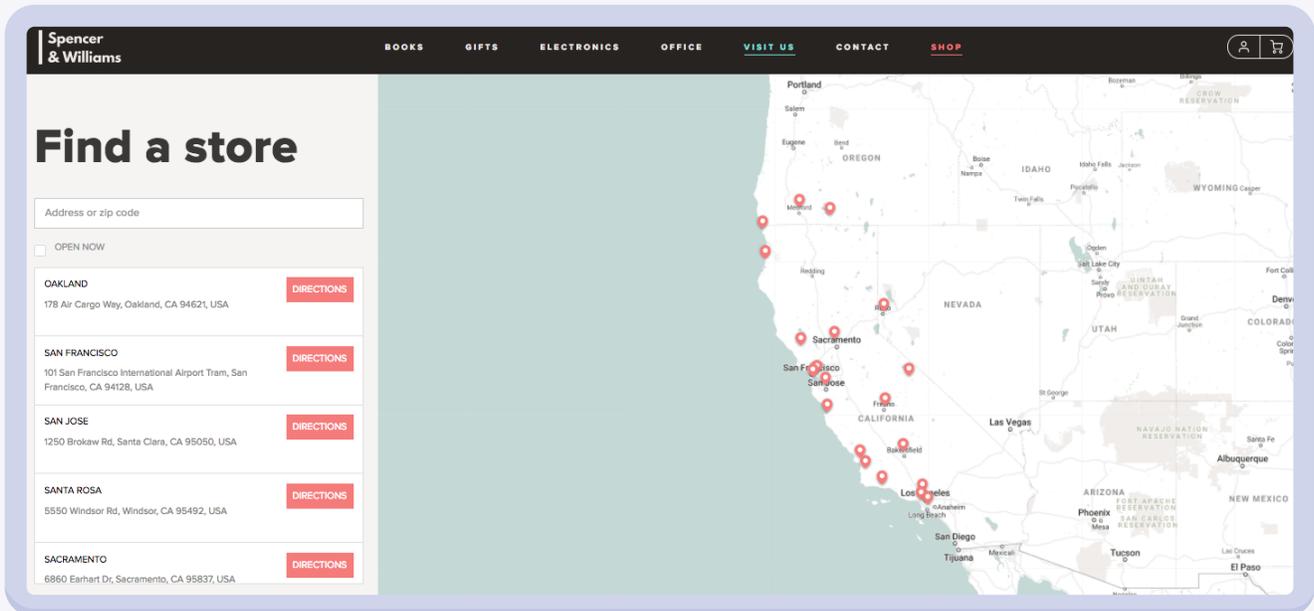
Why is this so interesting? **No search bar query by the user is involved**, even though the search technology behind the scenes takes care of the engaging and natural customer experience — including ranking and personalized recommendations.

Imagining possibilities

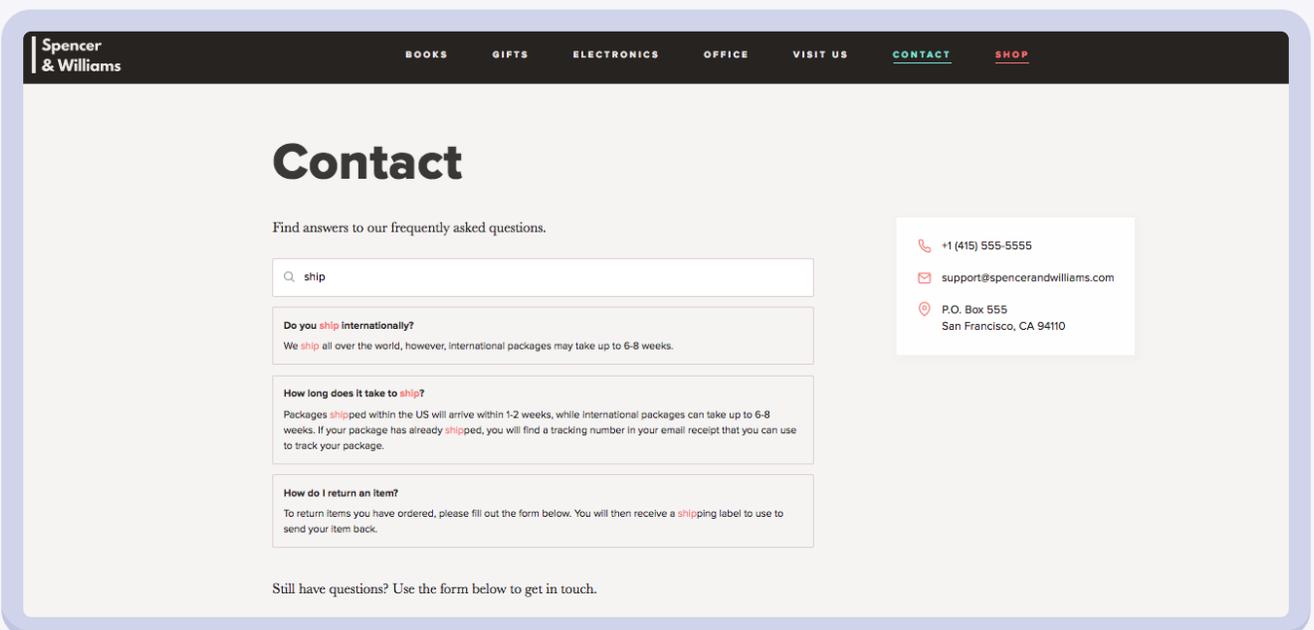
At Algolia, we built a fake e-commerce website to showcase what's possible in the way of interesting user experiences. Our imaginary store is called Spencer & Williams. It primarily sells books, but also electronics, gifts and office items. In this particular case, we chose to highlight the search bar on the home page as a way to draw the users in and give them a seamless, lightning-fast way to purchase. If a user searches for "Harry Potter", the top result is only one click away from adding to the shopping cart:



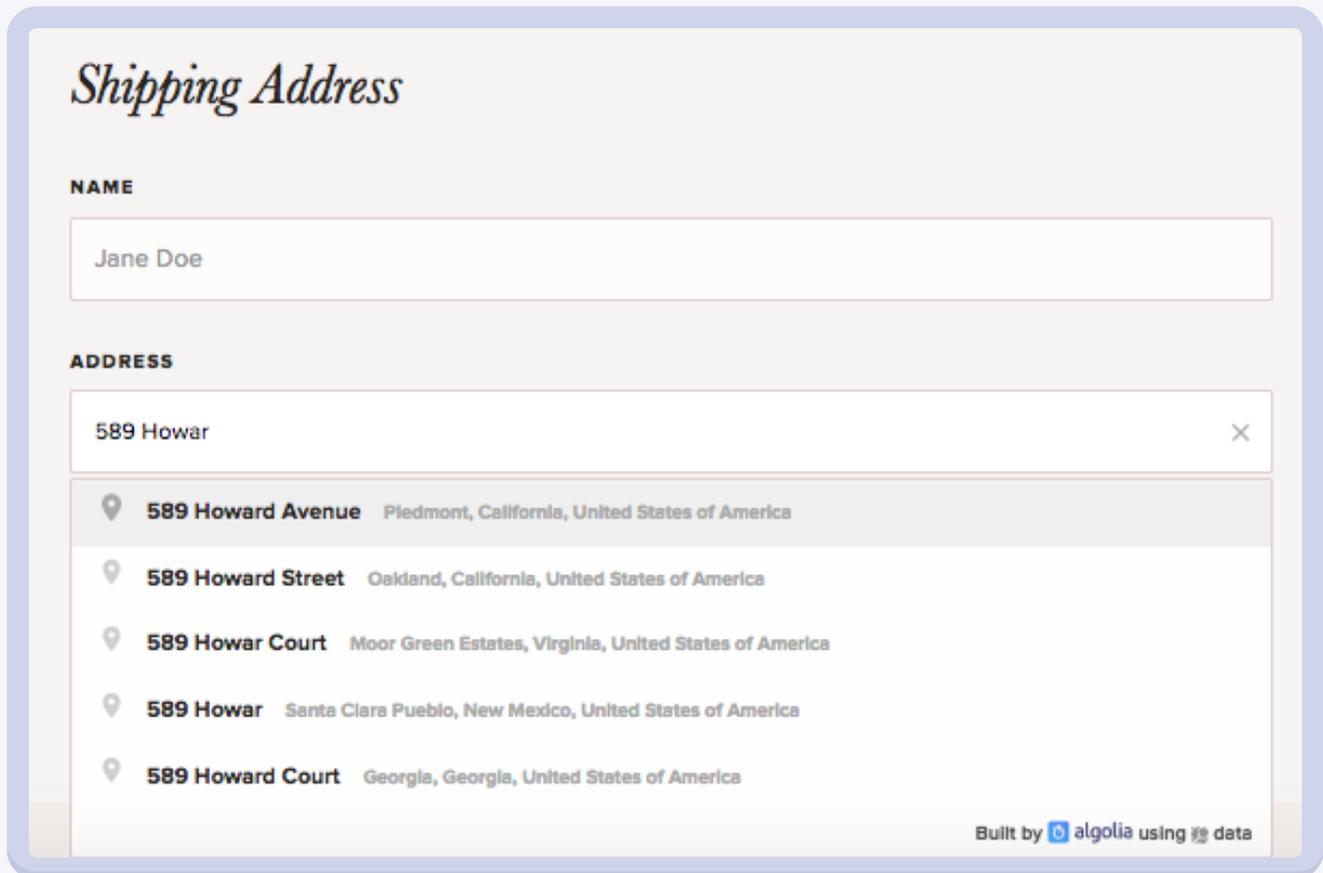
“Visit us” page is an interactive experience powered by our search engine, combined with Google Maps. Compare this with plain text address and a static map.



The Contact page includes a search of frequently asked questions, significantly reduce those pesky support tickets. Aftership, one of our clients, reduced the number of support tickets by 90%.



In the checkout area, the address autocomplete prevents users from typing in the wrong address (which can result in costly returns).



The image shows a 'Shipping Address' form. It has a title 'Shipping Address' in a serif font. Below the title is a 'NAME' section with a text input field containing 'Jane Doe'. Below that is an 'ADDRESS' section with a text input field containing '589 Howar'. A dropdown menu is open below the address input, showing five suggestions, each with a location pin icon, the address, and the city/state/country. The suggestions are: '589 Howard Avenue Piedmont, California, United States of America', '589 Howard Street Oakland, California, United States of America', '589 Howar Court Moor Green Estates, Virginia, United States of America', '589 Howar Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexco, United States of America', and '589 Howard Court Georgia, Georgia, United States of America'. At the bottom right of the form, it says 'Built by algolia using data'.

Shipping Address

NAME

Jane Doe

ADDRESS

589 Howar

- 589 Howard Avenue Piedmont, California, United States of America
- 589 Howard Street Oakland, California, United States of America
- 589 Howar Court Moor Green Estates, Virginia, United States of America
- 589 Howar Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexco, United States of America
- 589 Howard Court Georgia, Georgia, United States of America

Built by  algolia using  data

Key takeaways

Search matters because it improves KPIs. Bad search is expensive not only because your users remember it but because they inevitably bounce from your site.

There are two key aspects to great search and discovery: **relevance** (including textual relevance, business relevance, and personalization) and **user experience**.

Advanced user experiences powered by search technologies go beyond the search box: they include powerful discovery through browsing, faceting, innovative UX buttons, and much more, shortening the user's path to the shopping cart while driving your KPIs.

About Algolia

Founded in 2012, Algolia provides search and discovery experiences that foster engagement, loyalty, and trust. At a time when there is more data and more competition across every industry, Algolia helps companies accelerate surfacing products, content, and information. Trusted by thousands of eCommerce, SaaS, and media companies, Algolia delivers the enterprise-grade scalability, reliability, and high performance that allow our customers to grow with confidence.

Accelerate conversions, increase engagement, and immediately improve your search.

Learn more at www.algolia.com.

