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What's Driving Search Abandonment in Online Retail

2023 Findings and Insights

Table of

→ Contents

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Takeaways

01

Bad searches are bad for business

After an unsuccessful search, 3 in 4 consumers reported that it resulted in a lost sale for the retail website. 51% went elsewhere to purchase the item, and 25% decided not to. The average cost of a lost sale for retailers was $72, with 25% of consumers saying the price of the item they searched for was $100 or more.

02

Ease of use means top of mind

89% of consumers say an easy-to-use retail website is absolutely necessary[2], with 96% of US consumers agreeing they are more likely to make repeat visits (globally, 86%). In fact, consumers overwhelmingly believe that an easy-to-use website is a big part of a brand's customer service experience.

03

Speed boosts satisfaction

9 in 10 consumers say a good search function is very important or absolutely essential, with 98% of consumers agreeing that their favorite websites are ones where they can quickly find what they are looking for. Additionally, 84% say a website that quickly loads encourages them to return.

04

When search works, their cart grows

Following a successful search for a particular item, 92% of consumers will purchase it. Over three-quarters will buy at least one additional item, up from 69% in the summer of '21.[3] On average, three additional items are purchased.

[2] Percentages include responses of "absolutely essential" and "very important".

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The consumer 🔍
search experience

→

What can retailers learn from consumers?

When thinking about their shopping experience, consumers universally emphasized the priority of being able to locate exactly what they need easily and quickly. The research shows that a positive search experience directly correlates to customer retention, with the majority of US consumers (96%) saying they are more likely to return (86% globally).

Speed versus time spent on a website

Beyond ease, consumers also call attention to speed. More than 4 in 5 agree that a retail website that loads quickly is very important or absolutely essential, with 68% of consumers agreeing that a fast-loading website is very likely to make them return to the same site.

Yet, despite their wishes for a website that loads quickly, their time spent shopping for a specific item on a retail website has increased from 15 to 25 minutes[4]. In addition, the maximum time they are willing to spend searching for a particular item is now capped at 37 minutes, on average, before they give up and move on. In fact, this year more than 1 in 5 consumers (21%) are willing to spend an hour or more looking.

These shifts in time spent searching for products online may be a reflection on the current climate of higher prices, inflation, and/or the holiday season. On top of this, more than 8 in 10 consumers say they have purchased an item while just browsing or navigating through a retail website, without using the search box or specifically looking for an item.

The (importance 🔍) of search

The game-changer for a positive shopping experience

🔍 retail websites 🎤

9 in 10

consumers say a good search function is very important or absolutely essential for retail websites

🔍

🔍 search function on retail websites 🎤

69%

of consumers use the search function on retail websites, making it the most common way to find products

🏷️

🔍 good search function 🎤

99%

of consumers are at least somewhat likely to return to a website if it has a good search function

🔄

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The importance of search

The search bar is your sales superpower

The search function is arguably the most important feature of an ecommerce website. It's also the most common way US shoppers search for products on retail websites (69%), followed closely by general website browsing (63%). It sits ahead of the navigation menu (45%) and filter feature (37%).

When compared to other website features, unsurprisingly, the importance of a good search function tops the chart for nearly 9 in 10 consumers (88%). Trailing behind on the list is the ability to filter results (73%), sort content in multiple ways (72%), visual appeal (58%), and make personalized product recommendations (37%).

The impact that drives sales

The power of a good search function is undeniable, with results showing that almost all consumers (99%) are at least somewhat likely—and most (65%) are very likely—to return to the same retail website if it has a good search function. In addition, the vast majority (92%) purchased the item they were searching for. Over three-quarters (78%) also bought at least one extra item besides the one they initially searched for. On average, three additional items are purchased after a successful search.

Furthering this sentiment, the majority (71%) agree they often purchase additional items once they find what they want on a website. In addition, a majority (US: 85%, global: 78%) agree that after a successful search experience on a retail website, they are more likely to purchase additional items.

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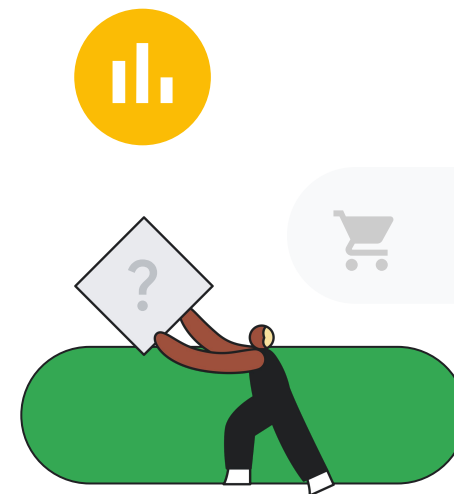
The (importance 🔍) of search

The game-changer for a positive shopping experience

1 in 10 — Only 1 in 10 consumers say they find exactly what they're searching for every time 🔍

79% of consumers say the search function on retail websites sometimes provides irrelevant items

45% of consumers view the brand as not providing the shopping experience they are looking for

When asked to grade their experience using the search function on retail websites, 37% of consumers say it's 'excellent' and 54% say it's 'good'. More specifically, the majority say that the search function provides exactly what they are looking for (95%), or provides good alternative items (85%) at least some of the time.

However, only around 1 in 10 say they get exactly what they are looking for (12%) or good alternatives (11%) every time, with most consumers running into problems often. This includes retailers sometimes providing items that are not relevant to what consumers are looking for (79%), showing out of stock items above available items (69%), inability to narrow the search using filters or categories (60%), the search taking too long to process (58%), or the site saying there are no applicable items when the customer knows the store sells them (57%).

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An ⟨ unsuccessful 🔍 ⟩ search

The experience, the immediate impact, and the future consequence
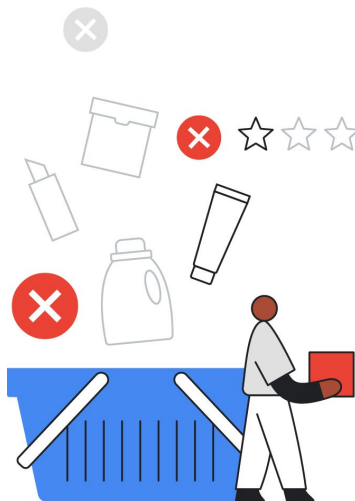
82%

of US consumers and 77% globally avoid websites where they've experienced search difficulties

3 out of 4

of consumers report that after an unsuccessful search, the sale is often lost to competition

53%

of consumers abandon their entire cart and go elsewhere if they cannot find one item

When it comes to brand sentiment, over 3 in 4 US consumers (78%) say they view brands differently after having an unsuccessful search on their website. Most commonly, they view these brands as not providing the shopping experience they want (45%) and needing to invest more in their website (38%).

Moreover, 72% say they are less loyal to a brand if finding what they want on a website is challenging. And around 80% leave the site to purchase elsewhere following an unsuccessful search. Eight in 10 take this further and say they avoid websites where they have experienced search difficulties.

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An unsuccessful search

Defining an unsuccessful search

Consumers define an unsuccessful search result as being provided items that are not relevant to what they are looking for (63%), not being provided with the item they are looking for (59%), and being informed there are no relevant items even though they know the store sells them (53%). This has occurred an average of four times per consumer in the past month. Others define an unsuccessful search as taking too long to process (49%) or when they can't narrow down a search using filters or categories (42%).

After an unsuccessful search, consumers will stay on a website for an average of 10 minutes before giving up on looking for the item.

The business consequences

Evidence shows that loyalty and repeat business is at risk with unsuccessful searches. Additionally, the majority of US consumers (78%) and global consumers (72%) admit they are less loyal to a brand when it's hard to find what they want on a website, with the majority of US consumers (76%) agreeing that if a company won't invest in improving their website, then they don't want to give them their money.

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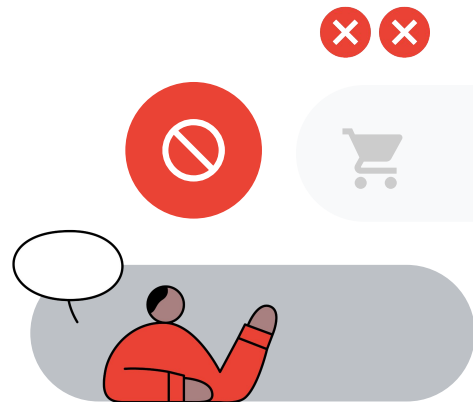
What's the (strategy 🔍) from here?

Winning back customers solutions for a second chance

To be re-engaged:

46% asked for a discount or promotion 🔍

45% proposed website upgrades 🔍

36% requested an email with the correct item they searched for 🔍
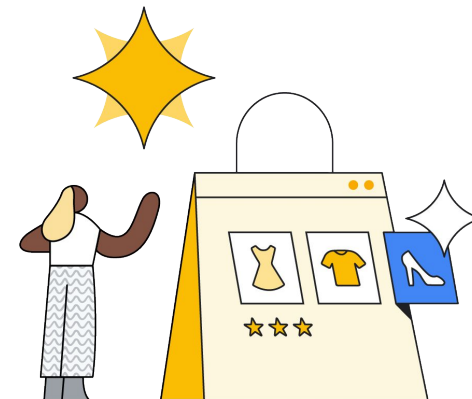
There is a disconnect between what consumers want and what retailers do after an unsuccessful search takes place. Fortunately for retailers, 86% of consumers say it's possible to win their loyalty after an unsuccessful search.

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Why is (creating 🔍) an ideal search experience so hard?

Search isn't a new focus for most retailers

For years, many retailers have worked on building a static, non-learning-based search functionality for their websites and apps.

Historically, these e-commerce sites have displayed product results based on either category bestseller lists or human-written rules, like manually determining what clothing to highlight based on seasonality. However, these models have yet to scale to different user needs and evolve with customers' expectations.

Despite its impact, search is still unsolved

While traditional tactics have kept the search bar functional, it's clear that the current approach is not serving the needs of shoppers.

Many retailers find it challenging to:

- Understand user context, natural language, and intent
- Design for user errors (misspellings, grammar, etc.)
- Design and build multi-objective (Topline, Margin) machine learning models
- Apply AI/ML expertise to build self-learning models
- Optimize and allow for multi-modal query methods
- Personalize and make the right products and content discoverable to shoppers

Ready to explore solutions that tackle search challenges? 🔍

How Google Cloud can help

Learn more

Discovery AI for Retail

Organizations now have the ability to provide Google-quality search, browse and recommendations on their own digital properties, helping to increase conversions and reduce search abandonment.

We've created a suite of products and solutions to help you:

- Reduce search abandonment by leveraging Google-quality search capabilities
- Enhance shopping experience by making it easier to search for products with an image
- Improve conversion and order value by personalizing the shopping experience

Deliver relevant recommendations at scale

Recommendations AI can understand nuances behind customer behavior, context, and SKUs in order to drive engagement across channels through relevant recommendations.

Help shoppers search for products with an image

Vision Product Search uses ML-powered object recognition and lookup to provide real-time results of similar, or complementary, items from your product catalog.

Power your ecommerce with Google-quality search

With Retail Search and browse, retailers can implement Google-quality experiences that are customizable and built upon Google's understanding of user intent and context.

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Customers are already [seeing results 🔍]

★ macy's

Increase conversion and RPV

Discovery AI equips macy's with Google-quality search functionality to improve product discovery and reduce search abandonment.

❝ In recent testing of Retail Search, **Macy's saw a 2% increase in conversion, and a 1.3% increase in revenue per visit.** We are excited to partner more closely with Google Cloud to continue to provide the experience our customers expect."

Matt Baer,
Chief Digital Officer

Macy's delivers a personalized shopping experience with Google Cloud Discovery solutions.

Play video

LOWE'S

Eliminate "no results found" and reduce search abandonment

Lowe's leverages Discovery AI to help their customers find what they're looking for with ease.
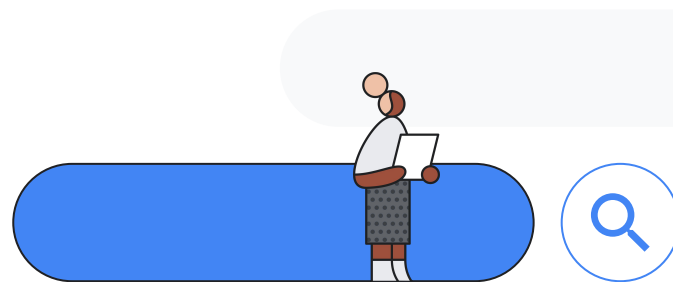
❝ **15% of our customers are giving us search queries that we've never seen before ...** Google is helping us decipher what our customers are asking for so we can get our customers what they need and what they are looking for."

Neelima Sharma,
Senior Vice President, Technology, Ecommerce, Marketing and Merchandising

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Research methodology

The US consumer survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of Google Cloud from November 29 – December 5, 2022 (including Black Friday and Cyber Monday). 1,008 adults aged 18+ who have visited a retail website and used the search function on a retail website in the past six months participated in the survey. Results were weighted by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, income, household size and marital status to align them with their actual proportions in the population.

Harris Poll conducted the global consumer survey on behalf of Google Cloud from November 30 – December 2, 2022. 13,407 adults ages 18 and older were surveyed online within Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Spain, and the UK. Of this, 12,456 used the search function on a retail website in the past six months. Results were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population.

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Thank you