

Discount Office Items boosts revenues 6.4% with Google Commerce Search



At a Glance

What they wanted to do:

- Improve the shopping experience and drive sales

What they did:

- Implemented Google Commerce Search on DiscountOfficeItems.com

What they accomplished:

- Increased revenues and site visits 6.4%
- Boosted transactions by almost 1,400 per month
- Measurably grew average order values

Business

Tim and Jim Horton founded Discount Office Items in 2003 to offer customers a large selection, low prices, and top-notch customer service. At DiscountOfficeItems.com, customers can find upwards of 62,000 different office supply products. The company has continued to experience double-digit growth each year. In 2009, Discount Office Items became one of the 500 largest online Internet retailers.

Challenge

Recognizing a key fact – that visitors spend only about eight seconds before deciding whether or not to remain on a site – Tim and Jim Horton, founders of Discount Office Items, wanted to enable visitors to find the right products, fast. But their custom MySQL search solution, according to CEO Tim Horton, was sluggish and returned irrelevant results. “It could take 30 seconds for customers to receive a search result,” he recalls. “Even then, results didn’t always deliver what the customer was looking for.”

Adding to the challenge, the solution required regular maintenance like bug fixes and tweaking. It was prone to periods of downtime and ate up server resources. Discount Office Items knew it needed a better search tool, yet most of the options the company investigated were too difficult and time-consuming to integrate into the retail site and manage in-house.

The screenshot shows the Discount Office Items website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'sign in', 'customer service', 'my account', and 'order status'. A shopping cart icon shows '0 items' for '\$0.00', with a note '\$75.00 away from free shipping'. Below this is a category browse bar with letters A-Z and a search bar. The main content area displays search results for 'BLACK CHAIR', returning 968 results. On the left, a 'NARROW RESULTS BY:' sidebar lists various chair categories with counts, such as 'arm sets (29)', 'back supports (1)', 'backrests & seat cushions (21)', 'casters (27)', 'chairs/stools (2)', 'educational seating (1)', 'exam room supplies & equipment (1)', 'executive/high back chairs (198)', 'folding/stacking chairs & carts (91)', 'foot rests (16)', 'ladders & step stools (1)', 'management/mid-back chairs (151)', 'panel system hardware (1)', 'reception side & guest chairs (188)', 'stools & drafting chairs (48)', and 'task chairs (169)'. The search results list includes items like 'Basyx VL852 Slim Black Leather Guest Side Chair' for \$148.14 and 'Alera Guest Chair, Leather-Like Caresoft, Black Fabric' for \$71.74. Each item has a 'COMPARISON' checkbox and a 'DETAILS' link.

Google Commerce Search was integrated into the site's existing interface, allowing shoppers to refine results by any attribute they choose.

About Google Commerce Search

Google Commerce Search is a hosted search service for your online store that brings the power and scale of Google's cloud computing platform to online retailers. Drawing on the speed and relevance of Google's search technology, Google Commerce Search increases online sales and usability by allowing customers to quickly and easily find exactly what they're looking for. Robust features including synonyms, advanced spelling, targeted promotions, and multiple customization options make for a streamlined yet powerful online retail experience. Simple deployment and scaling, user-friendly analytic and tracking components, and enterprise-class support mean you can optimize your online product search experience and give customers the information they need to make purchases online.

For more information visit:
www.google.com/commercesearch

"More people are using our site search now to find the right products – Google Commerce Search really works and the results are highly relevant."
—Tim Horton, CEO, Discount Office Items

Solution

When Horton heard about Google Commerce Search, he realized it was a great fit. He immediately requested a demo. "We were impressed," he says. "It was clear that Google Commerce Search would improve the shopping experience with fast, accurate results and intuitive use. Plus, using hosted search from Google made sense for getting going quickly and scaling to accommodate business growth."

From a visitor standpoint, Google Commerce Search would deliver the right products faster and filter results by category, price, brand or other attributes. With the XML API and customization options, the search box and results could look and feel consistent with the existing UI, while offering automatic spell check, stemming, and advanced synonym options.

What's more, Google Commerce Search would enable Discount Office Items to promote chosen products within search results, and customize, track, and optimize search performance. And, as a hosted solution, it would minimize burden on the IT staff and data center resources. Horton moved ahead.

"When we saw how fast we could recoup our spending and start making more money due to better, faster search, the decision to implement Google Commerce Search was clear."

—Tim Horton, CEO, Discount Office Items

Results

Deployment, Horton says, was easy. It took less than a month, including integration with full product inventory. "We wanted to go beyond a browser-based implementation to include integration with our product inventory," adds Jim Lind, Programmer. "Implementing Google Commerce Search was fast and painless."

Results were immediate. Visitor volumes jumped 6.4%, as did revenues. Transactions increased by almost 1,400 per month and average order values grew measurably. "People are using site search to find – and buy – the right products," Horton reports. "Google Commerce Search really works and the results are highly relevant. Because of this, we're seeing a noticeable increase in visitors, sales and revenue."

IT reports that the solution installed quickly and continues to integrate downtime-free updates and feature enhancements. They have freed servers and human resources, making them available for other purposes. "Search was one of the weakest parts of our site," comments Williams. "Now, it's one of the strongest – all with less load on our servers and less time spent on maintenance for the IT staff."

Today, customer service representatives are also using the search tool to help customers locate the right products, having a positive effect on sales and customer satisfaction. For Discount Office Items, the best part about Google Commerce Search is the outcome for the bottom line. "We're a small company with an eye on achieving return on investment," says Tim Horton. "We took a cost analysis to our budget committee. When they saw the ROI and increased revenue due to better, faster search, we all agreed: Google Commerce Search was clearly the right choice."

