

Ice.com

TUNING IN TO SHOPPERS

The Challenge: Create an interactive site search experience like the one consumers experience in a store interacting with a sales representative.

The Solution: Install a site search engine that understands the intent of shoppers' queries and makes consumer reviews and promotional video available in search results.

Development time: Ongoing

Technology: Celebros Ltd.

The improved site search engine on Ice.com allows consumers to set parameters for how to sort search results from a pull-down menu that includes such options as Top Sellers, before clicking on the search button.

The screenshot shows the Ice.com website interface. At the top, it says "ice.com" and "FREE SHIPPING ON ORDERS OF \$200 OR MORE". Below that are navigation tabs: GIFTS BY PRICE, RINGS, EARRINGS, BRACELETS, PENDANTS, NECKLACES, and WATCHES. A search bar is present with a "SEARCH" button. The search results show "226 Results - Page 1 of 10" for the search term "engagement rings". There are filters for "In: Rings" and "Narrow Results" with sub-sections for "Price" and "Stone Shapes". Three product listings are displayed, each with an image, a "Product Video" link, and pricing information. The first listing is a "1 Carat Black & White Diamond 10K White Gold Ring" with a retail value of \$600.00, an ICE Price of \$295.00, and a Sale Price of \$225.00. The second is a "1/10 Carat Diamond 10K Yellow and White Gold Filigree Ring" with a retail value of \$550.00, an ICE Price of \$275.00, and 5 payments of \$55.00. The third is a "1/2 Carat Diamond Set of 14K White Gold Bridal Engagement Ring and Wedding Band" with a retail value of \$1300.00, an ICE Price of \$575.00, and 5 payments of \$115.00. Each listing also shows a star rating.

In e-retailing site search is the equivalent of an in-store salesperson. Like any good salesperson, site search must be able to interpret the shopper's needs and desires from their query and guide them to the right product based on what is known about that individual.

At the same time, the site search engine must also be a merchandising agent for the retailer, showing a broad selection of recommendations based in part on such criteria as Top Sellers in the category described by the consumer and products that have an accompanying consumer review.

Finally, the site search engine must allow consumers to share information with, and gather opinions from, friends and family, just as they would if family or friends had accompanied them to a store on their shopping excursion.

Seeking to create an interactive site search experience, online jeweler Ice.com Inc. installed an intuitive

search and navigation engine. The application understands the intent of shoppers' queries, makes consumer reviews and promotional videos available in search results where applicable, and suggests a range of choices.

"Social interaction during the shopping experience is adding an entirely new dimension to e-retailing because it brings a higher level of personal interaction to the sales process," says Pinny Gniwisch, chief motivational officer for Ice.com. "Jewelry is an emotional purchase and jewelers want consumers to make choices based on social interactions because they can spark emotional responses. Side-by-side comparisons can work against the sales process because they can overwhelm the shopper's ability to make a choice."

To help stir the emotion consumers need to feel to buy jewelry, Ice.com implemented Salesperson 2009 from Celebros Ltd. The retailer chose

Salesperson because its ability to include product reviews, ratings and promotional videos recreates the social interaction consumers enjoy when shopping in a store. In addition, the site search engine enables consumers to set parameters for how to sort search results from a pull-down menu that includes such options as Top Sellers, before clicking on the search button.

A self-learning site search engine, Salesperson tracks search queries and consumers' movement through a retailer's web site. This capability makes it possible for Ice.com to align its marketing and merchandising strategies with its site search strategy by identifying sales trends sooner, such as an emerging best seller, and incorporating those trends into search results, provided they are relevant to the consumer's query.

"If a trend shows shoppers are refining their search for a gold necklace based

on a certain price point or carat quality of the gold, we will push products that fit that criteria up in the search results and push less relevant products down,” says Gniwisch. “By learning what criteria are important to consumers as they search, we can adjust our merchandising strategy accordingly to get them to the products they want sooner.”

Continuous tracking of the search terms used by consumers has prompted Ice.com to create landing pages for popular terms and search strings, such as “diamond rings on sale.” Before, such a search string would land shoppers on a results page showing diamond rings, but they would have to sift through the results to find rings on sale.

“Getting customers looking for items on sale to an actual results page displaying only those sale items has helped us promote clearance items a lot more successfully than we have in the past, because it significantly refines the search process,” says Gniwisch.

The inclusion of video links in search results provides a more aesthetically pleasing presentation through movement of the camera lens, music and narration. Hearing the adjectives used to describe the product spoken, as well as the inflection of the narrator, as opposed to reading a product description, conveys a greater sense of excitement about the item, the same way an in-store sales representative does when talking about an item. The background music sets the mood of the presentation by lending graceful ambience to the video.

Besides enhancing product presentation, including video in the search results means consumers don't have to go searching deeper into the site to find a product video, a process that can cause some shoppers to lose interest and abandon the site.

The inclusion of product reviews and ratings in the search results helps remove much of the hesitation consumers may feel when shopping for jewelry online by reassuring them other consumers found the product appealing enough to buy and are happy with their purchase. Ratings are shown at the bottom of each product thumbnail on the results page. Consumers' access customer reviews by clicking on the product rating.

“The inclusion of ratings, reviews and video in search results delivers the information consumers need to feel confident about making the decision to purchase right at their fingertips,” Gniwisch explains.

While more information can help stir consumers' affinity for a piece of jewelry, many consumers want more choices in their search results. After surveying consumers and tracking shopper behavior on its site, Ice.com increased the number of results returned per page from 12 to 24 items.

A box at the top of the results page allows shoppers to further increase the number of items shown to 48 and 72 per page. Sorting criteria in the pull-down include New Arrivals, Low Price, High Price, Total Reviews, Average Rating and which products have promotional videos.

“Consumer feedback and research told us shoppers do not want to go beyond the first page of results, but that they don't mind having to scroll down a page to view results so long as they can avoid having to take the extra step of having to click to the next results page,” says Gniwisch. “Based on this information we increased the default setting for results to 24 items per page, with the option to increase results up to 72 per page. The change has had a direct impact, increasing conversion rates.”

To make certain that consumers see the new features within the search

consumers. Test results showed that the changes made it easier for consumers to find the search box.

“Emphasizing the search box helps make the shoppers aware of this tool and makes it pop off the page, which is why we encourage clients to increase the search box size and locate it in a noticeable place,” says Yossi Hermusch, vice president of marketing for Celebros.

Going forward, Ice.com is considering the addition of links that shoppers can use to share product pages with family and friends through social networks, e-mail or other collaboration sites, such as WebEx.

Exchanging opinions with friends and family is a key component of shopping for jewelry because of the emotional nature of the purchase. Enabling consumers to share information and opinions dovetails into the growing social aspects of the web to which more and more consumers are gravitating.

The inclusion of links to share information with family and friends will build on Ice.com's successful launch of a Facebook fan page, which grew from 700 fans to 11,000 fans, during the first few months of 2010.

“As consumers join our fan page, they become evangelists for the site,” says Gniwisch. “Our fan page is driving more traffic to the site than our e-mail

‘The inclusion of ratings, reviews and video in search results delivers the information consumers need to feel confident.’

results, Ice.com modified the design of the site search box. The first step was to increase the visibility of the search button by moving it to the top left-hand corner of each page in the site.

Placing a larger border around the search box and brightening the search button by using a lighter shade of blue on the upper half of the button that blends into a slightly darker shade of blue on the bottom half helped to make site search more visible. Each change was given a trial run through A/B testing to determine how it resonated with

marketing list, which is why we are intrigued by the potential of socialization tools to increase sales.”

By positioning its site search engine to be more like an in-store sales agent, Ice.com has created a site that sparks the emotional pull consumers need to feel when making a jewelry purchase.

“Our goal is to become a more socially oriented web store and provide the tools consumers need to easily navigate our site and interact with others as they desire, because it will grow the bottom line,” says Gniwisch. ❖

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