Site Search Redirects:
A Better Place

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Overview

If your customer base relies heavily on your site's internal search engine and you're not using internal search redirection—one of the most powerful and easy-to-use features of Experience Manager—you're missing an opportunity. Redirects are an extremely simple and often overlooked feature, and once you have a "recipe" in place for your business, you could be sitting on a big conversion opportunity.

Redirects allows your business users to "intercept" a site visitor who searches for a particular keyword or phrase and guide them to a "better place" on your website—a navigational category, a merchandised landing page, or even a completely customized marketing experience. The general idea is that when visitors use extremely broad or generic keywords, internal search usually returns far too many results. Even the best search results layout requires customers to filter and possibly work through numerous pages to find what they really wanted in the first place. Redirects allow you to point those users to a better starting point for their searches, giving them a superior "jumping-off point", and it all starts with data.

Start with Data

If you're not currently using Redirects, the first step is determining which search terms pose the biggest improvement opportunity. In most cases, your web analytics will quickly and easily provide the starting point. If your analytics platform captures the search terms visitors use on your site and can associate those actions back to a handful of basic metrics—in this case, # of searches, revenue, and orders—you probably have enough to make some initial redirection decisions.

Run the internal search report and identify those terms or phrases with the highest number of searches and low conversion rate (measured, in this case, as Orders divided by # of Searches). It's not perfect, but on the grand scheme of things, it'll give you a quick look at your best- and worst-performing terms. The next step is to dig in further to determine what products people ultimately bought who used those search terms. Some hidden gems live in this data step since this will help you "connect the dots" back to what the users most commonly are seeking when they search for that term. This will help you when it comes time to put the best Redirect in place for that term.

As we proceed through the article, we'll use an example from our business—a search for "microscope slides"—to illuminate the power of redirection. In our case, data showed that site search for "microscope slides" returned over 3,000 product results, which was far too many for our users. One of the biggest products we sold had a terrible conversion rate from site search and the reason was pretty obvious: users were simply overwhelmed and had little guidance or organization available to them. With Redirects as a tool in our arsenal, however, the solution was very easy.

Exploring the Core Issue

Now that you have data in-hand that identifies possible redirection opportunities, it's a good idea to go one level deeper to see what visitors are actually experiencing when they search your site for those terms. Performing the search and looking through the initial results will usually provide the "a-ha" moment for your business team. Most commonly, the search results will be overwhelming, broad, or simply too large for users to consume. You could use Boost & Bury to manually intervene with the result set, but if the result set is extremely large, Redirects are probably a better option. In some cases, the items visitors eventually purchase may not even be in the search result set at all, and that often happens when they're using a very broad keyword that's not even present in your core data set. Adjusting your MDEX setup is always a possible remedy, but Redirects are far easier!

Choosing the Destination

So you've identified a search opportunity, and after running the search yourself, it's obvious that you can take visitors somewhere better on your website. The destination may be obvious—maybe you have an existing category page, a custom landing page, an outstanding piece of content, or another page that provides better context and focus for that search query vs. your normal search experience. When thinking about the ideal destination, you'll want at least one or more of the following elements present:

- **Context**—some type of text, visuals, or marketing assets that reiterate that the user is in the "right place", and creates a better starting point for them after their search. In our example, we might add some context about that fact that we have thousands of different types of slides and we're here to help guide you in the right direction.
- **Sub-navigation links**—this is especially useful when a search term could have multiple sub-categories that could hold the ideal results. For microscope slides, we might feature a series of the most commonly-visited slide subcategories (such as Beginner Slide Sets, and so on).
- **Suggested products**—products that are most often purchased against the search term… these may not be the only items on the page, but if they're your best bet, put them front-and-center. If we know that certain slides are among our most popular, we may elevate those on the category page being used for the Redirect.
- **Relevant promotions**—promotions or special offers that are relevant for those searching for the term. A promotion around "buy a microscope and get 2 slide sets for free" would be pretty useful in our example!
- **Authority or guidance**—this may not be the only message to have in the Redirect experience, but rounding out some of the other elements above with the fact that you offer the best products, support, or other authoritative message will surely help the user's peace-of-mind as they continue.

It's important to note that once you get good at leveraging Redirects, you may even begin testing your destination pages against even more custom pages you build inside Experience Manager itself. For example, if you have a great category page that you choose to use for a Redirect, but think there could be even more value in a different page layout or design, you can build that new page out inside Experience Manager and test against the category page to see which performs better.

Building The Redirects

Once you have your data and your destination ready to go, setting up the Redirects themselves is extremely fast and easy inside Experience Manager. We tend to use Exact Match logic to assure that only specific words or phrases kick off the redirect. In our example, if we used "Match Phrase" for a search for "slides", it would end up Redirecting any search containing the word "slide", which would hinder search performance. You can also setup multiple keywords to redirect to a single destination in a single step.
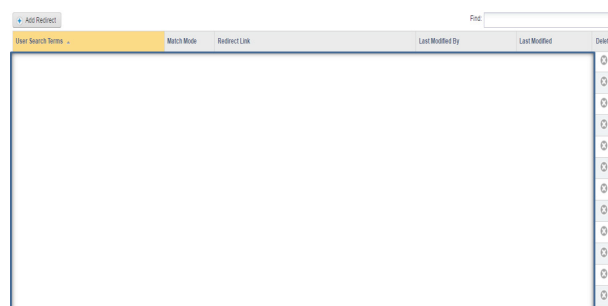
Add Keyword Redirect

Redirect Link

Enter a URL:

[   ]

Example: http://www.oracle.com, /path/to/other/page.html

User Search Terms

Enter a keyword or phrase and select a match mode 🔵

[   ] [Match Phrase ▾]

[⊕ Add Another]

[Cancel] [**Save**]

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[⊕ Add Another]

[Cancel] [**Save**]

Analyzing Performance

Based on your approach to analytics on your site, you'll likely have to determine the best way to measure performance of your redirects. Some platforms, such as Adobe, offer custom variable mapping that allows you to tag internal URLs with specific parameters in order to measure internal campaigns, clicks, and so on. For example, if you've set up a Redirect for "men's shoes" that points to a category page at www.sitename.com/menshoes.do, adding a tracking URL inside your Redirect setup screen, such as www.sitename.com/menshoes.do?intid=redir_menshoes will help you assess the performance of the redirect itself.

There are countless other ways to measure the performance of redirects so be sure to run your reporting and analytics design in parallel with your Redirect strategy so you can get useful data and insights the moment you start executing Redirects.

Wrapping Up – Building a Redirect Practice

Redirects are so powerful for some companies that they've set aside a portion of or a complete FTE against the building and maintenance of Redirects. For other companies, Redirects make up a small—but powerful—portion of someone's job. It all depends on how your particular users tend to search and think about your products or services.

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