

Leading home, hearth and garden retailer sees 103% increase in orders for recommended products with Google Commerce Search

Plow & Hearth

At a Glance

Goals:

- Easily deploy promotions and product recommendations
- Improve customer experience
- Improve conversions
- Cut costs and overhead
- Increase accuracy and speed of search

Approach:

- Implemented Google Commerce Search and Google product recommendations

Results:

- Over four-month period on Plow & Hearth, search rose 86.7%; transactions grew 31.7%; and overall revenues were up 2.7%
- 67% higher click-through rate on recommended products
- 103% increase in orders over manual recommendations
- 91% better sales over manual recommendations
- 21% higher conversion rate
- Reduced manual effort by hundreds of hours annually

Company

Plow & Hearth is a catalog, retail and Internet company specializing in quality-built, unique, enduring home and lifestyle products. What began in 1980 as a small retail store in Madison, Virginia, has grown to include the flagship brand – Plow & Hearth – plus Problem Solvers, WinterthurStore, and Wind & Weather.

“We only offer products we would use ourselves, at fair prices, and we guarantee them without condition,” says Brianne Forst, director of e-commerce for Plow & Hearth. “The web is a major part of everything we do, and we strive to keep the online experience as high-touch and user friendly as it is in our stores.”

Challenge

Plow & Hearth’s e-commerce operations were based on an aging solution that was difficult to manage and could not adapt to the evolving trends in web technology. “Updating keywords, synonyms, and product recommendations by hand required hundreds of hours annually,” recalls Forst.

“When shoppers searched for products, results appeared by SKU number versus relevance or sales popularity, which was less helpful to our customers” says Forst. “The oldest products appeared first in the search rankings, and this was negatively affecting conversion rates. While 20% of site visitors were using search on our old platform, few were purchasing products based on their search results.”

“Overall, with the Google Commerce Search product recommendation feature, we saw a 67% greater click-through rate, 103% increase in orders over our manual recommendations, 91% better sales, and a 21% greater conversion rate to our manual curations.”

—Brianne Forst, director of ecommerce, Plow & Hearth

The company’s aging e-commerce and product navigation platform was also negatively affecting product promotions and merchandising. On Plow & Hearth, customers can purchase everything from trellises to footwear and outdoor furniture. While Plow & Hearth prided itself on making accurate, meaningful product recommendations for individual customers, this had become a growing challenge. “We were curating recommendations and promotions for products manually,” says Forst. “The delay between making recommendations and updating them based on current inventory often meant that we had to tell customers the items they wanted were out of stock. We needed a better, faster way to merchandise items online.”

While product recommendations were on the company’s priority list, Forst says it was difficult to find a “plug and play” solution that would work with the company’s existing product and inventory data. “We couldn’t afford a time delay or a lot of complexity to go live with something new,” she says.

About Google Commerce Search

Google Commerce Search is a hosted search solution for your e-commerce store that leverages Google's tremendous search expertise and computing infrastructure to deliver a superior experience that bridges the gap between brick and mortar stores and online shopping. Robust features include a product recommendation engine, instantaneous search results, targeted promotions, smart synonym and spelling detection, and extensive merchandising options. Google Commerce Search works seamlessly on desktop e-commerce sites as well as both mobile sites and apps. Customers who have implemented the solution include General Nutrition Centers (GNC), Westfield Shopping Centers, and Forever 21 among many others.

For more information, visit:

www.google.com/commercesearch

"We're getting as much out of Google Commerce Search as we can. It's an unbelievably relevant, flexible, and easy-to-use solution that gives us many new opportunities to improve site profitability."

*—Brianna Forst, director of ecommerce,
Plow & Hearth*

Solution

The company considered purchasing other high-end e-commerce search solutions, but after extensive research found that administering those products would still require significant merchant involvement in the form of a skilled Plow & Hearth developer trained in Endeca's tools and scripting. Based on its rival capabilities but much simpler ease of use, speedy time-to-market, and ability to streamline product recommendations and promotions without manual work, the company selected Google Commerce Search, Google's hosted e-commerce search solution.

Results

Google Commerce Search immediately increased Plow & Hearth's search speed, relevance, and intuitiveness for site visitors—so much so that the company made the search box a more prominent feature on the Plow & Hearth site. Visitors can more easily find the right products, and Plow & Hearth spends almost no time maintaining the technology. The resulting sales and conversions have been impressive. During the first four months of implementing Google Commerce Search, use of search rose 86.7%, transactions grew 31.7%, and overall revenues were up 28.7%.

Google Commerce Search has also made it easy to implement merchandising strategies, eliminating hundreds of hours previously spent manually fine-tuning things such as re-directs, product promotions, and resulting rankings and displays. An additional benefit has been the company's ability to incorporate hyper-relevant product recommendations with zero manual effort.

After implementing Google Commerce Search, Forst and her team decided to put it to the test, pitting it against the previous manual solution for product recommendations. On every product detail page on the Plow & Hearth site, the team offered two hand-selected items and compared them against two products Google Commerce Search automatically recommended. This allowed marketers to easily compare the success rate between the two.

"Overall, with the Google Commerce Search product recommendation feature, we saw a 67% greater click-through rate, 103% increase in orders over our manual recommendations, 91% better sales, and a 21% greater conversion rate," says Forst. "The benefits have been phenomenal."

The company is now implementing personalized Google recommendations for products within email marketing campaigns distributed to a list of three million people, as well as using Google's suggestions on its shopping basket page.

"We're getting as much out of Google Commerce Search as we can.

It's an unbelievably relevant, flexible, and easy-to-use solution that gives us many new opportunities to improve site profitability," says Forst.

