

## Why Site Search Plays a Critical Role in Growing Your Business

Tim:

Well hi Steve how are you?

Steve:

I'm doing well Tim Thanks Very much you as well.

Tim:

That's good. Good to see. Ah we have a lot to talk about today. We were having a conversation the other day you Mike and I were having a conversation and it came up about you know why we do this, You know what started solo segment and I want to start by letting the audience know you know all twelve of you that no I want to start by saying we don't like to talk about ourselves.

We would much rather talk about our customers. We would much rather talk about the benefits of search and things like that we're going to get to that as this goes along. But as we were having the discussion about why we chose this why solo segment focuses on search and why we think that matters.

It led to some really interesting discussion and things that I think would be beneficial to the audience and beneficial to you know folks listening to this as to why? why we went this direction so I'm going to kind of pitch it out to you I know we're gonna have a little more back and forth on this but you know why? why search Steve? Why do we do what we do?

Steve:

Um, yeah, well the first thing to you know that everybody needs to know and it's probably like many of our customers is we've been doing this for a while um and and by this I mean you know been in the digital space I mean I was with tech startups in the nineties you know so very early when kind of the web was just becoming a thing. You know you of course were very early in the financial services industry and then again in hospitality in digital and Mike Moran kind of the other co-founder. You know he's been in digital since the earth cooled and you know I think the thing that we've realized and anybody who's been in this space for more than about a week realizes that you know it's really hard right? It's really really hard to create digital experiences that are compelling, and you know 1 of the reasons that I think that marketers. Um, you know so much focus on like landing pages and kind of very structured journeys.

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Steve:

Is because it simplifies the problem right? if you can get somebody to raise their hand come to a page and say this is what I'm interested in and I'm going to click this button to give you a call to action a signal that I'm ready like that's awesome because it's really a simple thing.

Tim:

Right.

Steve:

Ah, you can put a box around it. You can manage it. What's really hard is to have a website with a hundred thousand pages. Ah you know 2.2 million visitors a month and to try to figure out when somebody just plops into a page from google some random page on your website. Or starts at the homepage. How do you engage them and progress them and I mean it's a really hard problem. Ah, but because again 2.2 million people show up every month and you don't know like anything about them. What their context is and and you try to solve it essentially through well we're gonna figure out the user experience and do some design and that will so you know, kind of help people find their way and as we all know it doesn't always work out that way.

Tim:

Well yeah, you and I were talking about this before we started recording and you know it's it's this fascinating thing you said a line that I'm going to expand on so first I need to give you credit for the line and the line was there is no navigation item. You're going to create, that's going to point people to every single answer that they're looking for apart from search right? but there is no item you're going to put in the navigation I have probably over the course of my career as you mentioned I started a charles schwab back in the mid 90s, all through the dot com boom and things like that and I worked for a bunch of traveled and hospitality companies for over a decade and obviously in the years since with lots of companies across a variety of industries and I've probably participated in oh I don't know a couple of Hundred website redesigns over that 25 year span, and pre and post many of those designs those redesigns we did surveys of the customers and you know obviously 1 of the questions is what's the single biggest problem you had in your visit today and almost to a 1...

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Tim:

The number 1 problem people had was I can't find the content I'm looking for I can't find the answer to the question I have that was the biggest problem they had and after every website redesign I've done where we've done these same studies. You know all of the business results got better conversion rates went up. Time on page went up. You know time on site went up business results got better all of the things you look at as success measures got better and then we would survey people and the number 1 problem they would have again almost to a person was I couldn't find the information that I'm looking for.

Steve:

Ah, sure.

Tim:

Because when you're talking about you know the biggest site I ever ran we were getting 250,000- 300,000 sessions a day right so we were getting 6 million-7 million people a month to the site. You know, right? 7 million people showing up over the course of the month they have, you know a slight variety of questions right? and there's literally nothing you're going to put up in the header. There's nothing in the masthead. There's nothing in the main navigation. There's nothing in the footer that is going to account for all of the possible use cases that those 7 million people have.

Steve:

Oh absolutely.

Tim:

Accept for search and so I think it's very much what you were saying about you want to find ways to get people to what they want and search seems to be the best way to do that. We're trying to create better experiences for customers that way.

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Steve:

Yeah, absolutely and that is I mean that is the thing that we bring you know take from our experience is that when you think about all the tools that are available to marketers in order to solve the engagement problem especially B2B search is. A very useful tool because you don't have to guess what somebody's interested in. They tell you and you know I think you've said in the past you know search is the first personalized experience on a B2B website now. Let's talk for a moment about personalization because.

Tim:

Right.

Steve:

Some would say well if 2 million people come to my website every month if I can only find out some information about them I could deliver a personalized experience and that is absolutely true. But in B2B the reality is the vast majority of the people. It's low single digits. Are identifiable so 90-95 percent of the folks who come to your website are unidentifiable. It only gets worse as cookies expire right? and those cookie expiration dates are coming in and so you know you always come back whether you whether it was ten years ago or it's today. You come back to if you really nail search you are going to get lower bounce rates. You're going to get higher Conversion. You're going to get more journey progression and that is a fundamental truth and that is why when we began to think about how do we solve this large enterprises B2B engagement Problem. we came back to again and again that site search is the place where this battle is going to be won or lost - because if you can engage in site search and you can progress them. You're going to get those conversions that you seek.

Tim:

Yeah, and I think you have a stat that you use all the time. So I'm gonna ask you to actually give the stat because I don't want to get it wrong. But the thing that we found that was fascinating to me right? We've just described one of the reasons we thought this was interesting was the fact that the web experiences that many people have are terrible. They're not delivering on what they want no matter how well you do it right? Even if your business metrics look good. You're still struggling with that and then we looked at search experiences and found even when people ask the question often. They're worse. So can you just talk a little bit about you know.

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Tim:

What do you typically see in terms of search success rates that led us to say this is a thing that we need to make better.

Steve:

Now so you know the first thing we did was we figured out a metric to measure search success because that's something that um you know is eluded marketers right? Like you know there's this search thing. How do we know whether people are finding things and traditionally how marketers have measured search. Is it's the clicks or the number of people using search right? Oh yeah, you know that is the metric of the value

Tim:

Yep, well particularly in B2B right? where there's not a shopping cart that they can see that the person bought the thing right? B2C or ecommerce has kind of solved this problem because they know whether or not somebody bought. And B2B less so, so please go on from there. Sorry.

Steve:

You bet? Yeah, so in that B2B experience. We tried to figure out a way to measure search and what we figured out was measuring search is actually not the way to understand search success measuring what happens after the search is how to measure search success and the consumer example of this is. If somebody does a search and they drop something in a cart. Well, that's a pretty good signal. They found what they were looking for in B2B you don't often find that maybe you get lucky in that they hit a contact form and they filled it out. Okay, that's that's clearly a successful interaction. But how do you measure all of those interactions that don't end in an event. That they're part of a longer term multi-visit journey there where somebody's becoming informed and they're progressing along a journey so that they can eventually engage with you and so looking at that first step was. How do you measure search success and the way you measure search success is you look at the Behavior signals you're getting after somebody searches as a signal and that you know the number is about 70% at best fail which is stunning if you think you know.

Tim:

Um, right if you're doing it well seven out of ten fail

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Steve:

7 out of 10 if you're doing it well and we've seen people that we've started with we implement our technology. We take a baseline on their legacy search engine and it's some odd sometimes nine out of 10 and so the fact that like 1 in 10, 2 in ten, 3 in ten are finding what they're looking for I think is shocking to people when they hear that especially given the fact kind of another data point that I like to talk about a lot is that searchers are eighty seven percent more likely to convert than. Non-searchers to to engage with some sort of marketing call to action now is that because search is so great and and no it's because these are your most engaged prospects right? These are the people who are they are committed. Yeah, especially if they're willing to use your lousy search engine. You know.

Tim:

Right? They're committed. They know what they want they know what they're looking for. Yeah sure.

Steve:

You know that they are they really want to do business with them just meet them halfway and give them an awesome search experience.

Tim:

And and when we say your Steve of course we mean all of the people listening to today have a spectacular search experience. But if you don't you should really check us out at SoloSegment.com but nonetheless you were saying that.

Steve:

You bet? Um, well I'm gonna yeah' about to reiterate 7 in ten fail and so and and by the way we love it when we run into a client and we occasionally do um we have this 1 client there about a Hundred million dollar business. And when we first instrumented their search engine and and in preparation for implementing our search engine half of the searches were successful and we thought something was broken because we've never seen this before right? We've never seen half be successful.

Tim:

Right? right. Ah, right, right? right.

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Steve:

And as we peeled back like what's going on here turns out our technology actually works good for us. Um, but what was going on there was that they are kind of blessed with like a very um standard set of kind of content type.

Tim:

Oh sure.

Steve:

It's all long form. You know text based like it's just delicious for a search engine to consume and to spit out and you know indeed you know they they kind of exist in a content space. Um, that is you know where. Delivering good search. Results is relatively easy now we've helped make them better so we've improved their search results about ten percent so we're we're pretty proud of that. But um, but yeah at the other end of the spectrum. Most companies have a great diversity of content I was talking to a company this morning and. You know we did kind of a little test on their search engine in the call and it just ah you know we did a couple of queries and every time we did a query these blog posts or these articles appeared and their product content. They are you know all this stuff honestly, that prospects people you want to do business with are interested in were way down the page. And the reason is because their search engine is tuned to have a bias towards that real rich content and not towards maybe content. That's more meaningful in a prospects journey and part of that is because of the data they capture and the way they index it and the way their search engine works and so. Having a technology having a point of view having data that helps you really understand the customer experience. What success looks like to a customer and being able to deliver that That's how you get great success integrating that data into the search experience and that's what drives us.

Tim:

Yeah, yeah.

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Steve:

Like when we woke up every morning we're trying to think about what data can we get about the search experience. What data can we get about the features that we're deploying so that we can demonstrate prove to ourselves proof to our clients. That when we deploy a new capability that it makes the search experience better and that again is at the end of the day like what is driving a superior customer experience. It's just everything we focus on.

Tim:

Yeah, no, it makes total sense. It makes total sense I mean it's it is a very frustrating thing I know we've we've had this experience where your you as a customer. Picture yourself as a customer for a second but you go to a thing you know what you're looking for. You know that the company makes the thing you do a search for the thing and you get a page that has something you know obliquely to do with the thing you're talking about. But isn't the thing you know, finding finding that content is is remarkably Challenging. You were talking about this in another episode. We did recently I don't remember it was our last episode of the 1 prior where you were talking about. You know, sometimes it's content prop Sometimes you just don't have the content. But we also see plenty of cases where people have the content but because of the the way their search engine is tuned or because of the the search engine that they're using or how it tends to to give precedence to certain types of content. The actual answer. Might be the eighth or ninth 1 down the page in a good scenario. You know it is on page 2 or 3 in the really ugly scenarios and I know that that drives us nuts because these are the people who we know buy from you these are people that you know buy from you. And they're telling you what they want and you're saying sorry bummer and everybody loses that scenario.

Steve:

Right? And you know oh yeah, absolutely and you know the frustrating thing is that you know you are essentially writing off you know it's probably not a huge percentage of your visitors. But it's it's enough for them that they matter especially given the intent The you know, kind of increase intent that we see from them. Um, you know as I think about kind of our journey and our initial you know point of view on this.

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Steve:

One of the things that's frustrating as a search technology buyer is that a lot of vendors focus on features and not on outcomes and part of what also drove us to think about what does search success actually look like is. You know I used to be a technology buyer and I want to focus on how do I deliver better outcomes now I'd love to have a search engine that I could you know, kind of quantify how many sales you got you know last quarter because of search now tremendously hard to do in B2B because there's no attribution right? It's you things are usually sold by field salespeople or phone salespeople. So it's hard to kind of pull that thread but you know this focus on how far can we get down that path in understanding what actions lead to you know more positive outcomes.

That's our goal right? It's an outcome focus versus a feature focus Now. We certainly have features in our technology but at the end of the day you know what buyers want what technology managers want what Marketers want is not great features. They want great outcomes and that's what a focus on search Success allows you to do. Is to focus on the outcomes. Not only for the people on your website but also for the people you know who need to report to their boss about you know how? well they did last quarter.

Tim:

Well and that's why we like to talk about not search results business results I mean not to not to do our commercial. But I mean we're coming to that part of the show where it's okay to do a commercial but I mean it is it is that reality of it. It isn't about search results and We're trying to create great experiences but we're trying to create great experiences in the service of a business outcome. You know my favorite stat I was having a conversation with somebody the other day and it goes to what you were talking about a minute ago where you know customers are asking you for the thing that they need and you know google Reported as quarterly earnings a well a couple of months ago they're going to be coming out with their q 3 earnings any day now. But they're not out yet at the time we're recording this and their revenues for q 2 were 62 billion dollars.

Steve:

Sure That's a good number.

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Tim:

And almost all of those came from search ads came from ads I shouldn't say search ads almost all those came from ads a big chunk of that came from search ads but how did they do that because they answered the question. So if you want a model for what to do right. I don't know 62 billion dollars in a quarter seems like a reasonable model to try to aim for so to me that's an important you know learning to say google didn't get there because they were giving people bad answers. They didn't get there because they were failing 7 times out of 10. They didn't get there because they were failing 7 times out of 10 with people who were twice as likely to buy as people who weren't that that to me is a powerful statement.

Steve:

Right? Yeah, absolutely and you know 1 of the things that that some B2B marketers are frustrated by especially as they think about search is you know they recognize that it's a really bad Experience. They may even recognize the value of it. But they struggle with well gee if 2 3 four percent of my visitors are are using it. Why should I make the investment. Why should I focus on this. Um and unfortunately part of the read right? This is like you know a circular thing right? because if you don't focus on it. You train your visitors To have an awful like to think about it as an awful experience so that they won't use it so that they will continue to struggle you know and it's just this this kind of death spiral to your website and you know you're not going to kind of connect with those 2.2 million customers you visit every month if you don't solve that problem.

Tim:

Well and and you know 1 of the big myths I think we've all learned in digital over the years you know if you there's this mistake that people have made and we've all made it of if you build it they will come well no, that's not always true if you build it that doesn't necessarily guarantee that they come. What is also true is if you don't build it. We can guarantee they won't come precisely to your point. You know if if you're not putting any emphasis on making search better. Don't be shocked that your customers are using it.

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Steve:

Yeah, you know it's interesting that whole idea of making the investment and kind of betting on the come right? that you're going to to see the results and it does require a little bit like everything in it and everything honestly in marketing. It always requires a leap of faith.

Tim:

Yeah, right right.

Steve:

Um, but ah, you know 1 of our clients and I can use their name because they did a case study with us ASME the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and you know they started with us a little over 3 years ago they're still with us. We're still their search engine of choice and they started with a very challenging search environment and it's progressed over time. We've measured the improvement because we have the metrics that can do that and we've used that data to make their search engine better automatically and what's really interesting is you know when they started they had like everybody does that little magnifying glass in the upper right corner and we said you know. Hey you got to make your search box better bigger because you make your search box bigger people will use it and if search is better. People will use it more so much so that today in their latest redesign which happened a couple months ago. The search box is in the middle of their homepage when you load their homepage. There's a hero image, and there's a search box because they recognize the power of search the power to connect people to the the thing that they want and that the easiest way to do that is not through some multilayered five hundred choices. You know Navigation menu. It's to having really good search that allows people to find the thing that they that's going to satisfy their need. That's going to help them grow their business and of course help ASME grow their business.

Tim:

That sounds like a great place to stop Steve, before we wrap up if I could just ask you to bring it home if somebody ask you? Why do you do this? Why is solo segment do what they do? What's the answer to that question.

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Steve:

We Want to help our customers grow their business and we want to do that with the technology that is most powerful in helping them do that site search is the answer to all user experience problems if you can have somebody ask you a question you don't have to wonder what the answer is. Use a data different approach deliver the right answer to them so that they can progress on your journey and that so that your business grows.

Tim:

Fantastic

Steve:

As ever did delight speaking with you look forward to catching up with you next time.

Steve:

You bet Thanks Very much Tim take care.

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