

BabyAge.com drives exponential growth and a 64% increase in search page views using Google Commerce Search



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Support exponential growth and search across tens of thousands of product SKUs
- Reduce IT complexity
- Improve online shopping experience

What they did

- Powered search on e-commerce site with Google Commerce Search
- Took advantage of features such as parametric search, promotions and relevance “boosts” for key products

What they accomplished

- Went live with Google Commerce Search within six days of initial contact with Google, from signing the contract to testing and deployment
- Reduced IT complexity and overhead
- Shoppers spent 21% less time searching, yet there were 58% more product searches

Company

Born in 1999, BabyAge.com, Inc. manufactures and sells high quality, brand name infant and juvenile products, from baby bedding and furniture, to strollers, car seats, cribs, and toys – all on a comprehensive Internet site. The company continues to be ranked in the Internet Retailer Top 500.

Challenge

The company believes strongly in the power of technology to support continued growth. In its 50,000 square-foot facility, BabyAge has integrated a fully wireless pick, pack and ship operation that wields proprietary software technologies. “Our distribution facility is just one example of our discerning approach to processes and technologies,” says Jack Kiefer, President and CEO. “BabyAge always chooses the best technology – when applicable – to address business impediments.”

Initially, BabyAge developed its own custom solution for search. However developing and maintaining search in-house was a cost and resource intensive endeavor. Adding to the challenges for the company, search was not meeting customer expectations while shopping on the site. “An expectant mother wants a ton of information, while a grandparent probably wants to quickly find a gift at a particular price point,” he says. “We have to support a wide range of customer needs, which requires a fast, relevant, and intuitive search interface.”

As a technology expert whose experiences include building the first Fixed Income Trading Intranet for Bank of America Securities and acting as CTO for iBaby.com, the first e-commerce initiative for iVillage, Kiefer exhausted multiple options for search on BabyAge. “We initially built our own parametric search engine – and that was effective when we had about 1,000 products,” he says. “But the amount of SKUs in our inventory was climbing into the tens of thousands. That prompted us to try a popular third-party search engine for a year, which to put it mildly, did not work out.”

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–Jack Kiefer, President and CEO, BabyAge.com, Inc.

The company reverted back to its internally developed search tool, but the extra resources required to continually refine the search code proved too costly. BabyAge was also facing an expensive investment in new hardware and software technologies to begin to address latency in its proprietary search application. Even with extensive effort, the internally-developed search option was slow, and offered limited synonym and automated spell-correction capabilities. “Merchants were spending time manually adding synonyms and spelling options for the products they offered on our site,” says Kiefer. “The overhead to properly maintain our search was extraordinarily high – and that doesn’t even factor in our merchants’ efforts.”

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 auto-completions, synonyms, advanced spelling, targeted promotions, and multiple customization options which 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

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Solution

Kiefer and his team looked at multiple alternatives for outsourcing online search, including Endeca, Mercado and Celebros. Then the IT staff discovered Google Commerce Search. Google's search solution would allow BabyAge to move into the cloud in record time and with minimal resources. Google Commerce Search was also affordable, and offered the top-line e-commerce and merchandising features BabyAge needed to stay ahead of the competition.

A major consideration for BabyAge was the desire to move into the cloud. There would be no need for expensive data centers, no hardware or software licensing expenditures or services required, and faster and easier implementation – without the ongoing need for consultants to implement and maintain a solution. "Google Commerce Search was the only solution that was offered in a true cloud environment, while other competitors were only offering 'hosted' solutions within a limited data center environment," says Kiefer. "Plus, let's call a duck a duck – who knows search better than Google?"

There were other factors in choosing Google Commerce Search, including set-up that seemed "almost too easy to be true," according to Kiefer. Having been involved with numerous enterprise software installations, Kiefer was impressed with the speed and ease of deploying Google Commerce Search. "Most enterprise implementations take months and months – even just considering the contract negotiations," he says. "Our Google Commerce Search deployment took precisely six days from our initial sales call to go-live."

One key factor was the ability to use the same feed from Google Product Search. BabyAge, like most online merchants, had already submitted its products to Google Product Search so that its catalog would appear in Google search results. By using the same feed, BabyAge avoided having to upload its products twice – a substantial time savings.

Results

Customers shopping the site attained the first and most obvious benefits. Google Commerce Search provided fast, relevant search results – right away. "The results were remarkable," says William Morrell, VP of Technology. "We were able to decrease the average time of search from six seconds to a fraction of a second."

Advantages also materialized quickly for BabyAge. Google's powerful search let BabyAge easily customize search parameters such as price, size and product category, and have the newly-edited search pages presented to customers with exceptional speed. The team can edit ranking rules and promote or "boost" selected products to refine marketing programs in real-time and maximize conversions.

Google's solution also provides built-in spelling correction and auto-completion, so merchants no longer spend as much time manually entering spelling or synonym options for their products. And, within a few hours, the BabyAge team can set up custom "facets" that show customers, for instance, everything that is relevant to a trendy fashion such as "Cowmooflage."

The popularity of search on the site has soared since implementing the Google tool, according to Kiefer. After launching Google Commerce Search in July 2010, the BabyAge team analyzed a year's worth of past data and found that search visits had increased 64%, with 58% more searches overall. Transactions referred from Google Product Search increased 188%.

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