

# Site Search Buyer's Guide

Everything you need to know  
to get faster, better search  
for your website

Lucidworks



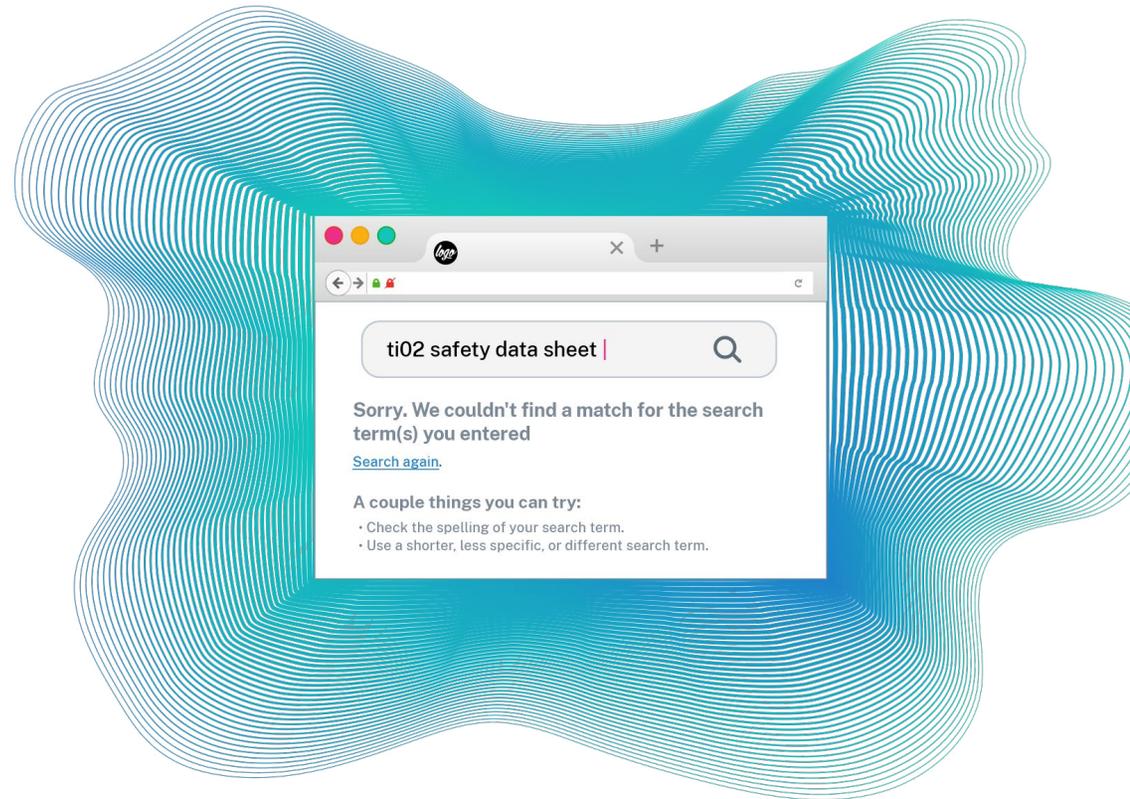
# It was all going so well (until it wasn't)

**You own the website. Or maybe just part of it.  
Or your team does.**

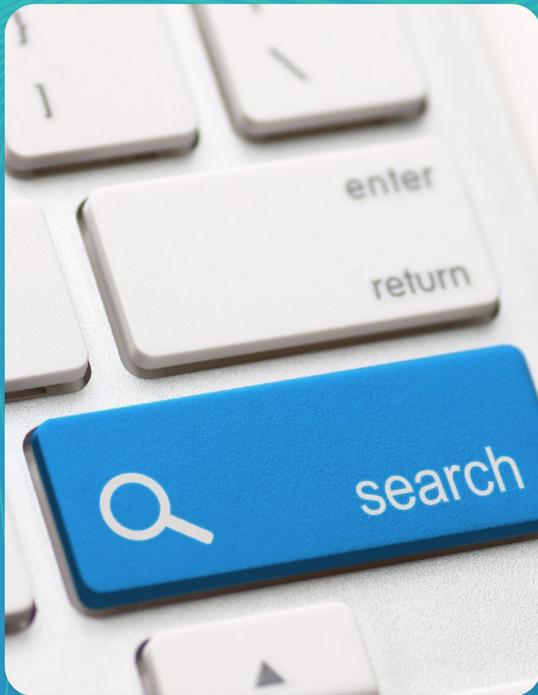
The content management system hums along just fine. It's relatively painless to put up new pages featuring information about your products or services for your users and customers. You're able to post blogs, host relevant documents, and showcase your brand as needed. Contact forms, gated content, and everything else is behaving as expected—but something is amiss.

The entire point of a website is to get visitors to the information they're looking for as quickly as they can: contact information, open positions, product information, refund policies. It's all on the site, but where? Unfortunately, most websites still rely on the top nav and curated links in the footer to direct users to where they really want to be. But the easiest way to get your website visitors to the precise answers they seek is through search.

**Site search engines**—search applications for a particular site—are one of the primary methods that brands and organizations all over the world use to make public information accessible to their customers online.



# How much is bad search costing you?



Most CMS platforms come with a rudimentary search function that gets you partially towards “search,” but can only access the content managed in the CMS itself, and nothing outside of it. It’s basic search for basic customer requests. CMS companies aren’t search experts.

Or you currently have a dedicated search application for your site. And that took a while to get up and running. You had to beg your IT department for resources and time. The engineers looked at you with a straight face and said it would be easy to “roll your own.” But now you’re dependent on your IT department to get any updates or upgrades out the door.

Maybe you outsourced it to a third party vendor. Everybody said that was supposed to be even easier. Yeah? No. The glossy promises have yet to meet expectations. While “more” search is “good,” complicated contract structures are stressing your budget and lacking results.

No matter how you got to where you are now with your site search you know one thing: You don’t like it. Your users don’t use it. It isn’t doing what it is supposed to do. And it costs way too much.

No one can find anything. Users come to the site, stumble through navigation, muddle through search, can’t find what they want, give up and bounce. Current customers confess to account managers they can’t find what they need. Even your own coworkers say the usually just “use a real search engine” to find things instead of wrestling with the site search.

You’re losing leads, losing customers, and losing business. It’s an expensive problem to have.

Bad search is bad for your business. Bad site search is bad for your brand. You know this. And you know you have to get rid of your crusty, calcified site search.

# The top three reasons why a website's search application is not up to par:

## Terrible Search Experience

Site search should simply just work. You type what you're looking for in the little box and you're sent directly to that thing. You don't have to add words, or put quotes around things or try to remember what "boolean" means.

But too often, search apps don't provide the type of experience that users expect from every search app they use. Spellcheck is spotty. Typeahead is sluggish and often nonexistent. Search results take forever to come back and don't even look like they belong to the same theme or template as the rest of the site.

Not a very compelling user experience and not a good impression of your brand or organization.

## Terrible Search Results

And even if the search is simple and straightforward to use, the results that get returned to the user leave a lot to be desired.

Search results have to go beyond seeing if a query exactly matches text in a page or PDF. It must understand user intent. Users don't always know the right words to call things that they're searching for. Site search should just know what you really mean and get you to that thing as quickly as it can.

Searches for a product name should go to the main page for that product. Searchers for things like *contact* or *customer support* should go to the obvious parts of the site. Search results shouldn't be just what is in the CMS, but the full gamut of public data and documents that is publicly available online.

## It Takes Forever to Fix Anything

The experience is bad. The results are bad. And that's just from the point of view of the person searching your site.

You're about to lose your mind.

Your team is trying to keep all the usual plates spinning with the website and other properties including new content, traffic reports, conversion metrics, content

calendars... spending any extra time worrying about search is time away from the critical care of your organization's online properties.

You can't spend all day fussing over your search app. You aren't a search professional. You can't hire one. You can't afford one. You just need to get going and get it up and running and know that it is working and continuously improving.

The operational burden becomes... well, burdensome.

That's why site search usually falls by the wayside for most teams.

And when you do finally get the attention and resources you need, you end up with long, painful, complex development cycles. You can't spend all your time playing catch-up.

Right now you'd settle for site search that is just non-awful.

***But what if your site search could be absolutely stellar?***

# The 3 critical capabilities for stellar site search

As you kickoff your search and start shopping for a new site search solution, there's several key features to keep in mind:

## Easy-to-Tune, No-Code Relevancy

The biggest obsession for any site search owner is the quality of the search results: How well do the results guide the user to what they are looking for or what they want to know? If they don't, how easy is it to tune the system so that it does better next time?

As legacy search apps get longer in the tooth, the quality of their search results starts to go down. At the same time, the number of data sources, data formats, and documents to index is only going to increase. The ranking algorithms that worked just fine when the search app was first deployed — well before you even got to (or heard of) the company — don't really work that well anymore. Futzing with the knobs delivers diminishing returns.

The easiest way to leapfrog over all this drudgery is to put the robots to work. Advances in machine learning can understand the context of the data and documents of your site so it's easier to find exactly what a user wants. This type of "push button AI" gets users high quality search results quickly. Further, user behavior and activities are monitored and recorded so the search app continuously learns. This results in automatic improvement of search results revealing trending queries, frequent searches, and recommended content algorithms that are specifically built for the site search use case.

And when the bots can't figure it out, you might still want and need the manual approach: business rules. Business rules like boost, block, pin, should be easy to edit, publish, and revise. You shouldn't need extra training or to involve your IT department. Newer search apps wrap all this up in a drag-and-drop interface. Tune results without having to know any code, preview how it changes search results, and then commit them to the live application.

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# The 3 critical capabilities for stellar site search

## Immersive, Delightful User Experience

And the experience built around the search results is just as important as the quality of the results themselves. You could have the most relevant, high-quality, search results listed on a page, but if the app doesn't engage the user, they aren't going to click. This isn't just making it "look pretty." It has to be usable and useful. A search experience that offers easy, engaging, and intuitive ways for users to ask and interact will be the difference between a winning and losing implementation.

There are several baseline capabilities that modern website users (which is pretty much everyone) expect and you should seek to deliver:

**Typeahead** is a key part of providing that responsive feel that every search app should have. Also called autocomplete, typeahead shows a user suggested queries or search results as soon as they start typing. It gives any search app that crisp, brisk, snap that a UI should have.

**Spell correction** has gone past the days of massive dictionary files and scrolling through endless rules to using queries and user behavior to improve and suggest improvements for misspelling as users type so they get what they want — even when they make mistakes.

**Facet management** lets you easily add the filters and checkboxes a user needs to sort their search results by type, date, format, or other attributes — without code.

**Synonym detection** monitors user behavior to recommend new synonyms over time to further improve the relevancy of search results.

An additional and often missed part of a delightful search experience is **pro-active content discovery**. Using insights captured by user behavior to show users what they might be looking for before they even start typing. You can create a richer user experience that powers recommendations based on popular and trending and related content and queries. This extends the power of content beyond the search bar.

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# The 3 critical capabilities for stellar site search

## Speed, Scalability, and Cost

Fantastic search results presented attractively with a delightful experience is great and all. But it better be fast. Speed is so core to how a search experience is perceived, you don't notice it until things *aren't* fast. Your site visitors expect the same velocity from your site's search application that they experience everywhere else on the internet.

This is why newer search apps have moved to a cloud-native architecture offering swift responses to search queries. Moving to the cloud also enables apps to scale up to meet demand at peak traffic times, and then settle back down to the normal ebb and flow. Cloud architecture also gives you a certain piece of mind as it relates to resilience. All the usual DevOps tasks are sorted out and taken care of: backups, disaster recovery, latency, etc. Configuration and setup is usually inconsequential with nothing to install or download.

Query response time is critical, but so is the speed of everything else the search application does for both your end users and your team. You want lightning fast indexing that can ingest your site and its documents, quickly crawling and indexing thousands of docs within a matter of minutes. And it keeps an eye out for updates and new content and grabs those as well. The site search app should be able to connect to your data sources and index your public sites so your unique mix of site content and file types is surfaced to users so results are always complete and fresh.

You also want speed on the admin side. If you can do a Starbucks run waiting for a configuration to update, you might need something a bit snappier. End users hate slow apps and admins resent them even more (and use them even less).

And at the root of speed and scalability is cost. Legacy search systems cost companies business, time, and resources.

With a keen eye on these 3 critical capabilities as you are shopping for a site search solution, you should be able to select a vendor that will quickly get you up and running with a minimum amount of runaround and a delightful experience for end-users.

Average Click-Through Rate (CTR)

8.26%

+27 (14.57%) Past Month



- Scientific Papers
- Code Documentation
- Human Resources
- Sales Targets
- Payroll

# And don't forget metrics

Proving the ROI for a site search app is not always straightforward. It's not like product catalog search where there's an obvious metric like conversions and add-to-cart.

But there are still some key indicators to keep track of as you deploy your new search application:

**Search utilization:**

How many queries per month is the app serving? Does this track with the overall traffic? Do adjustments to presentation and UI affect it?

**Null results:**

How often does a search query produce no search results? (And which queries?) Frequent queries with no content can also point you towards new content that needs to be developed.

**Click-through rate (CTR):**

How many times does a user click to view a document from a set of search results? This indicates the quality of a set of search results.

**Bounce rate:**

After a user clicks, do they stay on a particular page long enough to consume the content? If they exit immediately, the content served up might not be the best match for their query.

Don't forget to baseline! Be sure to get as much historical data as you can *before* your new site search application is rolled out. That'll help you prove the return on investment and time spent on spinning up a new site search solution.

# Superior site search in minutes

## Get Started >

Lucidworks Connected Search gives your website the best search relevancy — from the very first search — in a fast, easy-to-use platform that anyone can manage.

Contact us today at [lucidworks.com](https://lucidworks.com) or call 415-329-6253