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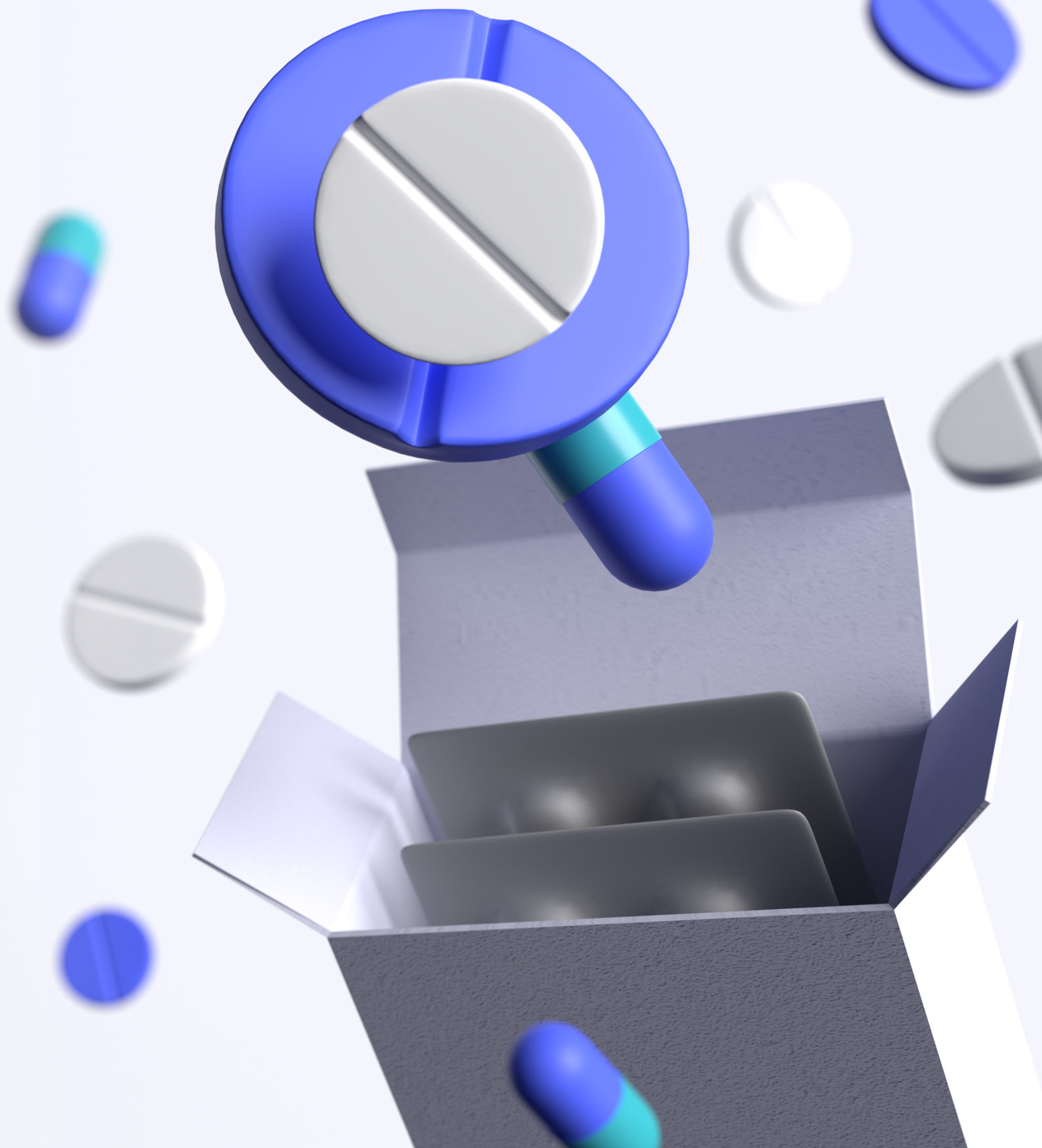
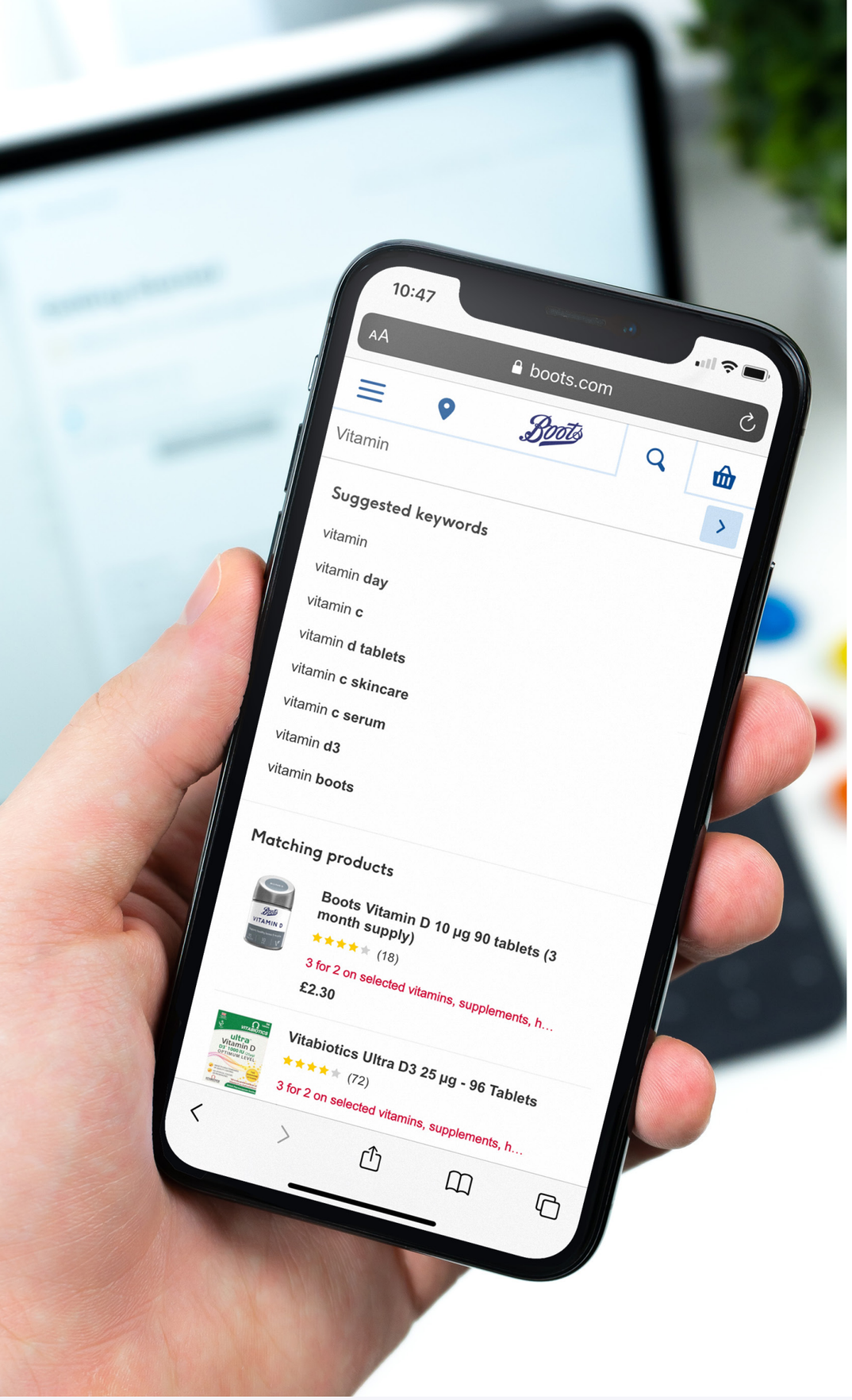
SEARCH BEYOND THE BOX

Increasing pharmacy sales with search and discovery





Why read this eBook?

Pharmacy sales are booming in both developed and developing countries. The pandemic has brought on a new surge of online demand for over-the-counter (non-prescription) medicine, as well as wellness products.

At the same time, digital advertising for ecommerce pharmacy websites is still heavily regulated in most countries, making it a subpar channel for customer acquisition, and conversion. This makes excellent user experience a critical avenue for pharmacies' digital properties to attract and retain users.

And when it comes to digital user experiences, who better to learn from than ecommerce?

Retailers know that a simplistic view of the customer journey: search bar > click > add to cart is not sufficient. Search is not simply about helping the user find what they are looking for. Ecommerce market leaders use search technology as an underexploited strategic weapon, driving KPIs like conversion rates, stickiness, engagement, and increased basket size.

In this eBook, we'll look at innovative ways that search and browsing can power creative user experiences for online pharmacy shoppers — and better results for the business.

01

SEARCH MATTERS

But really, why read this book?

Why spend time on moving your pharmacy site's search experience forward?

Bad search is expensive

Things are as simple as this: if the user can't find what they are looking for, they will bounce and go to a competitor.

43%

43% of site visitors
go immediately
to search boxes

FORRESTER®

2.6x

Shoppers using search
spend 2.6x more

salesforce

12%

12% of users
will go to a competitor's site
after an unsuccessful search

kissmetrics

Users remember bad search experiences

While great search provides an impression of an overall smooth customer experience, bad search is far more memorable:

> “So many e-commerce sites still suck really badly. Too little information, too inconvenient to browse and search. Ripe for disruption.”
>
> **@giffengrabber**

> “On-site search is so important to ecommerce stores. So why is it a neglected feature on Shopify?”
>
> **@affan_imran**

> “@Rackspace gaaaaah! your webmail search SUCKS!!! it doesn’t work on finding “mail from” an email address”
>
> **@flatpooks**

Great search produces business results

Ecommerce companies already know that advanced site search can double conversion rates. Pharmacy platforms can do well copying the retailer playbook, as effective search is so critical for pharmacy shoppers who want to find the right items at speed.

-88%

88% reduction in bounce rate after implementing Algolia search solutions

LACOSTE

35%

35% higher conversion rates compared to prior site search function

UNDER ARMOUR

4%

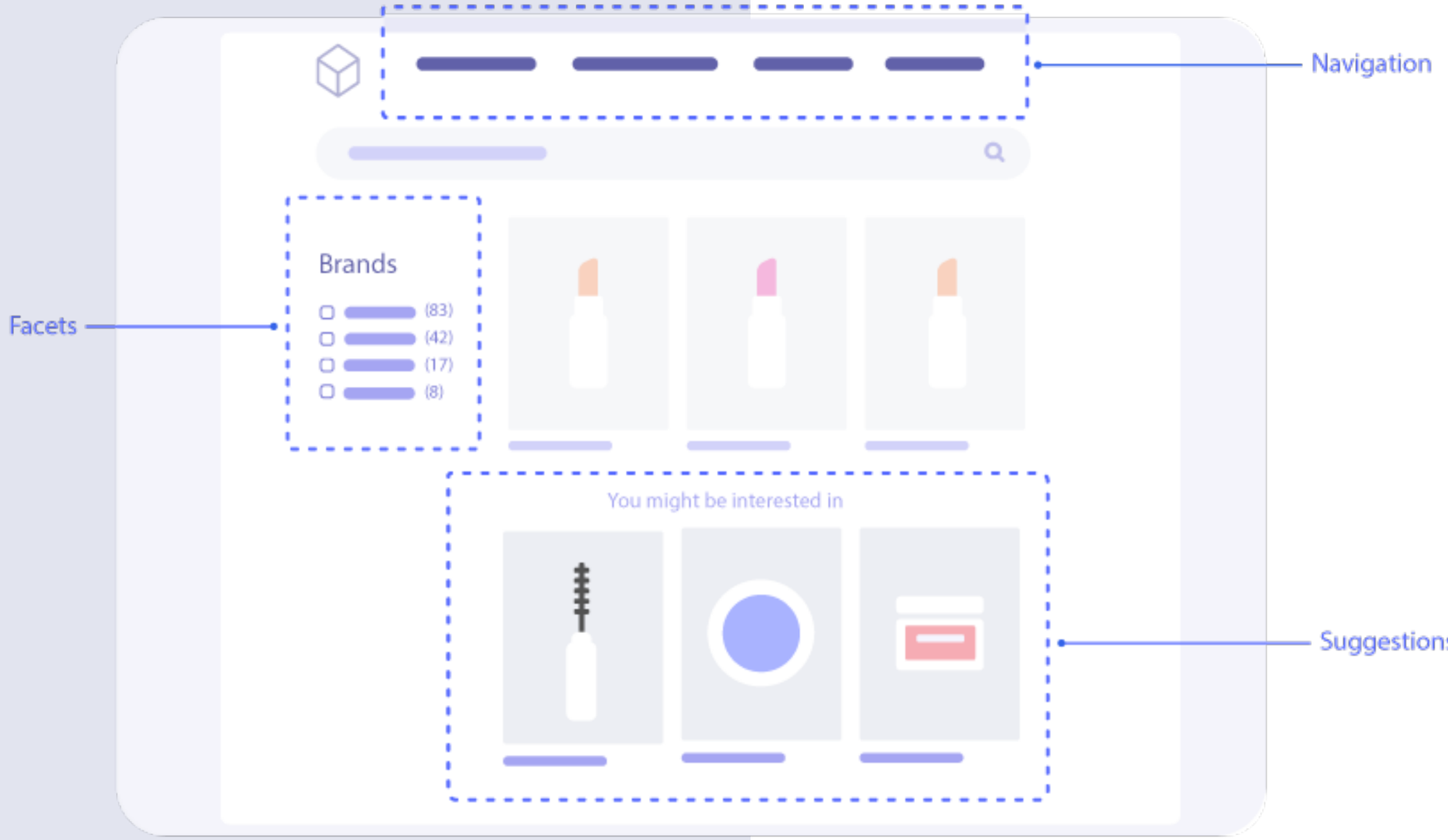
search, browse behavior, and personalization tools led to 4% increase in revenue

EYEBUY DIRECT

02

USER INTENT: SEARCH BEYOND THE BOX

At its essence, search is about harnessing your online pharmacy shoppers' intent and connecting it to the product they want to find. Users can indicate intent in many different ways: by typing directly into the search bar, leveraging filters and facets, or even clicking suggestions you provided because you know something about their preferences. Anything that the user directly tells or imparts to you is something that can be used to ensure that what they are seeing and finding is relevant to them.



Covering the basics

Before considering advanced use cases, it is key to ensure the basic elements of your search technology are in place. First and foremost: are the results coming to the user relevant to them? There are several different aspects of relevance that are useful to differentiate between, and we'll list them in order of importance.

Textual Relevance

- Typo-tolerance
- Synonyms
- Language-agnostic
- Natural Language Processing

Business Metrics

- Conversion rates
- Media Views
- Comment counts
- … and more

Personalization

- User behaviour
- User preferences
- Contextual Awareness

The name of a product, its brand, keywords in the description — what we call attributes — constitute **textual relevance**. Textual relevance means reading correctly into the user's intent even if they misspelled a word or used a stop word (the, and, at, with…). It also means giving them a synonym result (offering a parka when they typed in "jacket"), and making sure that plurals are accounted for (searching for "feet warmers" should display foot warmers).

You can leverage your own **business metrics** to further impart relevance, ensuring that the user sees content they are most likely to act on. You could, for example, be tracking conversion rates on your products, and wanting to display first the result with the highest conversion rate.

Personalization is a proverbial cherry on top for stellar relevance, and it can be considered at a user level or at a group level. Let's say a user is not logged in but you know they are in a certain age bracket or from a certain country — in that case, we are talking group level personalization. If they are in fact logged in, and you know their browsing or purchase history, you can take advantage of personalization at the user level.

Personalization is all about taking signals from your user: the conscious signals they are sending you by interacting with your user interface, and the more subconscious, latent signals coming from their past preference indications. All this must be done with utmost consideration for user privacy.

03

USER EXPERIENCE: ADVANCED USE CASES

There was a time when ecommerce pharmacy search was just a box: a box to check on your list of website elements, and a box for users to enter queries into. This is no longer the case. Advanced technologies are raising the bar for customer experiences, which are, as Forrester put it, "becoming not only omnichannel but more multisensory and complex to design. To adapt, companies must embrace a design thinking approach focused not on technology but on ease, effectiveness, and emotion."

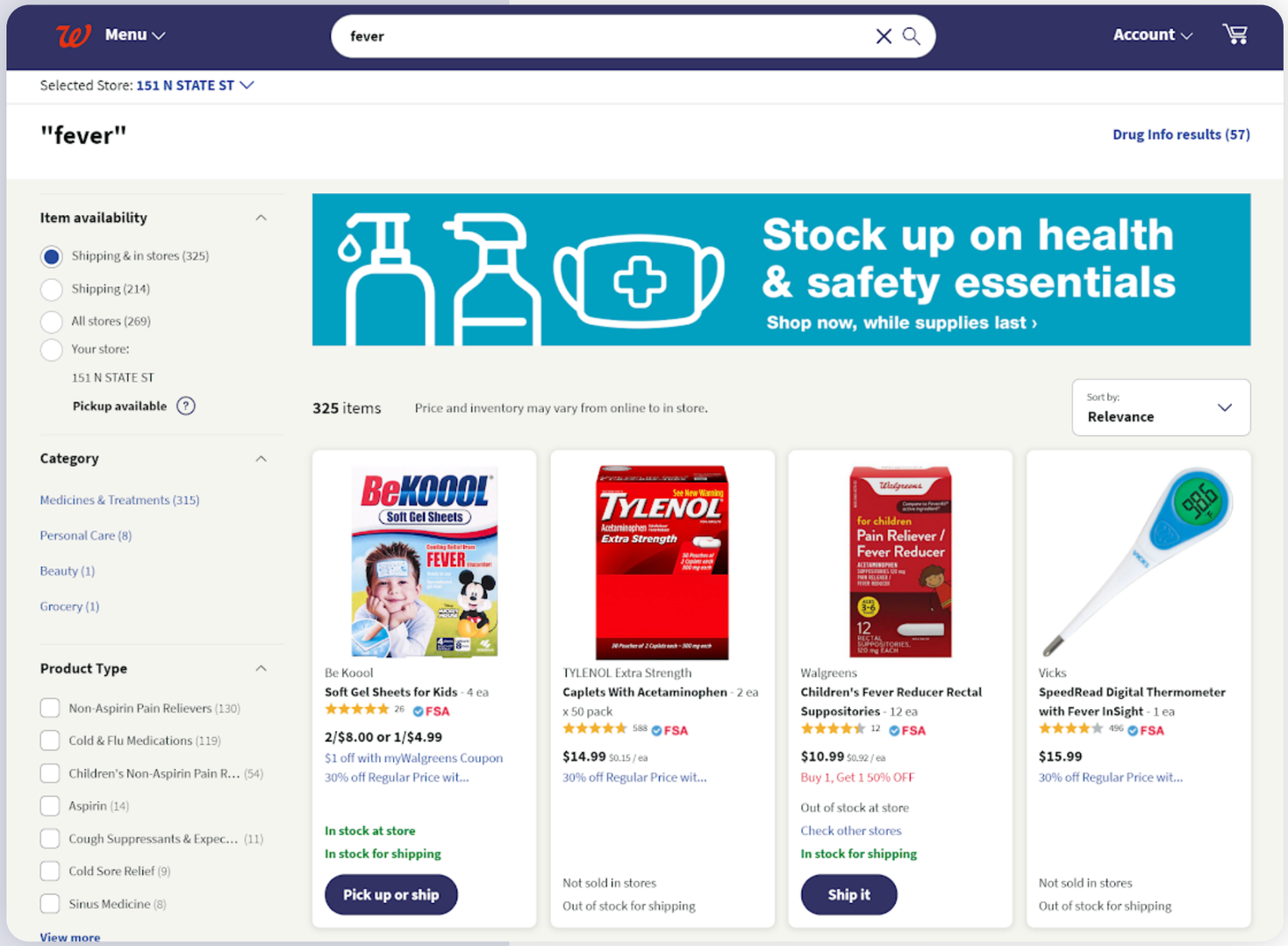
For ecommerce pharmacy platforms, this mandate is even more important since shoppers typically arrive at your site knowing exactly what they want. The last thing they want to do is relive the physical drugstore experience of endlessly scanning shelves for a frustratingly elusive product, then look for the store employee to ask them where it is.

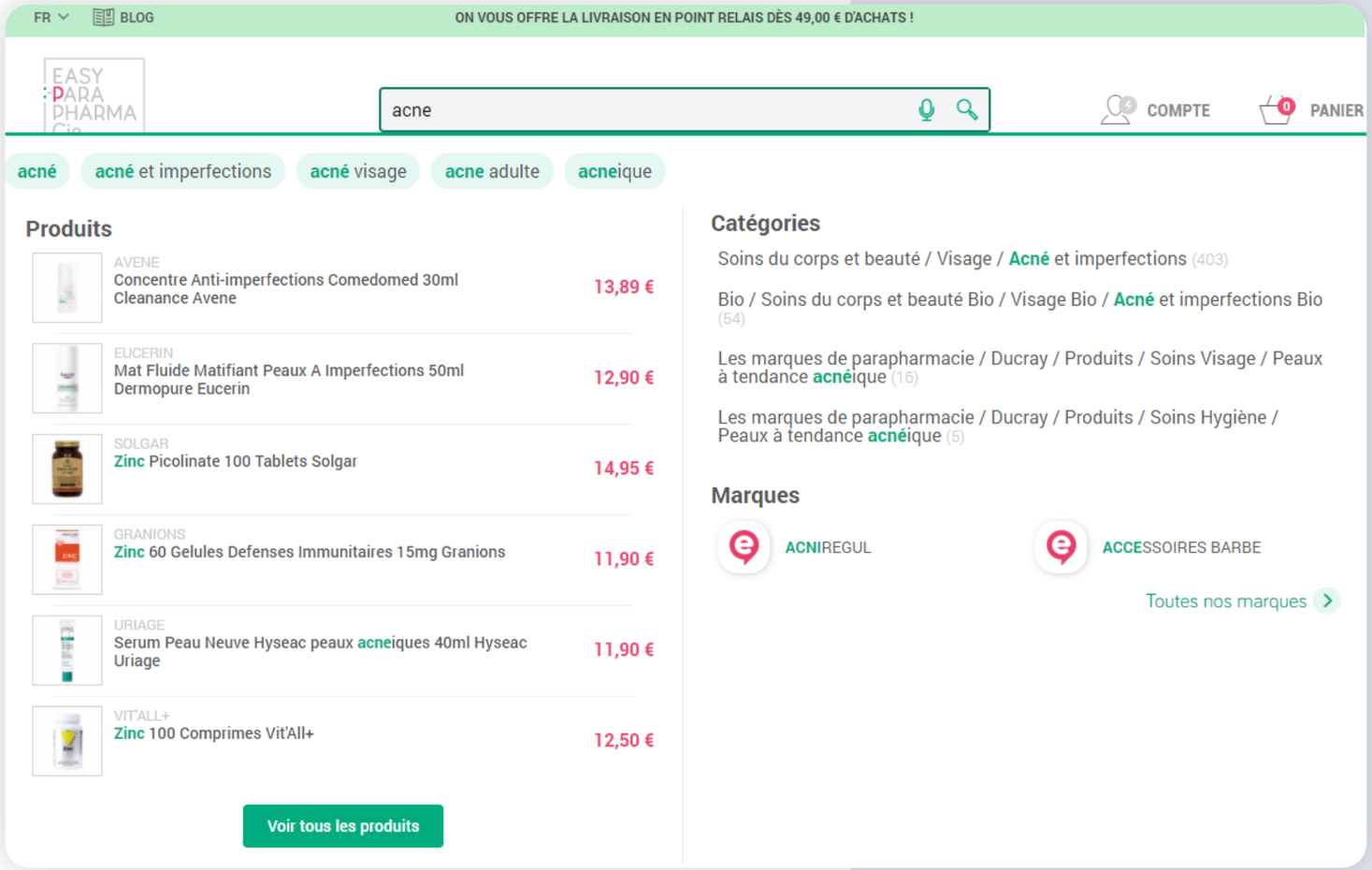
Today's ecommerce pharmacy platforms must offer users the most logical and inspiring ways to get to the shopping cart. This means going past the standard usage of the search box. Here, we'll show the key tools major retailers like Walgreens are using to power search experiences beyond the box for their ecommerce pharmacy websites.

Search by symptoms and active ingredients

Walgreens and Germany's Shop Apotheke are using this feature to make online pharmacy search more intuitive and logical. A typical brick and mortar drug store scenario is to search for things according to symptoms and active ingredients: why not provide that experience online?

To take the Walgreens example, users can search either by "fever" or "acetaminophen" and get relevant results in each case.





Query suggestions

Query suggestions provide real-time search recommendations as online pharmacy shoppers type in their queries. These contextually related suggestions increase click-through rates by accelerating the search process.

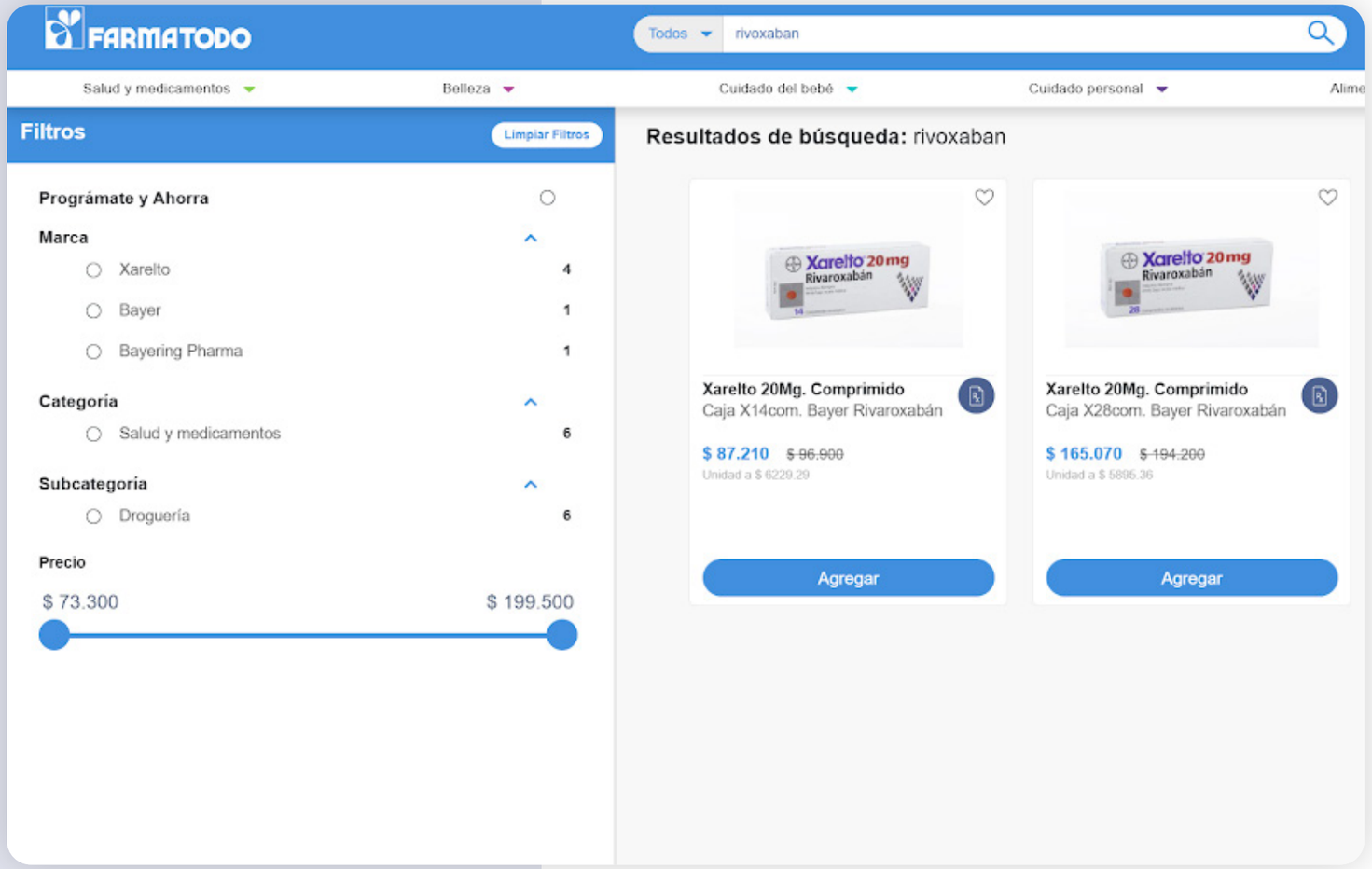
Going back to our brick and mortar pharmacy situation of having to tap the store employee on the shoulder, this is the part where the very knowledgeable and helpful employee gives the shopper other options to choose from — ones that she may not have been aware of and that are actually better than her original choice.

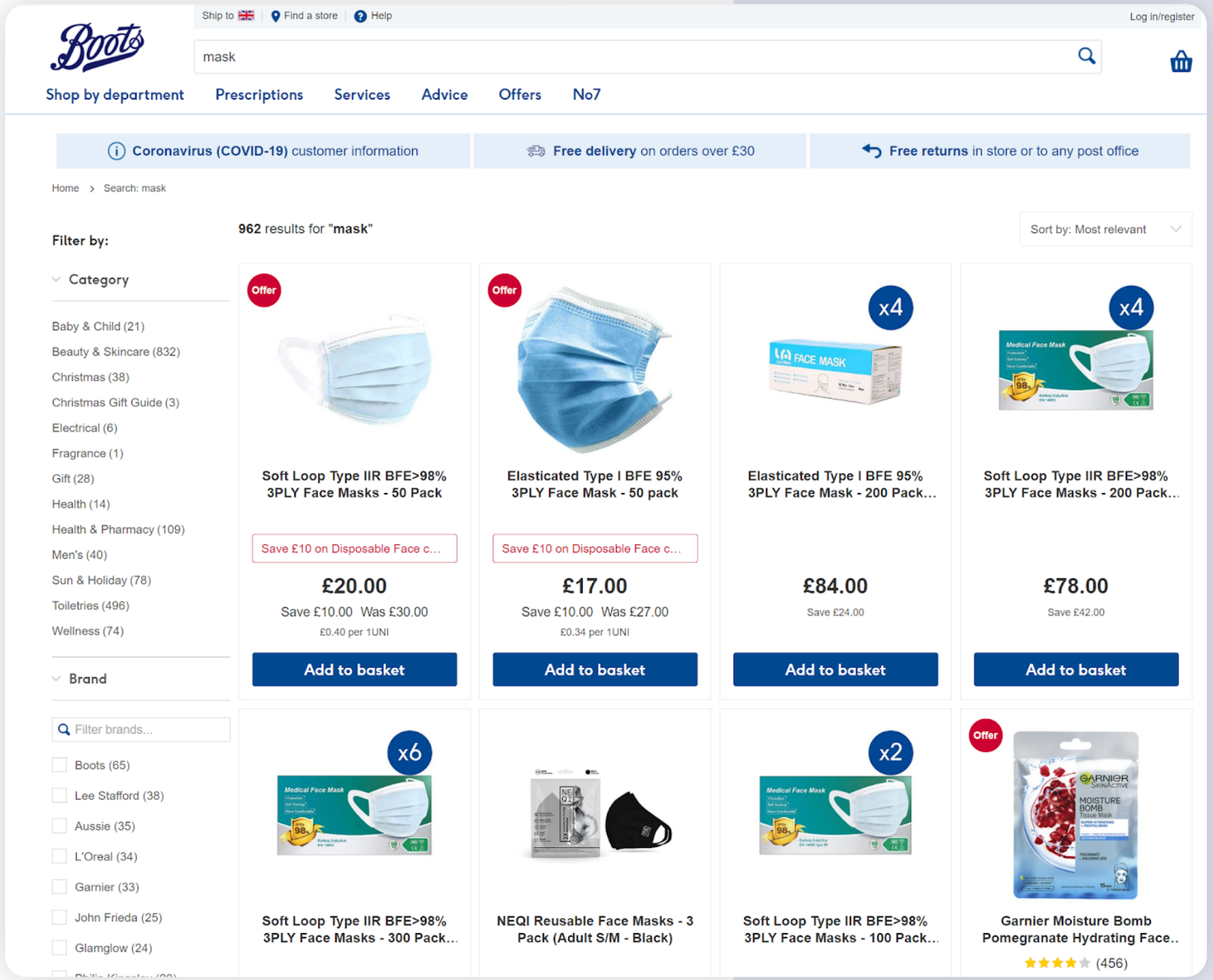
France's Easyparapharmacie offers both specific product suggestions and broader category suggestions, and bolds these query suggestions in the search results.

Typo tolerance

Online pharmacy search can be a typo-ridden experience, especially if the user is searching for drug names or ingredients. Typo tolerance means giving online pharmacy shoppers the results they want — no matter how badly they may be butchering the intended search term.

Here's an example of how Columbia's Farmatodo uses typo tolerance to improve its search experience. People searching for the drug rivaroxaban — one of the top 10 drugs sold in the world — often enter "rivoxaban", but typo tolerance allows Farmatodo's search engine to still return relevant results.





Adapting to seasons and unique circumstances

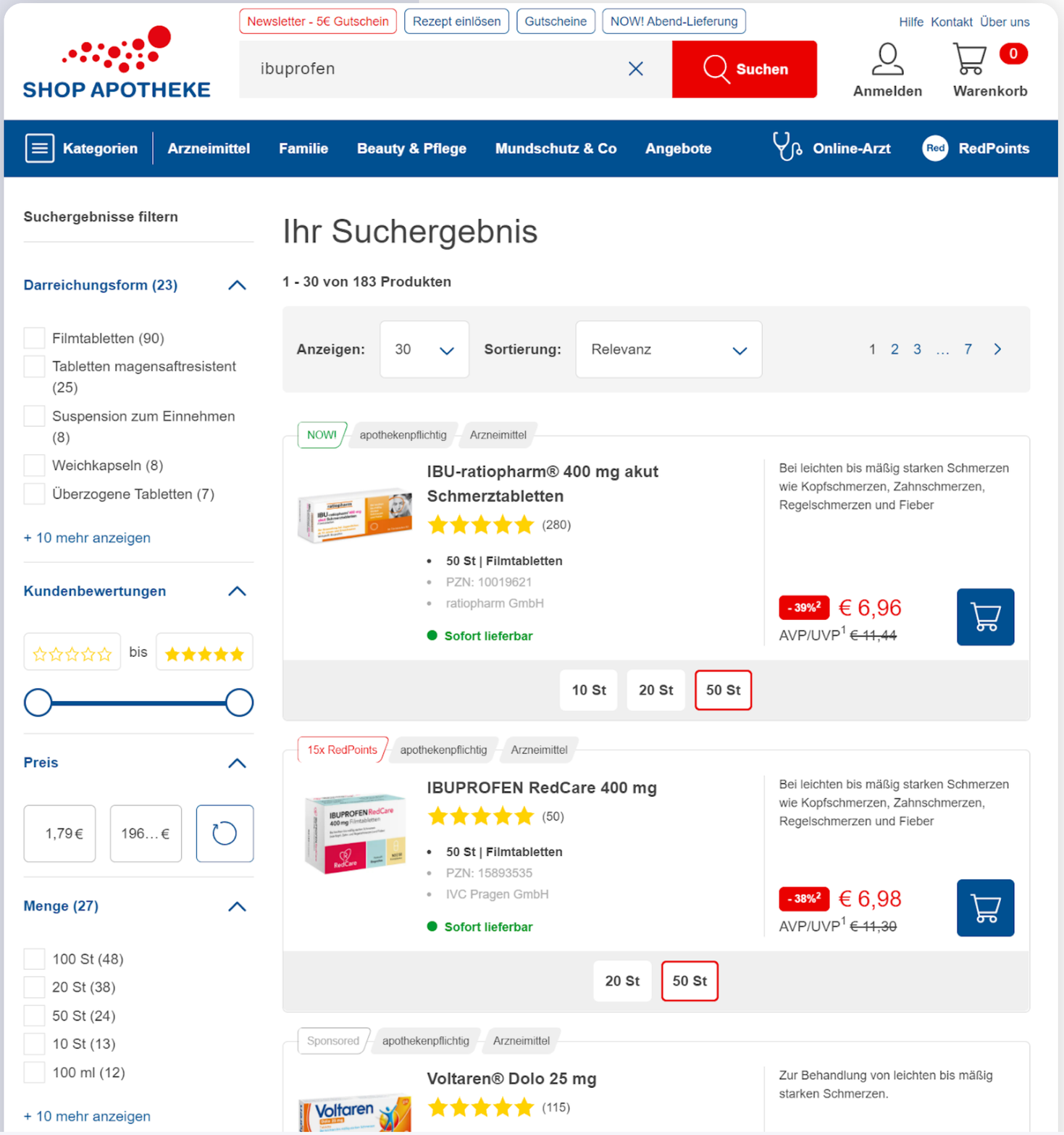
Online pharmacy shoppers' needs can change frequently according to the time of year. They can look for allergy pills in the spring and flu remedies in the winter. Unique situations like the COVID-19 pandemic can usher in a entirely new set of healthcare-related terminology and potential search queries.

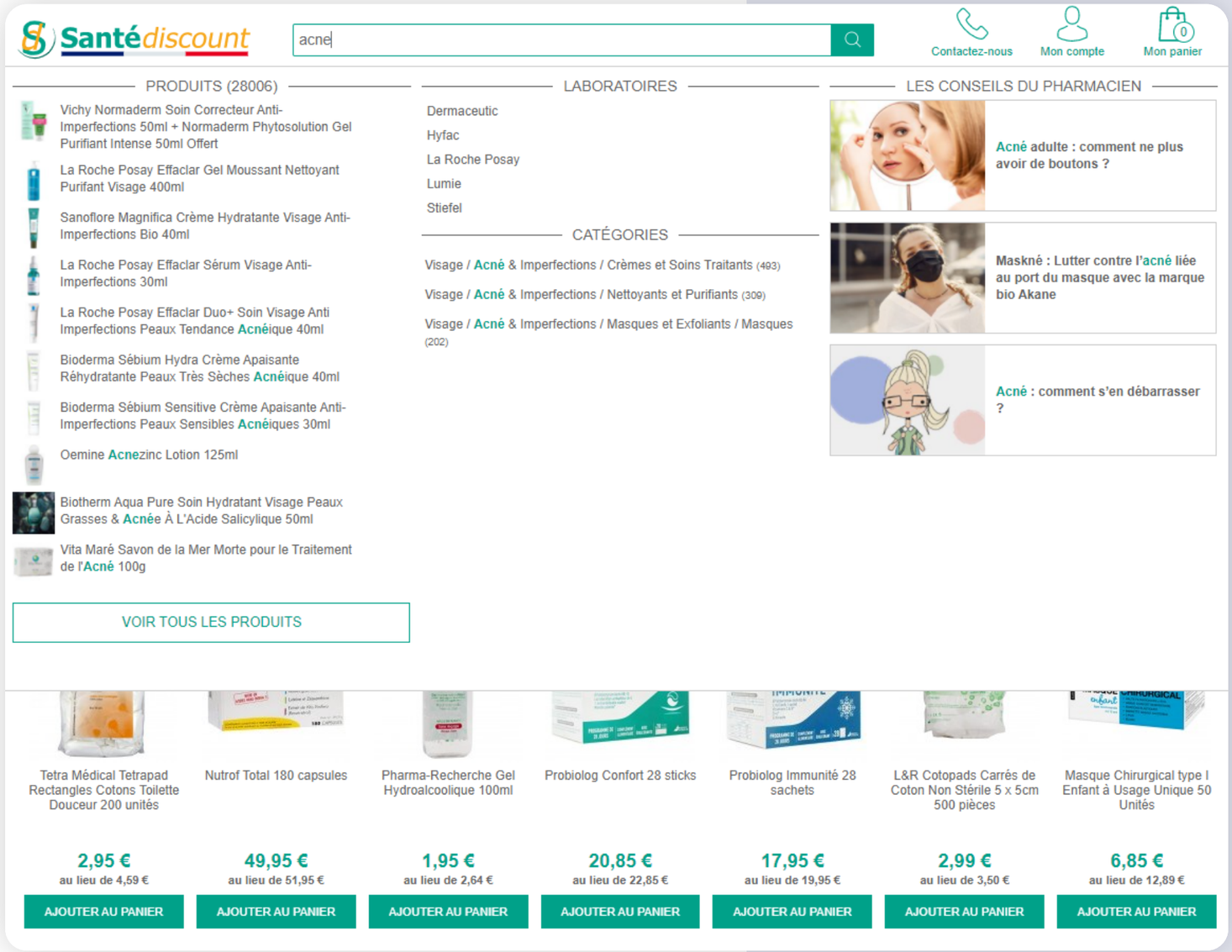
The UK's Boots understands the power of having a contextual search experience that adapts to seasons and special situations. For example, when users search for "mask", protective face coverings appear before beauty and skin-care masks.

Providing packaging options

There are more pharmaceutical packaging options than ever, and online pharmacy shoppers sometimes have a packaging preference.

Shop Apotheke's search experience lets users choose from available packaging options for each result directly on the results page.





Federated search

Federated search allows you to produce results that encompass far more than just the products themselves — including product documentation, use guides, and published articles.

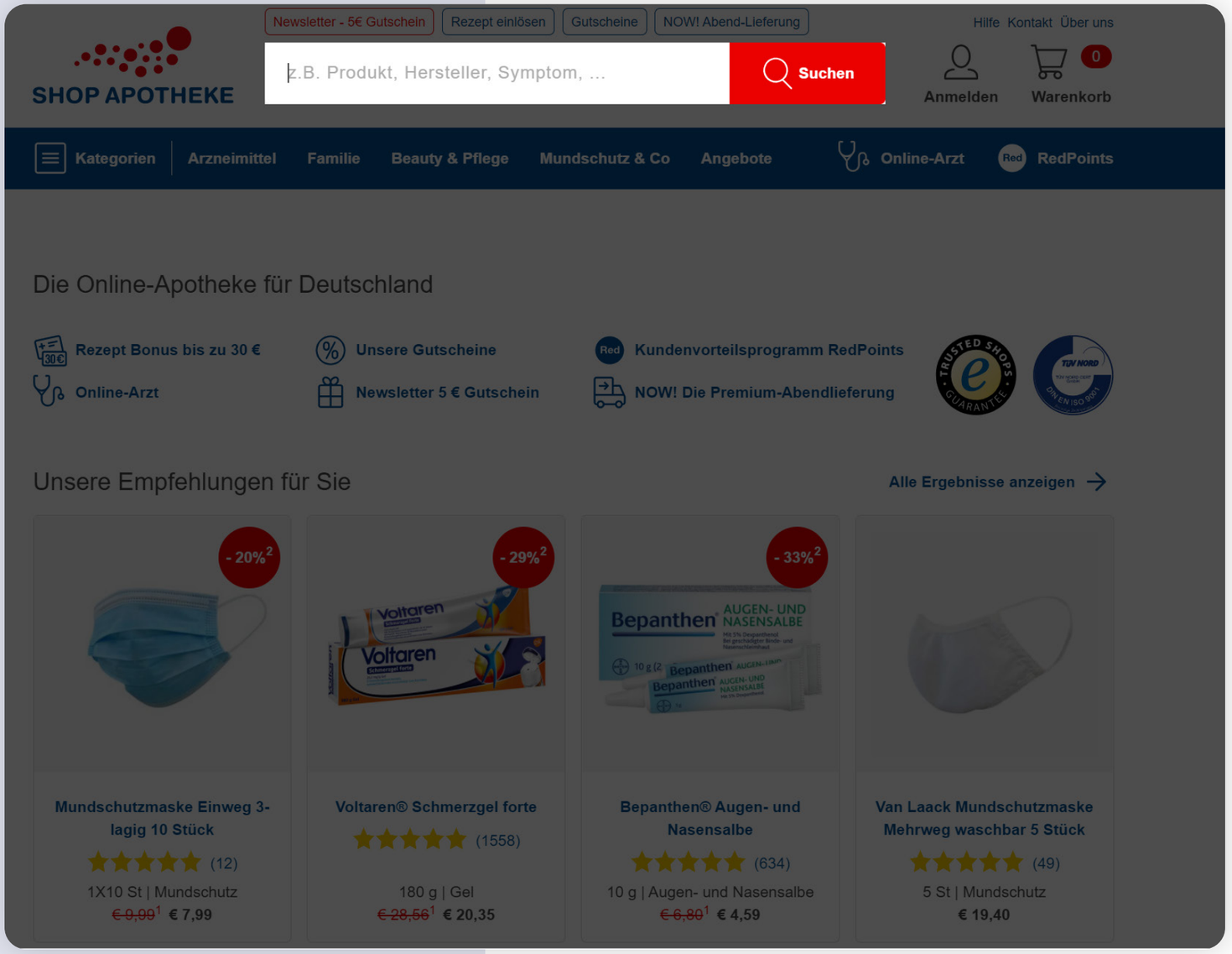
This benefits the users in many ways, but especially by reducing the amount of time they need to spend searching and by giving them extra context and knowledge around the drug they are searching for.

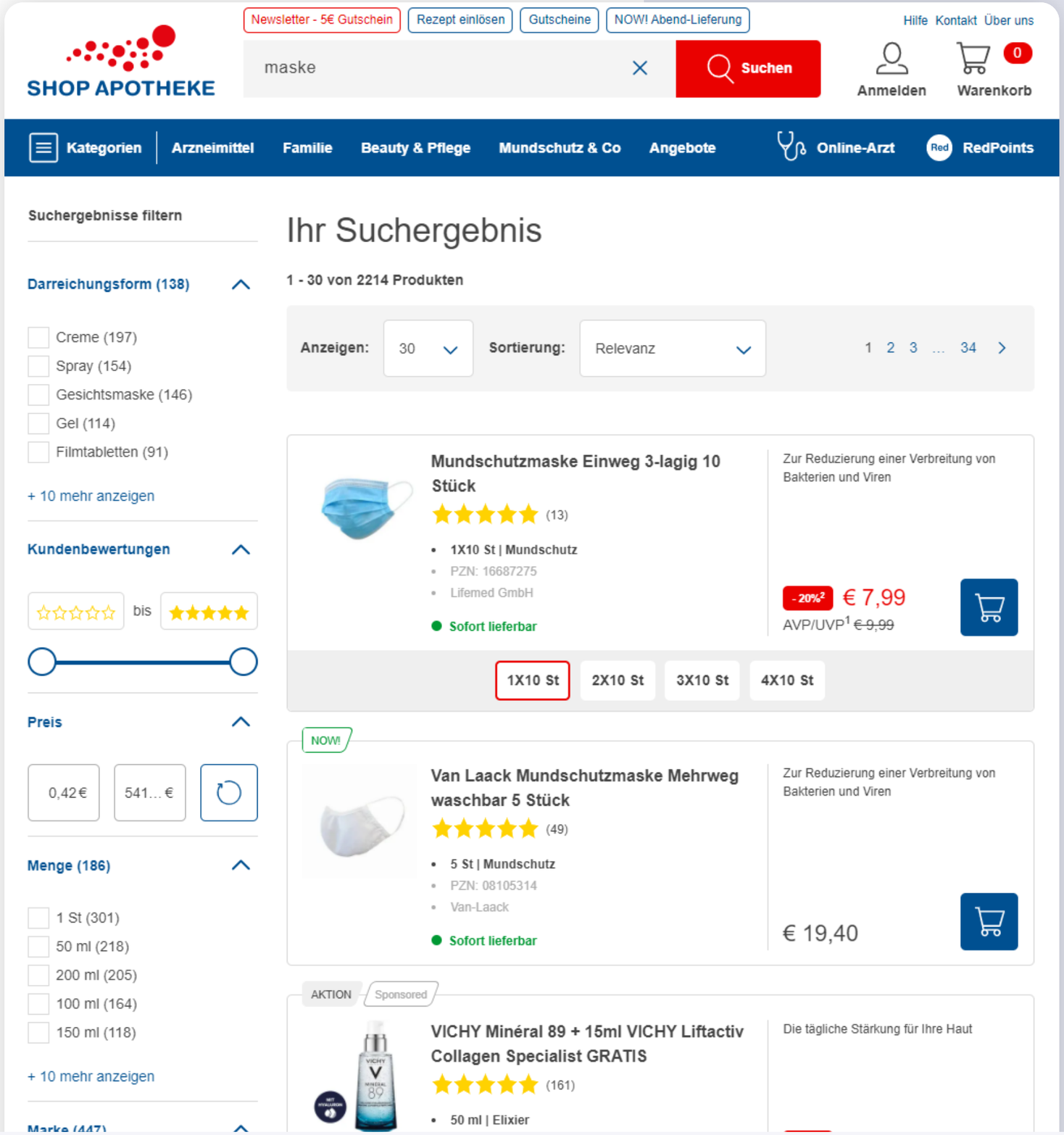
The French pharmacy site Santédiscount uses federated search to give customers a comprehensive list of relevant products, top manufacturers, useful categories, and related articles, all with just a few strokes of the keyboard.

Microcopy

Microcopy is an ecommerce platform's way of telling searchers that they have a wide array of search options to choose from. Essentially, it's a category list that populates the search field before the user even begins to type in the search term.

An example would be Shop Apotheke's use of microcopy to tell users they can search for products, but also manufacturers, symptoms, and more to get results





Including merchandising in search results

Everyone loves a good deal. The smartest online pharmacies include merchandising in search results to give their searchers that unexpected but welcome surprise of discounted products. Pharmacies can use this space to promote their own private-label items, or even to sell sponsored spots to wholesalers.

In Shop Apotheke's example, wholesalers can pay to list their products in a designated position for relevant queries, and Shop Apotheke can promote its house-label products in the top results.

Key takeaways

Search is critical to both user experience and business KPIs. Bad search is expensive not only because your users remember it but because they inevitably bounce from your site, negatively impacting revenue directly.

There are two key aspects to great search and discovery: relevance (including textual relevance, business relevance, and personalization) and user experience.

Advanced user experiences powered by search technologies go beyond the search box: they include powerful discovery through browsing, faceting, innovative UX buttons, and much more, shortening the user's path to the shopping cart while driving your KPIs.

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THANK YOU FOR READING

ABOUT ALGOLIA

Algolia enables e-commerce businesses to create fast, relevant and intuitive search and discovery experiences that increase conversions, engagement and customer loyalty. We deliver personalized shopper experiences and fuel your digital strategy with sophisticated search technologies like AI and conversational search. A powerful set of features allows you to analyze and A/B test relevance strategies, then use those insights to improve your product catalog, fuel merchandising initiatives and fine-tune relevance. You can promote specific results, display promotional banners, or redirect your customers when they search for the latest trends. More than 10,000 companies like Lacoste, Under Armour, Dior, L'Occitane En Provence and Fanatics rely on Algolia.

Learn more at **www.algolia.com**