Dawn & algolia

From greenfield to MACH:

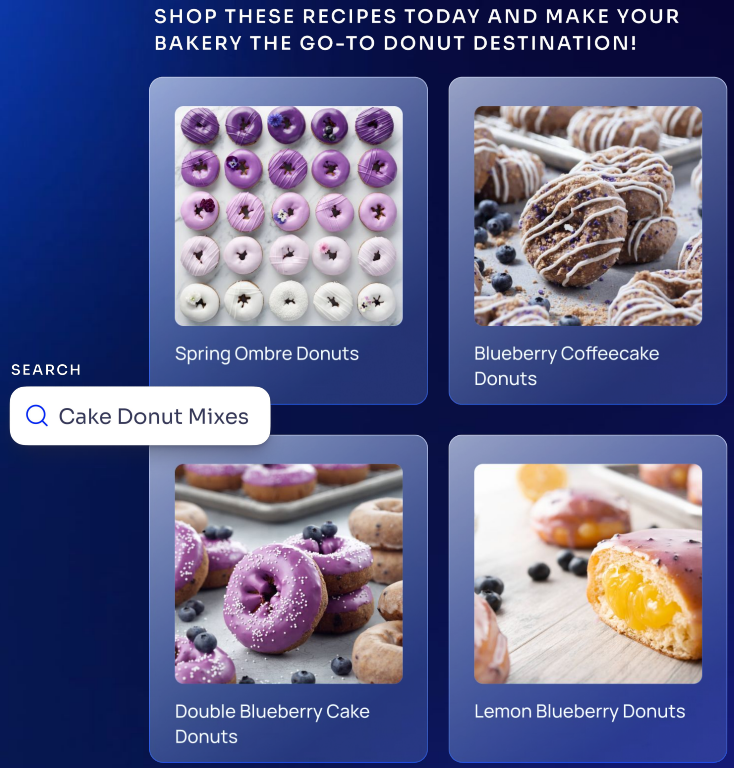
How Algolia Search helped Dawn Foods advance its B2B e-commerce goals

“The Algolia Search index is easy to create, and easy to manage. The quality in terms of relevance and recall of results are exceptional. And Algolia narrows down to the right one or two results for our customers from a massive and complex catalog. All those things make it stand out for us.”

Gireesh Sahukar, Vice President, Digital,
Dawn Food Products Inc.

Summary

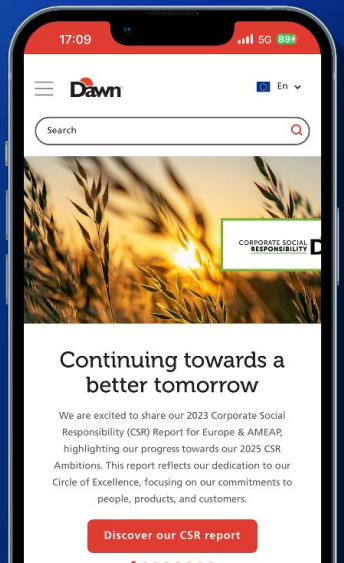
Bakery ingredient manufacturer and distributor, Dawn Foods, transitioned from having no eCommerce presence to becoming an advanced, AI-ready business model in less than 3 years. And it all started with Dawn Foods and digital transformation partner EPAM listening to the voice of the customer, addressing poor search performance, and adopting a MACH architecture with Algolia, commercetools, and Contentstack. Learn how Algolia improved search accuracy and relevancy, providing better customer experience, increasing conversions, reducing abandonment rates, and doubling sales year-over-year – all after the new search experience was built in just one month.



Use Case:
B2C Ecommerce

Headquarters:
Jackson, Michigan

Algolia Customer
2021



Key Results Qualitative

+ Multifaceted product and content search
+ Improved search relevancy
+ Reduced search abandonment
+ Increased search conversions
+ Delivered target lift

Integrations

+ Contentstack
+ Commercetools

Feature Usage

+ Algolia Search API
+ Instant Search
+ Dynamic Synonyms
+ Query Suggestions
+ Custom Ranking

The Challenges

- Poor search performance and feedback
- Search abandonment by customers
- Low conversions

The Solutions

- Full-featured search platform
- Provides single search platform for all content
- Accurate and relevant search results
- MACH digital transformation partner: EPAM (learn more about how they tackled this project from their perspective here)
- MACH architecture: Algolia, commercetools, Contentstack, Google Cloud, Salsify

The Results

- Increased sales year-over-year for 3 consecutive years
- Exceeded adoption targets
- Delivered net sales target lift

Global bakery manufacturer and ingredients supplier Dawn Foods has established itself as the premier bakery service provider, inspiring bakery success every day. Committed to delighting its customers around the world, Dawn Foods delivers the partnership, insights, innovations, products, and bakery expertise that empowers them to achieve their aspirations.

Headquartered in Jackson, Michigan, Dawn Foods partners with more than 50,000 artisanal and retail bakers, food service leaders and manufacturers located in more than 100 countries and has nearly 4,000 team members globally. Since 1920, Dawn Foods has been a trusted advisor to its customers, helping drive their business forward.

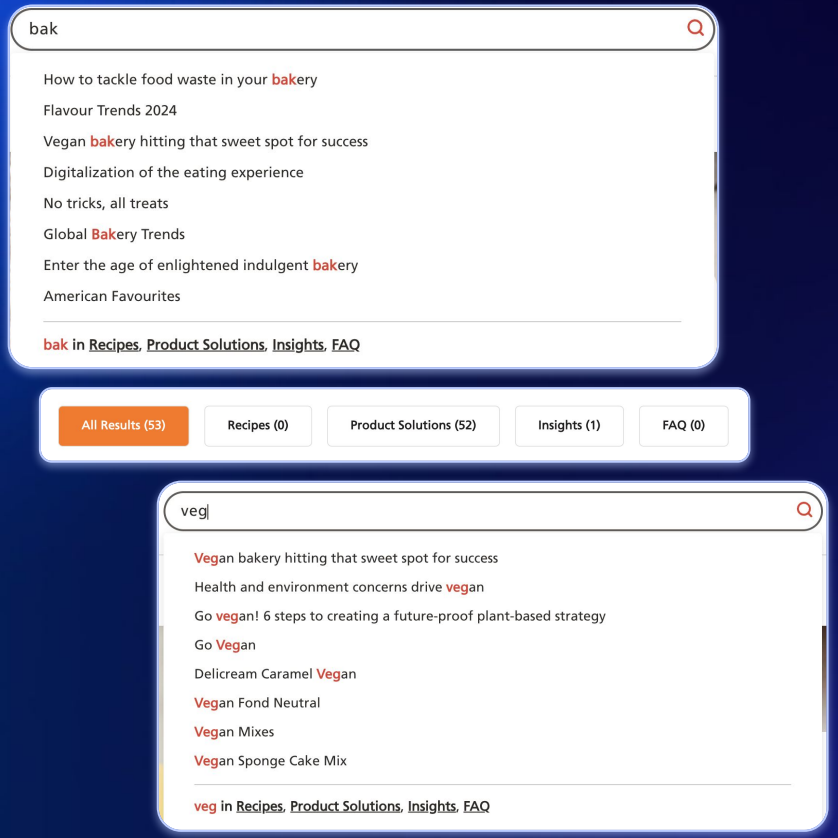
“When we started five years ago, our intent was to create an e-commerce stack that was future-ready,” says Gireesh Sahukar, Vice President of Digital, Dawn Food Products Inc. “Everyone in retail can see what’s right in front of them, the next 12 to 24 months. We wanted to be prepared for beyond that timeframe, and a MACH approach gives us the lightweight solution with needed flexibility to pivot quickly when necessary.”

As a B2B supplier, the company needed to meet different requirements for the business customers it served. Sahukar likens it to a utility. Customers are looking to the website to make their work easier, they want to be able to quickly create an account, find what they need, conduct transactions, and leave.

“You want to get in, get done and get out as quickly as possible,” he says. “Our users are looking at the site from the perspective of it being work for them, so we must treat it as such and help them get it done as quickly as we can. That’s our intent and motivation in what we do.”

“Search needs to be a utility. It needs to be really fast, and it needs to provide the right best first set of answers.”

Dawn Foods digital team recognized that its initial search solution would not achieve the scale, or be a long-term solution to support the unique ability to **index different types of content (such as recipes and FAQs),** that would be needed for future plans.

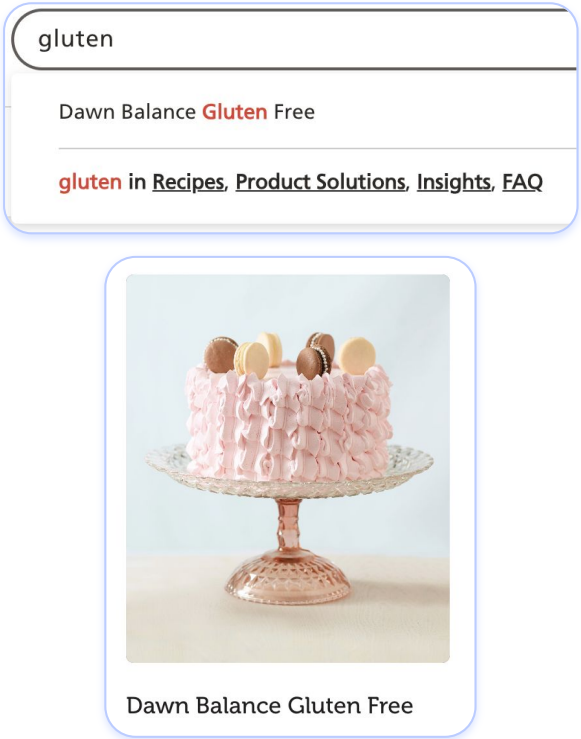


Getting B2B search right

The number of products that must be indexed for customers to search and find is massive. Dawn Foods has well over 10,000 SKUs of products, but there are personalized catalogs for any given customer containing only narrowed down by localized availability to 25%. To add to this B2B complexity, customers also have individually negotiated pricing, resulting in 10 million different price points across its product catalog.

And they are surprisingly complex. For example, if a bakery is looking for ingredients for “gluten-free german chocolate cake”, it needs to be directed to the two correct products offered, not thousands that include one of the four keywords in the search term. Unfortunately, that’s exactly what was happening with the company’s simple keyword search capabilities.

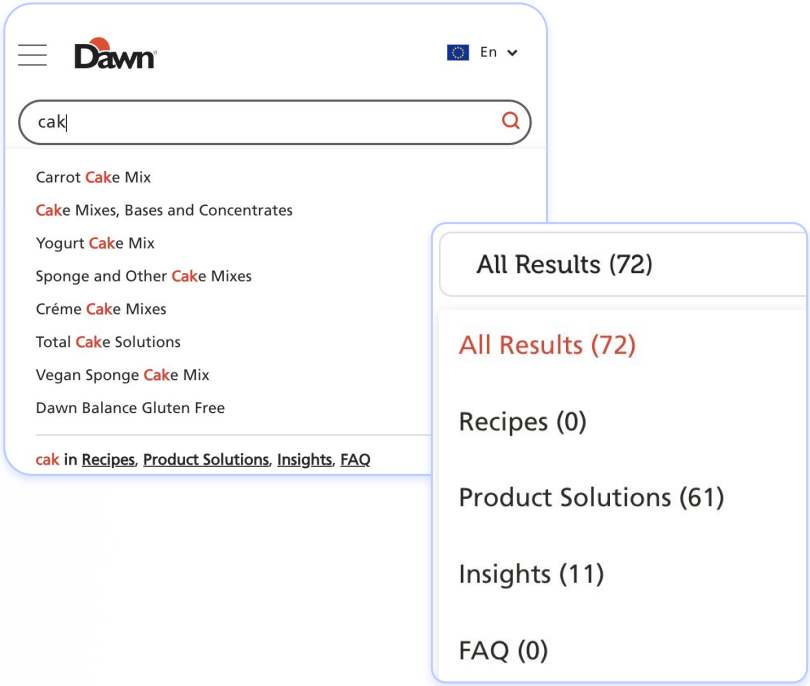
The digital team was receiving internal and customer feedback suggesting a subpar customer experience related to search and had reached the limit of its original search solution’s search functionality.



Employees and customers alike were telling the digital team how difficult it was to quickly find anything on the site, resulting in rage clicks, falling usage of search functionality, high search abandonment rates and lower than desired conversions. On recommendation by its e-commerce platform provider, commercetools, they investigated Algolia.

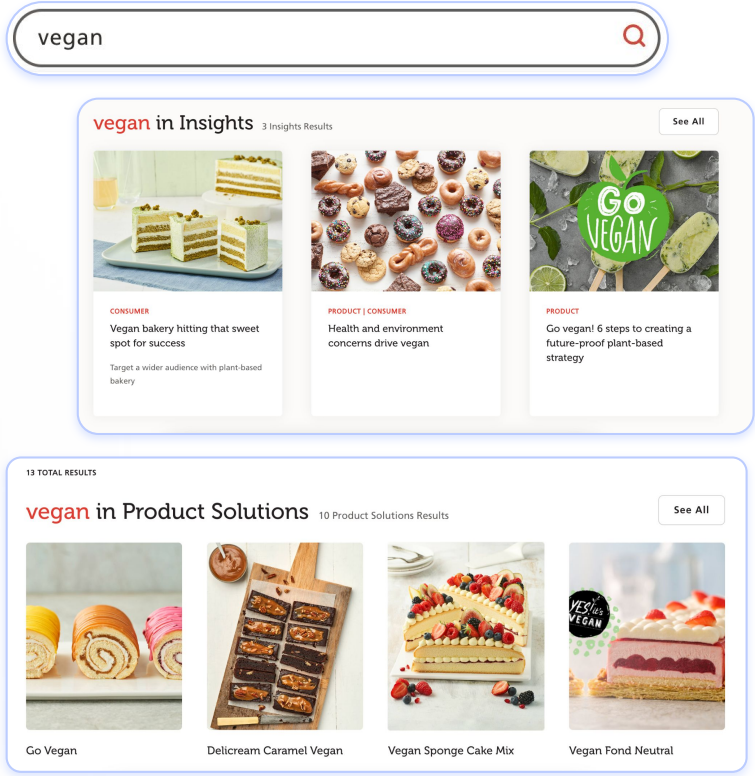
The digital team worked fast, taking an incremental approach to ensure they fully addressed technology limitations, internal team capacity, and delivery timelines. “We decided to change out functionality as if it was one modular block at a time, starting with the biggest impact: search,” Sahukar says.

Implementing Algolia was fast, taking only six weeks thanks in part to the solution’s strong documentation and advice from its Algolia solution architect. Dawn Foods saw immediate improvement from deploying Algolia, providing the faster and more accurate results needed for B2B e-commerce.



Since then, the company has greatly increased search influenced sales since implementation, exceeded its adoption rate targets and delivered a targeted lift — thanks to using search to deliver value to its customers.

“**Algolia gives our users the answer appropriate to their query, understanding their intent, and matching what they’re asking for**. And that’s before conducting any sort of tuning activities on the solution. We just put all the searchable data into Algolia and it provides the right results. It worked for us right out of the box.”

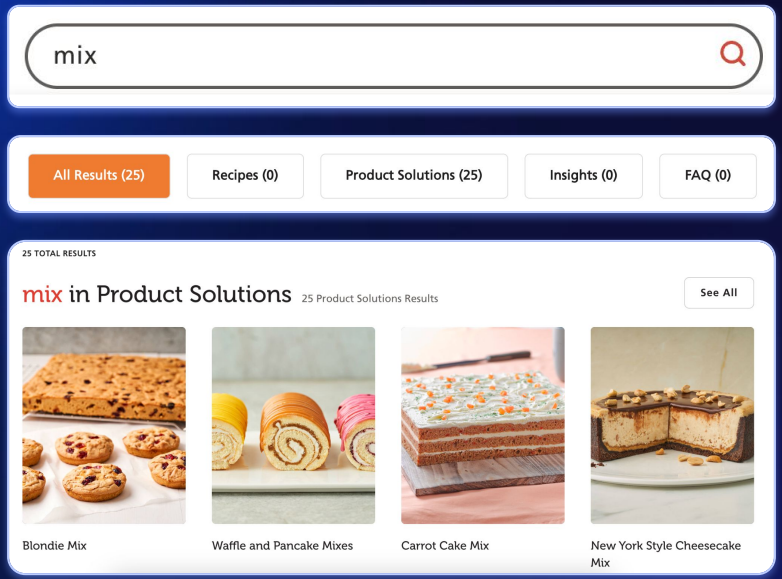


Meeting complex B2B requirements

With its original search solution, gleaning insights from customer search experiences was also a challenge. The company also recently merged its e-commerce and corporate brand websites to reduce customer friction. The combined dawnfoods.com needed search that could handle both product and non-product content.

Dawn Foods' new Algolia Search implementation made all their content — products, recipes, insights, marketing content, information and support pages, and education — available and accessible through search. For non-product content, the company takes advantage of Algolia's multilingual capabilities to meet its global audiences' needs.

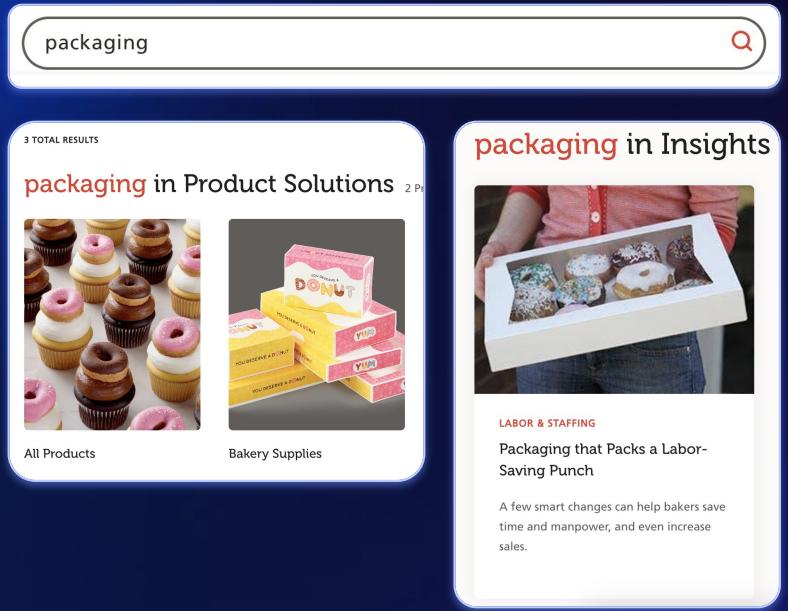
The website now provides the same search experience across content using a single engine, and Algolia is helping the company create a more adaptive, personalized experience.



Unlike the limited insights it originally had, Dawn Foods can now leverage extensive search data through Algolia. The digital team plans to use that data to create a feedback loop to further refine search and improve conversions, address inventory awareness, and present the business with opportunities to expand its catalog.

Of course, as a B2B supplier, Dawn Foods must also ensure search accounts for supply chain challenges and changes in availability, quickly directing customers to replacement ingredients as needed. As well, **Search must address custom SKUs available to individual customers, such as packages**. Algolia has made all this possible, and easy to implement.

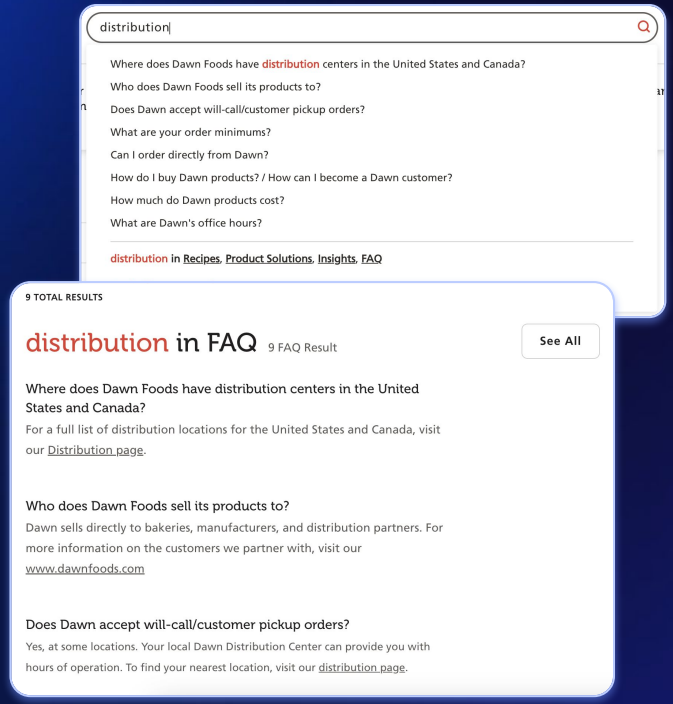
Both Internal and external complaints related to search have since been replaced with strong praise, thanks to the fast and accurate results customers are receiving to their queries.



To ensure ongoing success, the digital team identified several KPIs related to search functionality it expected to improve with the new search platform, and is performing tracking and analysis, testing, and, of course, relying on user feedback.

“The voice of the customer is huge for us,” says Sahukar. “We rely on customers’ feedback to develop our website's roadmap. Again, our customers are bakers, they’re at work in the middle of the night, maybe covered in flour, and they are using websites in a way that consumers wouldn’t.”

While the digital team has been able to meet its promise of creating “one single destination for what customers need to find,” its new Search capabilities have mirrored old ways of B2B commerce with new ones, basically **turning the Dawn Foods site into an always available sales and information resource for its customers.**



Going headless and more

In addition to Algolia's Search API, Dawn Foods has implemented several rich features, including Dynamic Synonyms, Query Suggestions, and Custom Rankings.

Algolia-supplied search data will also be used to provide marketing insights around potential campaigns, and ultimately help speed innovation as the company adopts functionality like personalization, dynamic merchandising, natural language AI and "long tail" search intent.

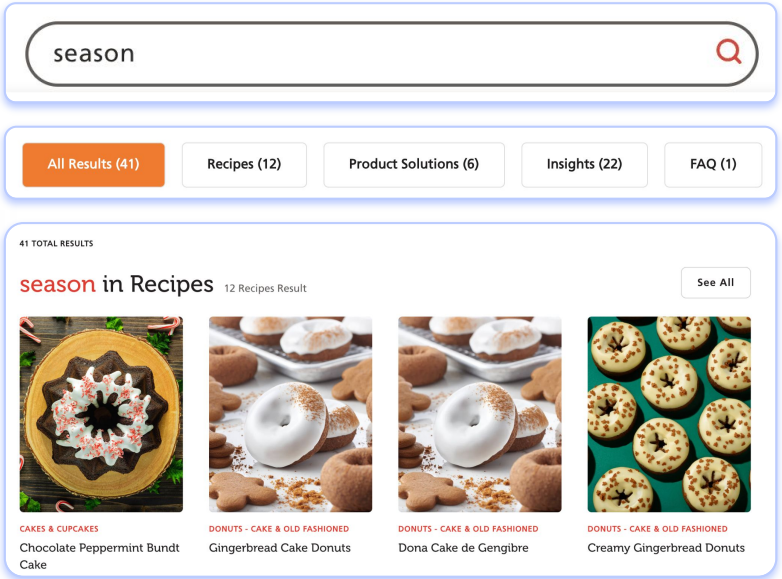
Algolia has helped Dawn Foods on its journey of a headless, composable MACH architecture, retaining the technology freedom and the flexibility needed to best meet its goals and serve its customers. After working with ecommerce transformation partner EPAM to identify the right way to address their needs, the Dawn Foods stack now includes best-of-breed solutions including commercetools as the e-commerce platform, and Contentstack as the content management system. Both support the same architecture as Algolia, being API-first and microservices-based solution providers.

By having moved to a headless approach, Dawn Foods can take advantage of best-in-class technology providers without being locked into one monolithic vendor or solution. An orchestration layer stitches together API responses on the backend, letting the company replace APIs without a forklift overhaul or creating any noticeable change to the customer view.

Thanks to its headless approach, Dawn Foods is implementing the best solutions and partners to position it to meet its current and future goals. **Its MACH-based e-commerce presence, implemented through partnership with EPAM over just 22 weeks, has allowed it to present to new and existing customers with more than 10,000 items it previously could not, and to provide 24/7 sales for its B2B customers. Meanwhile, their digital team grew from two to 18 over the following six months.**

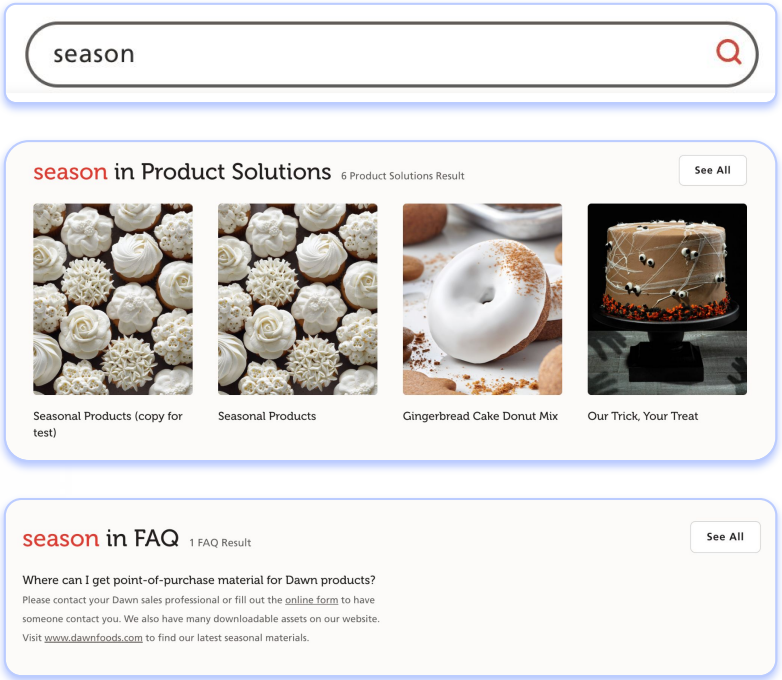
The results of adopting Algolia for search have been telling. Over a two-year period, **the company has seen usage climb by more than six times, from less than one million to nearly 20 million searches, with conversion rates similarly improved**. Over four years, time per session and time to order — both metrics the company wanted to see reduced — have fallen by 30 percent. And, despite much higher usage, latency has remained low thanks to Algolia's fast and lightweight API, Sahukar says.

Importantly, incorporating Algolia into the company's MACH approach has ensured the company's e-commerce platform is poised for success, ready to adapt and take on whatever the future brings.



“Partnering with Algolia and companies like them that are experts in their space, and who are plugged into what we’re doing gives us complete control over mapping our stack to our functional requirements and best-in-class tech suited to our business.”

“We couldn’t have homegrown a custom build, we have to continue to enhance with best-of-breed MACH solutions that deliver an incrementally better experience for our business.”



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