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King Arthur Baking Co. uses Search to help customers discover the joy of baking

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Mike Hoefler, Director of Web Development, King Arthur Baking Company



Headquarters:
White River Jct. VT, USA

Use Case:
E-Commerce
Content Search

Customer
Since 2019

Feature Usage:
Search API,
Dynamic Re-Ranking
Auto Synonyms

Technologies used:
Acquia
(Drupal CRM platform)
BigCommerce
(e-commerce platform)



- Fast and relevant search results
- 18% increase in conversions
- More relevant recommendations

The Challenge

- Allow users to search easily across disparate, varied content
- Make it easier for customers to discover relevant products
- Create a positive and improved customer experience

The Solution

- Easy to maintain and manage
- Integrates with existing CMS (Drupal) and e-commerce platform (BigCommerce)
- Scalable search and discovery able to handle diverse content and products

The Results

- Improved customer service through faster, more relevant search
- More relevant product recommendations and increased conversions
- Ready to scale as the company incorporates new data or new content

King Arthur Baking Company has a history almost as storied as its legendary namesake. Founded in 1790 as the first flour company in the freshly minted United States as the Henry Wood & Company, it remained family-owned for more than 200 years.

In 1896, then Sands, Taylor, & Wood Company, the company launched King Arthur Flour to highlight its strength, purity, higher purpose, and other Arthurian characteristics. Fast forward 100 years, and owners Frank and Brinna Sands would decide to sell the company to its employees upon retirement. That same year, on Christmas Day, it unveiled its first website.

Since 2004, the company has been 100 percent employee-owned, “which is a really great and unique thing about our company,” says Mike Hofer, its Director of Web Development, the product owner responsible for his company’s customer-facing website.

As an employee-owned company its nearly 400 employees earn shares in the company that convert upon their own retirements. This fosters a culture dedicated to customer experience and cultivating mutual success from its limited resources.

The principle of having a “higher purpose” hasn’t been lost. In 2007, the company became a founding BCorp member, which certifies for-profits on their social and environmental performance.

“So, we exist for the good of the customers, our employees, and the planet, so whereas a traditional company has to put shareholder value above all else, being a Certified B Corp allows us to put some other metrics on equal footing,” Hoefler says.



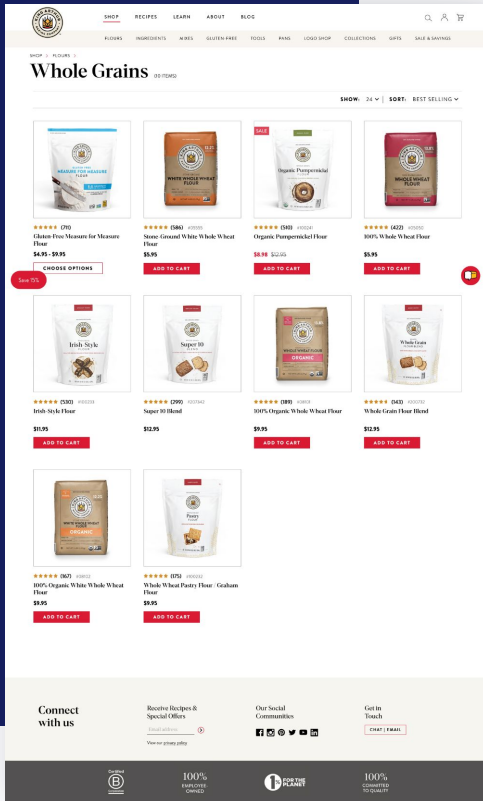
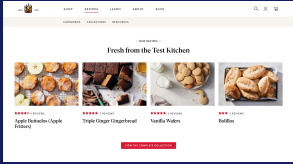
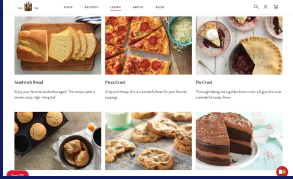
Baking customer experience into the mix

King Arthur Baking customers aren't just grocery stores and bakeries but include a large following of home bakers ("prosumers") looking for good resources online and quality products "to bring their baking to the next level," Hoefer notes.

Maybe that's why in the 25 years since it launched its first website, the number of recipes customers could find grew from 13 to over 2000, as well as featuring more than 1500 blog posts and 1000 products.

"We have a test kitchen staffed with baking experts who create and test our recipes over and over again to make sure they will bake well in home kitchens, the instructions are easy to follow, and home bakers are able to achieve success with their baking," he says.

The company's biggest customers are the grocery stores that distribute its flour and encouraging people to bake ultimately encourages them to buy. A positive web experience is how the company meets its mission of "sharing the joy of baking with the world."



Cooking up faster, more relevant search

During a digital transformation effort, the company moved its blogs, recipes, marketing and corporate content onto an Acquia-hosted Drupal platform — all with the goal of improving its content management system (CMS), creating a better user experience, as well as developer and management experience.

“Previously we had a search solution that was focused on e-commerce, and we tried to shoehorn recipes and blogs into an e-commerce search platform,” Hoefler says.

During the re-platforming project, the company decided to explore options for search that gave them more control over relevancy, “and not just treat everything as if it was a product.”

It reviewed options and decided on Algolia over open source solutions based on its technical capabilities, including search speed, and control interface. They went live with Algolia in the summer of 2019, and then last year added new content to search indexes and interfaces, a task they were able to do in-house based on the ease of working with the Algolia API and with the help of Algolia’s professional services team.

“We now have total control over the look and feel of our search results. With our previous tool, we were really restricted to working within some boundaries and couldn’t do the development ourselves... We were reliant on other people for the interface development.”

— Mike Hoefler,
Director of Web Development,
King Arthur Baking Company

“Now we have hands-on control of the look and feel of those search results and for a company like ours, where we put a lot of pride into how the website looks and feels... and want to have, as best we can, a consistent user experience across different areas of that site. That was very important for us”

— Mike Hoefler,
Director of Web Development,
King Arthur Baking Company

Algolia is implemented across the website, the header and more recently the customer has added modal capabilities to allow a search to be presented by recipe, products, and blogs.

Hoefler says the move to Algolia, and the iterative improvements made, have given his customers a faster and easier to navigate search experience, and helped them to discover fresh content — for example, presenting previously unavailable videos and baking guides.

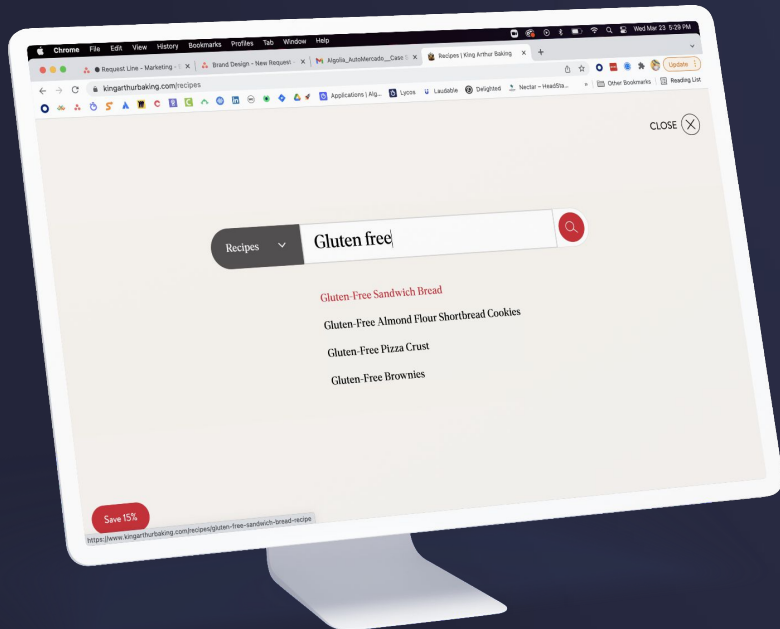
“Search is a different beast when you’re serving up blog posts and recipes and e-commerce and videos and allergen statement pages.

It’s quite a challenge to present that in a way that is intuitive and easy for our customers to understand.”

The combination of Algolia and Acquia lets King Arthur Baking meet its search needs and web publishing and communication needs today and, in the future, as it develops new plans.

“Both platforms really allow us to do what we want to do with top-notch technology behind them. And we know we’ll always be able to grow and improve our customer experience online with the tools and toolset that they both provide.”

A freshly minted e-commerce platform



As the second phase of its digital transformation journey, the company recently relaunched its e-commerce site on the BigCommerce platform, and Hoefler says Algolia's flexibility and API-based approach served this effort well.

"By detangling or separating Search from the application itself, we have some flexibility to do things with our platforms that we might not otherwise. So, if we decide to change our CMS, we can do that without impacting Search; if we decide to change our e-commerce platform, we can do that without impacting Search." — Mike Hoefler, Director of Web Development, King Arthur Baking Company

The company has implemented Algolia's dynamic AI-based re-ranking during the 2021 holiday season. Adopting this feature was "a very simple choice", Hoefler suggests.

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“We just looked at the suggestions it was making in terms of the popularity of products on a results page, and it would boost the ones getting more clicks or better priced for us, more popular with our customers. It really helped us ensure search was really relevant for our customers when they were searching during our busy holiday period.”

At the end of the day, whether it’s e-commerce, marketing, or corporate content, Hoefler says Algolia lets him support the content being surfaced by users “the way it’s supposed to be supported — without having to force it into a certain size or shape.”

The results have been remarkable.

Within the first six months of implementing Algolia, conversion rates for sessions improved by 18% over the same period the prior year.

For King Arthur Baking, success is realized when those visiting their website find joy in baking, and Algolia helps them do that by surfacing great recipes, videos, blogs, and content specific to their needs. “It’s about delivering unexpected but relevant content to our visitors to inspire them to bake and giving them the content to be successful,” Hoefler says. He likes to see customers come to the site for one thing and learn that there are other

related (or unrelated) options to explore. He points to Algolia’s auto synonyms feature as another that has been extremely useful. “While we may call it ‘flatbread’, they may call it something else; perhaps they are searching for a ‘pita’ recipe.” In addition to content, the auto synonyms feature helps customers find the right product, Hoefler adds. “We call our proofing baskets Brotform, but through the tool we found many customers were searching for Banneton. We were able to add the synonym to our configuration with one quick click.”



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“The auto synonym tool really helps us to discover the words our customers are using to search for products and make sure we are serving them the relevant results.” Hoefler says he’s looking into the possibility of implementing Algolia Recommend in the future, seeing a good use case for it.

Coming up, Hoefler says he intends to extend search functionality to his company’s online baking classes, which currently can’t be surfaced during searches. “When you search for scones or cakes, you’ll not only see recipes, products, and blogs but also classes coming up around cake baking.”

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