

PLIEGER &  algolia

Century-old wholesaler in digital transition uses Algolia to improve search and discovery

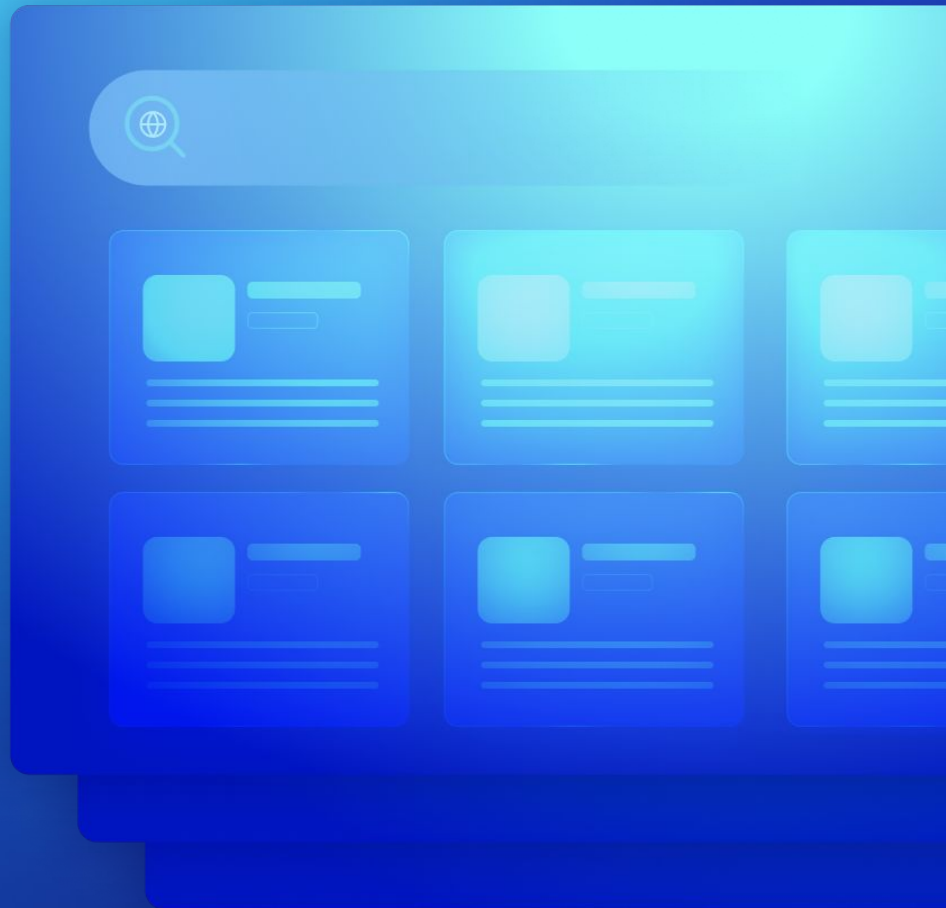


"We've been able to become more data-driven. Before we didn't have any data, just complaints to work from. Now we can use the data from Algolia to really focus on the right KPIs," Heydendael says. "I think that's an asset. It sounds like a simple thing, but it really helps."

– Jeroen Heydendael, Director, Customer Experience, Plieger Groep

Summary

Plieger Groep has been providing retailers, hardware shops and installers in the Netherlands with technical plumbing, heating, installation, air and ventilation, and electricity products since 1918. When it was time to modernize its e-commerce platform, the company's Search experience was found lacking. Find out how **Algolia improved its customer experience through better search relevance, and backend through greater visibility into search data.**



PLIEGER

Use Case:

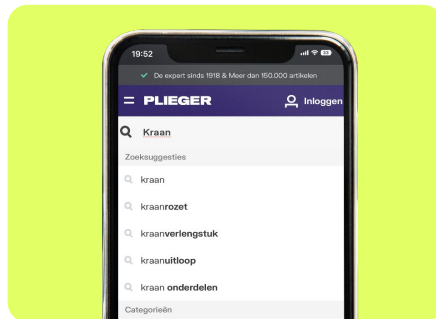
B2B E-Commerce

Headquarters:

Utrecht and Zaltbommel,
The Netherlands

Customer Since

2022



Key Results (Qualitative)

- Easy configuration without developer involvement
- Improved customer experience
- Better KPI's/dashboarding than before

Feature Usage

Search API, Dynamic Re-Ranking, Rules, Visual Editor, Query Suggestions, Facets & Filters, Recommend, and Synonyms

Key Number Plays

- More than 150,000 products
- Average Click Position reduced from 16.00 to 5.5

The Challenge

- Poor search experience resulting in customer and employee complaints
- Need for a dedicated resource to manage search
- Undergoing broader digital transformation
- Expert customers who know what they are looking for

The Solution

- Chose Algolia for strong Facets & Filtering capabilities
- Implemented a range of features, including Dynamic Re-Ranking and Recommend
- Used by e-commerce and marketing teams

The Results

- Improved search relevance
- Customers finding results faster
- Average Click Position reduced
- Improved B2B customer experience

For more than a century, [Plieger](#) and sister company ThermoNoord, subsidiaries of Plieger Groep, have been wholesalers in plumbing, heating, installation, air and ventilation, and electricity. In the field of bathroom products, the company is the largest provider in its home country of the Netherlands. The Group aims to accelerate the Dutch energy transition and is now part of the German Cordes & Graefe group.

Founded in 1918, it has grown to have more than 68 branches across the country (and growing!), dubbed Plieger Express and 20 showrooms, while its distribution warehouse and head office sit in the city of Zaltbommel. Today, it provides retailers, hardware stores, plumbing companies, and installers of all sizes with more than 150,000 products. Due to its success as a wholesaler and the popularity of its own branded collection of luxury baths, toilets, sinks, heating products and more, it is one of the most recognized brands by Dutch consumers.

A multi-channel company, Plieger serves its smaller installers and DIYers with a more consultative, personal touch in its Express locations, but maintains a high degree of focus on the customer and quality across all its channels, including its web store and app.

“You go into one of our Express stores, and you can talk to one of our colleagues and drink coffee and meet other installers. It has become a gathering place where professionals meet,” says Jeroen Heydendael, Director, Customer Experience at Plieger Groep.

“That’s our offline experience, and it is very successful. We also want to be that enjoyable and easy to work with online, especially with the shift from older installers to younger installers who are used to ordering everything online.”

Customer Service for a New Era

With 105 years of success as a technical wholesaler, Plieger had a very old-school way of conducting business and technology to match. In 2020, the company started a broad digital transformation effort to change that. The goal was to meet current e-commerce needs and be able to better attract new employees.

Search experience would prove to be a vital part of the transformation.

“Our clients couldn’t find what they were looking for,” Heydendael says. “These aren’t like consumers looking all over to find a bit of inspiration. They often know exactly what they’re looking for, even the item number or SKU, but products can have diverse sizes, configurations, functionalities, or other characteristics. Even knowing what they wanted, customers would have difficulty applying filters to find what they were looking for.”

“We got a lot of complaints from customers, but also a lot of complaints from our employees, and what we saw was that our own people were searching on our competitor’s website to find items and then coming back and buying from us because they like us. But, of course, that’s not the service we want to deliver.”

**Jeroen Heydendael, Director,
Customer Experience,
Plieger Groep**

Improving Search with Algolia

Plieger's customer experience team knew things had to change. In fact, Heydendael says improving search functionality was a driving force behind the company's transformation in online customer experience."

"We recognized we needed a new search solution, and not one where we'd have to hire a developer to configure it, because developers are scarce, expensive and would need to have a deep understanding of our business's UX search experience," he says. After reviewing options, it chose Algolia. It migrated from its previous Solr solution to Algolia Search, as the latter provided strong filtering capabilities — essential to helping their professional clients find the precise product they need to meet specifications — and its ability to configure search easily without the need for a dedicated developer.

"Implementation was fast and took place over two to three sprints; configuration and optimization took approximately six months but would have been much quicker," Heydendael suggests; "we had multiple other issues with the digital transformation that required attention during that time."

Over the year after its initial implementation of the Algolia Search API, Plieger incrementally added a wide range of features, including Dynamic Re-Ranking, Rules, Visual Editor, Query Suggestions, and Facets & Filters.

The ease with which any "smart guy or girl" can manage and configure Algolia has empowered e-commerce and marketing professionals at Plieger, Heydendael suggests. "It's important for us that someone pushing the buttons behind the scenes isn't just an external developer but understands our business and our products and our clients."

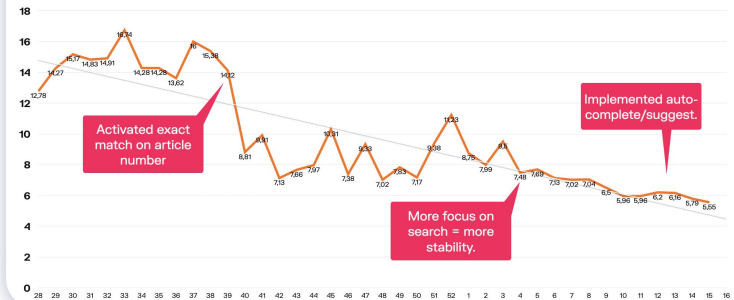
Improved click positions and greater visibility

As Plieger improved its product data and implemented Algolia features, it saw dramatic improvements in Search performance.

For instance, over a 40-week period, the company saw its average click position (ACP) drop from more than 16 to close to 5.5, **illustrating how much easier it has become for customers to quickly find the relevant results they are looking for.** The greatest boost to average click position happened after the start of 2023 when the company undertook a greater focus on the KPI; it saw ACP drop from 12 to its current value over only 15 weeks after implementing autocomplete and search suggestions.

Algolia search engine performance.

Average Click Position per week. Lower = better



Zoeksuggesties

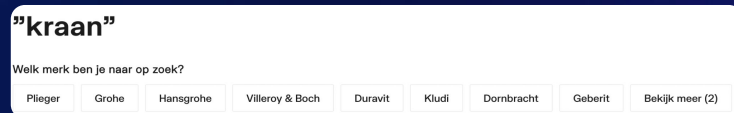
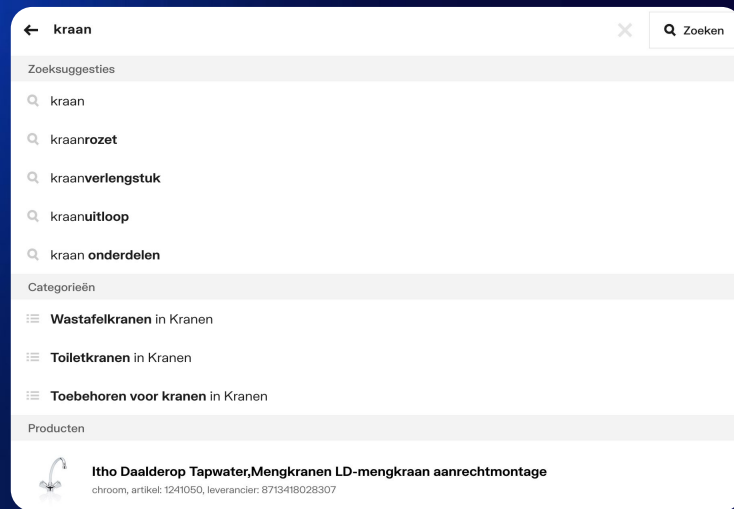
- Q kraan
- Q kraan onderdelen
- Q kraan verlengstuk
- Q kraan plieger
- Q kraan zwart

For its customers, Facets & Filtering has been essential, Heydendael says, and is “really making our clients happy.” Now, installation professionals can easily narrow down products they need by specifications. In terms of their positive effect on the search experiences, he says **Dynamic Re-Ranking, Facets & Filtering, Autocomplete, Recommend and Synonyms** have had the greatest impact.

For the internal e-commerce and marketing teams, the visibility into search data that Algolia provides has proven to be a significant advantage. “We’ve been able to become more data-driven. Before we didn’t have any data, just complaints to work from. Now we can use the data from Algolia to really focus on the right KPIs,” Heydendael says. “I think that’s an asset. It sounds like a simple thing, but it really helps.”

The screenshot shows a search results page for 'roma kraan'. The top navigation bar is blue with a search icon, the text 'roma kraan', and links for 'Showroom afspraak' and 'Inloggen'. Below the navigation, it indicates '1-20 van 296 Producten' and a pagination control showing pages 1, 2, 3, and 15. The main content area displays four product cards, each with a small image of a faucet handle and the following text: 'Plieger Roma baduitloop wandmontage', '1/2"x16.8cm | Chrom'. Below each card is the article number: 'Artikel: 1067081', '1067010', '1067026', and '1067002'. To the right of the product cards are two facet panels. The 'Productsoort' panel has a search input and a list of categories with counts: 'Bedieningselement sanitaire kraan' (79), 'Wastafelmengkraan' (50), 'Douchezuil/paneel' (46), 'Badmengkraan' (30), 'Stopkraan voor sanitaire toestellen' (20), and 'Toiletkraan' (20). The 'Merk' panel has a search input and a list of brands with counts: 'Plieger' (254), 'Hansgrohe' (42), 'Roma' (253), 'Croma Select S' (21), 'Croma' (10), 'Croma Select E' (5), 'Croma 100 Vario' (3), and 'Rota' (1).

With the success Plieger has had with its own digital transformation, **the company is better poised for the market and better able to recruit good digital-savvy employees.** Heydendael says the company has big plans for the future of its e-commerce platform, and is investigating iteratively adopting a best-of-breed, headless commerce or composable architecture



Algolia experts can help you take your site experience to the next level.

Get a customized demo from our search experts today.

[SCHEDULE A DEMO](#)

www.algolia.com