

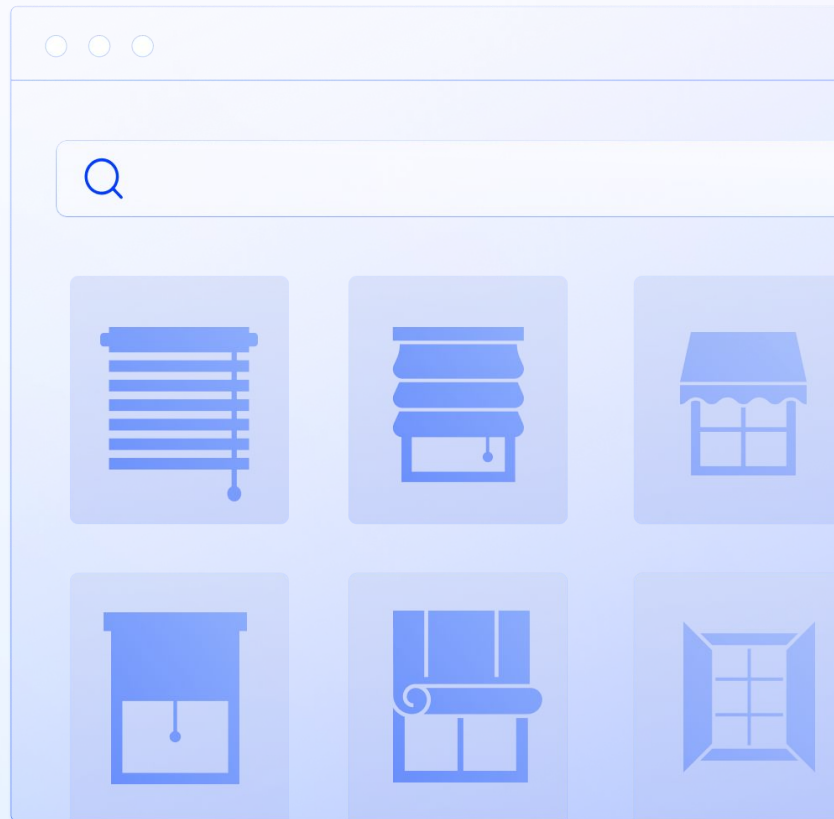
Blindster takes window of opportunity to go headless; adopts Algolia for fast, scalable search

“Algolia's powerful SaaS solution does the heavy lifting for our small development team. Indexing APIs and other functionalities come in handy when it comes to promo changes, price updates, and ranking. Also, Algolia's out-of-the-box UI integration provides a great base for developing complex UI use cases”

- **Hector Almaguer, CTO, Blindster**

Summary

As one of the largest online retailers of custom blinds and window treatments, Blindster.com underwent a website rebuild to achieve owner Kyle Cox's goal of becoming the market leader. Blindster adopted an API-first headless commerce approach, implementing best-of-breed solutions on the backend to support its highly customized site and products. Learn how Algolia's flexibility and out-of-the-box functionality is helping Blindster to reach its goal of becoming #1 in the industry.



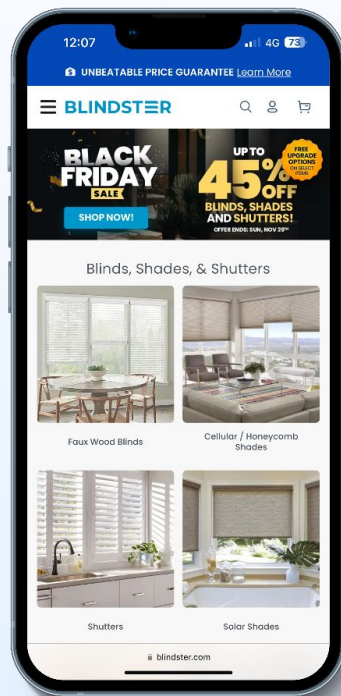
BLINDSTER

Use Case Ecommerce

Headquarters Houston, TX, USA

Algolia Customer 2022

Users global



Key Results (Qualitative)

- Improved indexing performance
- Support for highly customized products
- Reduced developer workload
- Improved customer satisfaction

Key Number Plays

- 18% lift in revenue from search
- 33% increase in conversions from search

Feature Usage

- Algolia Search API
- A/B testing
- Analytics
- Dynamic
- Re-Ranking
- Reindex

The Challenges

- Need to support millions of product SKUs
- Old monolithic website not able to index millions of product attribute combinations
- Support headless commerce approach

The Solutions

- Algolia Search API for fast, scalable indexing
- Full featured with Analytics, Rules, Synonyms and Dynamic Re-ranking
- Flexible, out-of-the-box functionality

The Results

- Reduced developer workload related to search
- Increased revenue from search users (18%)
- Great conversions from search (33%)
- Support for future personalization goals

When Kyle Cox launched Blindster.com in 2010, he did so with a simple website but lofty customer-centric business goals.

The online retailer of private-label, custom-made blinds and shades based out of Houston, Texas, was not his first rodeo. He had already built and grown a successful ecommerce website in the same industry, which he'd sold five years prior. He knew well the importance of customer service.

With that in mind, Blindster's goal was to make shopping for custom window treatments easy, affordable, and hassle-free. "We don't just want customers today; we want customers for life!" is the Blindster motto.

In its first seven years of business, Blindster grew steadily, but Cox recognized that the key to becoming the market leader would come from operating as a technology-first company.

He hired senior software engineer Hector Almaguer to be his CTO. Almaguer shared Cox's vision for an entirely new website with a custom platform.

“Our competitors would never dream of completely scrapping their custom ecommerce platforms and rebuilding them from the ground up,” Cox says. “We had a profitable business, with growth every year, but not the kind of growth I wanted. So, we took a leap of faith and built a new custom ecommerce platform from the ground up.”

It was a huge undertaking, taking slightly more than two years, but it paid off. The rebuilt website has been instrumental in growing revenues by nearly two-thirds by 2021.

Not your typical ecommerce site

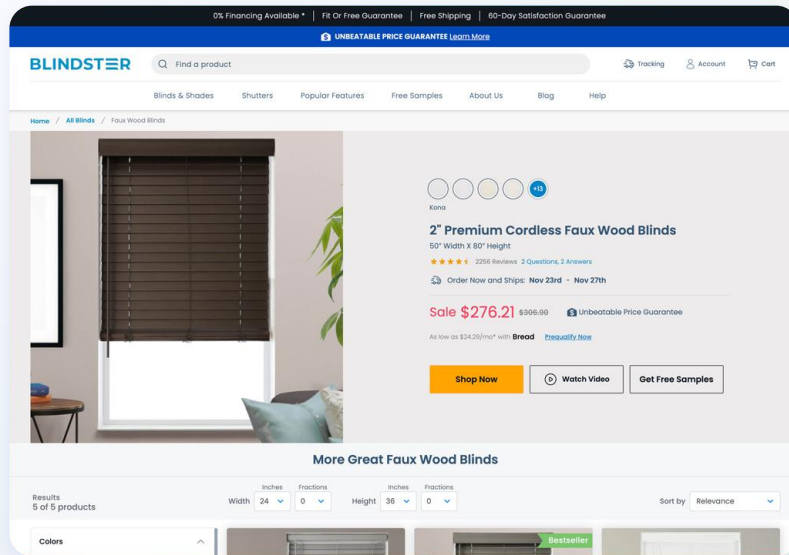
Customers design their window treatments, which are then built by one of Blindster's manufacturing partners. Most of its customers are DIY homeowners who do the measuring and installation themselves.

Because of the customized nature of the offering, the website often requires a lot more customer interaction than most ecommerce sites. It also includes a great deal of high-end content such as video and 360-degree photography produced in-house.

While they don't physically make the blinds, Blindster's customer service team is responsible for the customer journey and before and after-sales and customer service. When Almaguer joined the company back in 2018, the Blindster tech team consisted of only one developer, maintaining an out-dated site (a 10-year-old monolithic PHP application).

This codebase, unfortunately, was very difficult to improve due to architectural limitations and was almost impossible to make site changes as quickly as Cox needed. Site search was not ideal.

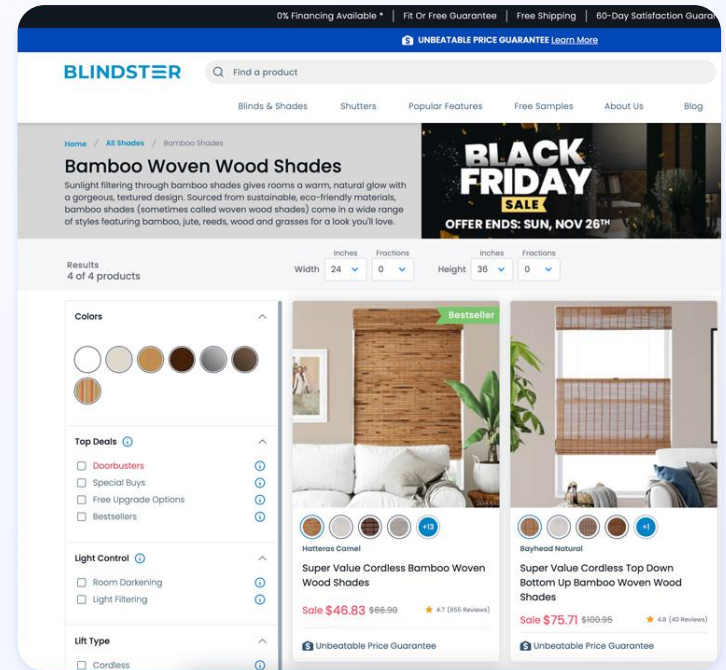
Immediately, **the goal became focusing on improving the current application while understanding and designing what the next iteration of the business would be, and building a team capable of taking on the task.**



There were a lot of discussions around the use of ecommerce frameworks such as Adobe Commerce (previously known as Magento), BigCommerce, or Shopify, all great frameworks but which, at the same time, presented several limitations:

- Inability to meet the need to generate millions of product attribute combinations
- No integration with noSQL databases which the team was looking to leverage
- Lack of flexibility to handle complex cost and price structures, something common in the window coverings industry
- Achieving the necessary freedom to move away from EDI and embrace API to process real-time information
- A lack of the flexibility needed to develop Cox's goals and grow smart
- Complexity, Steeper learning curve, slower performance and cost were also taken into consideration.

These, among other factors, led to the final decision of **building a custom platform from scratch. Twenty-seven months, and five applications later, Blindster's new headless ecosystem was born in September 2021.**



Going headless with Algolia

Almaguer and team decided to take a more headless, API-first approach to the ecommerce site. It gave them the environment flexibility they would not have with a solution like Magento or Shopify Plus but be able to handle the unique needs of being a customizable window treatment business.

The team built five different applications, including a back-end app, an API, a front-end app, and a translator that communicates with its factories, all with CI/CD automation (Cox notes they are the only company in the industry doing this). The company originally used Elasticsearch for search for the website relaunch because of previous experience the team members had and the need to act quickly.

“It was fine,” Almaguer says. “The problem was that to grow and do all the things we wanted to in terms of indexing, positioning, suggestions, etc., all that we’d have to build on top of Elasticsearch.”

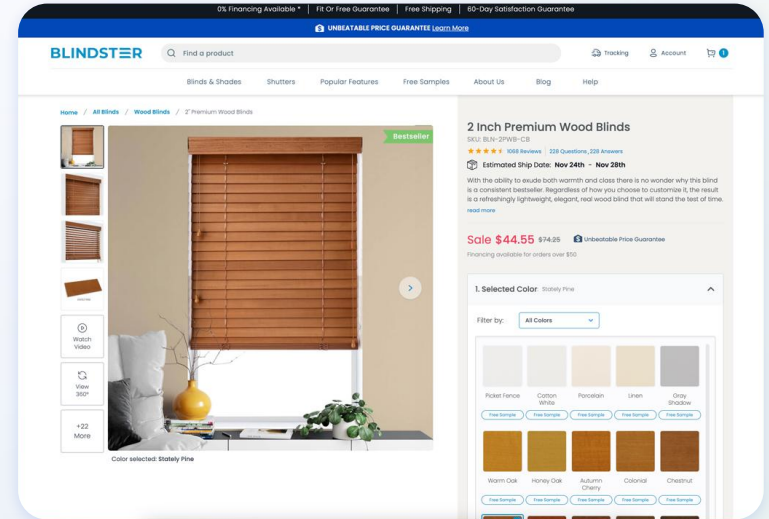
“That would take a bigger team than we have,” he explained, noting his team is made up of five software engineers. “So, when we started thinking about enhancements in search, we saw it wasn’t going to be possible for us to build it on top of everything else we have in the pipeline”

Almaguer and team reviewed several options and selected Algolia because it had back-end capabilities that would reduce the workload on his development team. “We could just use this SaaS tool and build on top of it and grow on top of it too,” he says.

Blindster implemented Algolia across search and category pages and is in the process of using it for content and its blog.

Implementation took longer than expected due to some “hiccups,” but Almaguer notes that Blindster has extremely unique rules due to the highly customizable nature of the product that makes indexing-maintenance extremely difficult, something the team was able to overcome.

The company initially implemented Algolia’s Search API for indexing but quickly added Analytics, Rules, Synonyms, and Dynamic Re-ranking. Soon, they will be expanding their search capabilities to further improve customer experience through Personalization.



Reducing work and getting results

Algolia has provided the flexible environment Blindster needed to support its headless commerce efforts. Algolia saves the company a lot of work on the development side, Almaguer says, freeing up the small team to work on other initiatives.

“Every time we have a new promo or price change, doing it with Algolia saves a lot of time,” he says. “Everything we want to build on top of search would take us three to five times longer without the out-of-the-box implementations that Algolia provides, especially around search experience and UI.”

Setting up products in the old site used to be a nightmare, taking days or weeks, because of the complexity of the offering and the limitations of the environment. Now, with the new headless platform and the use of Algolia it can be done quickly — and doesn't require technical expertise.

“Right now, with the current back-end infrastructure, we can set up a new product in less than two hours. It has all the information, they can set pricing, and rules they want in combination with any attribute. We have coupons, catalog and cart price rules, upcharges, cost verification services, invoices, payments, credit memos, shipments, tracking, etc.”

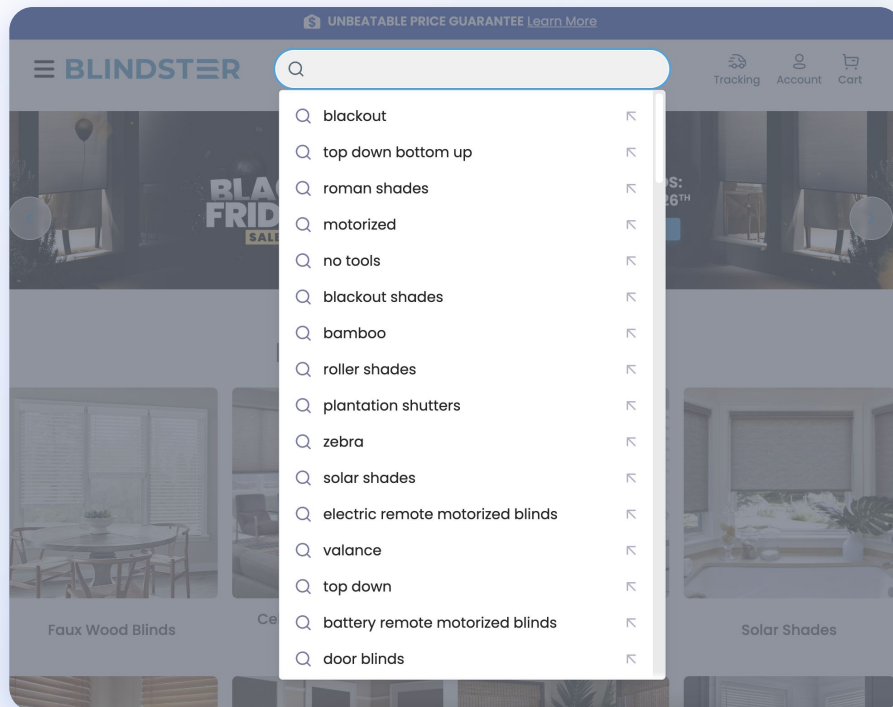
“Basically, all the flexibility that Magento or Shopify Plus would have, but in our custom environment, plus supporting everything that's customizable in the blind and shade business.”

The company has already seen how its new search platform has directly impacted business. **Since implementing Algolia, it has seen an 18% lift in revenue from customers using search, and a 33% increase in conversions from search.**

It's one step in the company's growing technology roadmap since it has relaunched. Going headless has allowed them to adopt best-of-breed technologies, like Algolia quickly — well ahead of competitors — and makes it easy to support a variety of marketing efforts.

“The platform that Hector and his team built is world class,” Cox says. **“My goal for Blindster is to become the market leader, and I believe implementing cutting edge technologies like Algolia will help us achieve this goal.”**

Going headless and adopting Algolia has allowed Blindster to scale and grow quickly, while staying ahead of competitors — all contributing to meeting Cox's goal of being the market leader in the industry.





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