CASE STUDY

Enabling growth at industry leader Acuity Brands

How a search-first approach transformed a complex catalog website into a growth engine in just five months

A leader in industrial lighting

Acuity Brands, Inc. is the North American market leader and one of the world’s leading providers of lighting and building management solutions for commercial, institutional, industrial, infrastructure, and residential applications throughout North America and select international markets.

The company employs over 13,000 associates and is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia with operations throughout North America, and in Europe and Asia as well. It is committed to lighting the way to a more brilliant, connected, and productive world.

Coveo Results

- Relevant search journeys through better search results
- Effortless search experiences through fast, reliable and faceted search
- Continuous data-driven optimization of content and search paths

“We took a search-first approach and transformed our website in just five months.”

ANDREW CROWDER, VP OF ENTERPRISE ARCHITECTURE, ACUITY BRANDS

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The Situation

Acuity Brands is the largest manufacturer of lighting and lighting control systems in North America, with about 5,000 product offerings across 8 different categories, 32 brands and 14 independent brand websites. The company goes to market through distributors and independent agents.

Acuity leadership knew their website was critical to growth and made redesigning the experience one of their top 5 strategic priorities. “We needed a website that really spoke to our status as a leader in the industry,” said Andrew Crowder, VP of Enterprise Architecture, Acuity Brands. “Our website experience needs to reflect that.”

Solution:
Ecommerce

Technology stack

Challenges:

- Customers were not able to find products and information
- Website was not able to accommodate the different ways customers wanted to search
- Limited visibility of content gaps and trends
The Path from Search to Revenue is Short

Internal research showed that search is the most popular site function for Acuity Brands, and the biggest indicator of a visitor’s intent to purchase from distributors.

Customers include agents, distributors, contractors, architects, and designers. Their goals are either to find products that meet their project needs and specify to a project, or get inspiration for design as they are designing a project solution. “Visitors downloading a spec sheet is just as critical as putting an item into a cart,” said Katherine Wendorf, Senior Manager, Integrated Content, Acuity Brands.

Yet the website experience was hurting their customers and reputation. Visitors weren’t finding the right products and information through static search or navigation. Relevant content was often buried and never turned up in search results. Visitors also weren’t able to consume content in a way that accommodated their need to build submittal packages or inform design.

Internally, the search and content teams weren’t able to access any insights to understand where search journeys were dropping off, which search terms were performing well, or where there were content gaps. Bad data was the root cause of their issue, in addition to being on an outdated platform with no metrics to provide insights. They also needed help from developers to implement any changes.

“Search is how our customers interact with our website.”

ANDREW CROWDER, VP OF ENTERPRISE ARCHITECTURE, ACUITY BRANDS
Taming complexity while continually improving each interaction

The team set out to rebuild a search-first website, staying with Sitecore for their CMS but upgrading to the most current version. They also decided on Coveo to power search, which was already integrated with Sitecore.

“Those technologies allowed us to build a new experience for our users that make their whole journey better and easier,” Crowder said.

With one search index and single source of truth, as well as one codebase across all of their different sites, Acuity Brands was able to leverage Coveo and Sitecore to tailor the content and experience for each use without compromising consistency. Instead of managing 16 different codebases, it’s now one—and significantly easier to manage.

In addition to enabling AI-powered search seamlessly in a complete handshake with Sitecore, Coveo provides a cloud administration console that enables its search and content teams to manage the experience without needing assistance from developers. This means they no longer must wait two to four weeks in sprint cycles for changes to take effect.

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A new search experience aligned to buyer goals, that keeps getting better

Despite the complexity of Acuity Brands’ multiple categories and extensive product options, Coveo AI-powered search was implemented in a brand new site build, and launched within an ambitious five-month timeframe.

The new search experience returns results in under three seconds and is optimized for mobile and smaller monitor sizes. The results pages adjust for smaller displays to make it easier to quickly scroll through the options.

Visitors to Acuity Brands can now quickly download a spec sheet, compare products, or see a quick view directly from the results page. All of those actions can now happen right from search without having to go to different product pages.

Searchers can also create their own experience with multiple options for facets and views. For example, a visitor looking for design inspiration may want to see a lot of products on a page that they can scroll through and explore. Others may know exactly what they want and require very specific product information for a submittal.

Flash forward a few months after the new site was live, and the Acuity Brands team uncovered some important insights based on Coveo analytics. With that insight in hand, they rolled out two innovative initiatives to further optimize their experience and dubbed these ‘Cross-Brand Search’ and ‘Double Zero Search’.

As Wendorf explains “we observed that customers searching for products on one of our many branded sites were sometimes ending up with zero results, even though we carried those within our wider Acuity Brands family of products. So, we put our heads together and realized that since we manage a single index which is then parsed out for each brand site, the issue was easily solved. Now, when a customer searches and no matching product is found within the current site, the application automatically does a second search against the whole catalog index and returns any product matches found across the entire portfolio”.

The second initiative ‘Double Zero Search’ was then used to address the issue of a customer’s search not finding any corresponding products from either the current brand site or the rest of the catalog. “We wanted to avoid returning no results”, stated Wendorf, “because that means we may lose an opportunity with the customer, and so instead we present them with a pictorial journey of product categories to get them back on track and engage with our product content.”

Both initiatives combined have yielded great results for the team and they’ve been able to convert an additional 40% of missed queries.
What’s next?

Now that the search-first website is achieving great results, the team will look to extend that experience to post-sales service.

“We can see through our analytics reports that there are many searches on our site that are more post-sale, for example, customers looking up warrantee information. We want to be able to service the entire customer journey”, says Wendorf, “so being able to say to that pre-sale customer: ‘What is it that you’re looking for? How can I get this information to you quickly?’ and to that post-sale customer: ‘How can we support and assist you with your purchase?’”

This strategy is particularly important for manufacturers like Acuity Brands, where many site visitors are actually returning customers and building that relationship and satisfaction is key to creating loyalty to the brand.

“We know that we have a good partner in Coveo as we head down this path of creating a unified search experience across purchase to support.”

Learn more about Coveo