Content search for retail tech: Driving engagement beyond products

Retail is shifting from transaction-led commerce to content-rich experiences that drive loyalty and deepen brand engagement. The traditional model, centred on search boxes returning SKU-based results, no longer meets the demands of today's shoppers, who expect discovery, storytelling, and contextual relevance at every touchpoint.

Today's shoppers don't just want to buy; they want to explore, learn, and get inspired.

According to McKinsey (2023), over 60% of buyers engage with content, such as tutorials, reviews, and videos, before making a purchase. This reality renders conventional keyword-based search increasingly inadequate.

Retailers respond with content search: a unified discovery layer that integrates structured product data with diverse content types, including how-to guides, shoppable videos, user-generated content (UGC), and editorial features. This evolution is being accelerated by advances in AI, semantic search, and multimodal understanding technologies that enable retailers to infer meaning, emotion, and intent, not just parse keywords.

Rethinking search in the retail journey ✦

Historically, search was a functional tool for retrieving known items. As retail evolves into a journey-based experience, search must transition into a discovery mechanism, an interface that reveals lifestyle content, brand narratives, and community signals alongside product options.

Traditional vs. content search
Traditional models center around lexical matches, filters, and transactional queries. Content search adapts to intent-driven, exploratory behavior by utilizing AI-powered interpretation and content blending.

Types of content in retail discovery
Retailers have long produced valuable content, yet much of it remains siloed. Content search unlocks this value by making assets discoverable within the shopping journey. These include:

- **Editorial content:** Style tips, seasonal guides, expert advice

- **Shoppable media:** Lookbooks, influencer livestreams, interactive videos

Attribute	Traditional Search	Content Search
Input Type	Keyword-based	Natural language, visual, and voice
Result Type	SKUs, filters, PLPs	SKUs + articles, videos, UGC, editorial
Shopper Intent	Transactional	Exploratory, educational, emotional
Discovery Pattern	Direct	Serendipitous, contextual, journey-driven
Underlying Tech	Text match, Boolean filters	NLP, semantic search, AI/ML embeddings

- **User-generated content:** Reviews, tagged photos, customer stories

- **Support content:** FAQs, care instructions, return policies

- **Community insights:** Q&As, discussion threads, peer recommendations

- **Brand narratives:** Sustainability stories, behind-the-scenes, values

A single query, such as "outfits for rainy days," can yield not only product recommendations but also weather-appropriate guides, styling videos, and community posts.

Content across the funnel

Content search supports the whole funnel, not just the point of purchase:

- **Top of funnel:** Queries like "best vegan skincare" surface editorial deep-dives, followed by curated SKUs.

- **Mid-funnel:** Tutorials and peer reviews provide decision support.

- **Post-purchase:** Search for care instructions returns how-to videos, reinforcing retention.

Retailers leveraging this model report 20–40% increases in content engagement and improved NPS (BCG, 2023).

Building the technology stack ✧

Content search requires more than adding media to search results. It demands re-architecting how content is indexed, ranked, and contextualized across digital properties.

Metadata and indexing
Unstructured content must be enriched with structured metadata to be searchable. Effective strategies include:

- Automated tagging with NLP and computer vision

- Unified taxonomies across product and content systems

- Contextual metadata, including trends, seasons, and use-cases

Headless CMS platforms support dynamic content delivery, real-time updates, and scalable taxonomy management.

Intelligent relevance modeling
Modern content search operates through semantic models, neural ranking, and multimodal fusion:

- Semantic embeddings infer meaning across varied phrasing

- Multimodal search supports text, image, and voice input

- Intent classifiers guide users to the most appropriate content type

- Neural rankers optimize based on engagement signals

Personalization and contextual delivery
Personalized content search adapts not only to what a user types, but also to who they are and where they are:

- Affinity models use prior interactions to boost relevance

- Contextual signals like device, location, and time of day adjust results

- Session-aware systems re-rank results in real time

Embedding content search into the ecosystem ✦

Content search must function as a fully integrated layer within the commerce infrastructure to create business value.

Unified front-end interfaces
Consumers expect seamless discovery, not fragmented journeys. Effective content search UIs include:

- Blended result pages that mix SKUs with videos, blogs, and UGC

- Adaptive layouts based on query type (e.g., "how to style linen pants" vs. "buy white linen pants")

- Visual-first displays optimized for mobile, with high-impact media

Back-end systems integration
Robust integrations are critical. Content search must connect:

- CMS for structured content management

- DAM for product data and media

- CDP for behavioral personalization

- Search engines and APIs for orchestration and performance

Composable commerce architectures enable modular, scalable search innovation across brands and markets.

Analytics and measurement
Retailers must move beyond CTR and conversion to gauge content's impact:

- Content interaction rate (CIR): Percentage of users engaging with content results

- Assisted conversions: Attribution across multistep paths
- Session depth and dwell time

- Content-to-cart ratio

These metrics should inform editorial strategy, search tuning, and investment allocation.

Redefining retail through intelligent discovery ✦

Retail is no longer about simply selling. It is about building trust, delivering value, and connecting through narrative. Content search enables this by transforming the search experience from a static list into an intelligent, responsive, emotionally attuned interface.

Retailers investing in content search are improving engagement metrics and building competitive moats. Treating search as a strategic product powered by AI, content, and real-time relevance, they elevate every customer interaction into a brand-building moment.

This is where the next generation of loyalty, differentiation, and growth will be won.

![Netcore UNBXD logo]

About Unbxd ✧

Netcore Unbxd is an AI-powered platform that helps brands provide personalized customer experiences to scale online exponentially. Our commitment to revolutionizing ecommerce experiences has garnered us esteemed recognition, positioning us as a leader in Gartner® 2024 Magic QuadrantTM for Search and Discovery and the Forrester WaveTM: Commerce Search and Product Discovery, Q3 2023 report.

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