



NRS: America's premier provider of paddling equipment for river runners and kayakers.

Business problem:

Providing an online experience consistent with NRS' respected brand, and making that brand more visible to online shoppers.

Solution:

SLI Systems' hosted site search service and natural search optimization service.

The Results:

Increases in traffic to the site and improved conversion rates from visitors.

SLI Systems has helped river running gear provider NRS master the class V rapids of e-commerce.

"First on the water" is the tagline for NRS (Northwest River Supplies), fitting for a company that pioneered the manufacture and distribution of boats and gear for adventure sports such as rafting, kayaking and canoeing.

Established 33 years ago by an entrepreneur passionate about running rivers, NRS manufactures and distributes from its home base in Idaho, through 1500 dealers and 1125 outfitters in the United States and 25 dealers in other countries. NRS also works with specialty retailers, including 150 rescue gear suppliers.

NRS has used its reputation on the water to become the leading multi-channel retailer in their industry, creating strong catalog and online channels for consumers and channel partners. The online channel, NRSWEB.com, protects and enhances the company's reputation as the premier source of information to paddlesports enthusiasts. NRS also operates specialty sites for particular audiences, including NRSB2B.com and NRSRescue.com.

Improving the Customer Experience

"Like any e-commerce site, current-content attractively presented and easy to find is critical to our success," says Keli Keach, NRS E-commerce Manager. As with many businesses, the NRS website has to be able to respond to a changing mix of customers, products and market conditions.

NRS has a product catalog of over 1000 items from the simple to the technical, and customers from seasoned river runners to beginners. It also trades in a highly seasonal market. NRS needed a site search that could provide relevant results to any of these customers, no matter what they look for and what the season.

"Our reputation is built on providing gear that handles whatever a river throws at it. Online we need to protect and enhance that reputation, and SLI Systems helps us do that."

Keli Keach, NRS E-commerce Manager





“Our existing search wasn’t dynamic enough,” says Keli Keach. “It wasn’t creating the kind of experience that we wanted – we knew improving that experience would translate into increased conversion rates and better customer satisfaction.”

NRS Chose SLI Systems

NRS chose SLI Systems’ hosted site search solution to improve the customer experience on their site and allow self-help 24/7.

“What I immediately liked about SLI was their Learning Search technology – it re-sorts search results as the seasons change, automatically learning from and responding to customers’ changing needs,” says Ms. Keach.

“SLI provided a customized search page format for us, including additional features such as stock availability, add-to-cart, thumbnail images and suggestions for related searches.”

Technology was only part of the solution. Says Ms. Keach, “The hosted service has integrated seamlessly into our e-commerce infrastructure, making it very easy to incorporate and manage. SLI is constantly monitoring to optimize the service for us. They let me know when something breaks before I even know it.”

SLI has delivered the kind of flexibility and scalability that NRS needs. “NRS is always trying to make improvements, always responding to changing customer needs, and we need our search to change with us. SLI always responds and we haven’t issued them a challenge they haven’t met.”

“Our reputation is built on being the source for online paddlesports information and delivering the gear to handle the challenges of every river. Online we need to protect and enhance that reputation, and SLI Systems helps us do that.”

The Bottom Line

Ms Keach says, “Choosing SLI Systems improved our customer’s online search experience overnight. We were always confident we had what our customers wanted on the NRS site, but SLI’s search now makes them more likely to find it.”

Since adding SLI’s service to their site, NRS’ key indicators have improved. Previously, less than 20% of visitors would even use site search. With SLI that figure is now 75%. Approximately 3.4% of visitors proceed from search results to purchase, up from less than 1% before implementing Learning Search. From the time SLI’s service was integrated, conversion rates have risen by 2%.

NRS has also enjoyed a substantial surge in traffic from web search engines since implementing SLI’s Site Champion product prior to the 2004 holiday shopping season. “Site Champion is helping improve our visibility in natural search results. We have received tens of thousands of referrals from Site Champion since going live, which has helped us grow our online business profitably. This service compliments our own natural search optimization efforts perfectly. The terms site visitors use parallel what people are looking for on Google, MSN, etc.”

“NRS is always trying to make improvements, always responding to changing customer needs, and we need our search to change with us. SLI delivers the flexibility and scalability we need. They always respond and we haven’t issued them a challenge they haven’t met yet.”

Keli Keach, NRS E-commerce Manager

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