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SEO for Ecommerce in 2024

(Technical Focus)

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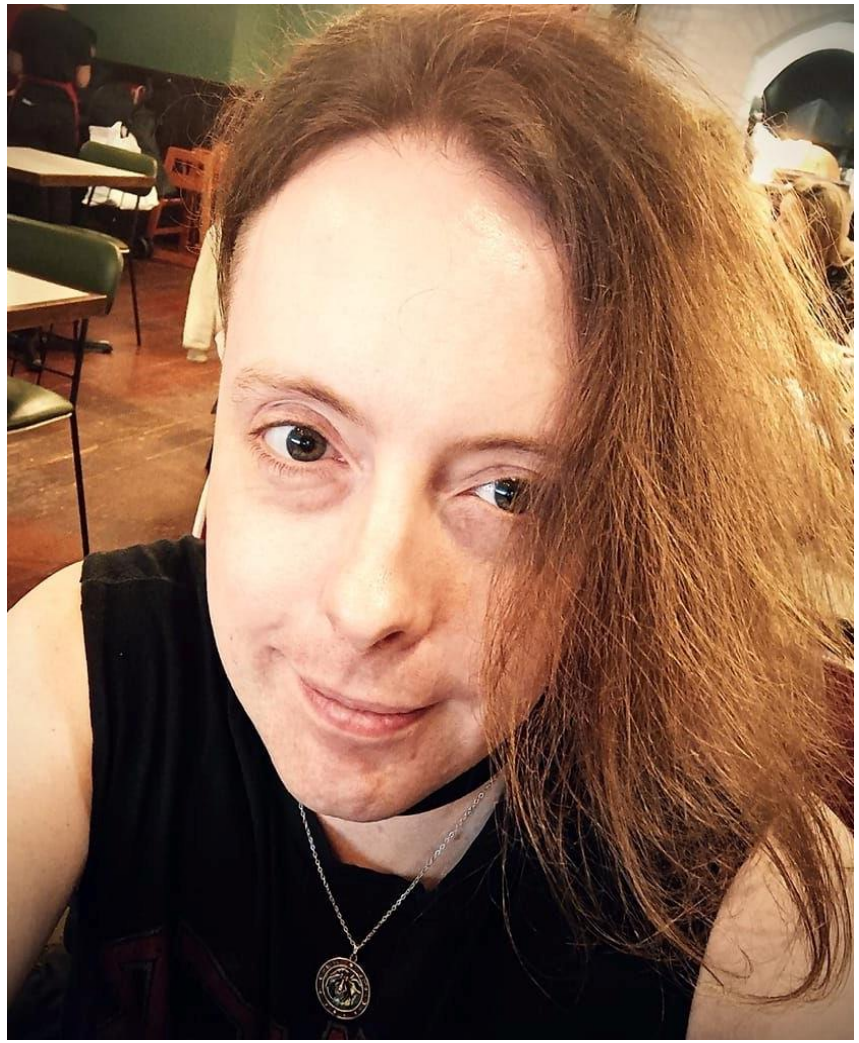
About James

- Technical SEO & Analytics Wizard
- AI API scripting dabbler (Python)
- Search Engine Land author: https://searchengineland.com/author/james-allen
- Regular on SEO Gurus podcast (Spotify): https://open.spotify.com/show/2FRN9Iks1VFcxcHBJlUNtu
- Always experimenting with Python and automation



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17 years of data-driven digital marketing for ecommerce & established brands

Strategy

Social

Search

Shopping

Skills

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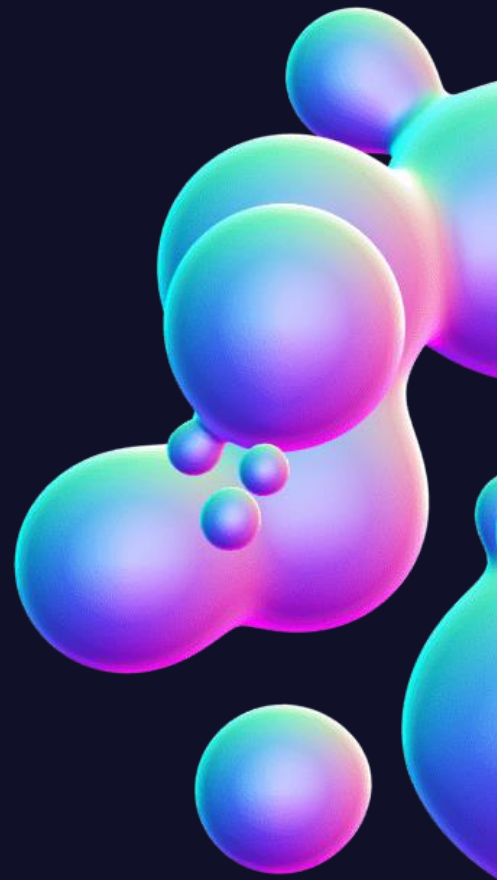
Agenda

- What makes ecommerce sites different?
- Ecommerce sites are good for search
- Ecommerce sites: SEO strengths
- Ecommerce sites: SEO challenges
- The Challenge is Efficient Indexation
- Crawl Control: Handling Indexation
- Beware Being too JS Reliant (Build)
- Ecommerce SEO in 2024 – brief summary



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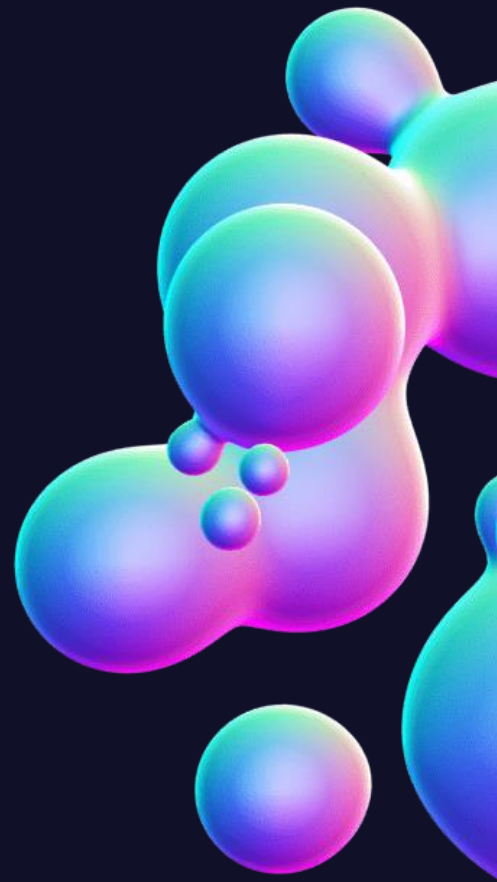
What makes ecommerce sites different?



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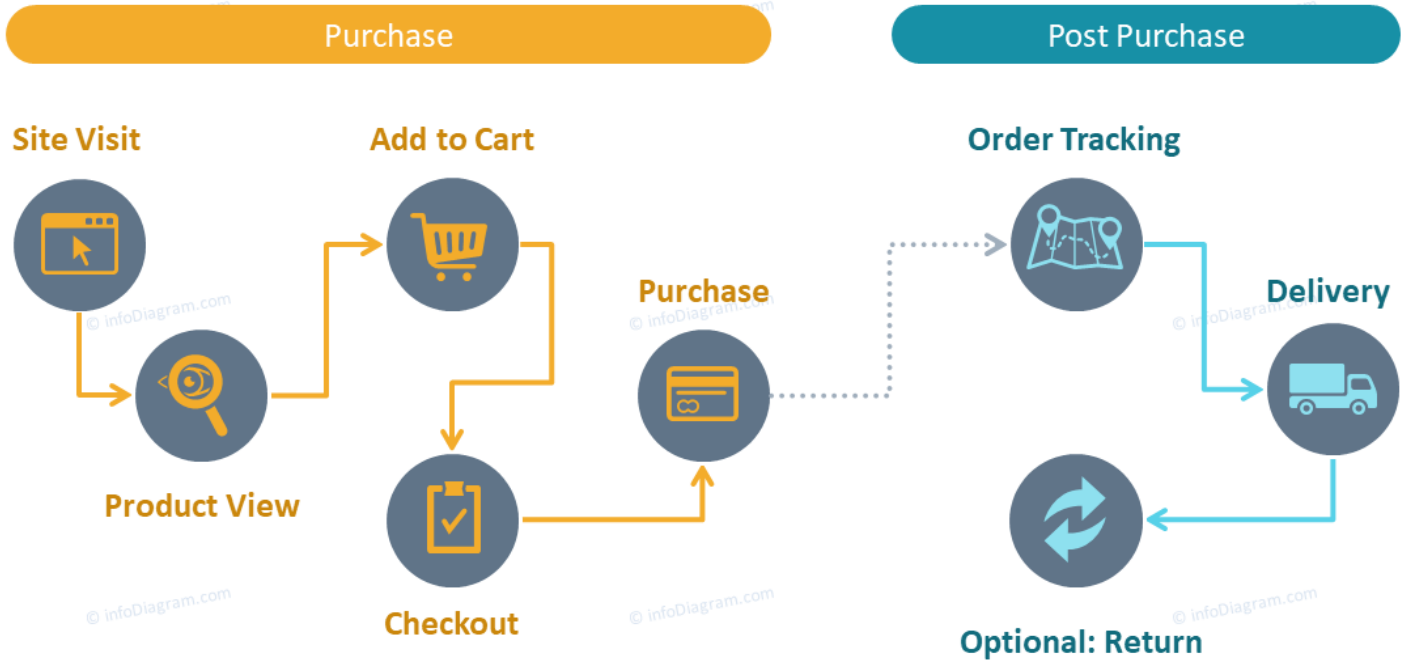
Ecommerce Sites

- **Allow users to transact online**
- There's usually a payment gateway and / or checkout system
- Purchases may be physical products which must be shipped, or digital items
- Some transactions may even be interaction based, e.g: Cameo – users pay for celebrity interactions



Ecommerce Sites

- **Wherever commerce happens online, that's ecommerce**
- If there's a transaction, it's a ecommerce site
- Popular platform include WordPress (WooCommerce / BigCommerce) and Shopify
- Many Magento sites are also ecommerce sites

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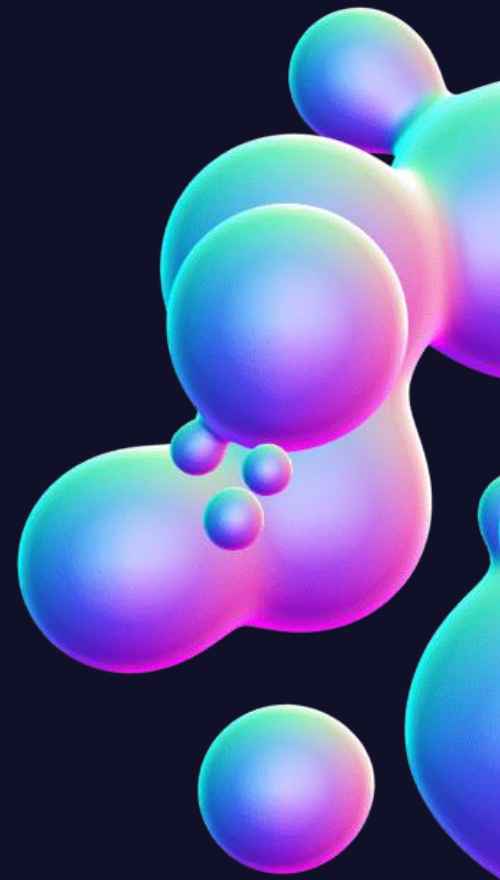
Ecommerce sites are good for search



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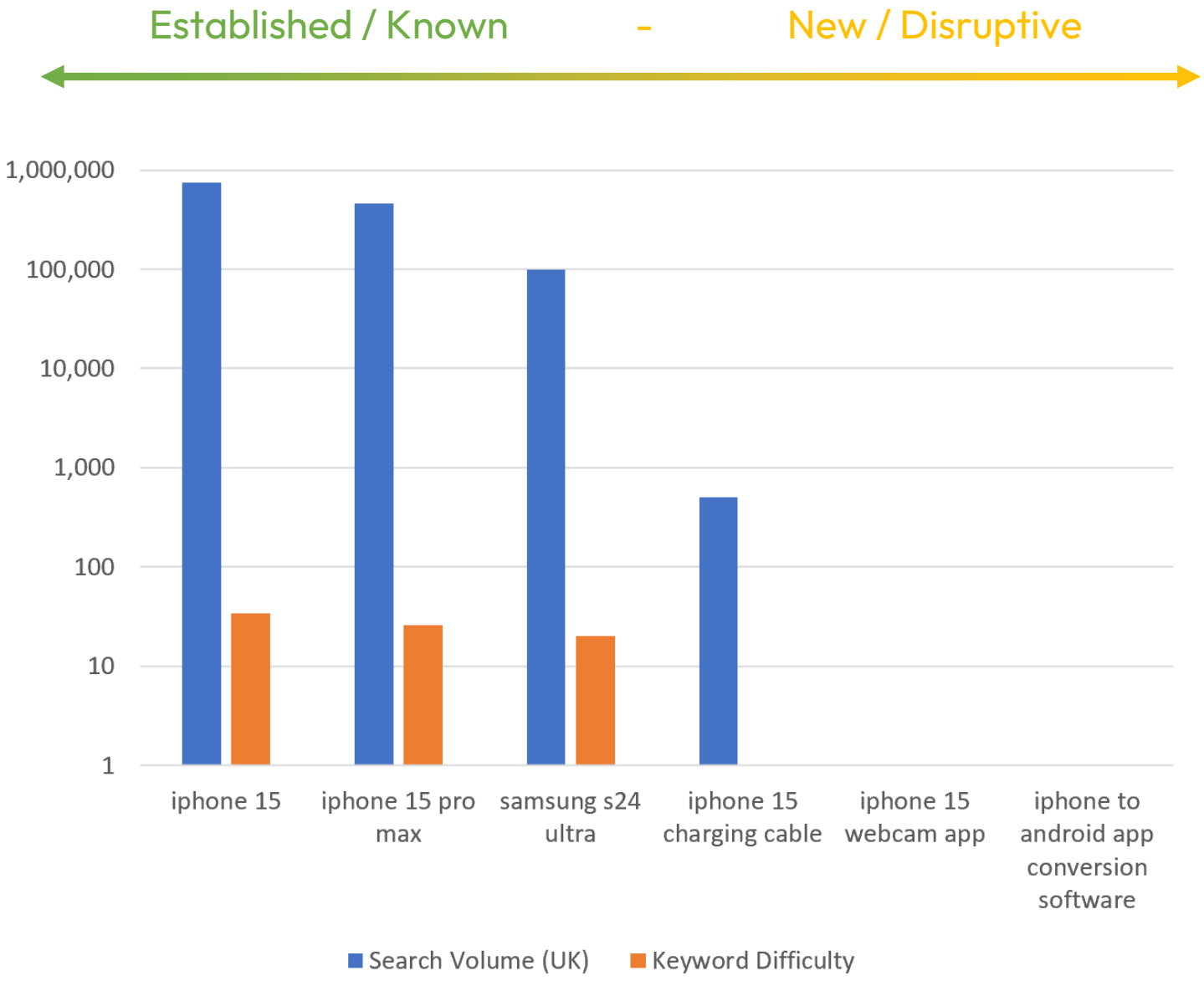
Good for Search

- Both paid and organic search (SEO) perform strongly for ecommerce sites
- Search works best when users are **already searching for things that you sell**
- PPC and SEO are still possible for new, disruptive products – but the road is longer
- Sites selling popular products gain a boost for search



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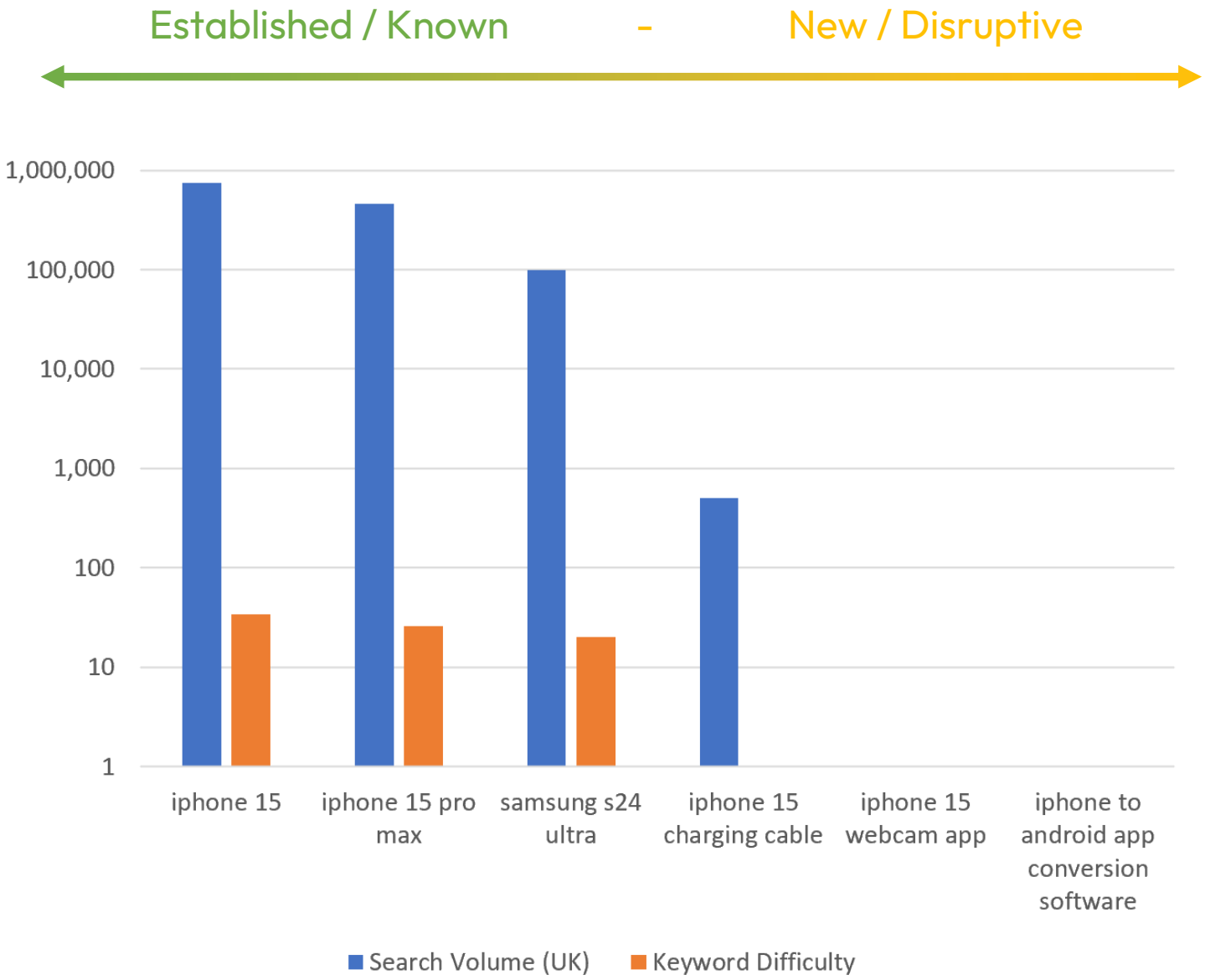
Good for Search

- Are you selling products with **existing search volume** which users already search for?
- If so, then those products connect with keywords which many users search for
- This means that minor tweaks to site architecture can result in an uplift of conversions
- It is those conversions which make you money



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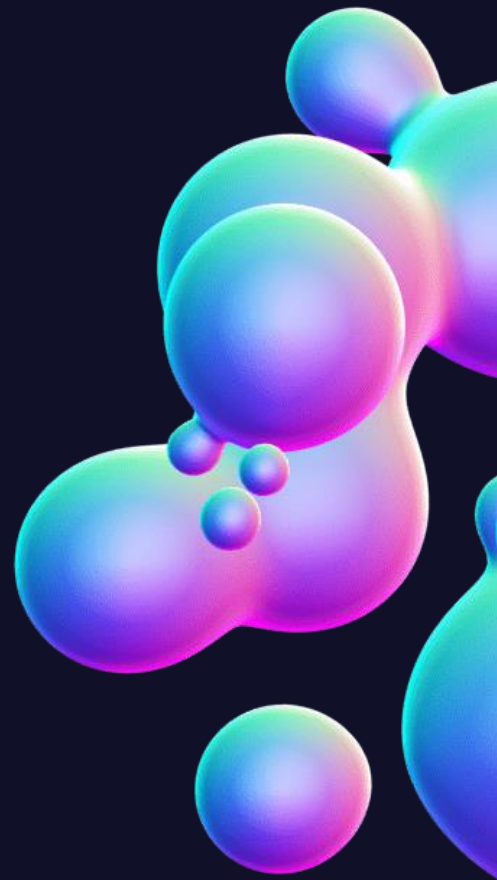
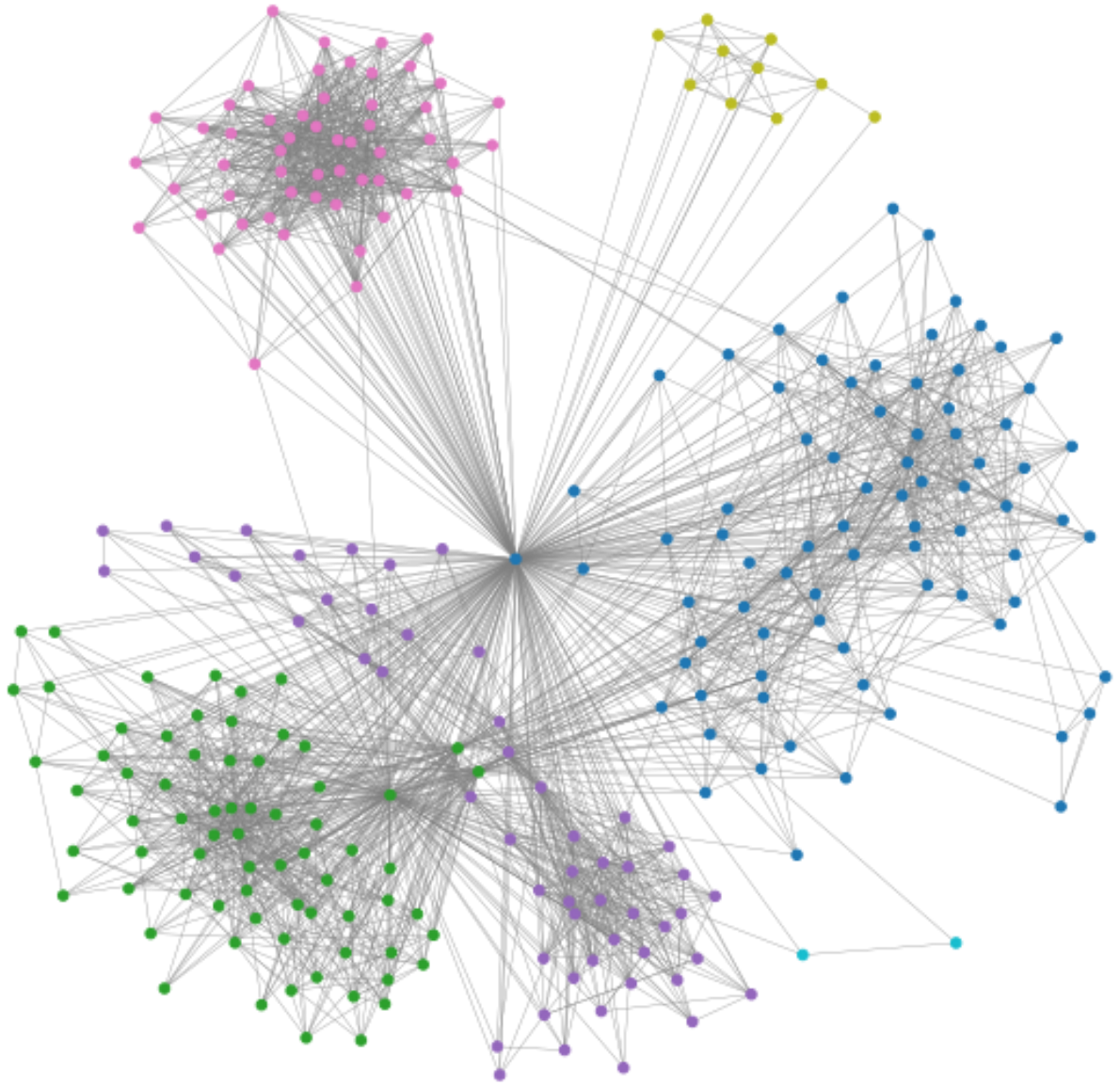
Ecommerce sites: SEO strengths



SEO Strengths

- Ecommerce sites have a large **ranking footprint**, due to listing a myriad of products
- Larger ranking footprints result in more SEO traffic
- More SEO traffic results in more numerous conversions
- Where SEO can provide higher traffic volumes, that makes SEO more effective



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SEO Strengths

- When you stock popular products, you're connected with higher volume keywords
- If your **USPs** are solid (competitive pricing, fast shipping) users will convert – and Google will take notice
- Stocking popular products is great, but **you must remain competitive** in order to succeed – even for SEO

Unique Selling Proposition

✔ - *Winning Zone*
Clear point of difference that meets the needs. make it even bigger.

✖ - *Losing Zone*
Your copetitor meets the consumer needs better then you do. you'll be crushed.

? - *Risky*
Competitive battle ground. use emotion, innovative, superior execution.

Who Cares
Many times, competitors battle in areas the consumer just doesn't care about. Have fun wasting your time.

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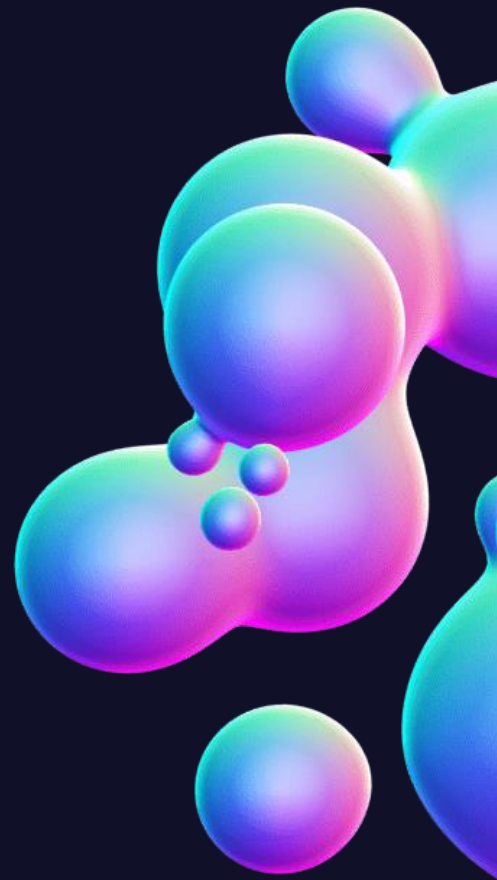
Ecommerce sites: SEO challenges



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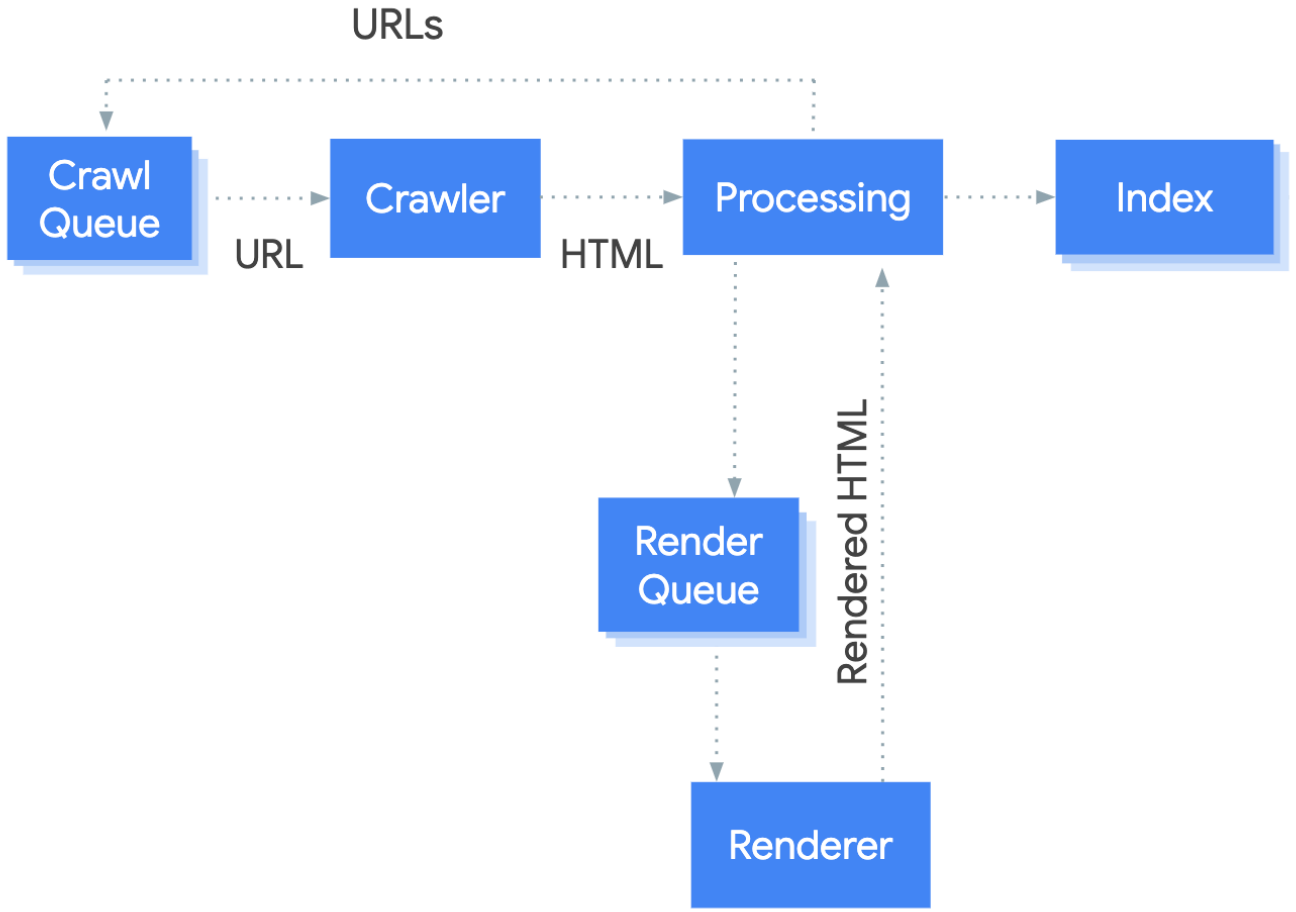
SEO Challenges

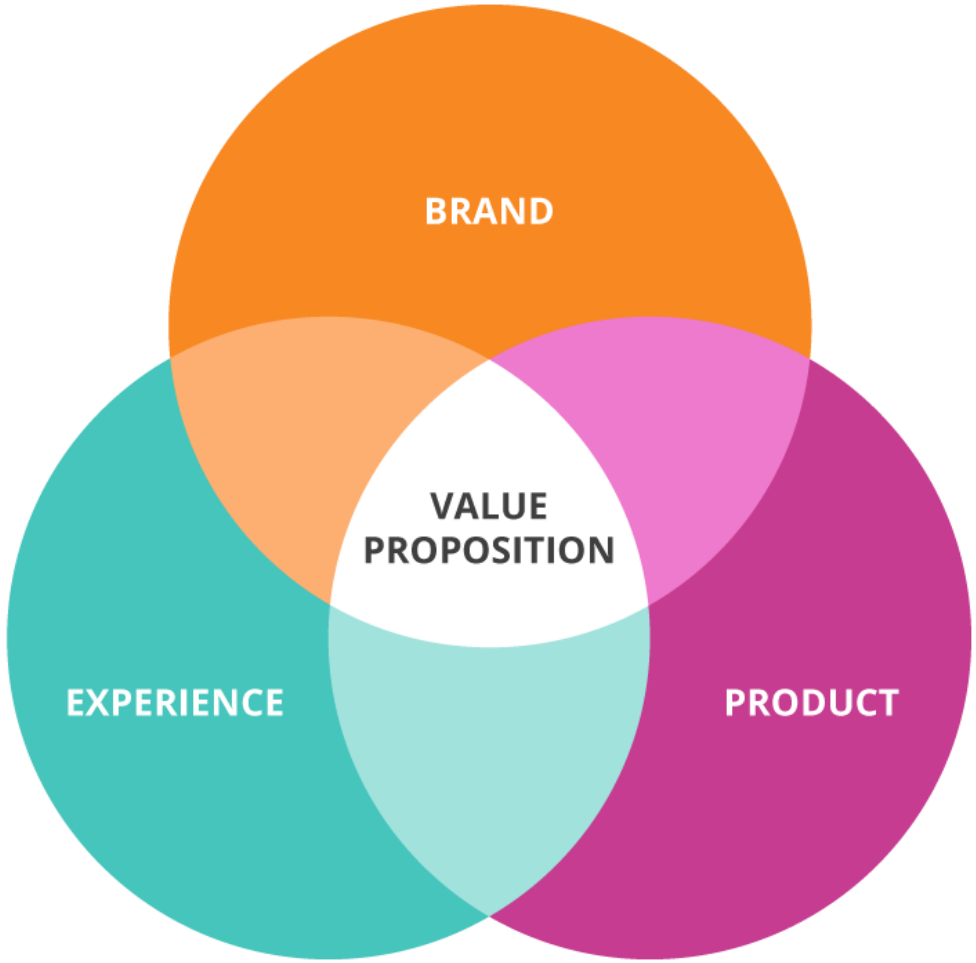
- With larger sites and larger ranking footprints, come **crawl allowance concerns**
- Delivery of relevant products for search users must remain efficient
- It's easy for site architecture to spiral out of control
- Parameter URLs from faceted navigation filtering can cause some problems

Has to happen for every page / product on your site...

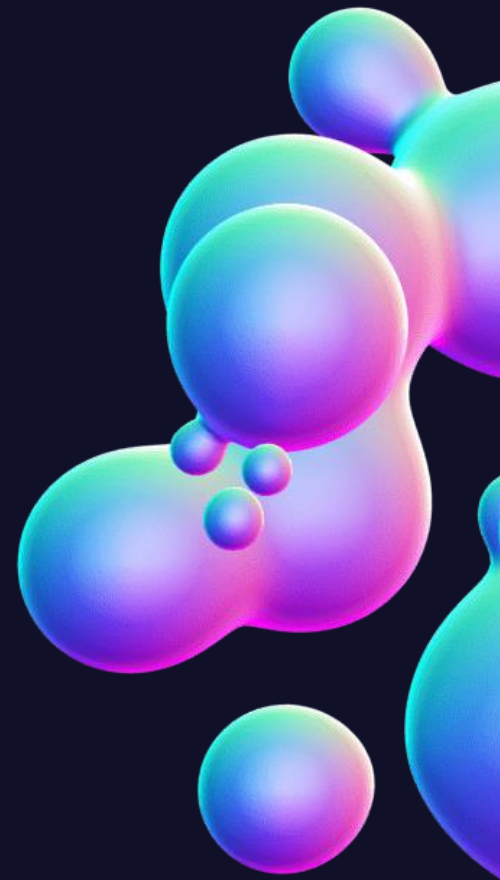


SEO Challenges

- You may serve hundreds, thousands, or hundreds of thousands of product pages
- This gives you an advantage, you can connect with more search queries
- **All of these pages must provide value-add for users**
- **Be competitive**, and provide more detailed information (more quickly, with better UX) than the competition

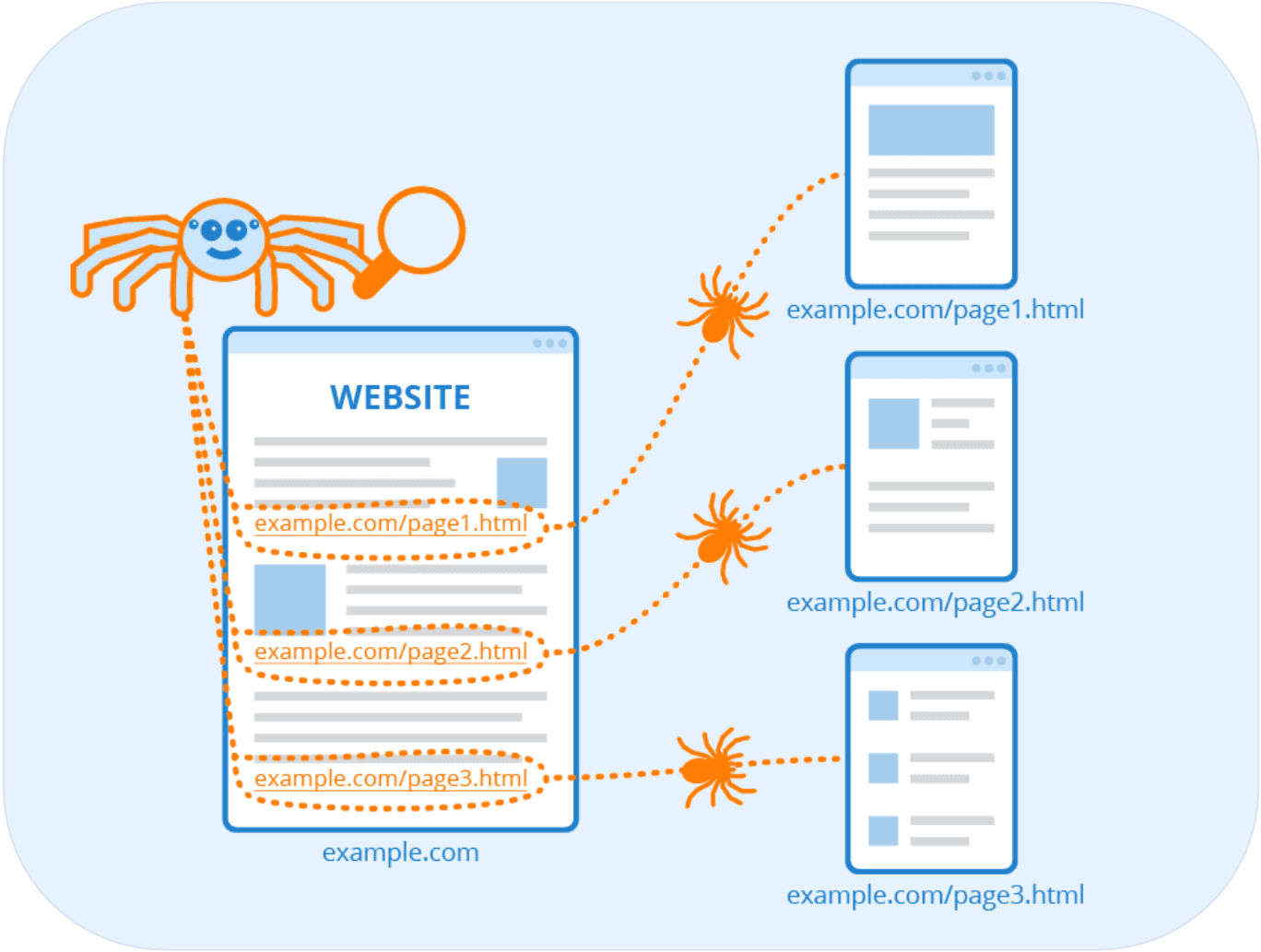


The Challenge is Efficient Indexation



The Challenge of Indexation

- Your site has **many products** and combinations of faceted navigation to serve to users
- **Which are relevant for search?**
- You must factor the user intent
- Sites of differing authority, serving different audiences – may perform differently via the various indexation techniques available



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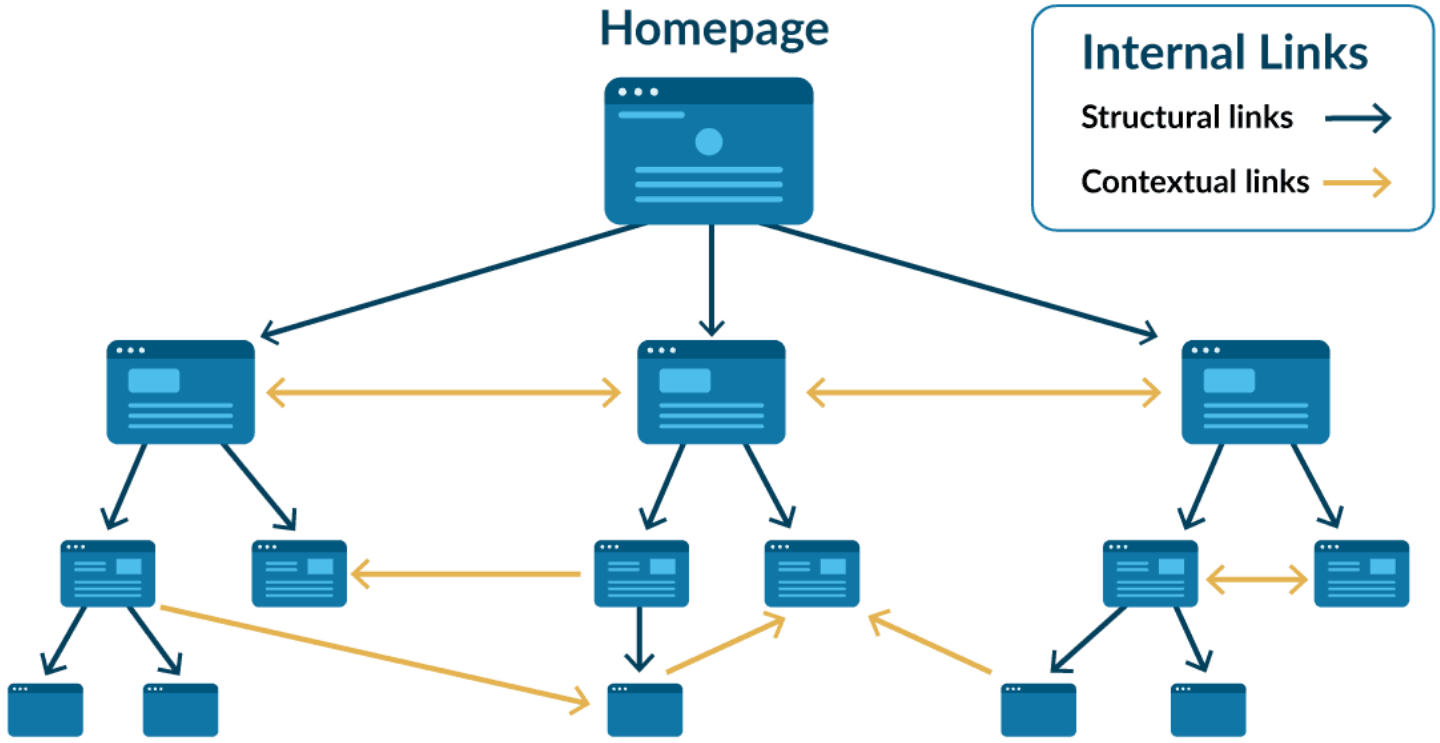
Consider your Site's SEO Authority

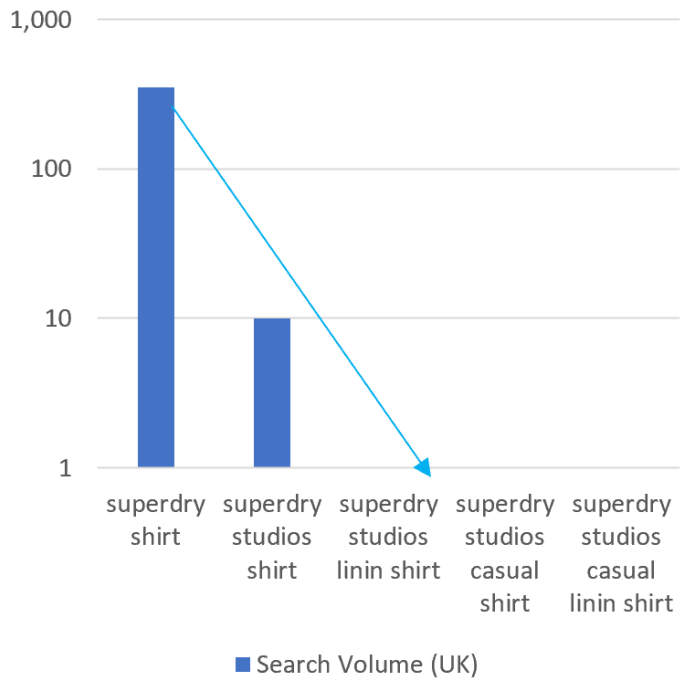
- **Sites with higher SEO authority** (created via organic, editorial link attraction) **can index more pages**

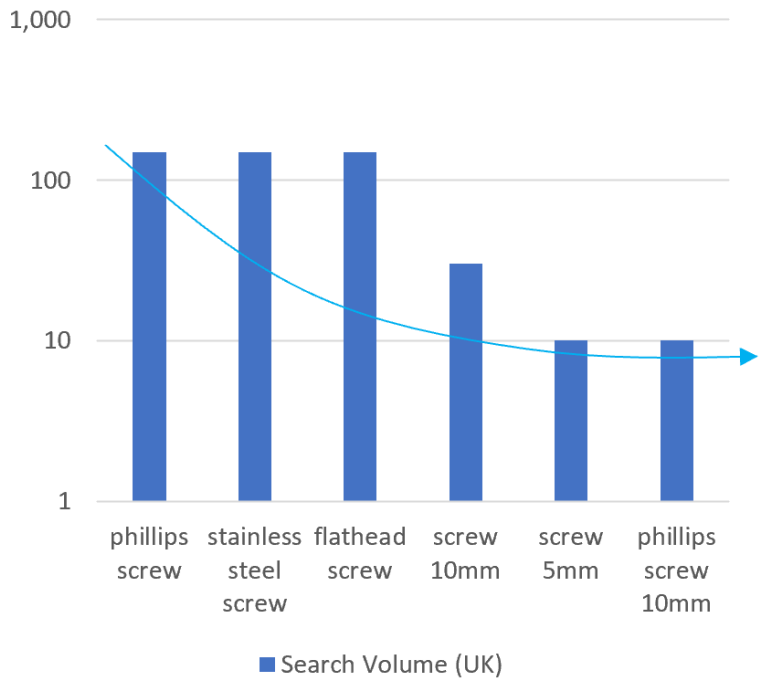
- Newer sites with less authority, may need to take a more streamlined approach, since their ability to index pages within Google's results is more limited



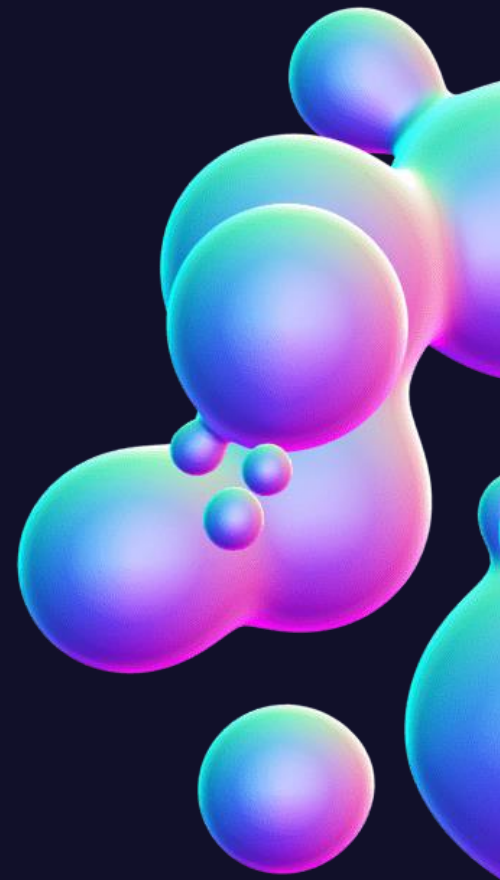
Consider Industry and User Intent

- **Factor your industry and your user's search intent**
- If you're selling branded shirts, then it may make sense to have a single product page with self-contained variations
- If you're selling DIY products (screws) then users may perform much more detailed searches, and so you may want to list all product variations on separate pages





Crawl Control: Handling Indexation



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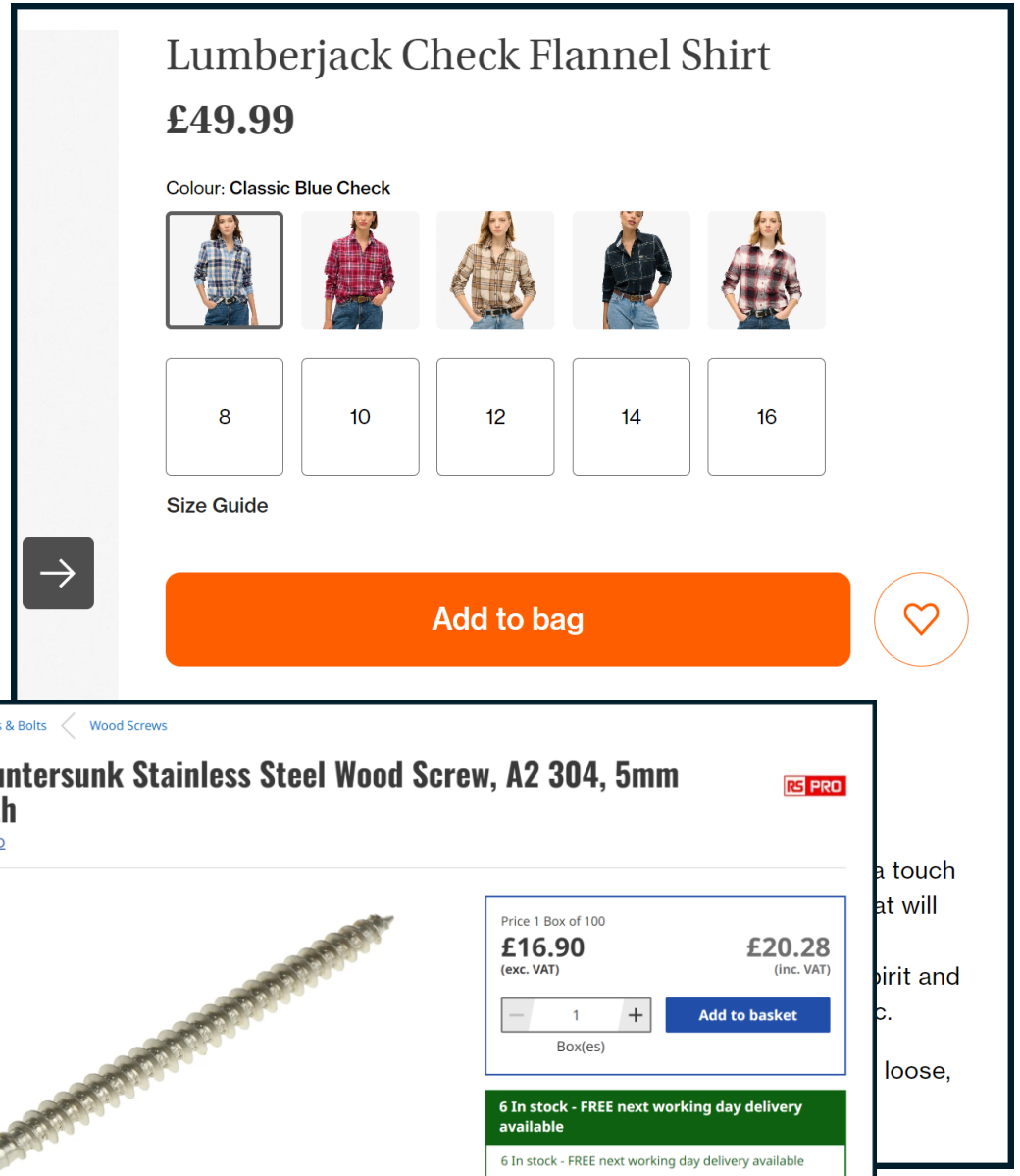
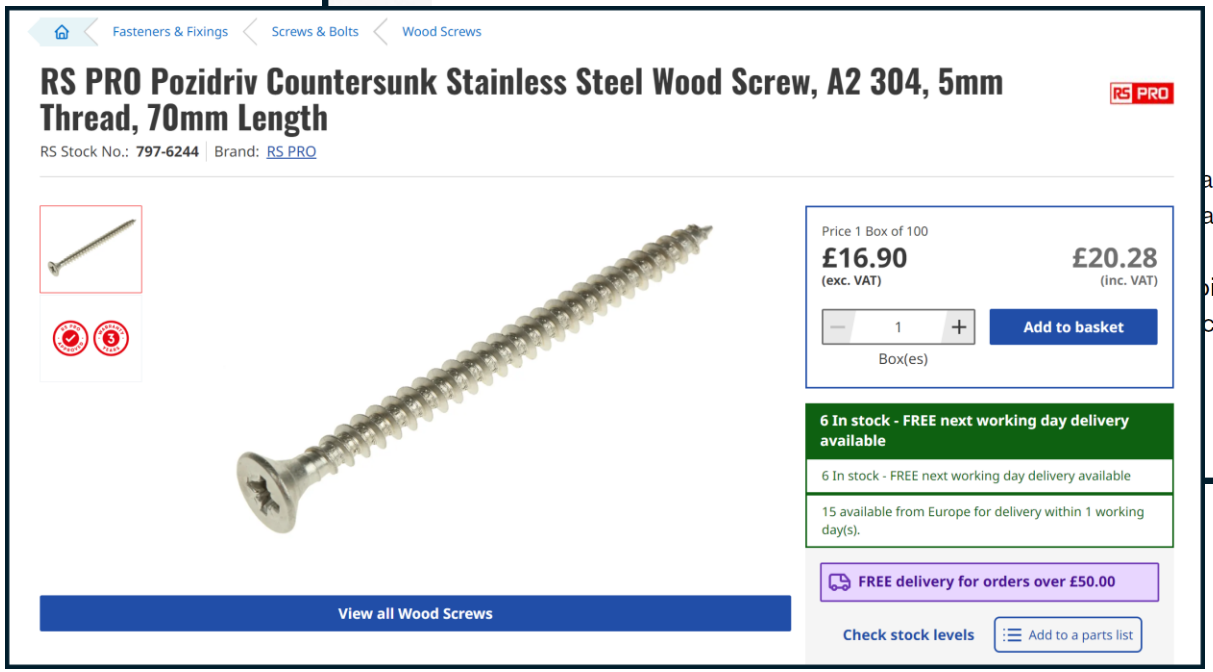
Handling Indexation

- **Make sure all your important product and category pages are in your XML sitemap index**
- Make sure that XML index is connected to Search Console
- **Consider your architecture**. For example, should you list all product variations on separate pages, or not?
- Could some faceted navigation be built out?





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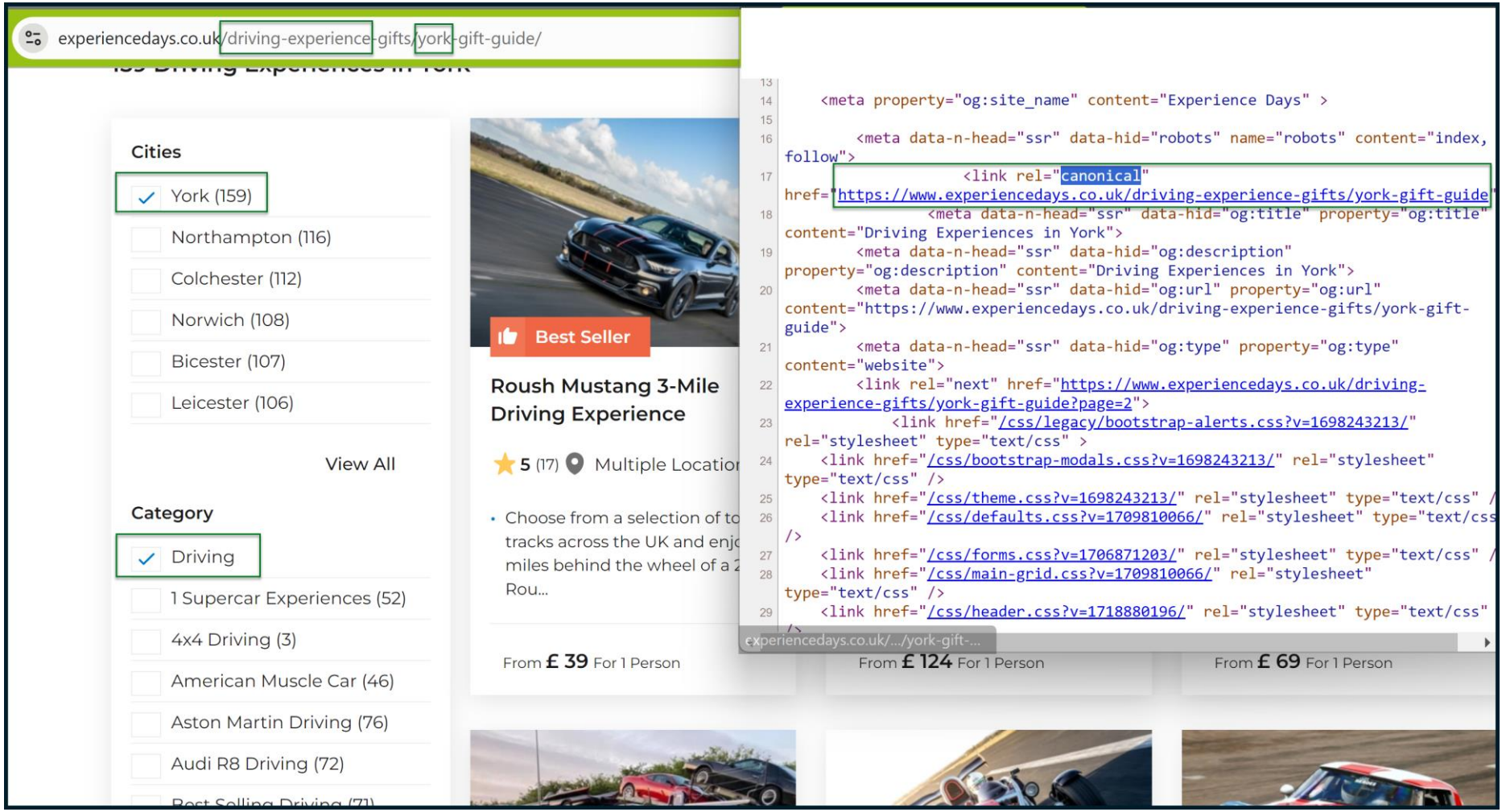
Handling Indexation

- **Some sites will allow certain faceted navigation** (filter) **combinations to produce clean URLs**, which can rank

- This can be a competent strategy when related searches (e.g: “driving experiences York” – 30 UK search volume) are popular



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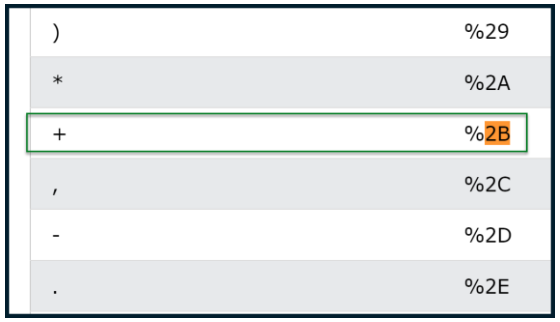
Handling Indexation

- On the other hand, **some filter / parameter combinations can get really long** and specific



)	%29
*	%2A
+	%2B
,	%2C
-	%2D
.	%2E

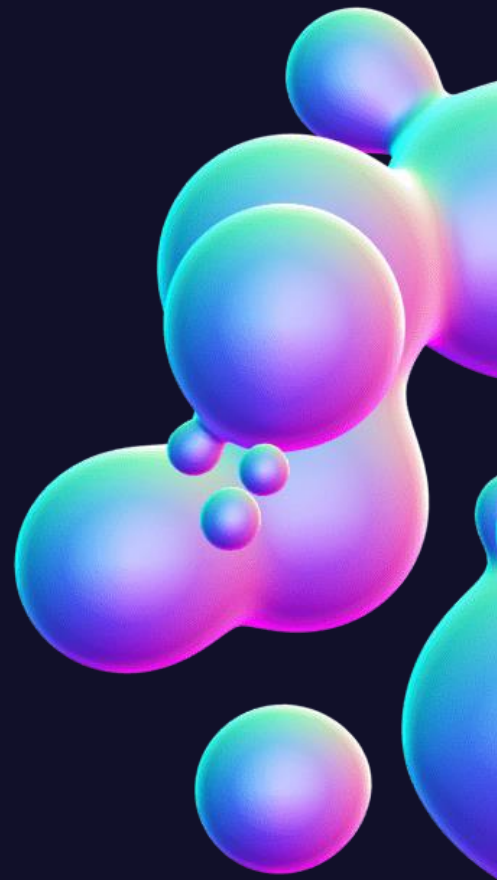
- Such combinations mathematically spawn thousands, or millions of pages

- Sometimes you will need to restrain crawlers, via your robots.txt file

```
# we use Shopify as our ecommerce platform

User-agent: *
Disallow: /a/downloads/-/*
Disallow: /admin
Disallow: /cart
Disallow: /orders
Disallow: /checkouts/
Disallow: /checkout
Disallow: /5498142835/checkouts
Disallow: /5498142835/orders
Disallow: /carts
Disallow: /account
Disallow: /collections/*sort_by*
Disallow: /*/collections/*sort_by*
Disallow: /collections/*+*
Disallow: /collections/*%2B*
Disallow: /collections/*%2b*
Disallow: /*/collections/*+*
Disallow: /*/collections/*%2B*
Disallow: /*/collections/*%2b*
Disallow: */collections/*filter*&*filter*
Disallow: /blogs/*+*
Disallow: /blogs/*%2B*
Disallow: /blogs/*%2b*
Disallow: /*/blogs/*+*
Disallow: /*/blogs/*%2B*
Disallow: /*/blogs/*%2b*
Disallow: /*?*oseid=*
Disallow: /*preview_theme_id*
Disallow: /*preview_script_id*
```

Beware Being too JS Reliant (Build)



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Beware JS Reliance

- Ecommerce sites are often large
- Large sites should beware, in terms of producing overly JS-reliant builds
- **Large sites which are almost 100% generated via JS, often struggle**
- This is true even in light of Google's recent comments: https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-renders-all-pages-for-search-including-javascript-heavy-sites/522103/

1. **Good news for JavaScript**: If your website uses a lot of JavaScript, Google will likely understand it.
2. **Speed still matters**: Although Google can handle JavaScript better, having a fast-loading website is still important.
3. **Keep it simple when you can**: While it's okay to use JavaScript, try not to overdo it. Simpler websites are often easier for both Google and visitors to understand.
4. **Check your work**: Use Google's free tools, like Fetch As Google, to ensure search crawlers can render your site.
5. **Think about all users**: Remember that some people might have slow internet or older devices. Ensure your main content works even if JavaScript doesn't load perfectly.

Beware JS Reliance

- Back in the early days (circa 2009) most JS generated content was impenetrable for Google
- In 2014 Google said they could render JS: https://developers.google.com/search/blog/2014/05/understanding-web-pages-better - but didn't do it all the time
- Now Google say they will render all pages, **but you must consider several things**...

1. **Good news for JavaScript**: If your website uses a lot of JavaScript, Google will likely understand it.
2. **Speed still matters**: Although Google can handle JavaScript better, having a fast-loading website is still important.
3. **Keep it simple when you can**: While it's okay to use JavaScript, try not to overdo it. Simpler websites are often easier for both Google and visitors to understand.
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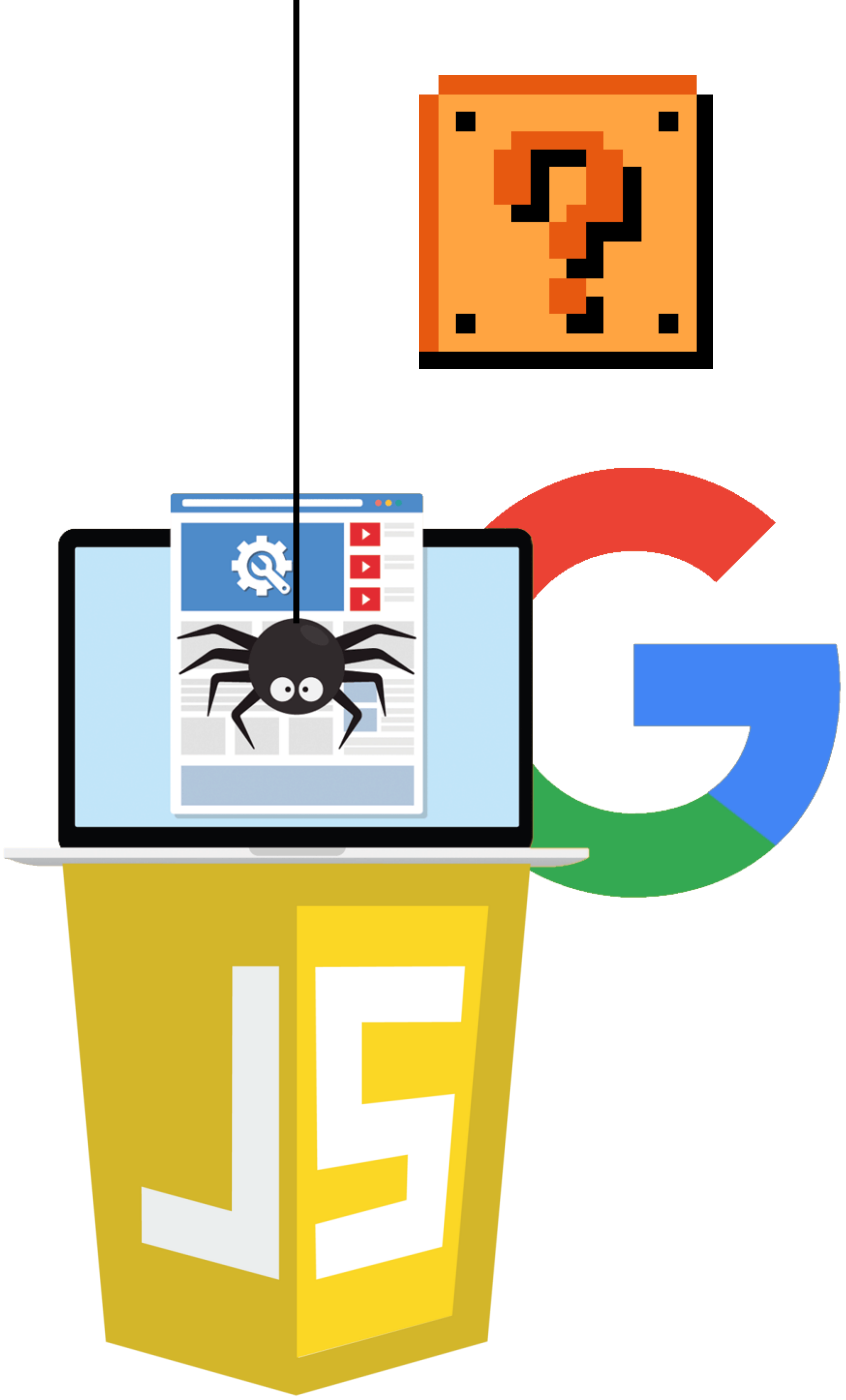
Beware JS Reliance

- The exact parameters around which this statement was made, are **still <u>not</u> fully known**

- For example, **does Google slow down its main web crawling engine for this**, executing JS (at the time) for all found pages? Or are all found pages sent to a separate, slower execution queue?

- Google probably won't do much in terms of 'interacting' with a page. **If there are non-hyperlink elements which can be clicked, Google won't click those** (as they don't lead to new pages for Google to discover). So, any content hidden behind buttons which need to be clicked (tabbed content in a single page) likely won't be indexed, if it's not also in the source code. **Google won't scroll pages** etc



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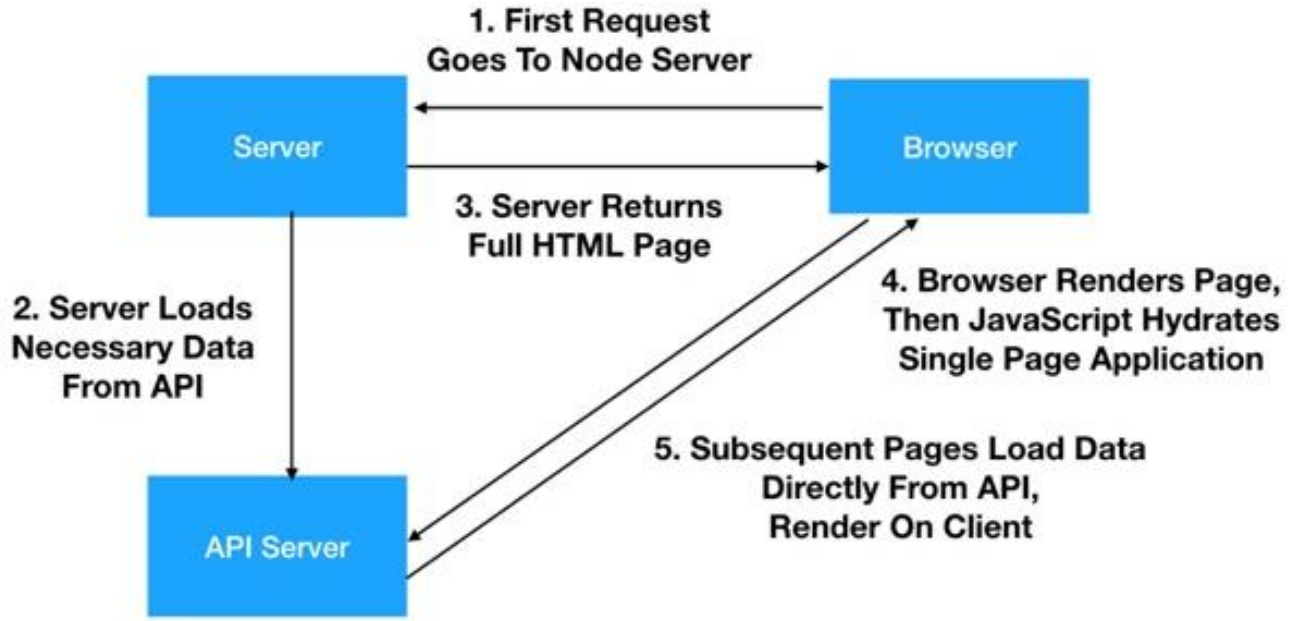
Beware JS Reliance

- **You can still use JS-heavy or SPA** (Single Page Application) **front-ends** if they are built on the right technology stacks
- For example, **utilising Nuxt** which stacks on top of Vue, makes SPA front ends easy to code, whilst including server-side rendering for source code population, with JS hydration
- You can **build a headless WordPress front-end using Nuxt** (with the back end separated out in another database)
- Sites can be JS heavy without being JS reliant

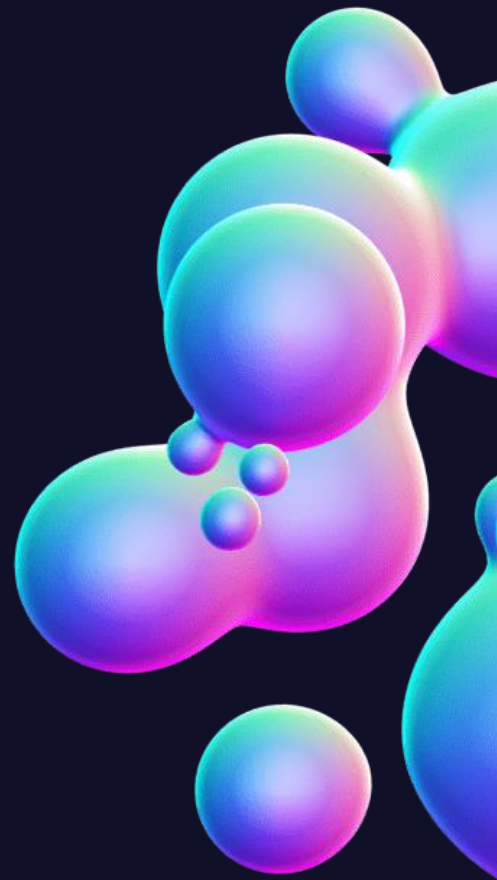


"Universal rendering allows a Nuxt application to provide quick page load times while preserving the benefits of client-side rendering. Furthermore, as the content is already present in the HTML document, crawlers can index it without overhead."

https://nuxt.com/docs/guide/concepts/rendering

Ecommerce SEO in 2024

(reminders from “Fundamentals of Ecommerce” Webinar)



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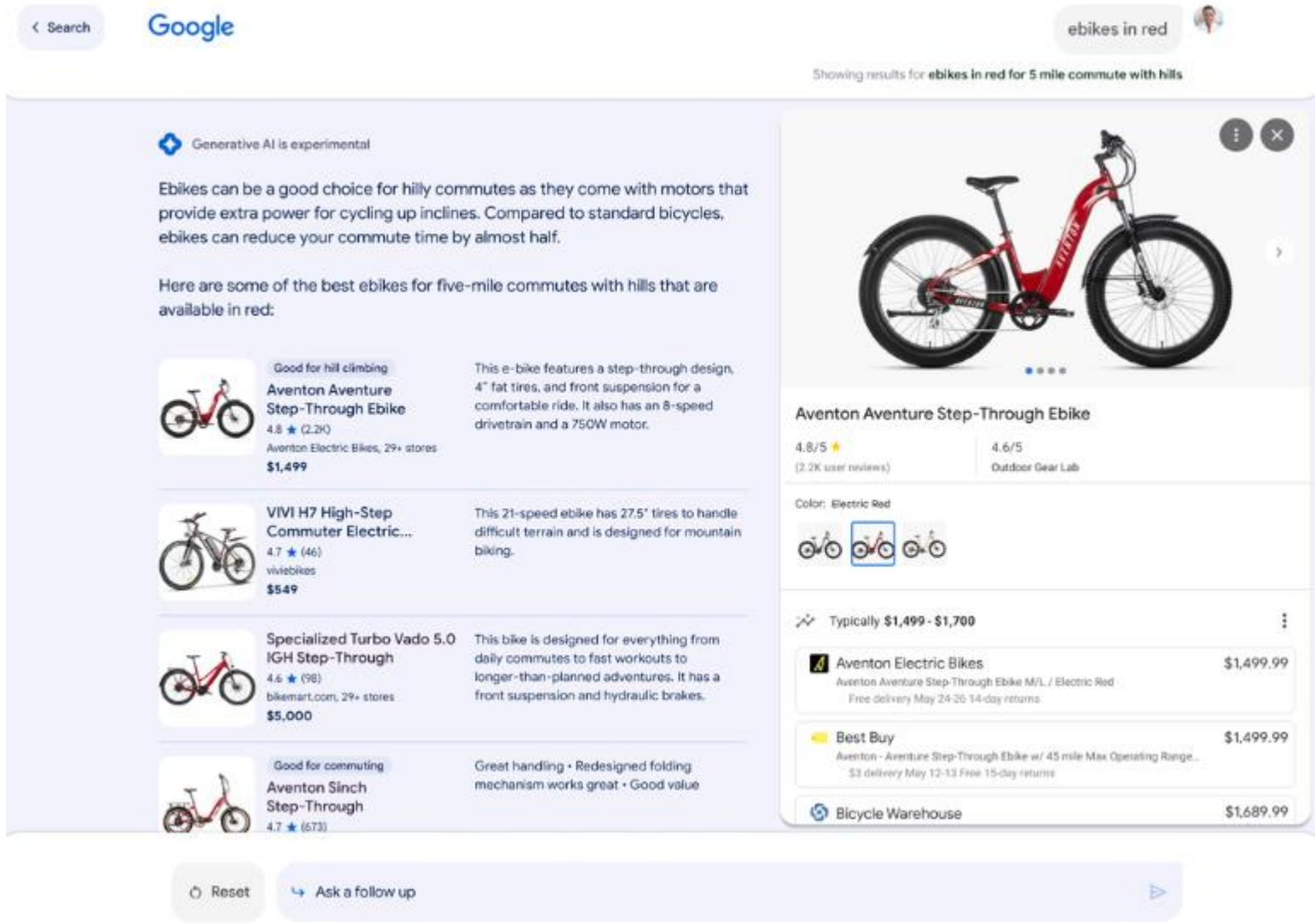
AI Overviews for Ecommerce

- **AI overviews is going to shake up ecommerce SEO**
- Overviews act more like a personal assistant, and **give specific product recommendations** instead of providing the user with category pages
- This bolsters the need for ecommerce websites to consider how they're integrating their product feeds for organic search

Search Query: Good bikes for a 5 mile commute with hills



Source: https://blog.google/products/search/generative-ai-search/

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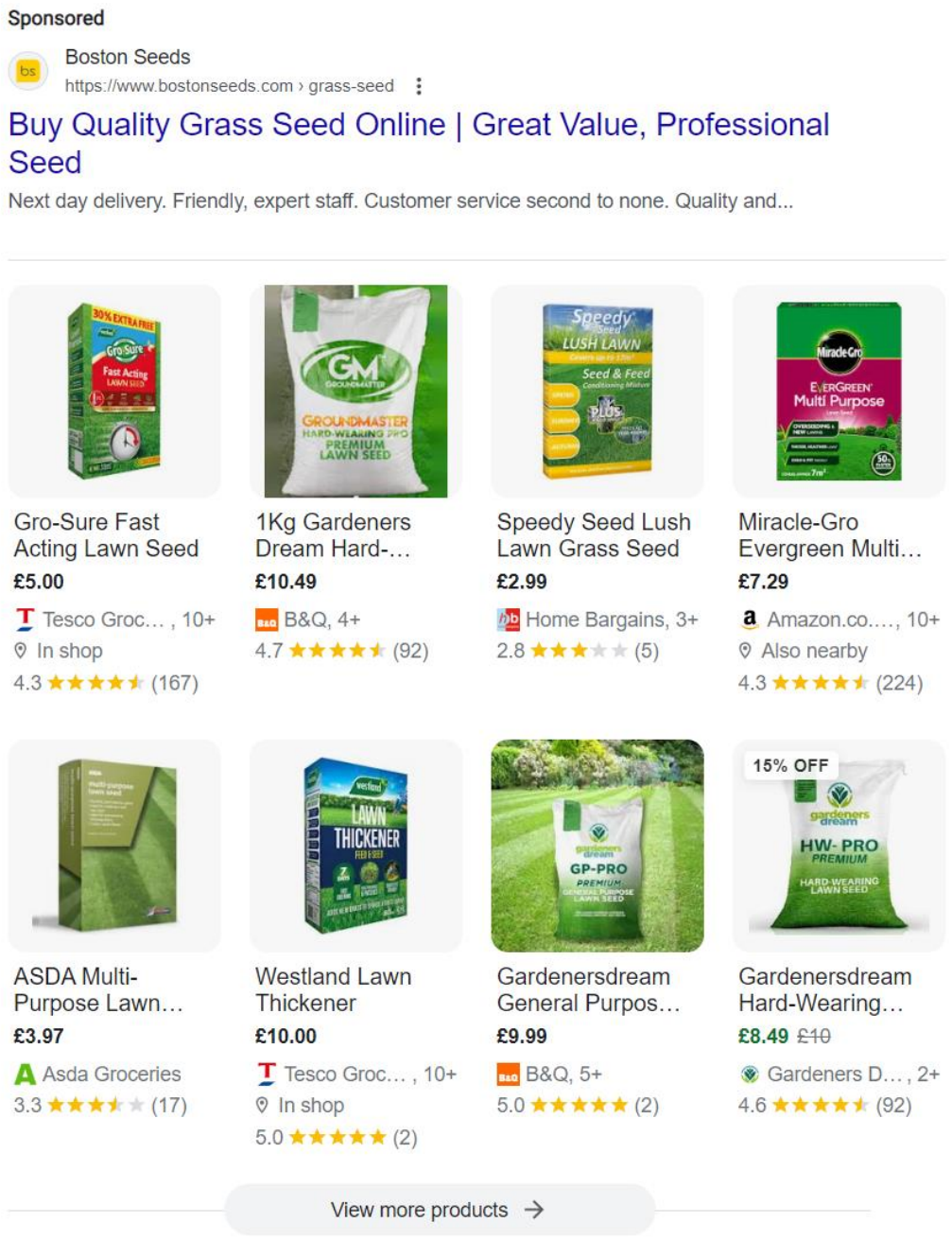
Organic Shopping

- **Organic shopping listings are becoming a lot more prominent** in search and this is an area you should focus on

- Optimise your shopping feeds for organic results, fill in all the details you can

- Required and optional fields here: https://support.google.com/merchants/answer/7052112 try to add more information than just the required items in your feed



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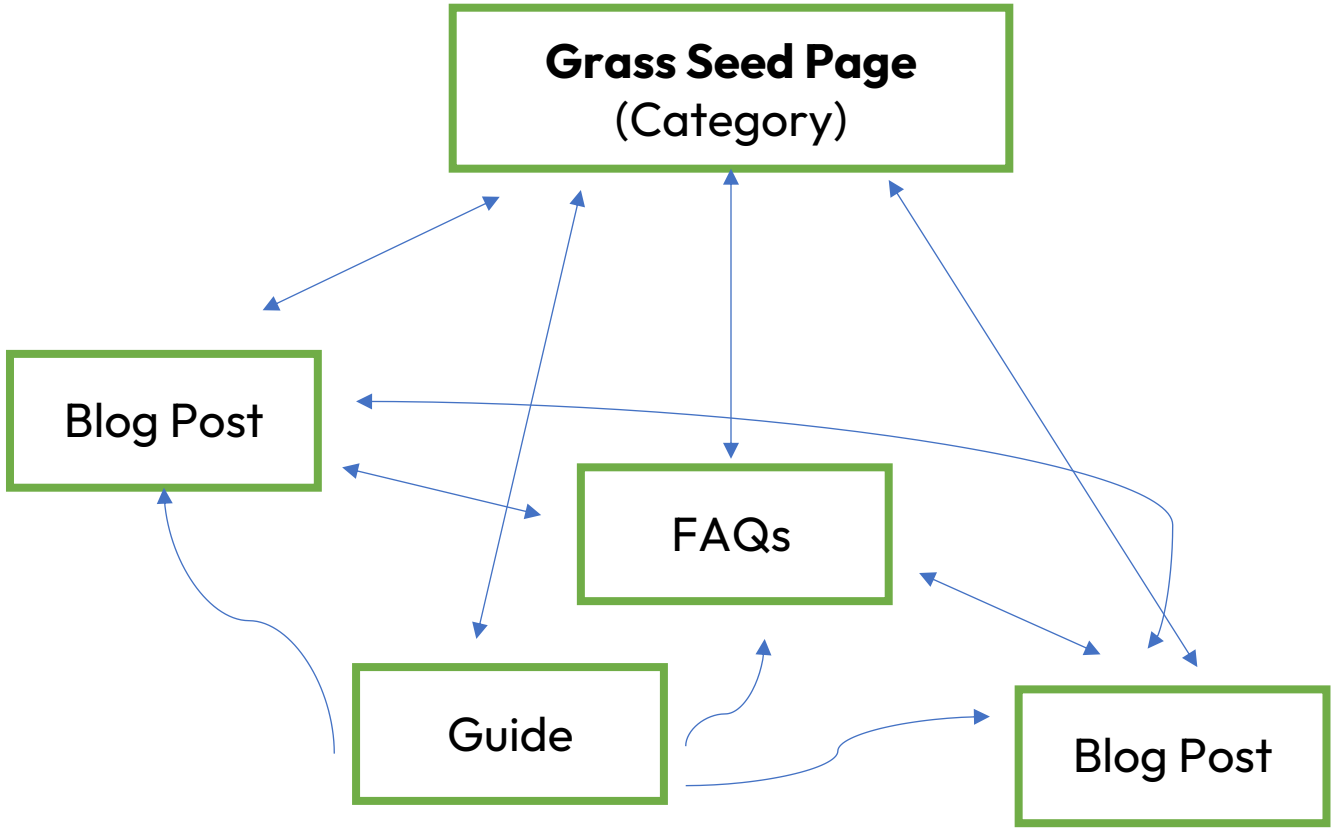
Topic Clusters

- **You cannot rely on optimising a single page** to start ranking
- Create topic clusters to show you are an authority in a specific topic
- Interlink these pages together so you have clusters of content around the same topic to build your authority – do this at scale

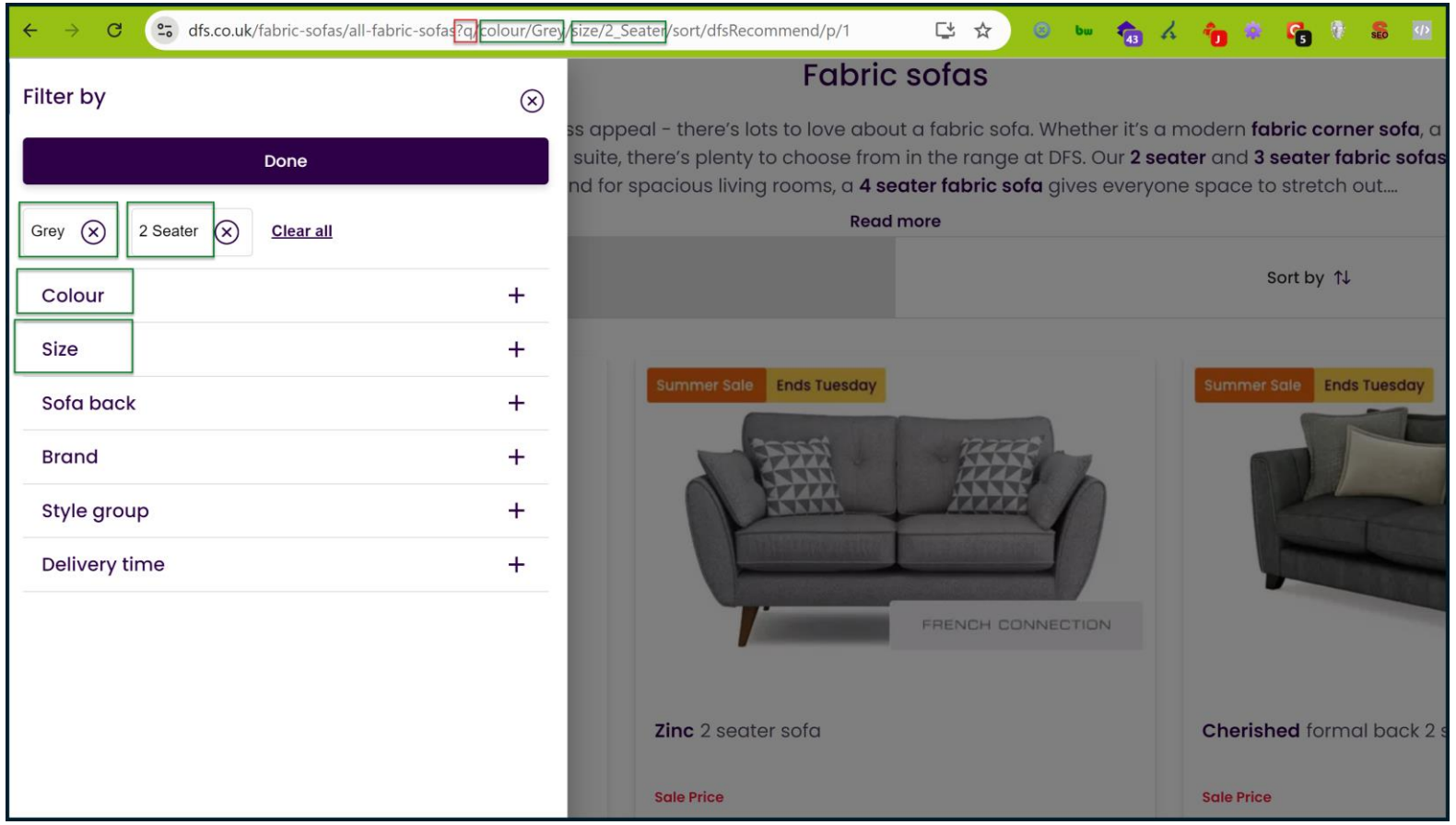


Faceted Navigation / Filtered Categories

- **Faceted navigation and filtering create parameter-based product feeds** which handle terms between your broader categories and product URLs

- Such URLs often don't contain unique content, custom Meta data or clean URLs (since they are generated)

- In Brad's prior "Fundamentals of Ecommerce" Webinar, he suggested **leveraging keyword data to build out some of these URLs as static pages**



Above: The fabric sofas category is filtered to grey 2-seater sofas only, and a page is generated. You can see that the generated page is parameter-based from the "?q" in the URL string (on most sites this would be "?q=")

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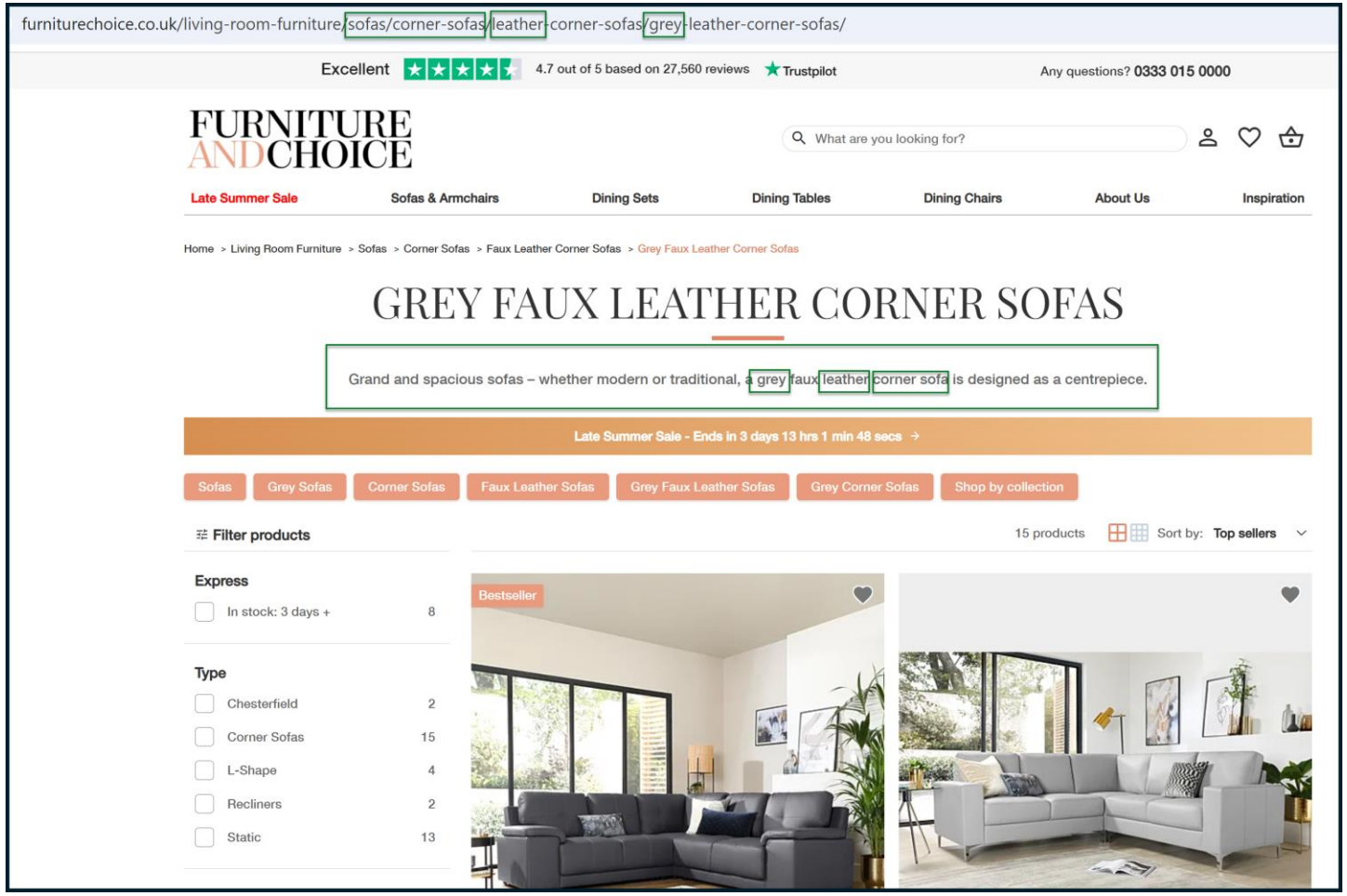
Faceted Navigation / Filtered Categories

- However, **for those with significant technical resource at their disposal, there is another way**

- Instead of producing static pages which mimic the content of such filtered product feeds, **static elements can be introduced into the dynamic content**

- This involves back-end CMS tweaks (so that custom content / Meta can be entered for certain, specified faceted navigation combinations)



Due to the mathematical potential volume of all combined filters, this is usually infeasible to implement for all faceted navigation combinations. As such, only 'worthy' combinations satisfied via keyword research, are usually broken out

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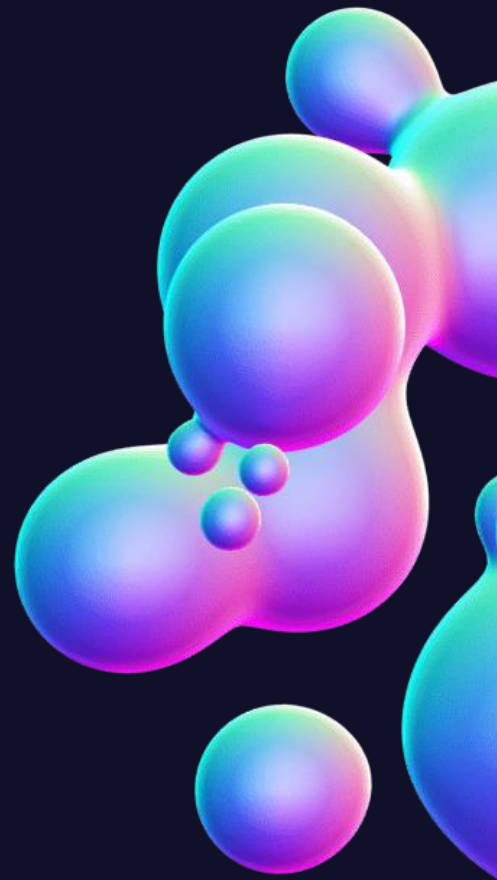
Conclusions



Conclusions

- **Leveraging SEO Strengths:** We've described the utilisation of extensive product listings for ecommerce sites, to enhance SEO footprints. This can lead to increased traffic and conversions

- **Addressing Challenges:** We've discussed strategies to manage crawl efficiency and indexation, ensuring that the most relevant products are visible and discoverable. Don't forget build outs, and robots.txt

- **Adapting to Technology:** We've highlighted the importance of minimising reliance on JavaScript for critical content to ensure sites remain accessible and effectively indexed by search engines

- **Utilising Nuxt for JS-heavy Sites:** For those committed to using JavaScript-heavy sites, we've described Nuxt as a solution that facilitates server-side rendering, enhancing SEO while retaining the dynamic capabilities of JavaScript (via JS hydration)

- **Preparing for 2024:** With the advent of AI in search, we've briefly explored the technological advances which sit on the direct horizon. We also covered techniques to index filtered product listings

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Any questions?

Thank you

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