# BIG ZETA

# Technical Search:
## The Gateway to B2B Conversions

*bigzeta.com*

## → INTRODUCTION

Too often, B2B buyers receive zero or inaccurate results when they use the search functions of electronics suppliers or distributors. A well-functioning technical search offers pinpoint accuracy and helpful context about products, so that B2B buyers—like design engineers—can move efficiently through their design process.

When companies operationalize search as part of their buyers' journey and demand funnel, they not only streamline a user's experience; they also increase conversions, optimize their site, and glean intelligence to inform business strategies.

## WHAT IS TECHNICAL SEARCH?

Technical search is a tool that helps technical users sort through hundreds or thousands of products to find a specific item. A robust technical search packs most of these key ingredients:

- » Keyword search
- » Parametric search
- » Selector-configurators
- » Chat bots
- » Big data
- » Globalization
- » Analytics
- » Artificial intelligence and machine learning

## HOW IMPORTANT IS TECHNICAL SEARCH TO B2B BUYERS?

In a recent survey of design engineers (specifically, electrical engineers who subscribed to the site All About Circuits), EETech Media & Marketing reported that 65% of all design engineers ranked search engines as the most important, most accessed resource for information. Furthermore, a Forrester Study reported that B2B buyers ranked "enhanced search functionality" number one among the three features they most valued from suppliers. Another Forrester Report revealed that as many as 68% of shoppers would not return to a site that provided a poor search experience.

When users turn to B2B search tools, they are typically in the latter stages of the buyer's journey: they've done their research, they know which suppliers or distributors to pursue, and they're using a search engine to compare critical product details. These users know what they want to buy and they're relying on search to find it.

However, search isn't always as reliable as users expect it to be.

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## ▎ THE PROBLEM

Search is the most desired, yet poorest performing, B2B feature.

EE Times recently surveyed more than 4,000 engineers for its "Mind of the Engineer" study, which found that design engineers named manufacturer sites their number-one preferred method for gathering information.

Of those design engineers surveyed, 70% claimed to gather content on manufacturers' sites multiple times a month, and 30% used the sites multiple times weekly. Unsurprisingly, 50% of users reported using search during their time on the site.

Yet, despite the key role of search in potential client conversion, B2B site users often complain about a site's "findability" in feedback surveys.



So, what's standing between B2B companies and a high-functioning search engine?

## OBSTACLES

While many B2B companies understand the critical role of technical search in their buyers' journeys, they struggle to implement a high-powered search engine. The reasons are manifold.

**They host a broad product inventory.** Webmasters must catalog thousands of products—including nondescript parts—

and millions of documents. Suppliers are also tasked with organizing complex product relationships.

**They must integrate multiple finding methods.** While many suppliers feature keyword search, parametric search, selector-configurators, chatbots, and other finding tools, one or many of their search methods might have a different back-end system, making it difficult to unify results across platforms.

**They must meet the high expectations of an intelligent user base.** B2B buyers are highly technical customers, employees, or partners. These professionals approach product search with a data-driven mindset that they expect their supplier to share.

**Their clients are on a complex buyer's journey.** B2B buyers operate in long sales cycles that affect how they interact with a supplier's site: they begin sifting through design options, conduct preliminary research on suppliers, conceptualize designs, prototype samples, justify their design to management, forge vendor relationships, mass-purchase, and repurchase.

**They manage sophisticated technology and make sense of dense data sets.** When webmasters sit on the other side of search, they are tasked with attaching explanations to search analytics. Because data can be interpreted in multiple ways and many search functions lack a coherent analytics dashboard, this report can be as ambiguous as it is daunting.

**They lack human resources support.** Webmasters and technical support specialists are laser-focused on keeping an entire site up and running. Although technical search is a foundational feature in site setup, specialists may neglect daily updates when they're pressed with other demands, like optimization.

The results of these obstacles manifest in several ways, reflected in a 2019 EETech Media & Marketing survey.

## CASE STUDY

The surveyors aimed to assess how electrical engineers use technical search in their design process. More than 300 engineers took part, 117 of whom were design engineers.

When surveyors asked which search tactics were most helpful in finding the right product or service, almost all participants pointed to suppliers' and distributors' respective keyword and parametric search functions.

## IDENTIFY PROBLEMS, EMPLOY SOLUTIONS

To overcome technical search obstacles, B2Bs must first understand what hinders their users most; that way, they can prioritize solutions. The 2019 EETech survey on B2B technical search sheds light on site users' expectations and provides insights on how businesses can meet those expectations.

In the survey, participants ranked the five most valued qualities of site search:

1. Accuracy

2. Results across multiple domains

3. Performance

4. Surfacing of parametric data along with keyword data

5. Additional context

Using these five qualities as a starting point yields productive insights about the solutions specific to B2B technical search:

## 1. Problem: Search users often receive inaccurate or irrelevant search results, or results listed in the wrong order.

The survey reports that 78% of engineers rank accuracy as their number one priority when assessing a technical search engine.

Although design engineers certainly explore supplier sites during their research stage, a large number of them return to manufacturer or distributor sites later—this time, knowing exactly what they want. These users enter specific product names or serial numbers into the search box, expecting the same level of specificity in results.

However, a user's search experience might be a series of trial-and-error attempts to strike a keyword that the site's search algorithm can understand.

**Solution: Site managers can reduce user frustration when "zero results" are returned by suggesting alternative search terms.**

When finding tools are running properly, the search engine can "guess" the user's intention (say, if the user misspells a keyword) and direct the buyer to the right product.

By specifying **synonyms for common keywords**, a supplier bridges the gap between terms that users enter and the nomenclature of site products.

## 2. Problem: Search results are disjointed across multiple domains.

Even if users input a hot keyword, they may receive irrelevant results or results ranked in a random order. For instance, using a component name may take the user to a forum thread on the component instead of the component's product page.

This proves especially frustrating to customers, considering that "Almost three-quarters of B2B buyers told [Forrester surveyors] that the ability to look up product information across any channel is important or very important when making work-related purchases online."

### Solution

The Forrester Consulting study focused on how B2B buyers value omni-channel businesses. They claim that "Weaving digital capabilities into the core back-office operational systems is critical to transforming to [a] new way of doing business."

An **integrated back-end** not only unifies results across domains, but it also provides site managers with insightful analytics on prospects.

With **real-time analytics**, B2B suppliers can detect current trends and patterns, informing suppliers how to better serve clients. Additionally, many sites now feature **easy-to-use dashboards** that display the most pertinent metrics to give decision makers data at a glance.

Which search tactics are the most useful in finding the right product or service? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 256       Skipped: 48
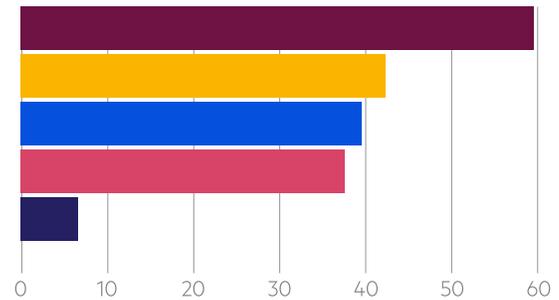


| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| ● Supplier Keyword Search | 59% | 152 |
| ● Supplier Parametric Search | 42% | 108 |
| ● Distributor Keyword Search | 39% | 101 |
| ● Distributor Parametric Search | 37% | 96 |
| ● Other (please specify) | 7% | 17 |

Total Responses: 256

*Figure 1. Survey participants ranked keyword and parametric search—on both supplier and distributor sites—as highly useful in their finding process.*

## 3. Problem: The search engine demonstrates poor performance.

While B2B sites are notorious for an antiquated user interface, design aesthetics aren't nearly as important to users as performance is.

"Performance," as defined by the EETech surveyors, refers to slow loading time. But other factors, including "recall" ability and precision, also play a major role in influencing performance.

**Solution: Advanced Keyword Search.**

A search engine that interprets the "intention" of the user is

required to improve performance. Search engine performance hinges on its ability for "recall" and "precision."

A powerful full-text search capability improves search performance. Its speed comes from an inverted index at its core, and its power comes from tunable relevance scoring, advanced query algorithm, and a wide range of search-enhancing features such as synonym tables and spellcheck.

## 4. Problem: Parametric data doesn't surface with keyword data, or vice versa.

Some users may be able to find a product through one finding tool—for instance, a keyword search—but won't be able to find the same product later through another avenue of search, such as parametric search.

Even more frustrating is when a user enters a keyword, finds a product, and upon entering the same keyword during a different session, is unable to find that same product.

Again, this issue is usually related to multiple back-end systems or disunified omni-channels of search.

### Solution: Shared Keyword and Parametric Search Database

Through an Ingester — an analytics platform that unifies multiple databases — the keyword search and parametric search are integrated.

Having a shared keyword and parametric database enables search results to be coherent and consistent. It allows for a query to be asked through either search interface and still deliver the same quality result.

## 5. Problem: Search functions don't provide additional context, including personalized results, for the buyer's persona.

Even if a supplier discontinues a product or runs out of inventory, buyers expect your site to suggest alternative solutions and related products. In a Forrester Consulting report, half of the surveyed B2B buyers "identified improved personalization as being a key feature for suppliers they would want to work with."
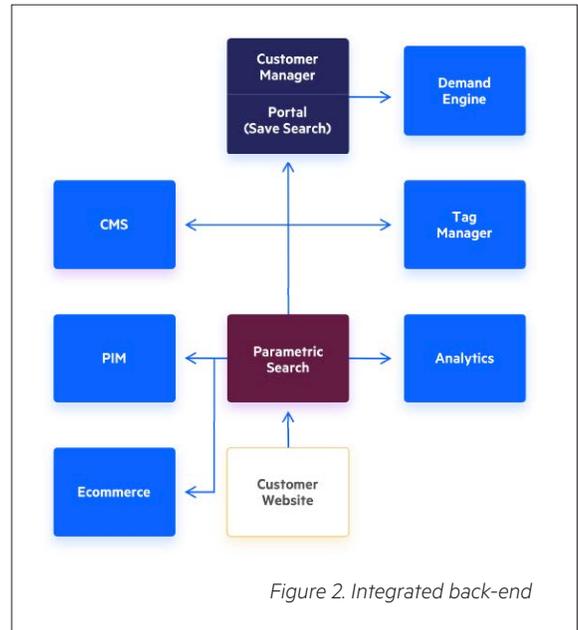


*Figure 2. Integrated back-end*

On the supplier side, 42% of manufacturers surveyed identified improved search personalization as a part of their technology initiatives.

### Solution

A successful search **algorithm** can gather information about a user, especially their previous browsing history on your site, and tailor a site experience for that specific user. The more your algorithm understands your user's intent, the more relevant their results will be.

When a search engine can learn the user's search behaviors—and those of similar users—it can predict what the user will likely search for next. Because the search engine is applying and learning from anonymous data, there are **no privacy issues**.

Other features that enhance accessibility include **autocorrect, bi-gram matching** (when a search engine assumes the correct keyword despite a user's added spaces, hyphens, etc.), and **stemming** (when a search engine creates a new keyword, accounting for prefixes, suffixes, or pluralization).

Including **ratings**, **reviews**, and **product comparisons** can also help the user feel that a site's search encourages them to make an informed decision in the product selection process.

### TIPS FOR "READING" YOUR SEARCH TOOLS

1. **Click by parametric field:** Which parametric fields or configurations are the most highly converting?

2. **Parametric product template usage:** Which parametric product templates are the highest used or converting?

3. **Parametric product configurations:** Which parametric filters are the most highly used?

4. **Most searched products:** Which of your products and applications are the most searched? Least searched? Unsearched?

5. **New product promotion and trends:** If promotions are a part of your search platform, how are users engaging with them?

### 3 INDICATORS TO GAUGE HOW YOUR SEARCH IS WORKING

**1. Your search leads potential clients through the demand funnel.** The demand funnel describes a prospect's relationship to your business, charting how to go from a lead to a contact, and eventually, a consistent customer. Considering that up to 50% of site visitors use search, according to surveys, suppliers can track how a search jumpstart can lead to an established business relationship.

Conversions happen when you connect a potential customer with the right product or information. While good search alone doesn't necessarily close a sale, you can evaluate how your finding tools lead to that result by monitoring whether customers are clicking the call-to-action buttons or engaging with personalized results, such as "last viewed" or "recommended for you" features.

**2. Your site has a low bounce rate.** A bounce rate tracks the percentage of people who "bounce off" or leave your site after visiting a page. If you lose a significant number of new users at search, you could be losing new business. Low bounce rates can indicate that users are satisfied with the easy navigation and findability of your site.

**3. Your users tell you outright.** If your technical search isn't up to par, your site users will let you know. Whether it's customers, employees, or partners, you should frequently solicit feedback on user experience so you can make improvements.

## CONCLUSION

### HOW DOES TECHNICAL SEARCH MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

B2B audiences are accustomed to the speed and accuracy of Google, and they expect the same high caliber of search from their product suppliers' sites. By investing in industry-standard metrics for site search, B2B companies enable client self-service, which in turn boosts conversions and saves the cost of technical support.

### BENEFITS OF A HIGH-FUNCTIONING TECHNICAL SEARCH ENGINE

» Exposes your entire product and service offering

» Leverages AI and machine learning for enhanced optimization

» Justifies the cost of search with actionable analytics

» Extends internal search engine learning to external search engine optimization (SEO) programs

» Maintains an easy-to-use interface

» Experiences a return on investment with the low cost of site management and enhanced budget control

» Differentiates from technical competitors

» Complies with SaaS standards and meets vendor SLA

» Heightens site security

» Delights customers, employees, and senior management

# BIG ZETA

## ABOUT BIG ZETA

Big Zeta is a provider of custom and standard SaaS products designed by engineers, for engineers. With over 100 combined years of B2B experience, our team helps make your digital strategies a reality through strategy, execution, and transformation. With products for optimized keyword and parametric search grown from empirical data and constant-feedback cycles, we provide holistic, customer-facing platforms that drive acquisition, engagement, and conversion.

Visit bigzeta.com to learn how we can help you meet the needs of your customers today!