



#B2B

#tools

#fittings



The functions that Next Generation offers are the problem solvers we were in need of.

Achim Schneider

Head of Digitalization

Once 'digitally desperate' now receives 78% of orders online

"It doesn't do any good if you have the world's most advanced eCommerce technology if the basics are not there," says Achim Schneider, Head of Digitalization at Seefelder. The basics he's referring to are product data, a topic he knows all too well, and many businesses focus too little on. When Achim began working with Seefelder, the company had it all: a reputable brand, loyal customers, a print and digital catalog of high-quality items - but bad product data, a key component in digital success.



Today, the company continues strongly with all but the latter, establishing itself as a trendsetting B2B project. Achim shares first-hand insights into Seefelder's digitalization journey, from initial challenges to amazing results - including everything he's learned during the three years it took to rebuild the company's product data, his team's approach to creating a tailored-made eCommerce platform, and how Next Generation makes their lives easier and their shop more successful. "We are now at a level no other business our size could be."

Quality for professionals

Seefelder is a leading wholesaler for fittings, assembly technology and tools, or as Achim describes it, "very technical, very unsexy articles". Since 1915, this family-run company has supplied craftsmen, industrial companies, government agencies, and property developers with an extensive range of more than 350,000 items from which door and building hardware, biochemistry, and furniture fittings generate the most sales.

Seefelder focuses on quality and expertise, offering professionals access to the industry's best brands and support from their field and office service team which is available in 9 locations throughout Germany. Due to the technicality of products and often urgent demand, a high level of customer support is needed. Achim stresses this degree of advice cannot work solely via an app, for example, but requires direct contact with customers. So, whether it's through a phone call, WhatsApp message, or live chat on their website, Seefelder commits to meeting customers wherever they are – a main USP for Seefelder. Oliver Nagel, Managing Director of Seefelder agrees, highlighting that despite digitalization, customer proximity is what sets Seefelder apart. "We have a very strong sales force and experience every day how important it is for our customers to talk to us and find solutions together. At the same time, we rely heavily on data preparation and eCommerce technologies to be present online with our product range."

An industry facing digital disruption

Seefelder, like many other B2B companies, relied on print catalogs as their primary selling tools. With a circulation of 15,000, the catalog was essential in showcasing the company and their offerings, which for Seefelder meant over 96,000 categories, 40,000 products and 140,000 product variants. "It's an industry that is still in its infancy as far as digitalization is concerned, but where there are

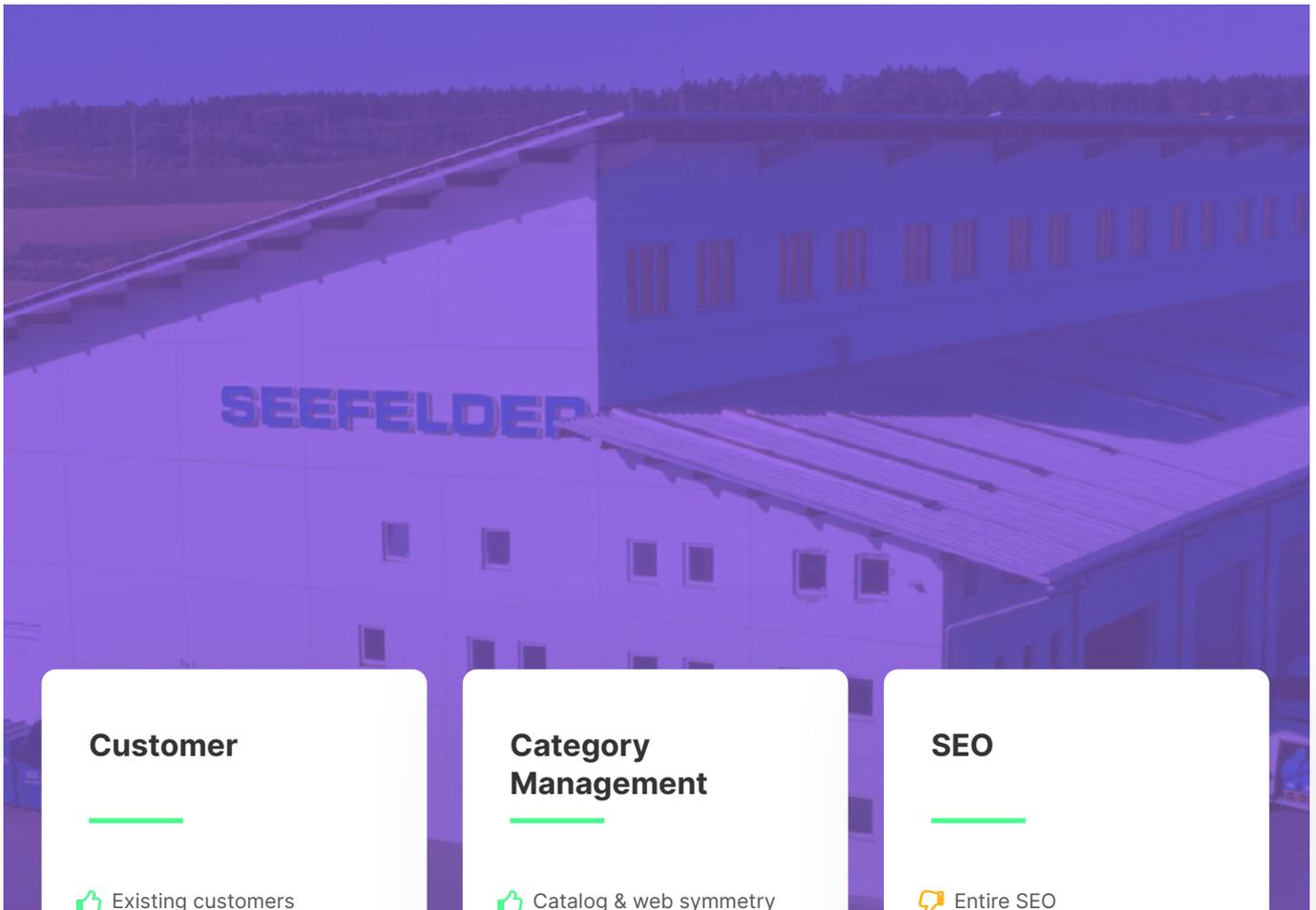
also huge opportunities as a result," Achim points out. He has been working with Seefelder since 2018. First, as the platform's technical manager at Smart Commerce, a team of experts who provide complete services for the design, construction, operation and optimization of high-end eCommerce platforms. And now, taking his expertise straight to the source leading digitalization at Seefelder.

When he first met Seefelder, he could describe the state of the company as "digitally desperate". Having taken their massive print catalog assortment online, Seefelder was looking for an implementation partner to help make the digital shopping experience a success. As the first step, Achim took a deep dive into the print catalog to see how it translated digitally and why it wasn't working. He picked a page for a common product: a screw. He found that for one simple screw, there were nine product category levels, some of which were repetitive or product properties. "We took a look at the whole thing and asked ourselves, 'who is really benefiting from the way it's been implemented?'" As it turns out, not many customers.

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// A decade ago, the majority of B2B buyers still researched and bought from B2B sellers via paper catalogs and landline phones. Today, offline and online have reached an inflection point. 42% percent of B2B sales globally are transacted through reps — the same percentage as through self-service (18%) and rep-assisted eCommerce (24%) combined.

Make Your B2B Business A Digital Business,
Forrester Research, Inc.,
January 29th, 2021



Customer

- 👍 Existing customers
Re-supplying
- 👎 New customers Browsing

Category Management

- 👍 Catalog & web symmetry
Uniform quality
- 👎 Time resources
Time to market

SEO

- 👎 Entire SEO

Initial assessment in 2018

The analysis showed that implementing the catalog into the website as it was, was not a problem for existing customers. Since the online shop followed the identical structure, repeat orders were as simple as entering the article number, hitting enter and buying. For new visitors who were searching or browsing, however, it was short of impossible or as Achim simply put it, “If you didn’t know the catalog, you couldn’t use the online shop.”

But it wasn’t just new customers who struggled with usability – it affected employees as well. The catalog data, which was maintained by hand over 20 years, required a considerable amount of time, effort and specialist knowledge. “There was a team dedicated to copying and entering texts and doing article maintenance. The time

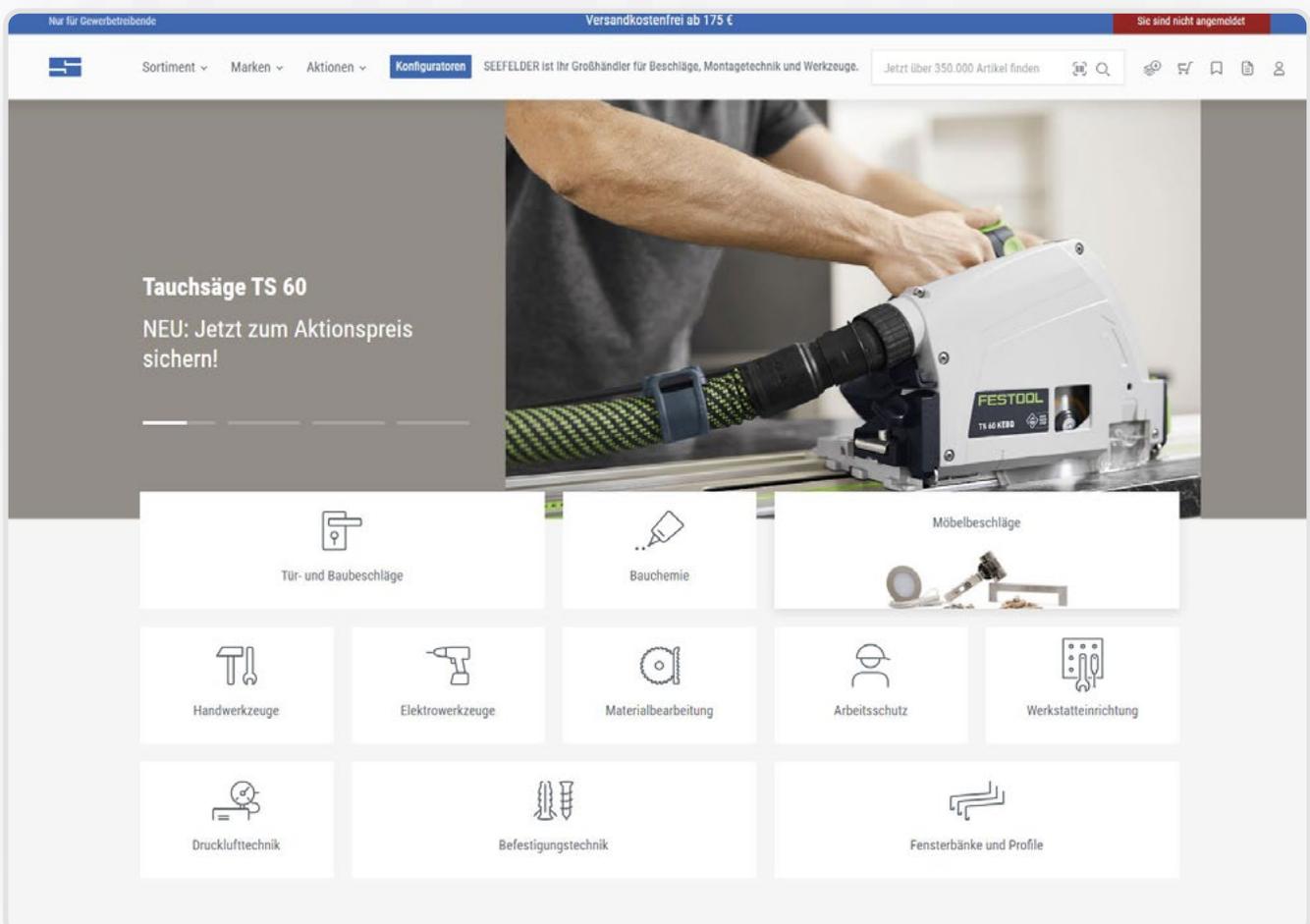
needed for this level of care was, of course, insane.” Generating and designing the catalog was also a major drawback – the time investment to maintain it up to date while new products are constantly released practically made the catalog outdated at the time of printing. “Bosch releases about four new drills every year. The catalog, which is updated every two years, couldn’t keep up with that.” With so many resources channeled into the catalog, there wasn’t enough capacity to focus on other topics like SEO performance.

From Elasticsearch to Next Generation

“Product data is key to driving valuable experiences across the whole customer lifecycle.” (Research Overview: Five Must-Have Tech Solutions For Brand Manufacturers, Forrester Research, Inc., June 16, 2021). This insight by Forrester reinforces Achim’s view on the impact of good versus bad product data. He knew that if the goal was to make Seefeldler successful digitally, he need to start at the basics and do a complete relaunch of the data.

Another building block toward eCommerce success was integrating the right shop system. It was important to operate on a platform that could translate the quality Seefeldler offered offline to online, so the Smart Commerce team chose Spryker as their platform-as-a-service solution. At the time, Spryker used Elasticsearch by default – a site search solution Seefeldler quickly realized was not up to the task. “We tried to make it work but we noticed with the first data that some of the requirements could not be met. We knew we were coming up with 350,000 product variants and needed a search and suggest tool that could take everything into account,” explains Achim.

Through a long-standing and successful partnership between Smart Commerce and FactFinder, the team knew and trusted the solution. “We’ve just had very good experiences and there were just very many places where we said: With FactFinder it would be better,” recalls Achim. The team had worked with older versions but when Next Generation was released, they were impressed by the increased performance. “The functions that Next Generation offers are simply the problem solvers we were in need of.”



Spearheading digital adoptability

From product data to a better store experience with higher sales and visibility: the roadmap to greater digital success was now in place. But how exactly did the company go about its transformation? Which core processes had to be adapted? And how is the new search solution being used today?

1. Supplier data instead of manual maintenance

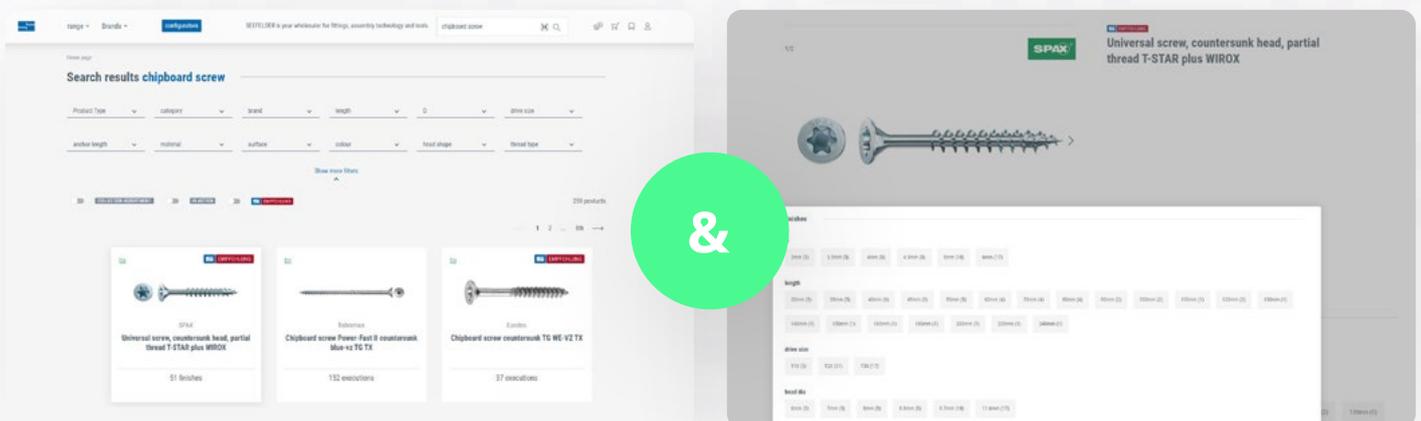
With the relaunch of Seefelder's platform, the data processes had to be rethought. Rather than maintaining everything by hand, going forward the company would use the supplier's product data. "There are enough suppliers who provide good data," emphasizes Achim, pinpointing a way to more efficient processes and more up-to-date information. No more copy and paste from the catalog, no more tedious maintenance of product descriptions.

A change of this size, of course, required additional investment. "We introduced a new PIM system that enables us to automate the data processes for more than 350,000 items." All the suppliers' product data was then imported, classified and enriched - often with very detailed, highly technical information, which creates further added value for the sales force. After all, these specifications also help in customer consulting today. "In the old catalog, this information was missing," Achim recalls. "In the past, employees could only provide advice based on their own expertise or special training."

2. Products instead of variants in the search results

A single product at Seefelder can have 250 different variations. Take screws, for example. If all screw variations were to appear in the search results, online customers would quickly be overwhelmed. For usability in the online shop, it was therefore crucial that customers could first select the product type in the results and afterward decide on the variant. Seefelder offers this through not just one but two possible ways: dynamic facets on the results page or within the product details page. This is very different than what is seen across Seefelder's competitors where all possible versions appear immediately as results.

Let's say a visitor submits a search query for 'chipboard screw'. Seefelder will display a faceted search menu directly above the results which allows them to pick the type of length, thread, head, material, and so on - bringing them to their desired product even having to scroll. Visitors can also click directly into a product details page and select the length, head diameter, and so on. If the visitor has already selected facets on the results page, FactFinder will automatically apply and display these on the details page.



Seefelder facilitates product selection instead of making it more difficult. Customers can filter down to their desired variant directly in the search results or product details page.

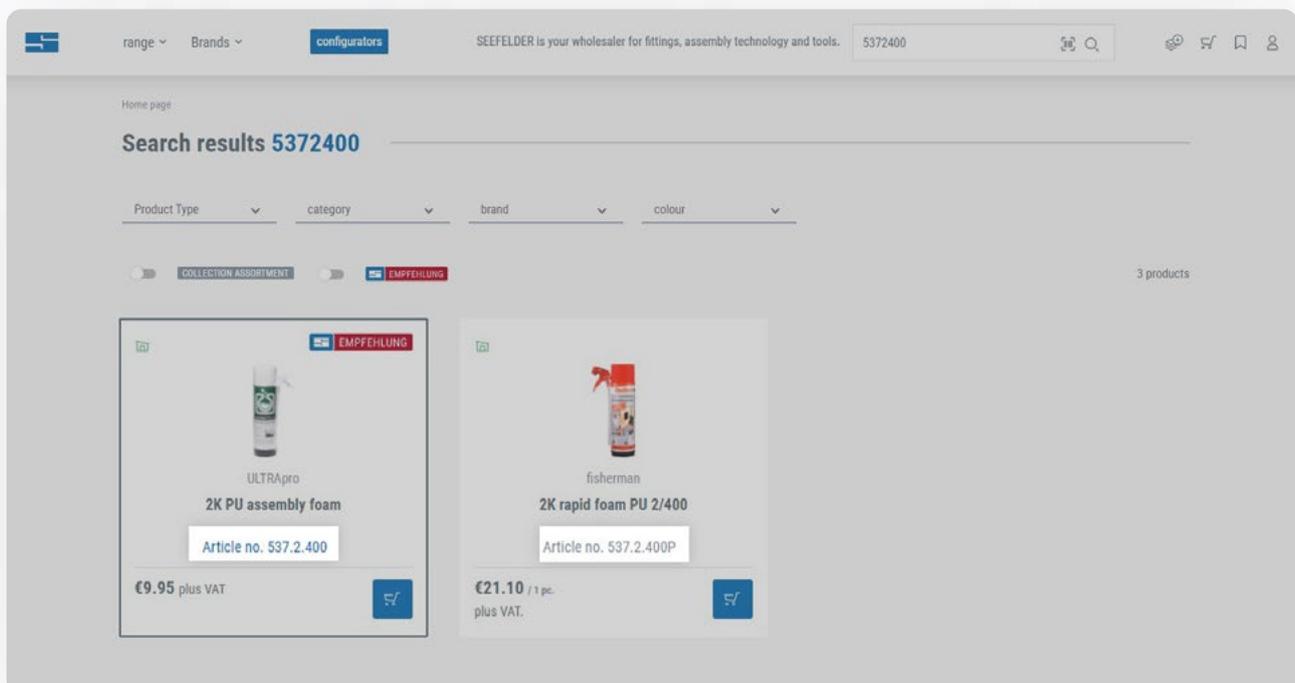
3. Full range instead of catalog range

For Seefelder, establishing a product range using a print catalog previously meant including as few product alternatives as possible as each catalog page was an additional expense both in terms of money and resources. In an online store, however, it's important to offer an assortment as broad as possible. For example, if visitors with a strong affinity for a specific brand can't find their desired manufacturer, they will quickly switch to a competitor's site.

The core element of Seefelder's eCommerce strategy was therefore that the category management could flexibly accommodate new suppliers. But new products also mean new attributes and filters that the store has to work with. "Basically, it can happen that 5,000 more attributes are suddenly used. That's when it's simply extremely important for the search to bring along tools to stem the tide," stresses Achim. These tools include store-wide rules for formatting filter attributes and controlling the order. They also include very specific rules for attributes that are particularly important. For example, individual filter options such as brands, Seefelder recommendations, and click & collect products can be displayed in every search result.

4. Fuzzy search for product numbers instead of exact matches only

In the tool and construction industry, products often have very creative item numbers. To simplify searches in the Seefelder shop, FactFinder has been adapted with an alphanumeric extension which makes it possible to search with periods, spaces, hashes and items numbered 0. Achim and his team have also developed an innovative use case to improve the visibility of their own brands: they simply give these products item numbers similar to the premium brand. So, when a customer searches for the item number of a well-known brand, the results will also show matching Seefelder products they might have not been aware of. This fuzzy item search is an important feature for Seefelder because the structure of item numbers is not always clear or easy. Today, customers can be sure to find the right product even if they don't enter the item number correctly. "We really have everything covered," says Achim.



Seefelder uses fuzzy item search to display brand products and private labels – giving more visibility to their own brands while offering customers a low-cost alternative.

5. Agile category management instead of developer resources

This is where Achim and his team identified the most important step towards a modern and agile B2B platform. "Assortment management must be able to onboard new catalogs and new product ranges – without needing development. This is another place where the search function plays a crucial role," says Achim.

At the beginning of the relaunch project, a large part of the development team was occupied with search optimization for the store alone because category management had no way of influencing the search itself. It was clear to those responsible for the project that this possibility had to be made. This included tools for search diagnostics that, for example, make it transparent why product A appears before product B in the search results. And if a search result was not optimal, the category managers should be able to optimize it directly.

Fast search optimization through synonyms

Achim recalls testing Next Generation with the search term 'Blaumann', a colloquial word for work overalls in German. Achim explains, "We don't have a single item in the shop that has 'Blaumann' anywhere in its product data." But because the team added 'Blaumann' as a synonym for dungarees and work pants, Next Generation delivers results as if the official product name had been entered.

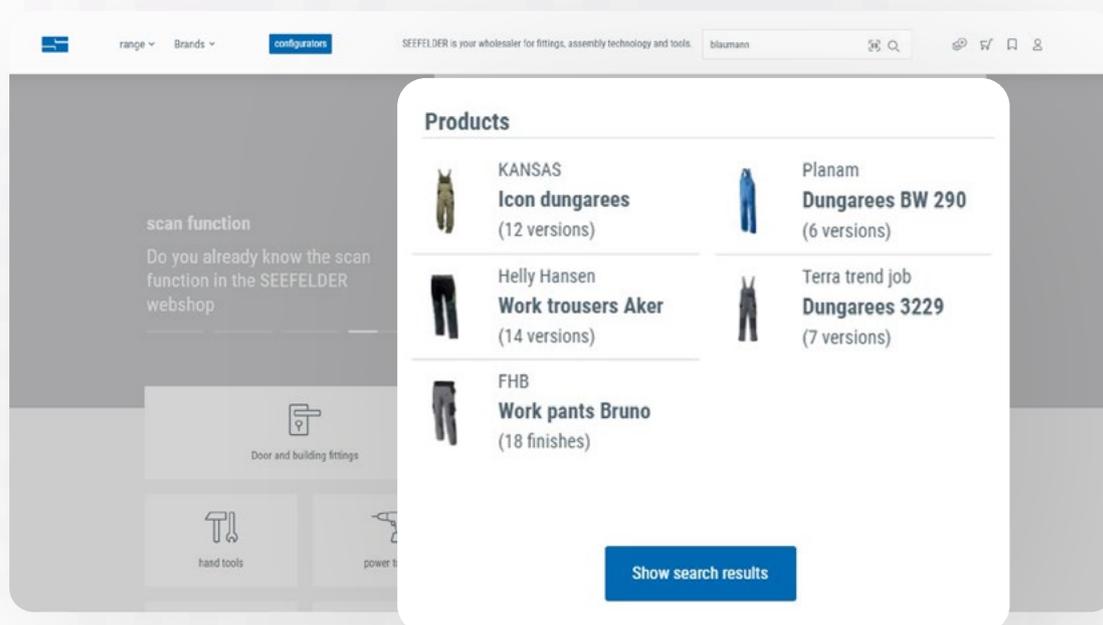
Achim notes that for Seefelder, the smart suggest feature is "an extremely important, super performant feature. We see extremely high rates of how the suggest menu is used."



I'm happy every time I log into FactFinder and haven't heard from our category management team for six months and there are again 50 thesaurus entries. These are things that make our lives easier and save resources in development.



Achim Schneider
Head of Digitalization



Seefelder's intelligent search function delivers accurate product suggestions, even when users search colloquially.

Results that exceed expectations

Three years of work to rebuild all the product data was a huge investment for a company this size but Achim knew it was necessary to reposition the company and differentiate the brand from competitors. Challenges of course come with transformation – especially after 20+ years of doing things a certain way, but Achim reinforces that an online shop can only be as good as the quality of the underlying product data.

23x higher organic visibility

Before the optimizations, Seefelder's visibility index was at 0.03, meaning they were listed on page 5 of organic results. After the relaunch, they are at 0.7 and rising with no end in sight. A growth this size may be small in number but huge in impact. Seefelder is quickly entering the playing field of industry giants and surpassing any business their size. The results definitely exceeded Achim's expectations, "We never dreamt that we would actually be this good. It's a success we've had which simply lies in basic work."

36% increase in digital order intake by employees

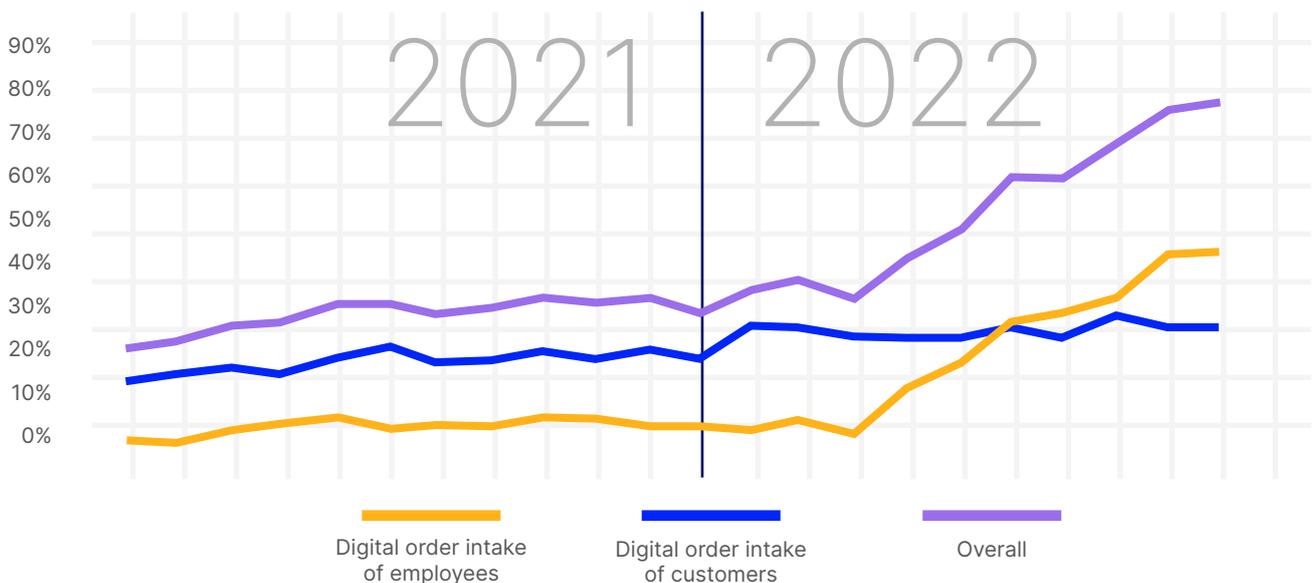
Since the relaunch, Seefelder's own employees are benefiting in their day-to-day business, as they can now accept and process orders more easily. In the past, internal use was consistently only 10%. This was

because there was just as much – or rather just as little – information in the online store as in the catalog. Achim explains that after the massive effort that went into finding the right item, employees found it easier to order directly via the ERP instead of the online shop.

Seefelder went live with the employee mode initially just for the field staff. "Our goal for the year was to increase the digital order intake of employees from 10 to 30%. After just three months, we were at 46%. That's definitely a huge success for us. It's also interesting to note that our search volume in the store has now tripled. That's also due to the employees themselves, who use the search to get information and find the right products for the customer."

78% of orders are already digital and growing

Backed by a focused strategy, targeted optimizations, and a great team, success was not long in coming. "It's going through the roof. If you take the orders from customers and employees together, the rate of digital incoming orders is already 78%." Seefelder's goal doesn't end there, however, with the company aiming to get that number above 90%. To do so, they have an action plan that includes installing touchscreens in-store where customers can inform themselves and order via the online shop.



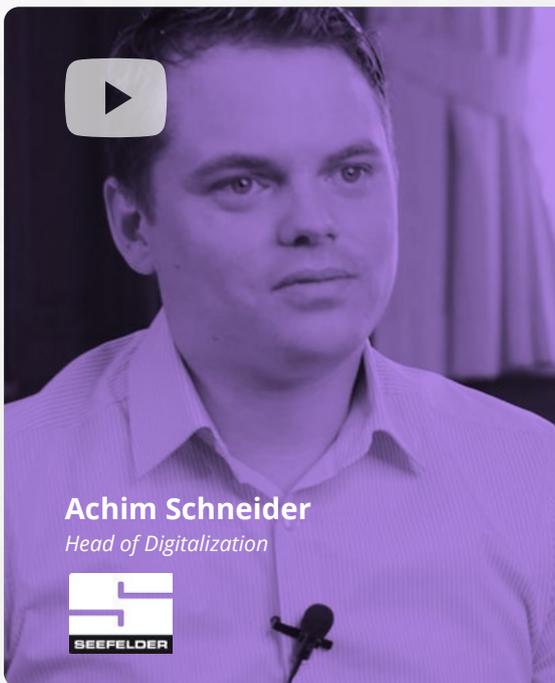
Advice from the pro: hard work, great partner, amazing results

“You can’t make the mistake of believing you can just kill anything with technology. Sometimes it’s necessary that you do certain basic work and that makes it possible for you to build unique services. We’ve managed to build a great foundation for our customers and employees where they can be successful together.”

Achim points out a big advantage Seefelder had throughout the journey was the support they received from FactFinder. Especially in the beginning, as Seefelder completely exchanged their product data, the team needed a lot of technical support which Achim describes as excellent. “It usually boiled down to ‘Do you have 15 minutes? We have a problem.’ And that has always worked – we get someone straight away.” He also appreciates having a dedicated contact and emphasizes how this saves him time by not having to start from scratch. “We’ve had a direct contact person for a few years now, which I find very important. He knows exactly how everything works with us – our catalog, data and products. That has always been very positive.”

Seefelder knows there is no secret to success, it

comes down to preparation and hard work which this innovative B2B business continues doing. Future plans include expanding on the topic of recommendations now that they have data they didn’t have before. The team continues to optimize the search and filters, and has begun working on campaigns and article configurators, experimenting with all the possibilities Next Generation has to offer.



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Smart Commerce offers complete services for the planning, construction and operation of high-end eCommerce platforms. The company is committed to the long-term online success of its business partners. With eCommerce-experienced experts and special technical know-how on common platforms, Smart Commerce implements all eCommerce-related processes - from the online shop to web analysis.

About FactFinder

FactFinder is the European leader in eCommerce product discovery and search. We help over 2,000 online shops worldwide like MyTheresa, Intersport, OBI, Stihl and Elkjøp Nordic increase revenue by 20-33% with outstanding shopping experiences.

By combining human and artificial intelligence, we understand every shopper's intent from the first click. We call that authentic intelligence. Smarter algorithms and human expertise create a union that will always give a competitive edge.

Every day millions of B2C and B2B shoppers find what they are looking for with FactFinder - fast, personalized and with joy.



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