

Case Study: Screwfix

How Kaiasm became the magic behind the Screwfix Unicorn.

It started in a meeting with Andrew Livingston, then Commercial Director at Screwfix. “You call this a ‘nailer;” we said. “Most people call it a ‘nail gun’. You should change that, right now. You need to use the words your customers use”.

This is a normal condition, in our experience, particularly where big complex product catalogues are involved, and where despite the best efforts and intentions of a smart and productive bunch of people—they are, really, we're not just saying that—it is simply too easy to misrepresent product categories with industry jargon and to be quietly oblivious to the way certain groups of customers think. However, Andrew asked us how many other categories they should change.

What we did

We took a deep, deep dive into the wonderful world of security, lighting and tools, and created three taxonomy maps that demonstrated many millions of pounds of opportunity to create relevance on their site where it was absent, and, critically, for products they already sold. Simple examples would be 'security lighting' (they called it 'PIR lighting'); 'central heating radiators' (they called them 'convector radiators'); and 'kitchen lighting' (they called it, ah, actually, they didn't call it anything, because they considered, quite reasonably, that the majority of lights could exist in many room types, so didn't classify them by room at all, oblivious to the fact that that is exactly how many of their customers search).

Our taxonomy maps and reports landed on the desks of some slightly sceptical Screwfix merchandisers, who, to their credit, were up for it anyway, and who dived into the instructions with gusto. Within a few weeks there were over a hundred new sub-category pages live within the existing product categories of the site, and the search traffic started flowing in at pace. By the end of the three months, the web trading team and the executive were sold and we were into a full twelve months of taxonomy work.

Within the first few months of this work, we then started working on the other half of the equation: the Screwfix buyers. Appreciating the quality of our research and the size and representation of the source data, they realised that this was some of the best market research they'd ever seen; our market taxonomy work ended up underpinning category planning and product range development across the business. Twelve taxonomies didn't quite cover the whole of the Screwfix catalogue, so at the end of the 12 months a further six taxonomies were commissioned, and then a further six, until we eventually topped out at twenty eight category taxonomies.

What happened next

The by-then Screwfix CEO Andrew Livingston told us: “Kaiasm has helped change the way we see our marketplace, and how we understand our customers. They show us what people want, in pictures. It’s brilliant and surprising. We buy and merchandise differently as a result.”

Thanks in large part to our work, and their relentless application of our advice on how to support the insights within it with changes to process and tech, Screwfix became the darling of the UK eCommerce world, and rocketed to over a billion pounds per year in revenue. A concentration on taxonomy-driven focus on customer demand, and responding to that with the right product, right product filters and deep categorisation allowed them to do this without spending all the margin fighting on price and promotional spend. As the CEO, COO, Web Trading Managers, Senior UX managers moved up and on to other companies, we were one of the first calls each of them made when finishing their gardening leave. We are still working with many of them today.

