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Troubleshooting Unexpected Search Results

A practical guide for customer-facing technical teams investigating unexpected e-commerce search results.

- Welcome
- 1. Start with the Problem
- 2. Investigate the Evidence
- 3. When the Product Is There
- Summary

Lesson 1 of 5

Welcome

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Who is this for?

Audience: Technical Support, Customer Success, and Implementation teams who troubleshoot unexpected e-commerce search results.

0:09 1x

What you'll learn

By the end of this module, you'll be able to:

- Identify the main areas to investigate when search results don't match expectations.
- Use evidence from the query and product data to narrow down the cause.
- Choose an appropriate next troubleshooting step before changing anything.
- Recognize whether a problem relates to retrieval or ranking.

Your troubleshooting path

When search results don't match expectations, use these five steps to narrow down the problem:



Understand the problem

What is the customer actually experiencing?

Check the query

What did the system receive?

Check the product data

Does the product contain the information search needs?

Check the results

Is the product missing, or simply ranked lower?

Decide what to investigate next

Based on the evidence, what should you investigate next?

Lesson 2 of 5

1. Start with the Problem

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When search results don't match expectations

10:42 AM

A customer reports that a product is missing from search. The product is available in the catalog, but customers can't find it.

SLA: 18 minutes remaining.

The customer is asking for an explanation.

You have several possible things you could change, but you don't yet know what's causing the problem.

What's your first move?



Start with the evidence. Don't guess the solution. Narrow down the problem first.

Start with these three checks

These three checks help you gather evidence before deciding what to change.

The query
🔎 Did the system receive what we expected?

Check the search terms, parameters, and filters in the query.

The product data

📦 Does the product contain the information search needs?

Check the product's name, attributes, categories and other relevant data.

The search configuration

⚙️ Is the search configured to behave as expected?

Check filters, relevance, ranking and other search settings.

Don't jump to a solution before understanding the problem.

A customer reports that a product isn't appearing in search. You confirm that the product exists in the catalog. What should you investigate first?

- [ ] Change the product's ranking
- [ ] Check the query and the product data
- [ ] Ask the customer to try a different search
- [ ] Change the search configuration

SUBMIT

Lesson 3 of 5

2. Investigate the Evidence

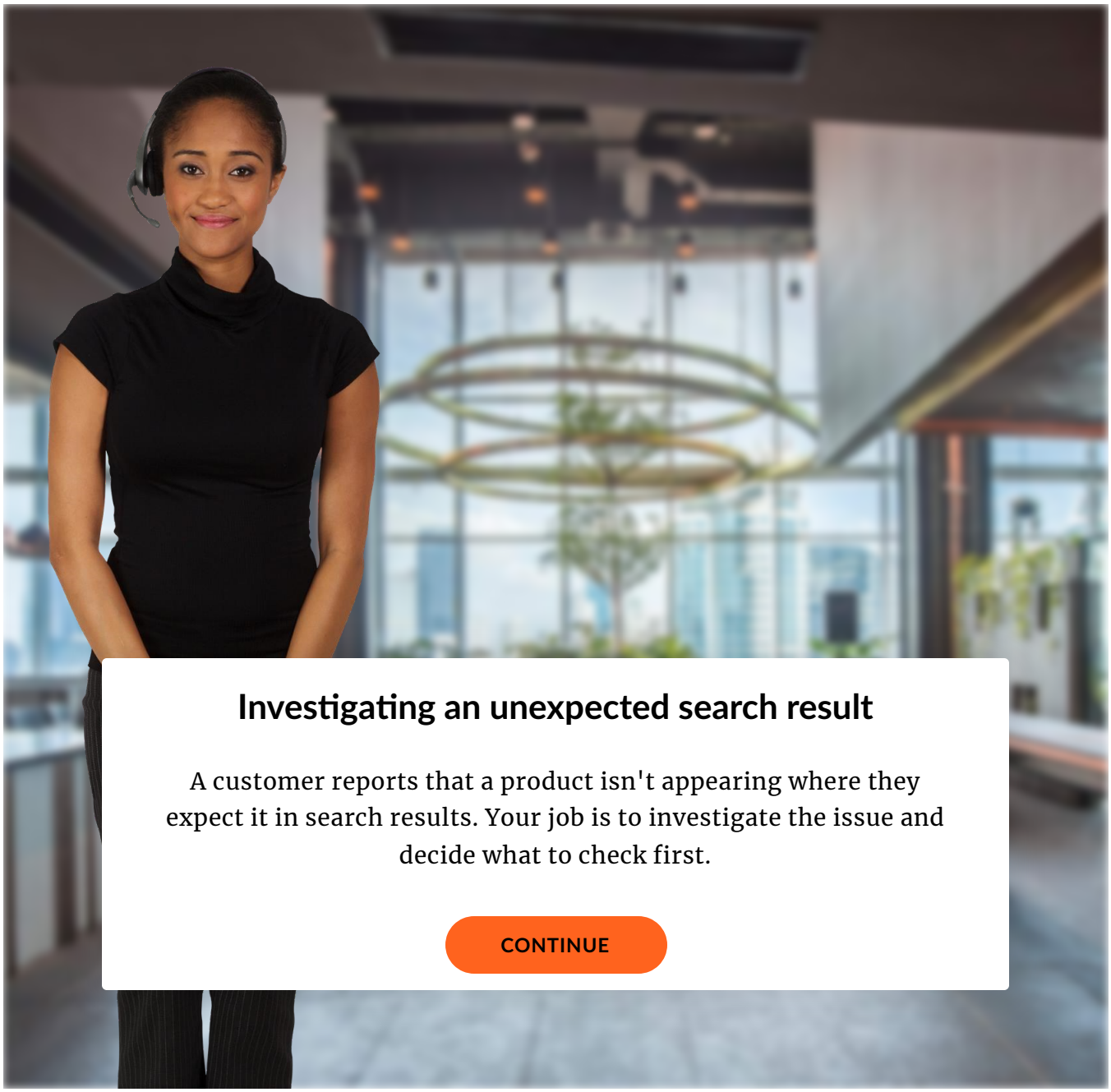
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The customer needs an answer. You need evidence first.

A customer is searching for **“black waterproof running shoes”**, but the product they expect isn't appearing in the results.

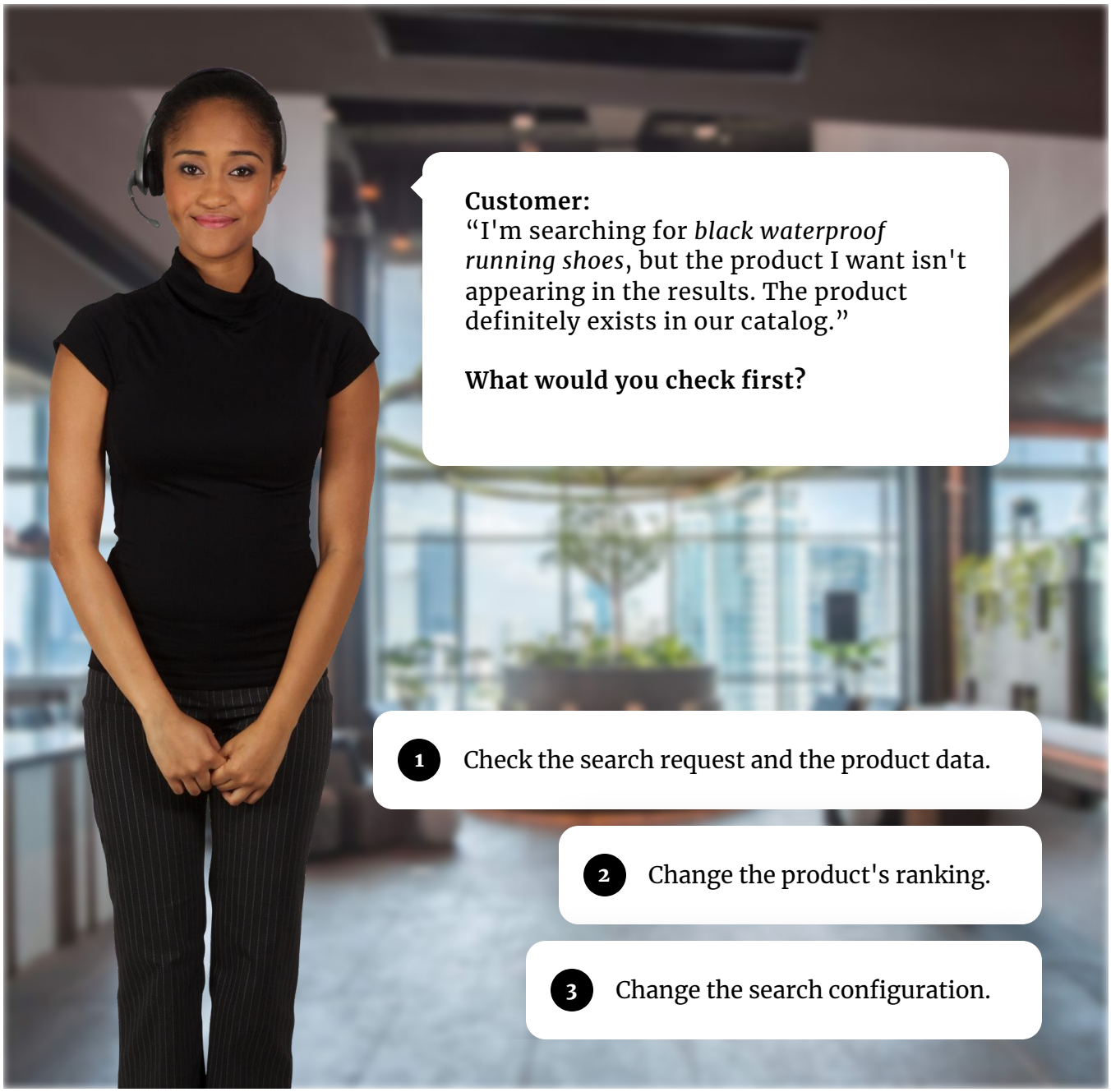
They tell you the product definitely exists in the catalog.

You have several possible things you could investigate. Which one should you check first?



Scene 1 Slide 1

Continue → Scene 1 Slide 2



Scene 1 Slide 2

0 → Next Slide

1 → Next Slide

2 → Next Slide

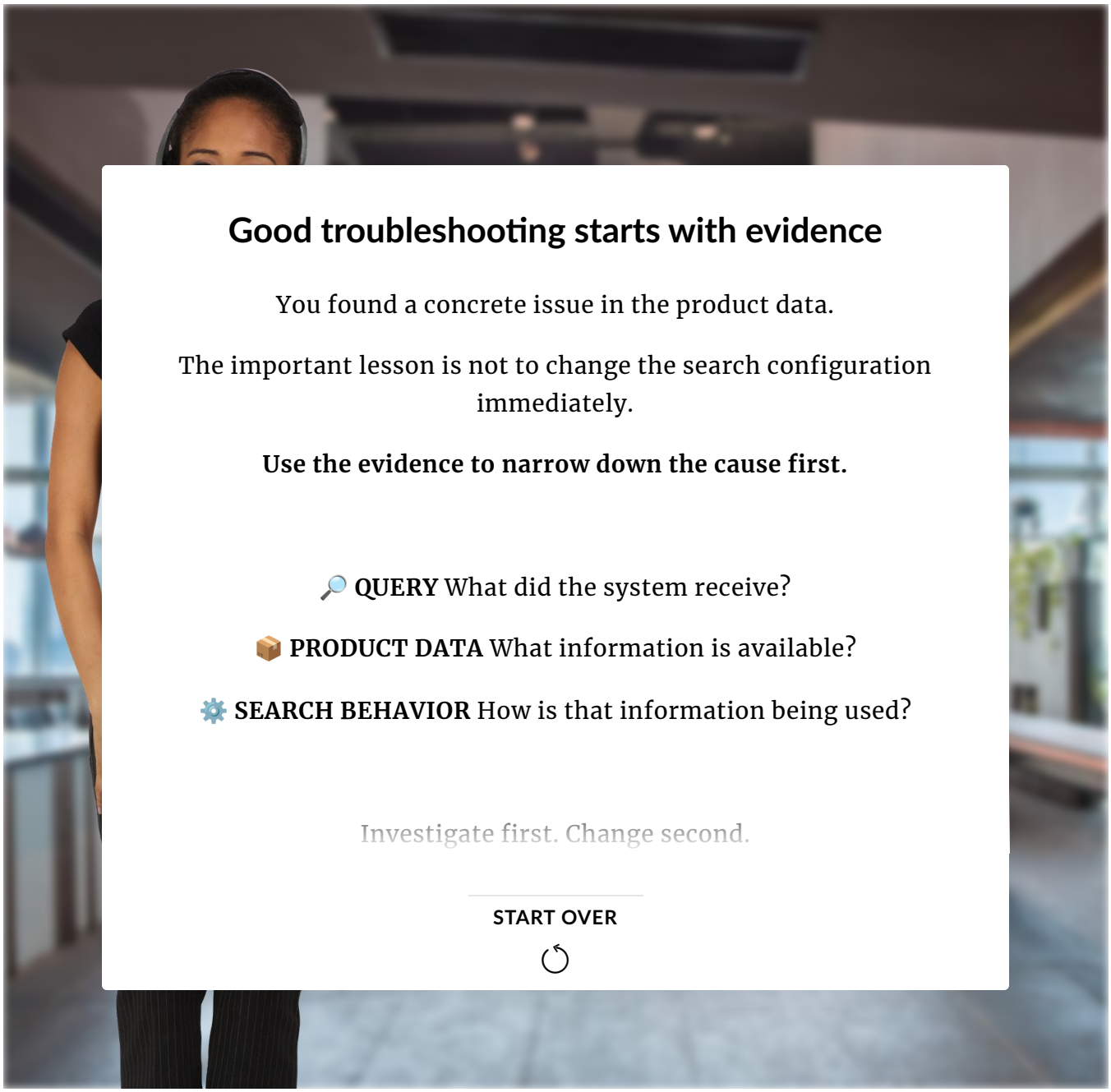


Scene 1 Slide 3

0 → Next Slide

1 → Scene 1 Slide 1

2 → Next Slide



Good troubleshooting starts with evidence

You found a concrete issue in the product data.

The important lesson is not to change the search configuration immediately.

Use the evidence to narrow down the cause first.

🔎 **QUERY** What did the system receive?

📦 **PRODUCT DATA** What information is available?

⚙️ **SEARCH BEHAVIOR** How is that information being used?

Investigate first. Change second.

START OVER

Scene 1 Slide 4

Continue → End of Scenario

Lesson 4 of 5

3. When the Product Is There

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The product is there, but it's not where the customer expects

- Not every search problem means a product is missing.
- Sometimes the product appears in the results, but much lower than the customer expects.
- **In this situation, the investigation changes.**
- First confirm that the query and product data are correct. Then **investigate** how the search system is **ranking the results.**



If the product is retrieved but ranks lower than expected, investigate ranking and configuration.

A practical troubleshooting sequence

When a product appears in search but ranks lower than expected, work through these checks in order. Start with what you can verify, then narrow down the possible causes.

Step 1

Confirm the query

Check the search terms, filters, and parameters in the request.

Make sure the system received what you expected.

Step 2

Check the product data

Confirm that the product contains the information expected for the search.

If the query and product data look correct, investigate the results next.

What happens next?

If the query and product data are correct and the product is still ranked lower than expected, the next area to investigate is **search ranking and configuration**.

The key is to distinguish a **retrieval problem** from a **ranking problem** before making changes.

A product is appearing in search results, but the customer expects it to appear much higher. You have confirmed that the query and product data are correct. What should you investigate next?

- ◯ The customer's browser
- ◯ Search ranking and configuration
- ◯ Remove the product and add it again
- ◯ Change the search query

SUBMIT

Key takeaway

If the query and product data are correct, look at the results. **When the product is there, investigate its position.**

1. Confirm the query

The system received what you expected.

2. Confirm the product data

The product contains the information the search needs.

3. If the product is present, investigate ranking

Look at how search determines the product's position.

The next question is not “Where is the product?” but **“Why is it ranked here?”**



If the **product is present**, the investigation shifts from retrieval to **ranking**.

Lesson 5 of 5

Summary

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When a search result doesn't match expectations, don't change things immediately. Start with the evidence and narrow down the problem step by step.

1. **Check the query**
   What did the system receive?

2. **Check the product data**
   Does the product contain the information the search needs?

3. **Check the results**
   Is the product missing, or is it present but ranked lower than expected?

4. **Investigate ranking and configuration**
   If the query and product data are correct, look at how the results are being ranked.

> Investigate first. Change second.

You've completed the course.

You can now apply an evidence-first approach to investigating unexpected search results.