

Maximize Your Sales By Providing Site Search

By Paul J. Bruemmer

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The Web will grow to over 10 billion pages in the near future, so every Web site faces the challenge of providing customers with current information that is easily accessed with a search function.

Users expect instant gratification. Instead, they often face the following scenario: no search box, a search box that returns too many irrelevant items, or no matches found. So what happens? They move on, leaving that site behind.

- Jupiter MediaMetrix reported that "80 percent of online users will abandon a site if the search function doesn't work well."
- An IDC study reported 50 percent of Web searches are abandoned, and up to 97 percent of some site searches show no click-throughs to any results.
- Forrester reported that 93 percent of commercial sites either don't provide site search or use software that fails basic tasks.

Desperately Seeking the Search Box

The search engine industry has responded to this need, with most major search engines aggressively pursuing sales and service contracts for corporate search solutions. It's a logical extension of their basic technology, with the products varying widely, from hardware to software to search services.

It's smart, the demand is there, and it's getting competitive. In fact, before the majors got into the game, numerous specialty vendors like Autonomy, EasyAsk, Mohomine, Mondo Search and Verity dominated the corporate search market (aka unstructured data search solutions).

Of the majors, FAST has been providing corporate search solutions since 1999, deriving 60 percent of its revenue from corporate search solutions. AltaVista and Inktomi have also provided search solutions for the last couple years. Ask Jeeves launched an enterprise search solution last year. The most recent vendors are Google and Lycos. Here's a description of their offerings.

Alta Vista

AltaVista Enterprise Search 2.0 gives you open architecture, document-level security, and advanced auto-categorization that provides universal access to all data within corporate enterprises regardless of location or file format. Fully customizable and scalable, it provides fast, fresh results and dynamic security functionality. Delivers search relevancy, performance, and functionality that is

efficient and cost-effective. This solution helps users find data in 30 languages and in over 200 file formats, including databases and e-commerce catalogs.

AltaVista has a range of clients from commerce sites like Amazon and Borders to government sites like the FBI and NASA and has licensed information-access and data-retrieval software to more than 1,200 companies

AskJeeves

Jeeves One is an enterprise solution for organizations that want to offer site search and are also interested in understanding and satisfying customer informational needs. The technology combines natural language processing (NLP) and complex analyses to bring order to the existing data structure and user queries on corporate Web sites.

This approach gives customers information access while providing the organization with insight into customer needs for future action. Queries are made through an AskJeeves-type question box, allowing organizations to learn information about their customers through the nature of questions asked. Jeeves One customers include Dell, Nextel, and Ford. A demo is available online.

FAST (Fast Search & Transfer)

FAST has provided Web search technology for leading portals and ISPs with the search index displayed at AllTheWeb.com since inception in 1999. The same search technology developed by FAST to power Internet portals like Lycos is used to provide ASP-based hosted search solutions for major corporations like IBM. The technology is distributed in shrink-wrapped packages and OEM for companies like Reuters, also supplying major e-commerce vendors like eBay."

FAST's enterprise solutions solve the real-time, data-intensive search and information retrieval challenges of large-scale enterprises. FAST Data Search is an enterprise-wide software solution containing the FAST Real-Time Filter, which I'm told is the first true real-time filter engine designed to hold any number of profiles/queries, matching those to any amount of streaming data, textual or numeric, and always guarantees instant responses for real-time alerting. FAST Site Search is a dedicated search solution for corporate Web sites, providing frequently indexed, highly relevant results via a familiar site search bar.

Google

The new Google Search Appliance was announced earlier this year. Google offers an integrated hardware/software solution extending the power of Google.com to corporate intranets and Web servers. When used as an intranet, the Google Search Appliance can simplify corporate search for administrators, making it quick and easy for employees to pinpoint needed company information.

The new search appliance comes in two versions: GB-1001 for departments and medium-size organizations with databases up to 150,000 documents, and the GB-8008 for large organizations with gazillions of documents.

The Google Search Appliance provides both hardware and software. It is easy to install and can be up and running in less than an hour. It features simple administration with an intuitive browser-based admin console. As for relevancy, we're all familiar with Google's reputation. Google says it's affordable, starting at \$20,000 for two years of support and software updates.

Inktomi

Inktomi Enterprise Search combines its natural language features with scalability, speed and ease-of-use to deliver relevant search results to corporate, public and government organizations. Results across Web-based content includes file servers, databases, content management systems and more on customer intranets or public sites.

Options include CCE (content classification engine) for creation of directories and display of search results with categories. You can also adjust relevance rankings and index database content, spider SSL-protected servers, and search multiple language documents. Licensing costs vary by database size, and there's no penalty for updating to a larger index. You can download and install a free trial version for 30-day evaluation. Customers include Boeing, CNN, Yale University, and more.

Lycos

Lycos InSite Pro is a search solution that also includes guaranteed listings in the Lycos database. It's unique because it bundles both hosted site search and paid inclusion listings in one package at attractive pricing..

Your site search function is hosted in the Lycos Data Center, providing a secure environment for site indexes. No software or hardware is involved, the search function can be customized, and Lycos provides a search box that is easy to integrate into any Web site design.

These are the newest offerings from major search engines to provide site search for any Web site. Don't disappoint your customers -- you can turn one-time lookers into loyal, repeat customers by making it quick and easy for them find exactly what they're looking for.

Free Site Search

Atomz.com provides free site search for smaller sites, as does FreeFind.com.

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Bio:
Paul J. Bruemmer <mailto:paul2@web-ignite.com> is the CEO of Web Ignite, <http://www.web-ignite.com/> a professional search engine marketing company. Founded in 1995, Web-Ignite has helped promote over 15,000 Web sites. Client testimonials report traffic increases of 150 to 500 percent. Bruemmer presents at search engine conferences and his articles have appeared on ClickZ, B2B Interactive, I-Advertising, I-Marq, MarketingProfs, Marketing Sherpa, Marketing Today, New Media, Pandia, Search Engine Guide and SitePoint.

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