

Fulfilling the Promise of Enterprise Search

By Ian Davies, Founder and Managing Director, ISYS Search Software



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As founder and managing director of ISYS, Ian Davies guides the company's overall direction and serves as its chief technology expert. He is widely regarded as a visionary and tireless business leader among Sydney, Australia's substantial technology population. Ian designed the original ISYS text

retrieval system in 1988 after recognizing a market opportunity for search engine technology. In 1993, he was elected a Computerworld Fellow in recognition of his achievements in software.

Prior to founding ISYS, Ian spent 10 years writing as a consulting technical editor for one of Australia's leading PC magazines. Additionally, he spent four years with a prominent commercial software house in Australia before becoming an independent consultant in IBM mainframe fourth-generation languages.

The fundamental objective of enterprise search couldn't be more straightforward—to help people find information fast. Unfortunately, some vendors continue to speak in tongues, proffering technology that requires a Ph.D. to understand and a team of them to implement.

The good news is companies are beginning to see the light—that search isn't a difficult or costly endeavor. In fact, keeping in mind the following three keys, businesses of all sizes can finally capitalize on the promise of enterprise search.

1. Don't Forget the Desktop

When you consider that a large portion of relevant corporate knowledge resides on employees' hard drives and in their e-mail, it's almost criminal to fail to capture desktop information. In fact, the term "enterprise search" becomes a bit of a misnomer when these repositories fall outside the scope of the solution.

Perhaps most beneficial when it comes to tools that can quickly and easily tie desktops into the overall enterprise search solution is the fact that you can take a tactical approach to enterprise search. Start with a workgroup of 10 employees or a department of 50. Let them prove the value of enterprise search and then expand outward. In doing so, you can rest easy knowing the technology works and that your employees embrace it.

Just as important is the ability of your enterprise search solution to index desktop data where it resides. The value of the technology begins to seriously dip the moment you're forced to alter, copy or move the content to a central server.

2. Follow the Three-step Search Process

As the amount of information continues to surge, tools like auto-categorization and results-clustering become just as important as relevance ranking. To ensure employees are getting the most from enterprise search, your solution should sufficiently address all three steps of the search process—query, results navigation and discovery:

◆ **Query:** Everyone uses different methods for searching for information. Some are search novices who rely on natural language processing. Others are experts with query syntax. Some need to search metadata, while others focus exclusively on full text. Regardless of your employees' familiarity or preferences, your enterprise search tools should account for these differences, as well as provide "sounds like..." and "starts with..." options for when they don't know the correct spelling of a word.

◆ **Results Navigation:** There's nothing more frustrating than being presented with a long list of results with no ability to sort, preview or filter. Enterprise search is most effective when users can benefit from on-the-fly categorization; results clustering and grouping; a results preview pane; "search within" and other filtering options; and advanced hinting, such as displaying summary information or metadata.

◆ **Discovery:** Without features like "hit highlighting" or "hit-to-hit navigation," employees are often left wondering why a search engine has returned a certain result. Imagine the smile on their faces when your search tool says that a 152-page PDF document is the one they want, only to give them no hint as to why it was selected. Your search technology should not only highlight your search terms, but also take you directly to the first hit in a document. If it can't do that, then your employees aren't saving as much time as they could be.

But discovery is also about what employees do with the information once they find it. Intelligent agents enable users to save searches and be notified when new information matches their search criteria. Annotations help individuals personalize results, while extract functions enable them to act on information. Perhaps most important is enabling employees to create a repository of found information that can be shared across a workgroup, department or entire enterprise.

3. Return and Cost: Look Before You Leap

It goes without saying that enterprise search, when done properly, helps employ-

ees spend less time looking for or duplicating corporate information, which translates into cost savings and productivity increases. But if the upfront and ongoing costs of the technology are too high, the benefit is greatly diminished. Solutions that require outside consulting translate into a higher initial investment, while a per-document pricing module serves as an obstacle to unlocking all of your corporate content and essentially ensures a higher total cost of ownership.

Search should be simple to implement and charged according to the people who actually benefit from it—your user community. And if you're paying several hundreds of thousands of dollars for your enterprise search solution, you're paying too much.

Whether the situation calls for search across desktops, networks, Websites, intranets or other enterprise systems, enterprise search needs to account for these three keys before it can fully deliver on its promise. Fortunately for businesses, there's an easy way to find out—make your vendor prove it before you buy it. ■

Established in 1988, ISYS Search Software is a global supplier of enterprise search solutions for business and government. The company's award-winning software suite offers a broad range of products designed for searching desktops, networks, websites and intranets. ISYS has been deployed by thousands of organizations operating in a variety of industries, including government, legal, law enforcement, financial services, healthcare and recruitment.

Headquartered in Sydney, Australia, ISYS also maintains offices in Denver and the UK. The company's customers include the US Department of Homeland Security, Cisco Systems, Boeing, Perkins Coie, Management Recruiters International, the IRS, the US Department of Justice, the Miami Police Department, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona. Additional information can be obtained by phone at 800.992.4797 and via the Web at <http://www.isys-search.com/>.