

# Information Management

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## Enterprise Search: Twelve Success Factors

I spent much of last year writing a book on enterprise search (and that includes web site search) for O'Reilly Media. The strap line for the book was Enhancing Business Performance, and only two of the 12 chapters are about the technology of search. I will be running a UKeiG Workshop on enterprise search on 24 September, so this list of 12 success factors is some very advanced publicity. If you and your organisation can tick all these factor as being 'sorted' then there is no benefit to you attending. On the other hand ...!

[Enterprise Search](#) is available as both an e-book and in a print format. The e-book platform allows me to update the book on a regular basis. This enables me to reflect changes in technology and good practice and so this list is in fact the updated version which will appear in the book later this year.

1. Invest in a search support team

Before you do anything else set up a search support team with the skills, enthusiasm, organizational knowledge and networks to get the best of the current search application(s). Even if the team is initially a team of one put the budget, headcount and job descriptions in place so that it can grow ahead of the requirements for support.

2. Get the best out of the current investment in search

There is usually much that can be done to improve the current search applications once the search team and the search vendor focus in on options and priorities. The information gained from search log files is a very important element of defining search requirements and setting benchmarks for any new search application

3. Enterprise search is an approach and not a technology

Implementing one single all-encompassing search application is unlikely to be successful and usually carries more risks than benefits. Enterprise search is about creating a managed search environment that enables employees to find the information they need to achieve organizational and/or personal objectives. It is also about paying serious attention to website search.

#### 4. Content quality is essential for quality search

Current search technology can cope with poor quality content but there should be guidelines for content and metadata quality. It is of little benefit to the organization if a search lists twenty relevant documents with a content quality that renders them unfit to be trusted. Titles of results are especially important in helping users assess relevance.

#### 5. Understand user requirements and monitor user satisfaction

There are three categories of metrics for search performance. In the first category are technical performance measures, such as latency and the speed with which the index is updated. The second category is for search logs, which do provide some form of quantitative measure. Finally come qualitative metrics from sitting in team meetings and finding out how well search is working, or asking a group of employees to rate their assessment of the search application on a quarterly basis.

#### 6. Undertake intelligent log analysis

Search log analysis needs to be conducted on a regular basis by a team that understands the activities and language of the business so that

emerging issues in search failure can be identified at the earliest possible opportunity.

#### 7. Search then browse then alert then search then alert ...

Users need to be able to search when needed, browse when needed and set up alerts as needed. These three processes need to be linked together to provide an effective information discovery environment. Search logs quickly show up problems with the site architecture when it becomes clear that users are searching for terms that should be links on the home page of the site.

#### 8. Be prepared for mobile search

Creating a mobile version of a web site or intranet, perhaps through responsive design, although this is not the same as providing mobile search. For example no one searching a site using a smart phone wants to be provided with a document – they need actionable information that they can use immediately.

#### 9. Search is a dialogue

Aiming to get the most relevant documents at the top of the search results list is a waste of effort. In an enterprise environment users will have complex queries that require them to be able to refine their query and re-evaluate the results with the minimum of effort.

#### 10. Procure value not functionality

When the time comes to invest in a new search application specify requirements on what you expect the search application to deliver and not on what features you would like to have supplied.

11. Search is a journey

The process of ensuring that search is meeting user requirements never comes to an end. Every day there are new employees, new business challenges, new business opportunities and new developments in search technology.

12. All search projects fail – search has to be ‘business as usual’

This is a consequence of search being a journey. As soon as a search project is over something will change. It could be a new repository or a change in business requirements. Search has to be properly resourced. There was a [study by Oracle](#) last

year which indicated that a failure to find information could result in companies losing 14% of revenues each year.

You can find a links to my monthly column on search for CMSWire at <http://www.cmswire.com/author/martin-white/> and I blog quite frequently about search at <http://www.intranetfocus.com/blog> .

I look forward to meeting you in September.

PS If you order my book from the [O'Reilly site](#) and use AUTHD as the discount code you should get a 40% discount on the price.

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